

# The Use of Modal Expressions in English by Native Speakers of Russian

ANNA WÄRNSBY

## 1 Introduction

This study examines in what ways and to what degree of success native speakers of Russian use modal expressions in English. The study is based on a translation experiment from Russian into English designed for use within the frame of the computer program *ScriptLog* (see Section 2.). The elicited data was subsequently analysed with respect to the question of whether the acquisition of modal expressions present a particular problem for Russian speakers.

The aim of this investigation is to see whether the use of modal expressions in English poses a particular problem for the native speakers of Russian who had participated in the experiment.

The hypothesis is that the subjects experience difficulties in using English modal expressions. My point of departure for this statement lies in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) (cf. Ellis (1994)) which states that learners' errors may be predicted by looking at the areas of differences between learners' L1 and the target language. Since modality is expressed differently in Russian than in English, from both a syntactic and a pragmatic point of view, it is possible, according to CAH, to identify modality expressions in English as a specific area of difficulty for native speakers of Russian. Further I suggest that this difficulty can be measured by the analysis tools available in *ScriptLog*.

## 2 *ScriptLog*

*ScriptLog* is a computer program developed by professor Sven Strömqvist, Lund University, and Lars Malmsten at the Department of Linguistics, University of Göteborg<sup>1</sup>. *ScriptLog* is a tool for experimental research of on-line writing. By using this program it is possible to record the writing process of an individual keyboard operator while using a word processing program. *ScriptLog* keeps a record of all keyboard events, i.e. each use of the alpha-numerical keys, cursor keys, the delete key, etc., the screen position of these events and their temporal distribution. Not only can the finally edited text be derived from a *ScriptLog* record but also the "linear" text with its temporal patterning, pauses and editing operations. Furthermore, *ScriptLog* facilitates analysis of texts recorded by means of the program, and it provides means for designing the researcher's writing experiment – e.g. using elicitation instruments, timing elicitation stimuli, etc.

So far it has been applied in research into the writing development of school children and university students, and for research on adults with severe reading and writing difficulties. In this paper *ScriptLog* is used in a translation exercise from Russian into English in order to identify particular areas of difficulty in the use of English modal expressions by speakers of Russian. The parameters chosen for analysis in *ScriptLog* are (i) lexical editing of the modal elements and (ii) pausing before modal elements.

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information about *ScriptLog* see *Gothenburg papers in linguistics*, 83-1999.

### **3 The design of the experiment<sup>2</sup>**

The experiment designed for this study is a translation exercise from Russian into English, consisting of two separate parts: namely a short text and 15 context-free sentences (see Appendix 1). In the first part of the experiment, the sentences contained a variety of modal expressions, e.g. adverbs, so-called "modal words", and particles. None of the categories were predominant, however. Unlike the text, the sentences were relatively easy with regard to the lexical items used. They were also syntactically non-complex. For these reasons no supporting glosses were supplied. This part of the experiment was timed, i.e. each of the sentences appeared on the screen for 5 seconds, after which the subjects were free to use as much time for the translation of the sentence as they needed. The subjects were informed that the sentences were completely unrelated to the text and to each other.

In the second part of the experiment, the subjects were given unlimited time for the translation of the text. For technical reasons, the text was divided into three parts of roughly the same size. However, the subjects were instructed to regard the text as a unitary whole. The motivation for this part was to test the subjects' command of expressions of modality in a coherent text. The text contained a variety of modal expressions. Particular attention was paid to modal particles and verbal modal expressions in Russian (see Section 4.4.). Thus, the resultant original text was of considerable lexical and syntactic complexity. Therefore, in the second part of the experiment the subjects were offered some supporting glosses within the Russian text. The subjects were not informed about the aim of the experiment.

The elicited material is displayed in Appendix 2.

