

Modal Verbs and Quasi-Modal Verbs: *Must, Will, Can and Have to, Be Going to, Be Able to*

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1. Introduction

When I was a junior high school student, I studied modal verbs such as *must*, *will*, *can*, and quasi-modal verbs such as *have to*, *be going to*, *be able to*, which correspond to each modal verb. I understood that *must* and *have to*, *will* and *be going to*, *can* and *be able to*, had the same meaning: that is, *must* and *have to* mean obligation, *will* and *be going to* mean future, *can* and *be able to* mean ability, and I understood that they were equivalent, so that *will* can be substituted for *be going to* in any situation. But, when I studied modal verbs in English Grammar Lesson and English Seminar, I found that the speaker chooses *will* or *be going to* in consideration of the events or the situations. I also found that modal verbs have two meanings.

In my thesis, I will take up modal verbs such as *must*, *will*, *can*, and quasi-modal verbs such as *have to*, *be going to*, *be able to*, and arrange the meanings and the differences between them.

2. Modal Verbs

2.1 The Usage of Modal Verbs

Modal verbs are used to indicate the speaker's attitude toward the events or the situations.

Let's compare the following examples:

(1)a. Mr. Wilkins is the oldest person in the village.

b. Mr. Wilkins must be the oldest person in the village.

(Collins COBUILD: 218)

In (1a), the speaker asserts the proposition as the definite fact, and the sentence does not include the speaker's attitude toward the event or the situation. On the other hand, in (1b), the speaker is certain that Mr. Wilkins is the oldest person in the village by using modal verb *must*, and the speaker thinks that nobody is older than Mr. Wilkins. As mentioned above, I can understand that the sentence containing a modal like (1b) is the speaker's judgement or consideration or opinion about the subject of the sentence, while the sentence without modal verbs like (1a) is the assertion about the subject of the sentence. Next, how about the interrogative sentence? Look at the example:

(2) What should I do?

(Lewis, Kurokawa *et al.* translation: 103)

Sentence (2) states not only the consideration or opinion about the subject (the

speaker) like (1b) but also about the addressee.

2.2 Root Modal Verbs and Epistemic Modal Verbs

I found in English Seminar that modal verbs have two usages as I described in Introduction. They are root usage and epistemic usage, and the modal verbs used as root usage or epistemic usage are respectively root modal verbs and epistemic modal verbs. Araki *et al.* (1977) say that root modal verbs express volition, characteristic, permission, ability, obligation, and so on that the subject of the sentence has. On the other hand, they say that epistemic modal verbs express the speaker's knowledge or judgement about the statement or the proposition that the sentence expresses. In Section 2.1, I explained that the speaker indicates their attitude toward the event by using modal verbs, and in this section, I have examined the root modal verb and the epistemic modal verb. Now I will examine *must* in (1b). *Must* in (1b) expresses the speaker's strong certainty that Mr. Wilkins is the oldest person in the village, certainty induced by the situation in which Mr. Wilkins' hair is white, or Mr. Wilkins is bent with age, and so on. It expresses the speaker's certainty about the proposition, so, *must* in (1b) is an epistemic modal verb.

Next, let's look at the following example:

(3) You must finish this work by 9 o'clock. (Imai 1996: 48)

Sentence (3) expresses obligation. Let's imagine that the speaker is the boss of an office. The speaker (the boss) assigns the obligation to his office worker (you). In this case, the speaker's attitude is the obligation assigned to the subject of the sentence. So, *must* in (3) is a root modal verb.

Let's look at the following sentence:

(4) You have to finish this work by 9 o'clock. (Imai: 48)

Sentence (4) is said to have the same meaning as sentence (3) in that they both express obligation. But, is sentence (4) equivalent to sentence (3) semantically and pragmatically? In the next sections, I will arrange the meanings and differences between modal verbs and quasi-modal verbs.

3. *Must* and *Have to*

In Section 2.2, I posed a question whether *must* and *have to* are the same or not. In this section, I will make a close examination of them.

Let's look at the following:

(5)a. The boss: You must finish this today.

b. Later, the office worker says to her coworker:

I have to finish this today. (Eastwood: 76)

Sentences (5a) and (5b) are the same in that they express obligation, but in sentence (5a), the necessity is inside the speaker: that is, the speaker (the boss)

assigns the obligation to his office worker. On the other hand, sentence (5b) indicates that the obligation is assigned by the boss: that is, the necessity is outside the speaker (the office worker). In the use of sentence (5b), the office worker is reporting that she is obliged to finish the work today. Her coworker thinks the boss says so, the obligation comes from the boss. The point is that the necessity is inside the speaker or outside the speaker.

