

Modals and periphrastics in English and Dutch

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Abstract. The article deals with the peculiarities of modal verbs and periphrastic constructions in modern English and Dutch. The status of these verb groups was determined, and the most recognitive features of them were singled out and described. The semantic aspects of these groups were observed in close comparison of English and Dutch. Distinct criteria for the classification of modals, auxiliaries and periphrastics were set out. Comparison of similarity and difference was based on the belonging of English and Dutch to the West subgroup of the Germanic languages.

Keywords: modal verb, periphrastic construction, quasi-auxiliary status, English and Dutch

The Germanic languages being united in one large group within the huge family of the Indo-European languages are separated according to some specific phonetic and especially morphological features in particular. Germanic morphological peculiarities are numerous but the most significant ones are the features of the verb system. All the modern Germanic languages have a group of modal verbs which having common basic features may be partially different in their functions and meanings in different Germanic languages. In any case modal verbs may be traced back to preterite-present verbs gradually changing on their historical way of development. Some Germanic languages lost a few verbs, but some developed a few new ones. The most effective way to investigate these changes is to compare (two) closely relative modern languages. Modern English and Modern Dutch seem to be the most interesting for further comparison. Both the languages are well developed and operate with modal verbs to a large extent. Linguistic relatedness between these two languages may be explained if we observe the ways of English and Dutch development.

Returning to English it is necessary to note that the profusion of complex verb forms with a quasi – auxiliary status (*have got to, used to, be able to*) is a striking feature of present-day English. Since the true modals (understood in a strict sense as *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would*) are morphologically defective, it is commonly assumed that a number of these complex, periphrastic forms (hereafter called “periphrastics”) fulfil suppletive syntactic roles: in some cases, there is fairly general agreement about this role (with *must*, there is the past form *had to* for the wanting **musted*; with *can*, the infinitive *to be able to* for **to can*; and with *may/can* (permission), the participle *being allowed to* for **maying, *canning*; in other cases, there is not so (with *will*, the infinitive *to be going to* for *to will*; and with *should*, the past form *was supposed to* for **shoulded*).

The semantic aspects of this situation are rather more obscure. A close relation between some modal – periphrastic (here – after “M-P”) pairs is standardly accepted (*must-have (got) to, should-ought to*), between others is less agreement as to the exact nature of the relation (*will – be going to*), while in certain cases a periphrastic is not obviously relatable any one modal (*is to*). In cases where a close semantic relationship is posited, this is commonly presented, whether implicitly or explicitly, as one of “synonymy” (however that term may be understood) [15, p. 1]. Nevertheless, certain specific semantic – or pragmatic – distinctions have often been argued for. Three well-known examples can be mentioned here: first, the association of some

form of speaker involvement or orientation with *must*, in contrast to *have (got) to*; second, the relation of the explicit expression of the performance of an action to the use of *was able to*, in contrast to that of that of *could*; and third, various hypotheses to account for distinctions in use between *will* and *be going to*. Such matters have not always been assigned great importance. Thus, distinctions between the *must – have (got) to* pair are treated in different ways [11, p. 13], and, generally, in more detailed pedagogical materials; but they are ignored in [12] (however, this is rectified in [13]), and they have no established place in theoretical accounts of the auxiliary verbs.

The term “periphrastic” is used to denote a complex verb that ideally displays the following three features: (a) grammaticalization; (b) idiomaticity; (c) semantic relatedness to a central modal auxiliary. These features requires some clarification. Feature (a), grammaticalization, requires that periphrastics have in common a set of syntactic and semantic features which together suggest the existence of a grouping of some significance but with less than categorical status [9, p. 3-7; 1, p. 230-244; 5]. Feature (b), idiomaticity, requires that the meaning of a complex form is not simply a function of the meaning of its components. This is intended to distinguish periphrastics from simple paraphrases (or paraphrastic forms). Feature (c), semantic relatedness, is the basic constraint here. Establishing truth conditional equivalence should be an appropriate way of showing whether an M-P pair are semantically equivalent, and the possibility of doing this will be explored. Before dealing with the classification of periphrastics, it is necessary, first, to set out criteria for the classification of auxiliaries, and, within them, of modals, and then go on to deal with items that are, in various ways, intermediate modal and full verb status. The following set of syntactic criteria has been widely accepted as a test of auxiliary status [10, p. 14-21]: (a) negation: the existence of *-n't* negative forms, as in *shouldn't* but **workn't*; (b) inversion: the possibility of occurrence in first position, before the subject, as in *should you?* but **work you?*; (c) “code”: the possibility of recurrence without a full verb, as in *so should we* but **so work we*; (d) emphatic affirmation: the possibility of use, when stressed in affirmation of a denied or doubted statement, as in *but he should!* but **but he works!* (for *but he does work!*). These criteria often referred to as the “NICE” properties, define the primary auxiliaries (*be, have, do*) and, allowing for a few anomalies, the secondary auxiliaries or modals (*can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, ought to, dare, need*). This list of modals can be narrowed down to be “pure” central group, which