The six subjects, henceforth Gosha, Sasha, Grisha, Pasha, Glasha, and Masha, all are native speakers of Russian have participated in the experiment described in the previous section. The age of the subjects ranged from 21 to 27 years. None of them had studied English formally at university level, either in Russia or abroad. One of them had, however, lived in England for two years. All of the subjects had lived abroad, in Sweden or Israel, during the last 6-10 years. Unfortunately, the fact that most of the subjects had not lived in Russia for a considerable period at the time of the recording may undermine the reliability of any generalization that may be suggested on the basis of this study, since the subjects' native competence in Russian may have been skewed by their intensive study of Swedish and Hebrew respectively. Still, the fact that the subjects have achieved a considerable uniformity in their translations indicates that the results of this study may be used to support the hypothesis stated in Section 1.

### **4 Modality**

Bybee & Fleischman (1995) regard modality as an addition of meaning (e.g. imposing obligation, giving permission or expressing judgement of the truth of the proposition) to the neutral value of a proposition in an utterance. Languages express modality via a great variety of formal means – morphological, lexical, syntactic, through intonation, or by a combination of the above means. This fact also reflects the functional diversity of modal expressions in a language.

Some researchers recognise three types of modality, i.e. epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality (cf. Palmer 1990). Although most of the examples in the Russian original which was offered for the translation to the subjects of the experiment are epistemic, the two other

---

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Irina Müller, Slavic Department, Lund University, for her invaluable remarks on the design of this experiment.

kinds of modality have also been included. The definitions used in this paper for the various kinds of modality are briefly presented below.

Epistemic modality indicates the degree of speaker commitment to the truth of the proposition. Bybee & Fleischman (1995) state that if a neutral/unmarked case (i.e. declarative sentences) is seen to indicate the speaker's total commitment to the truth of the proposition, then anything marked by epistemic modality indicates something less than total commitment on the part of the speaker. Example (1) illustrates this,

- (1) Jane must be home by now.

In sentence (1) the speaker expresses certainty with respect to the degree of truth of the proposition "Jane is home".

Palmer (1990, 1988) describes deontic modality as performative, i.e. deontic modals perform an action of "imposing obligation", "giving permission", "making promise", or in some other way influencing or directing the behaviour of the addressee. In cases of deontic modality the speaker may, for example, grant or ask for permission to act out the proposition of the utterance. This enables us to describe both epistemic and deontic modalities as discourse-oriented. Consider,

- (2) You must be home by 9 o'clock tonight.

In (2) by using the modal auxiliary the speaker imposes obligation on the addressee to come home by 9 o'clock.

Concerning dynamic modality, Palmer (1990, 1988) argues that dynamic modality is concerned with the ability of the clausal subject to perform the action stated by the main verb in an utterance. It may, therefore, be considered subject-oriented, as in the example below.

- (3) Timmy can draw pretty pictures.

In (3) the speaker is concerned with informing the addressee about Timmy's ability to draw pretty pictures, without expressing his/her commitment as to the truth of the proposition or deontically influencing the behaviour of the addressee in some way.

#### **4.1. Modality in SLA**

Mastering expressions of modality, and, in particular, expressions of epistemic modality, requires considerable language proficiency since expressions of modality are often polysemous/polyfunctional. This is reflected by the fact that in general L2 learners of a language use modally modified expressions less often than native speakers (Holmes 1988).

There is no general agreement regarding the order of acquisition of the different modal meanings. Stoffel & Véronique (1993), for example, claim that both deontic and epistemic modalities are present in learner language from the initial stages of L2 acquisition. On the other hand, Dittmar & Terborg (1991) suggest that deontic modality develops before epistemic. Deontic meaning is said to be more explicitly expressed, while epistemic meaning is more implicitly present. The findings of Dittmar & Terborg (1991) have been challenged by Giacalone Ramat (1992), who ascribed the developmental pattern suggested by Dittmar & Terborg to the particular elicitation techniques used in their experiments. Giacalone Ramat agrees with the results presented in Stoffel & Véronique and points out that the early emergence of epistemic modality in learner language may be explained in terms of its relevance for adult interlocutors.