Let's compare the following:

- (6) a. I must go now.
- b. I have to go now. (Imai: 48)

Suppose that the speaker is invited by his friend and he is in his friend's house. The speaker utters sentence (6a) or (6b) to his friend when he is going home. In uttering sentence (6a), the speaker imposes the obligation on himself. The possible situation is, for example, that the speaker promised his mother to be home by seven before he went to his friend's house and the time uttering (6a) is six thirty. The important point is that that the speaker thinks so too and agrees to promise to be home by seven. On the other hand, the possible situation for (6b), for example, is that the last train will start soon, or it's getting late, or the speaker's parents will lock him out if he doesn't get back home by seven, and so on, although he wants to stay at his friend's house more. In the use of *have to*, the speaker expresses that the situation forces him to go home, even if he is reluctant to do so. But, even in the situation in which the last train is starting soon, when the speaker wants to catch the last train, the sentence (6a) might be used.

Let's compare another point of examples:

- (7)a. I must make an appointment with the dentist.
(Swan, Kaneko *et al.* translation: 226)
- b. I have to make an appointment with the dentist.

In sentence (7a), I imagine that the speaker is suffering from toothache now, and the speaker thinks that it is necessary to make an appointment, while the possible situation for sentence (7b) is that the speaker's mother advises him to see a dentist for check up and he makes an appointment with reluctance because he does not feel anything wrong.

In (6a) and (7a), the necessity is from the speaker and the speaker expresses his judgement toward the event. In (6b) and (7b), the necessity is from the outside. The speaker states the situation in which the speaker is placed.

In this section, I have examined the difference of *must* and *have to*. Swan (1980: 265) says that "You must do something" means that the speaker thinks "You are obliged to do something" and *have to* expresses the obligation from the outside such as law, rule, contract, order of others, and so on. The point is that when the necessity is inside the speaker, we use *must*, and on the other hand, when the necessity is outside the speaker, we use *have to*.

4. *Will* and *Be going to*

When we talk about future events or situations, we use *will* or *be going to*. I found in English Grammar Lesson that in the use of *will* the speaker's concern is in the future when the events happen, while in the use of *be going to* the speaker's concern is in the present factors which will bring the future situations. In this section, I try to examine the meanings and compare *will* with *be going to*.

First, I will classify *will* into two groups. Let's look at the following examples:

A. Prediction

- (8) I will be twenty next Monday.
- (9) One day people will travel to Mars. (Eastwood: 40)
- (10) We will be in Manchester before ten, I expect. (Swan: 234)
- (11) Your marriage will never fail if you keep buying her flowers. (Swan: 236)
- (12) If I give you money, you will only spend it on drink. (Swan: 236)

B. Volition and Decision

- (13) There is the doorbell. -I will go. (Swan: 239)
- (14) It's cold. I will shut the door. (Eastwood: 40)
- (15) Come to a party. -OK. I will bring my boyfriend. (Swan: 273)

In sentences (8-12), the speaker predicts the future situations. It has nothing to do with the present. On the other hand, *will* in sentences (13-15) is used for an instant decision on future acts. In sentence (15), the possible situation is that a person invites his/her friend to a party and then the friend decides to go with her boyfriend at the moment of speaking. I have classified *will* into two meanings and given examples. In the examples, the speaker uses *will* in the case that he/she does not have the conviction that the event occurs surely.

Second, I try to examine and classify *be going to*. Let's look at the examples:

A. Prediction

- (16) My god—we are going to crash! (Swan: 234)
- (17) She is going to have a baby in June. (Swan: 235)
- (18) Look!—it is going to rain. (Swan: 235)

B. Volition and Arrangement

- (19) Neil is going to buy a new sweater. (Eastwood: 40)
- (20) I am going to visit my uncle tomorrow. (Eastwood: 40)

Sentence (17) expresses not only the future but also the present situation in which she is pregnant now. In sentence (18), the speaker predicts so because the sky is filled with rain clouds. In sentence (18-20), the speaker has a plan to buy a new sweater or to visit his/her uncle tomorrow. The speaker has already planned to do so at the moment of speaking. The use of *be going to* means that the speaker is focusing on some present symptom of future situation, or the speaker has already decided and has plans.

Next, I will consider the situations where *will* or *be going to* is appropriate. Let's

look at the following:

A. Prediction

- (21) a. It will rain this evening.
b. Look!—it is going to rain. (Swan: 235)

B. Volition

- (22) The phone is ringing.
a. I will answer it.
b. *I am going to answer it. (Swan: 237)
- (23) a. Where are you going to go for your holidays?
b. *Where will you go for your holidays? (Swan: 235)

Sentence (21a–b) are the same in point of making a prediction, but there is a difference between (21a) and (21b). In (21a), the speaker says so on the basis of the weather forecast. In sentence (21b), the speaker says so because there are rain clouds in the sky. *Look!* shows the judgement based on the present situation. Next, why is sentence (22b) wrong? I have reviewed that *will* means the instant decision at the moment of speaking, but *be going to* means what we have already decided. In uttering sentence (22b), I consider that the speaker has already decided to answer the phone before the phone rings. So, we can't say sentence (22b). And in sentence (23a), the speaker asks the addressee the plan for the holidays and the speaker thinks that the addressee has already decided and has some plans for holidays.