would exclude the last three. These three items have, in particular, the following characteristics: *ought to* (at least in standard BE) standardly requires *to* with the infinitive, while *dare* and *need* also occur as lexical verbs; in addition, *used to*, with considerable restrictions, may show NICE features, but is usually excluded Palmer terms it “very marginal”, [10, p.170]. Beyond these items, there are verbs commonly treated as being semantically related to modals like *is to*, *be going to* and *had better*, which all start with a primary auxiliary, and in that respect display auxiliary characteristics. Obviously, there has to be some way of deciding how a limit can be set to complex forms of this kind, since while items such as those mentioned are felt to be fixed units, there are also cases of a less obviously idiomatic status (*be willing to* and *be allowed to*).

A reliable, but rather more detailed, treatment of this question is provided in [13, p. 121-127]. The criteria for auxiliaries here are as follows: (a) operator in negation with *not* (*cannot*); (b) negation and verb contraction (*isn't, 've*); (c) inversion of subject and operator (*will she?*); (d) emphatic position (*I will try*); (e) operator in reduced clauses (*can you? – no, I can't*); (f) pre-adverb position: positional option available for frequency adverbs and disjuncts like *certainly* (*she would never/ certainly believe that story* but **she believed never/ certainly that story*); (g) quantifier position (*the boys will all be there* but **the boys play all there*); (h) semantic independence of the subject, manifested in three different ways: (1) of subject-auxiliary restrictions (*the bus ought to be here at 5* but **the bus hopes to be here at 5*); (2) possibility of existential *there* – constructions (*there used to be a school* but **there hoped to be a school*); (3) active-passive correspondence (*thousands of people will meet the president = the president will be met by thousands of people*; but *thousands of hope to meet the president = the president hopes to be met by thousands of people*).

Assuming that the auxiliaries as a whole can be satisfactorily listed, the modals can then be defined as a subset according to the following two syntactic criteria [10, p. 26]: (a) no *-s* form: thus **he shoulds*; (b) no nonfinite forms: thus **to shold, shoulding, shoulded*; hence no co-occurrence: thus *I should can go*. There are following criteria for the characterization of the modals [13, p. 127-128]: (a) construction with the bare infinitive (*they must go* but *they ought to go*); (b) finite functions only; (c) no 3rd person singular inflection; (d) abnormal time reference (*he might return next May*); (e) is not simple: this refers to the fact that past forms of modals can be used in ways not available to other verbs – thus, *it was possible he will return next May* does not correspond to the standard epistemic sense of the *he might return next May*. On the other hand, the form in question, *might*, is not itself regularly available for past time reference (thus, **he might return yesterday*, to parallel *he may return today/ tomorrow*). This means that it is doubtful how far forms like *might* and *should* can be treated as past tense of *may* and *shall*, respectively, except in specific uses, such as in reported speech. The modals do, in fact, generally have anomalous potential for time reference (with *must*, that *must be done later in the summer*), where *must* has future reference; but with *have to*, that *has to/ will have to be done later in the summer*, with restriction on these uses, suggesting that *must* has wider temporal refer-

ence. This criterion for modals will be relevant to the comparison of certain M-P pairs below.