There are, however, some aspects of the acquisition of modality which are generally agreed on. Firstly, Dittmar & Terborg (1991), Stoffel & Veronique (1993), and Giacalone Ramat (1992) have found that in the initial stages of L2 acquisition modal meanings are most often implicitly communicated. That is to say, modal meanings are often expressed through intonation or are retrievable through discourse/pragmatic indicators, the situational context and previous discourse. Secondly, beginner L2 learners tend to favour the use of lexical modal expressions to grammatical ones. Moreover, the emergence of adverbial modal expressions occurs earlier than the emergence of verbal modal expressions. Apfelbaum et al (1991) suggest that a plausible explanation for these findings may be the low degree of grammatical development in the initial stages of L2 acquisition. Furthermore, Giacalone Ramat (1992) and Terborg (1992, 1993) found that the use of modal verbs to express epistemic meaning is a relatively late achievement in L2 acquisition. The authors have also corroborated the findings of Apfelbaum et al (1991) in that they discovered that both epistemic and deontic meanings are expressed lexically first. Later, deontic meanings come to be expressed predominantly through modal auxiliaries, whereas epistemic meanings tend to be conveyed by full verbs of believing and thinking. As regards adverbial epistemic expressions, they are said to emerge later than epistemic main verbs and are less frequently used. Furthermore, epistemic modality is generally expressed through the pragmatic rather than syntactic mode.

#### **4.2 Translation and the acquisition of modality**

Since this study is based on a translation experiment I will give some explanatory background. Nida (1964:196-197) claims that there are three types of problems facing a translator when dealing with a category such as, for example, modality:

- (i) the "optional character" of modal expressions;
- (ii) the range, or scope, of a modal expression in an utterance;
- (iii) the frequency of selection of modal expressions.

It is in the optional features of language which produce the greatest difficulty for the translator. If expressions of modality are regarded as optional in the sense that modal expressions do not usually add to the proposition content of an utterance, modality can consequently be viewed as a difficult category to translate.

Translation is a complex process which occurs as part of the language learning process. Translation exercises are often used by teachers in the foreign language classroom as a teaching and testing device (Bensoussan & Rosenhouse 1990). Although this study does not undertake the task of evaluating translations produced by the subjects as such, some observations on what criteria may be used in such evaluation are worth mentioning in this context. In connection with translation from L2 to L1, Widdowson (1979:105) suggests that translation operates on three levels of understanding: surface equivalence (syntactic structure), semantic equivalence (propositional content, ideational and interpersonal elements), and pragmatic equivalence (communicative function, illocutionary effect). These levels of operation are also involved in translations from L1 to L2. This paper concentrates on expressions of modality in learner language. The levels of semantic and pragmatic equivalence are of particular interest. Erroneous translations at these levels are taken to indicate learners' insufficient command of modal expressions in English, which may further indicate a more general area of difficulty particular to Russian learners of English.

### 4.3 Modal expressions in Russian

Yartseva (1998) regards modality as a functional-semantic category, which expresses different kinds of relationships of an utterance to reality, and also different kinds of subjective qualification of what is being said. The term "modality", she points out, is used to denote a wide class of phenomena, which differ in semantic scope, grammatical characteristics, and in the degree of their integration into the different levels of language structure. There are also two types of modality – objective and subjective. Objective modality conveys the relationship of the proposition to reality in terms of a realis/irrealis distinction. Subjective modality conveys the speaker's attitude towards the proposition.

Of concern to this paper are the following notions: (i) expressions of modality in Russian regarding a cline in terms of the realis/irrealis distinction (reality – hypotheticality – irrealis); (ii) different degrees of speaker commitment to the truth of the proposition; (iii) different modifications of the relation between subject and predicate expressed lexically. The modal expressions in Russian used in the experiment are briefly introduced below. This description of the modal expressions in Russian is primarily based on Vinogradov (1972).