I mentioned root usage and epistemic usage in 2.1. As for *will* and *be going to*, type A examples are epistemic usage, and type B examples are root usage.

The difference between *will* and *be going to* is the speaker's attitude toward the event. *Will* is one of the modal verbs. In the use of *will*, the speaker sets up his/her mental world and the speaker's concern is in the future when the event happens. *Be going to* is not a modal verb: it represents real world cognition. In the use of *be going to*, the speaker's concern is in the present situation in which the event is coming to realization.

In this section, I have examined *will* and *be going to*. When the speaker uses *will*, the speaker makes a prediction and an instant decision, and when the speaker uses *be going to*, the speaker has already decided and has the plan or schedule: that is, the speaker recognizes the future event based on the present situation.

5. *Can* and *Be Able to*

When we express that someone has the ability or opportunity or permission to do something, we use *can* or *be able to*. I had understood and used *can* to express the ability or opportunity or permission in the present and *will be able to* to express them in the future and *could* to express them in the past before I studied modal verbs in English Grammar Lesson. But I found that we also use *can* to express the

ability in the future and *could* does not always express the past. In this section, I would like to examine *can* and *be able to*.

First, let's look at the following sentences:

(24) Sarah is very musical. She can play three instruments. (Eastwood: 70)

(25) Can you do this sum in your head? (Eastwood: 70)

(26) It's nice today. We can sit in the garden. (Eastwood: 70)

Sentence (24) means that Sarah has the ability to play three instruments and sentence (25) means that the speaker asks the addressee whether they have ability to do this sum in their head. Sentence (26) means that they have the opportunity to sit in the garden. Swan (1980) says that *can* expresses the ability to do something that you want and there is nothing to prevent the speaker doing something. In the examples like the above, *can* can be replaced with *be able to*, though *be able to* is said to be a little more formal and less usual than *can*.

Next, I will consider the "future" use. Let's look at the following:

(27) You will be able to drive it perfectly after a few more lessons. (Close: 125)

(28) We are too busy today, but we can repair your car tomorrow. (Swan: 126)

Sentences (27-28) express the future ability. But there is a difference between them. In sentence (27), the subject does not have ability to drive a car perfectly now but the ability exists in the future. On the other hand, sentence (28) means that although the act of repairing the car will be in the future, the speaker's ability to repair the car exists now; just a lot of things to do prevent them from repairing the car now.

Next, I will consider the "past" use. Let's compare the following examples:

(29) Sarah could play the piano when she was five. (Eastwood: 70)

(30) Luckily I had my camera with me, so I was able to take some photos.
(Eastwood: 70)

Sentence (29) means that she had the ability to play the piano in the past. It does not directly mention whether she actually played the piano, but probably she did repeatedly. On the other hand, sentence (30) means that the speaker had the ability and took some photos actually. The speaker had the ability and did so on one particular occasion. *Could* can be used to talk about general ability in the past, but it cannot be used to talk about a particular act which realized in the past. In this case, *be able to* is used. *Could* can represent future situations. Let's look at the following:

(31) I can't come today but I could come tomorrow. (Lewis: 107)

I have examined *could* in the past. But *could* in sentence (31) does not mean the past but the present. Sentence (31) means that the speaker does not have the opportunity to come today but will perhaps have the opportunity to come tomorrow.

In this section, I examined *can* and *be able to* and *could*. *Can* expresses that the ability to do something exists in the present whenever the speaker likes. *Could*

expresses that the ability to do something existed in the past, but it does not refer to the realization of a particular act. *Could* does not always indicate the past. It means the further opportunity in the past.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I took up the modal verbs such as *must*, *will*, *can* and the quasi-modal verbs such as *have to*, *be going to*, *be able to*. The speaker expresses the attitude toward the event by using the modal verbs. Modal verbs have root usage and epistemic usage. Root usage expresses the speaker's judgement about the subject of a sentence, epistemic usage expresses the speaker's judgement about the event. In the usage of *must*, the speaker has the necessity. In the usage of *will*, the speaker expresses prediction, or volition, or instant decision. In the usage of *can*, the ability exists in the present. On the other hand, in the usage of *have to*, the necessity is outside the speaker. In the usage of *be going to*, the speaker has already decided and has the plans, arrangements, schedules. The sign about the future event exists in the present. In the usage of *be able to* for the future, the ability exists in the future. When we say that the ability resulted in a particular action, we use *be able to*. I think that the speaker expresses the present situation where they are placed in the usage of quasi-modal verbs.

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