There is no doubt that English and Dutch are related languages and their relative bounds are reflected in different ways showing the long and interesting process of their mutual coexistence and influence on each other. Separating the distinct elements and differences between them helps to find specifications in some branches, particularly in the field of modal verbs (their grammatical forms and periphrastics). The West Germanic languages being our special objects in this investigation, have some adjacent districts, their family likeness (between modal verbs and periphrastics) is more intimate and obvious. Some modal verbs have gradually become extinct in proportion to the amalgamation of periphrastics. Developing periphrastics as substitutes of lost modal grammatical forms present day vocabulary has consequently adopted a certain stock of these periphrastic structures (formed without modal verbs), part of which are still preserved in the active vocabulary of the present day. Like the great majority of studies in this area, this description is primarily at sentence level. Direct comparison of English and Dutch modal verbs at the sentence level provides adequate contextualization. The Dutch language operates with auxiliary verbs (*hulpwerkwoorden*), they are used for forming tenses and voices. Modal verbs (*modale hulpwerkwoorden*) express possibility, desire, necessity, suppositional meaning. Modal auxiliaries are verbs which help or complement another verb. Dutch has four modal auxiliaries which form a separate category not only by virtue of their use, but also because of their formation (*kunnen, mogen, moeten, willen*) [14, p. 127]. Modal verbs can have more than one meaning. In the past-tense form they often have a conditional meaning in the present tense [14, p. 128]. *Kunnen* = possibility or ability: *Ik kan niet gaan = I cannot go. Zij kan goed schrijven = She can write well. Konden jullie niet komen? = Couldn't you come? Dat heft zij nooit gekund = She has never been able to. Dat kon well eens moeilijk zijn = That could well be difficult.*

Mogen = permission or possibility: *Jij mocht niet gaan = You were not allowed to go. Mogen wij het zien? = may we see it? Hij mag dat niet doen = He must not do that. Mocht u hem spreken, zeg hem dat alles in orde is = Should you (if you should) speak to him, tell him that everything is all right.*

Moeten = obligation or certainty: *Je moet het doen = You must do it. Moest jij ook werken? = Did you have to work too? Ik moet nu weg = I ought to/ should go now. Hij moet nog komen = He hasn't come yet. Zij moet het weten = She must know it. Dat moest hij noet doen = He shouldn't do that.*

Willen = desire: *Wil je het even voor me doen? = Do you mind doing it for me? Hij wilde (wou) het niet zeggen = He did not want to say it. Zij hebben het altijd gewild = They always wanted to. Ik won graag een kilo aardappelen hebben = I would like (to have) a kilogram of potatoes [14, p. 129].*

It is necessary to note that the verb *moeten* (*must, to have to*) is regular in the present tense: *Ik moet = I must; wij moeten = we must*. The verb *mogen* (*may, be allowed to*) is irregular in the present tense: *Ik mag = I may; wij mogen = we may*. The verb *kunnen* (*can, be able to*) is irregular and needs some attention: *Ik kan = I can; wij kunnen = we can; U kan/ kunt = you can*. These three verbs

(called modal auxiliary verbs) express the idea that an action needs to be done, or that it is wished that it be done. They do not themselves convey the idea of action; they are used with the infinitive of an action verb, which in Dutch goes to the end of the sentence: *Ik moet naar de winkels traat gaan* = *I have to go to the shopping street. Mag ik iets u vragen?* = *May I ask you something? Kan ik u helpen?* = *Can I help you?* [3, p. 47-48]. *Kunt U me zeggen waar we wohen?* = *Can you tell me where we live? Mag ik Uw pas zien?* = *May (can) I see your passport?* [2, p. 15].

Dutch modal verbs are involved into the construction (*mogen van; moeten van; niet hoeven van*). This construction is hard to match in English, but it implies actual or implied permitter of the action by *van*: *Dat mag je niet van moeder* = *Mother says you are not allowed to do that. Van wie mag(ik) dat niet?* = *Who says I can't do that? Dat moet ik wel van mijn ouders* = *My parents say I have to. Van mijhoef je niet te komen* = *As far as I am concerned you don't need to come. Dat hoeft niet van mijn hospita* = *My landlady says I don't have to. As is clear from these examples, negation of moeten changes the meaning: Ik kan zwemmen* = *I can swim. Ik wil niet zwemmen* = *I don't want to swim. Ik mag zwemmen* = *I am allowed to swim. Ik moet zwemmen* = *I must swim. Ik hoef niet te zwemmen* = *I do not have to swim (Bel.) Ik moet niet zwemmen* = *I do not have to swim. Construction niet hoeven te + Infinitive means not to have for Infinitive. This verb is only used in negation [14, p. 129-130]. Ik mag niet klagen* = *I can't complain = I mustn't grumble. Dat mag niet* = *That is not allowed. Hij mag het niet doen* = *He must not do it. Hij moet het niet doen* = *He does not have to do it [2, p. 34].*