#### 4.3.1. Syntactic means of expressing modality in Russian<sup>3</sup>

The declarative mood in Russian is considered to be null, or negative grammatical category. The declarative mood is used for simple statements, assertions or negated assertions of an action in the present, past or future tense. This mood is seen as "objective". This "objectiveness" may, however, be modified by different nuances of subjective notions characteristic of the tense forms. Moreover, temporal expressions of modal nuances of an action are transferred to the modal words and particles, which may accompany sentences in the declarative mood. The combination of modal words and particles with different forms of the declarative mood expresses a variety of modal meanings. The two meanings relevant to the experiment are described below.

Firstly, the combination of the particle *bylo* with the past perfective verb form expresses interrupted action, which is demonstrated in (4). This complex form constitutes a specific sub-type of the irrealis mood. In some cases the modal particle *bylo* may combine with a perfective participle of realis type. Also *bylo* may sometimes combine with another modal particle *by* in conditional sentences. These observations indicate that there is an incipient similarity between the use of *bylo* and the optative mood.

- (4) Ja xotela **bylo** pojti gul'at', kogda poshol dozhd'.  
I wanted PART PERF-go walk-INF, when PERF-went rain.  
'I was about to go for a walk, when it started to rain.'

Secondly, the occurrence of modal words and particles in a declarative sentence change the reading of the sentence so that it comes to express unreliability, doubt, and sometimes even irrealis mood. Thus, some forms of the declarative mood are similar to meanings usually expressed by subjunctive and optative moods.

- (5) Mne skazali, chto ona **jakoby** zakonchila svoju raboty.  
I-DAT said-PL, that she PART finished her work.  
'I was told, that she has (ostensibly) finished her work.'

---

<sup>3</sup> The translations provided for each example in this section are intended to reflect the semantic equivalence of the examples. The surface equivalence is not taken into account.

Conditional mood (a sub-type of irrealis mood) in Russian is expressed by the combination of a past tense form (*l*-form) of a verb with the morpheme-particle *by*. *By* can be separated from the verb, since it has tendency to follow the first word in the sentence, whereby it may cliticize to conjunctions. This in turn leads to great variation of the syntactic forms and functions of the irrealis mood. The morpheme-particle *by* is the overt formal marker of irrealis and hypotheticality in Russian.

- (6) Jesli **by** ty prosnuls'a vovrem'a, ty **by** ne opozdal na urok.  
If PART you woke up in time, you PART not was late on lesson.  
'If you had woken up in time, you would not have been late for the lesson.'

The use of *by* in combination with the *l*-form of verbs is, in fact, polyfunctional. This construction can express conditional mood, as in (6), optative mood, as in (7), and – very rarely – subjunctive mood.

- (7) "Da, pozhaluj, ja pojel **by** i utki."  
Yes, perhaps, I PERF-eat-PAST PART also duck.  
'Yes, I think, I'd like to eat the duck too.'

Infinitives in Russian, apart from their use with objective meaning, can also express modal meaning, as can be seen in (8-9). Infinitives are frequently combined with lexical verbs which express modal colouring. Such combinations express variety of modal meanings, which are usually expressed by oblique moods.

- (8) Ja ne **mog** jego **pon'at'**.  
I not could him PERF-understand-INF.  
'I could not understand him.'

- (9) On nameren **ujexat'** v otpusk.  
He plans PERF-go-INF in holiday.  
'He plans to go on holiday.'

Infinitives can also serve to express subjective notions such as uncertainty, doubt, wonder, emotional hesitation or understanding of the pointlessness/futility of an action described in an utterance as in (10).

- (10) My tozhe poidem. Ne **ostavats'a** zhe na vecherinke vechno.  
We also PERF-go. Not stay-INF PART<sup>4</sup> on party forever.  
'We should go too. There is no point staying at this party forever.'

Different uses of infinitives as expressive modal elements are accompanied by special intonation patterns. (Intonation lies outside the scope of this study.)

Moreover, infinitives frequently serve some function in optative mood constructions.

- (11) Pokurit' **by**.  
PERF-smoke-INF PART.  
'I would like to smoke (a cigarette)/It would be nice to have a smoke.'

---

<sup>4</sup> Intensifying particle with connotation of contrast.

The use of infinitives in declarative, optative and imperative mood demonstrate the polysemy/polyfunctionality of this form.

#### 4.3.2 Modal verbal particles

Some of the particles can be considered to be representatives of the basic categories of modality in Russian, the particle *by* being a typical example. As mentioned earlier, *by* is one of the components of the subjunctive and optative moods. It is also possible to use *by* in order to express such modal meanings as possibility, desirability/preferability, and condition in infinitival constructions. *By* is also used in verbless constructions to express different degrees of hypotheticality as in (12).

- (12) Xorosho **by**, jesli eto tak.  
Good PART, if this so.  
'It would be good, if this is so (i.e. true).'

A separate group of modal particles is formed by the so-called prepositional particles (e.g. *pust'* 'let' in the permission sense). These particles in combination with a 3<sup>rd</sup> person verb form in the present or future tense are used to express different kinds of deontic modality, such as permission, order, invitation or advice to perform some action.

- (13) **Pust'** ne soglahajets'a, no ponimajet teb'a.  
PART not agree-3P-PRES, but understand you.  
'He may not agree with you, but he will understand you.'

Another example of a verbal particle is *li*. It can be used as a question particle. However, it may also express other modal meanings. Further examples are particles *budto* ('as if') which expresses the speaker's doubt towards what has been previously said by his/her interlocutor, and *jakoby* ('ostensibly') which expresses doubt with respect to the interlocutor's statements and characterizations.

#### 4.3.3 Modal words

Modal words cannot be defined as any particular word class on the basis of their syntactic distribution. They may combine freely with different elements in a clause, and have no connection to any word class in particular. Modal words may take scope over the whole utterance or over some element within this utterance. They are said to belong to a different grammatical domain from other elements in an utterance. Modal words are seen as elements that lie outside the syntactic structure of the sentence and can only be adjacent to a sentence. They are not seen as clausal constituents, not even as functional ones (cf. Cinque 1997).

The borders between modal verbs, modal particles and adverbs are vague. In order to decide whether the element in question is a modal particle or a modal word, one has to consider such factors as the grammatical function of the element in question, its phonetic properties, its lexical weight, its polysemy/polyfunctionality, and its function in relation to other elements.

However, it is possible to distinguish at least five types of modal words on the basis of morphological criteria:

- (i) Modal words of adverb origin: This is the most frequent group in modern Russian. The form of these modal words is identical to the so-called quality adverb ending in

-o, e.g. *dejstvitel'no* 'actually', *normal'no* 'normally', *bezuslovno* 'unconditionally', etc.

- (ii) Modal words similar to adverbs of category of state: e.g. *vidno* 'it seems', *slyshno* 'it is heard', *verojatno* 'probably', *ochevidno* 'obviously', etc.
- (iii) Deverbal modal words: Morphologically deverbal modal words are personal or impersonal present or future tense verb forms. Sometimes deverbal modal words may be formed by infinitives. Forms such as *priznajus'* 'I must admit', *vidish li*<sup>5</sup> 'you see', *govor'at* 'they say', *kazhts'a* 'it seems', *priznats'a* 'to admit', etc. constitute examples of this group.
- (iv) Denominal modal words: This is one of the most non-productive types of modal words formed by isolated forms of nouns with or without prepositions. Some of the modal words of this type are similar to the category of adverbs, e.g. *slovom* 'in a word', *v chastnosti* 'in particular', etc.
- (v) Deadjectival modal words: Sometimes modal words are formed from adjectives. In these cases a head noun of general character is omitted, but due to its semantic generality is easily recovered from the context, e.g. *glavnoje* 'the important (thing) is'.