In Dutch, however, unlike English, you can often leave out the action verb and simply express the idea with these so-called modal auxiliaries: *Ik moet naar de school* = *I have to go to the school. Mag ik een bier?* = *May I have a beer? Kan ik naar de winkelstraat?* = *Can I go to the shopping street?* [3, p. 48]. When modal verbs are used independently, without an action verb, its meaning (*gaan, komen, does,...*) is very frequently understood: *Ik kan het niet (doen)* = *I cannot do it. Hij moet vroeg weg (gaan)* = *He must leave early. Zij wil niet naar huis (gaan)* = *She does not want to go home. Je mag niet naar binnen (gaan)* = *You may not come/ go in. Any of the modals can be used in an expression where they are introduced by het or dat and where the subject is merely implied: Dat mag (niet)* = *That is (not) possible. Dat hoeft niet* = *You do not need to do that = That does not to be done. Het moet wel* = *It can't be helped = It must be done [14, p.130]. Het mag (kan) waarzijn* = *It may be true [2, p. 34].*

Dutch modal auxiliaries show the variation of their meaning in different tenses, particularly in past simple: *De man wilde me waarschumen* = *The man wanted to warn me. Kon je hem niet helpen?* = *Were you not able to help him? U mocht hem niet storen* = *You were not allowed to disturb him. Wij moisten vijf minute wachten* = *We had to wait for five minutes. These verbs in the perfect tense are not formed with the past participle, but with the infinitive. For verbs with te + Infinitive, the te is dropped, and they also are not formed with the past participle but with the infinitive: De man wilde me waarschumen* = *The man wanted to warn me. Kon je hem niet helpen?* = *Were you not able to help him? U mocht hem niet storen* = *You were not allowed to disturb him. Wij moisten vijf minute wachten*

= *We had to wait for five minutes. These verbs in the perfect tense are not formed with the past participle, but with the infinitive. For verbs with te + Infinitive, the te is dropped, and they also are not formed with the past participle but with the infinitive: De man heft me willen waarschuwen* = *The man has wanted to warn me. Hebje hem niet kunnen helpen?* = *Have you not been able to help him? U heft hem niet mogen storen* = *You haven't been allowed to disturb him. Wij hebben vijf minute moeten wacheten* = *We have had to wait for five minutes. Logic would seem to call for the use of hebben in the perfect tense of modals such as kunnen or mogen. Nevertheless, Dutch refuses as stoutly as any other language to be "logical". When an action verb occurs in a sentence like this, many speakers and not a few writers seem to be influenced by the perfect auxiliary of this verb (hij is gemoken; wijzijn gegaan), and say hij is niet kunnen komen; wij zijn niet mogen gaan, and so on [14, p. 132-133].*

The sense of future time in Dutch is generally expressed with the same form of the verb as the present. Dutch does have a future form for its verbs, however, and this is used when you wish to stress intension: *Zullen wij de roltrap nemen?* = *Shall we take the escalator? Dat zal ik doen.* = *I shall/ will do that. This tense is formed by using the verb zullen with the infinitive of the verb expressing the idea: Ik zal gaan* = *I shall go. Wij zullen gaan* = *We shall go. The future can also be formed by using the verb gaan (to go) with the infinitive of the verb expressing the idea, as in English: Ik ga kopen* = *I am going to buy. Wij gaan kopen* = *We are going to buy [3, p. 76]. The verb zullen might be said to function as one in expressing conjecture, probability or inevitability. What zullen has in common with the modal verbs: (1) That it syntactically acts exactly the same: the infinitive of the action verb normally stands at the end (Ik zal het morgen doen* = *I shall/ will do it tomorrow. Wij zullen naar de stad moeten gaan* = *We shall/ will have to go down town). (2) That past tense forms are used to express present but conditional meanings exactly as they are in English (Dat zou hij nooit doen* = *That he would never do. Zoe je dat misschien voor me kunnen doen?* = *Would you perhaps be able to do that for me? Eigenlijk moest het morgen klaar zijn* = *It really ought to be ready tomorrow. Ik wou graag wat citroenen hebben* = *I would like to have some lemons. Mocht hij dat toevallig niet weten, ...* = *If by chance he should not know that, ... Ik wou dat ik het kon!* = *I wish I could) [14, p. 138-139]. Other meanings of zullen to express not what is true, but what is probably true right now: Dat zal wel erg moeilijk zijn* = *That must be pretty hard. Hij zal wel heel knap zijn* = *He probably is quite smart. Zezullen dat wel gezien hebben* = *They've no doubt seen that. Dat zal wel: Probably so [14, p. 139].*

There is also a group of verbs that can be used together with an infinitive (the full verb), but in these cases *te* will have to be inserted before the infinitive. Some of these verbs are: *hoeven* = *have to; proberen* = *try; vergeten* = *forget; staan* = *to be; zitten* = *to be; beginnen* = *start; beloven* = *promise (U hoeft niet lang te wachten* = *You don't have to wait long. Ik probeer te komen* = *I am trying to come. Wij vergeten bood schappen* = *We forget to do the shopping. Hij staan te wachten* = *He is (stands) waiting. Ik zit te lezen* = *A am reading. De trein begint te rijden* = *The train starts to move. Ik beloof te komen* = *I promise to*

come). There are also such verbs as: *Ik duft niet te kijken* = *I don't dare to look*. *Ik weiger dat te geloven* = *I refuse to believe that* [3, p. 90]. Whatever meaning is intended normally becomes clear from the context. *Mogen, moeten, hoeven* express the idea that something needs to be done or that it is wished that it be done. *Moeten* could mean *must, have to, need to, should*: *Ik moet boodschappen doen* = *I have to/ must/ need to/ should do some shopping*. *Mogen* means *may, being allowed to*: *Ik mag hier fotograferen* = *I am allowed to take pictures here*. *U mag hier niet roken* = *You are not allowed/ supposed to do that*. *Dat mag je niet doen* = *You are not allowed/ supposed to do that*. *Mag ik u iets vragen?* = *May I ask you something? May ik een enkeltje Haarlem?* = *Can I have a single to Haarlem?* *Hoeven* is normally used when you do not have to do something: *U moet lang wachten* = *You have to wait a long time*. *U moet komen* = *You have to come* [3, p.91-92]. There is a certain semantic resemblance between *willen (to want)* and *gaan (to be going to)*, they are closely connected with context: *Ik wil bellen* = *I want to phone*. *Wil jij een appel?* = *Do you want an apple?* *Zij willen wat drinken* = *They want to drink something*. These verbs are used very frequently and are often in conjunction with another verb which then appears in its full form (the infinitive) at the end of the sentence: *Ik wil bloemen kopen* = *I want to buy flowers*. *Ik ga bellen* = *I'm going to phone*. *Wij willen wat drinken* = *We want something to drink*. *Zij gaan boodschappen doen* = *They are going to do shopping* [3, p. 90]. It is possible to find a set of correspondence between Dutch and English grammatical forms incorporating modal verbs and periphrastics: *U hoeft niet ...* = *you don't have ...*; *Ik durf wel ...* = *I do dare ...*; *Wij gaan ...* = *we're going ...*; *Ik moet ...* = *I have to/ must ...*; *Wil jij ...* = *Do you want ...*; *Hij kan ...* = *He can ...*; *Mag ik ...* = *May I/ Can I ...*; *Ga jij ...* = *Are you going to ...*

In the field of modal verbs modern English and Dutch show different stages of these languages on their way of transforming the synthetical structures into analytical ones. The English language being among all the Germanic ones the most progressive according to analytisation demonstrates the absence of infinitive and participial (I, II) forms for modal verbs, absence of their future, perfect forms, functioning past forms only for a few modal verbs, impossibility of cooccurrence for two modal verbs in one common grammatical structure. As a reflection of these restrictions there is a very well developed group of periphrastics which not only compensates the lack of grammatical forms but demonstrates the tendency to further analytisation. Periphrastics having the property of flexibility to such a degree that they are able to cover all the cases of the field of modality that cannot be covered with modal verbs. Dutch operates with modal verbs and has only a few undeveloped periphrastics.

The aim of this study was to investigate the functioning of periphrastic verbal items in relation to the modals they seem to relate to, and, more specifically, to consider the possibility that there are systemic distinctions to be observed between the use of the two sets of items in English and Dutch. The focus of the investigation was the proposal, widely expressed in various forms but particularly associated with Lakoff [6; 7] and Larkin [8], that modals express speaker-related meanings and intentions, while periphrastics express modal values that arise externally or independently of the speaker. English and Dutch having some correspondence in the modal verb groups (*can* = *kunnen*; *may* = *mogen*; *must* = *moeten*; *will* = *willen*; *would* = *wilde (wouden)*; *shall* = *zullen*; *should* = *zouden*; *dare* = *durven*) demonstrate some difference in meanings and functions. Dutch mostly operates with different grammatical forms but English does with periphrastics.

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