The category of modal words tends to consist of phrasal collocations of two types: (i) verbal (e.g. *dolzno byt'* (V<sub>(aux)</sub>+V) 'must be', *otkrovenno govor'a* (Adv+gerund) 'frankly speaking', etc.), and (ii) nominal (e.g. *k sozhaleniju* (Prep+N) 'unfortunately', *po sluxam* (Prep+N) 'according to rumours', etc.).

#### 4.3.4 Adverbs

As mentioned above, the border between modal words and modal adverbs is not clear-cut. In one of the types of adverbs in Russian, namely the so-called quantitative adverbs, it is possible to observe new morphological characteristics and grammatical functions. This makes it necessary to view quantitative adverbs as a mixed or transitional group that combines functions of adverbs and functions of modal words.

The process of transition from adverb to modal word is described by Vinogradov (1972) in the following terms. Generally, adverbs are closely connected syntactically to the word they modify, be it a verb or an adjective. Sometimes this syntactic connection between the adverb and the word it modifies may be weakened, whereby the adverb is interpreted as a parenthesis or a modal word. Consider the following examples;

- (14) On **reshitelno** otkazals'a ot obeda.  
He categorically refused from dinner.  
'He categorically refused to have dinner'.
- (15) On, **reshitelno**, soshol s uma.  
He, (certainly), descended from mind.  
'I'm absolutely certain he's gone mad'.

In (14) *reshitelno* is a manner adverb, whereas in (15) it is a content disjunct expressing the speaker's certainty as to the truth of the proposition. Thus, the transition from adverb to modal word involves a radical change of the functions performed by the adverb in a sentence.

---

<sup>5</sup> These forms may sometimes be combined with the particle *li*.



## 5 The results of the analysis

The data collected was analysed in terms of the following parameters: (i) the on-line lexical editing performed by the six participants in the experiment on modal expressions, and (ii) pausing before modal elements. Furthermore, two native speakers of English<sup>6</sup> have been asked to evaluate the translations produced by the subjects (see Appendix 2). The area of interest was to investigate whether infelicity obtains in the translation of the type of modality from the Russian original into English. The results of these investigations are presented and discussed below.

The number of modal elements in the Russian original is presented in Table 1 below.

	<b>Total number of words</b>	<b>Number of modal elements</b>	<b>Percentage of modal elements</b>
<b>Part I, sentences</b>	90	20	22%
<b>Part II, text</b>	184	32	17%

**Table 1, The number of modal elements in the original text**

Some of the modal elements used in the Russian original have no equivalencies in English as, for example, the question particle *li*. This means that questions are not overtly modally marked in the English output. Other elements such as, for example, modal particle *by*, have no direct equivalence in English, and have to be translated by an appropriate modal verb or other modal element in English, which may be difficult for the subjects to accomplish. These factors may account to some degree for the lesser number of modal elements in the output of the subjects than in the original text (see Table 2 below).

	<b>Total number of words</b>	<b>Number of modal elements</b>	<b>Percentage of modal elements</b>
<b>Gosha, Part I</b>	110	16	14%
<b>Gosha, Part II</b>	140	10	7.1%
<b>Sasha, Part I</b>	48	9	18%
<b>Sasha, Part II</b>	153	15	9.8%
<b>Pasha, Part I</b>	94	16	17%
<b>Pasha, Part II</b>	197	14	7.1%
<b>Grisha, Part I</b>	111	18	16%
<b>Grisha, Part II</b>	219	12	5,5%
<b>Glasha, Part I</b>	85	15	17%
<b>Masha, Part I</b>	102	16	16%

**Table 2, The number of modal elements in the output**

Table 2 demonstrates the number of modal elements in the output of each subject. As was mentioned above the subjects have generally used less modal elements than there are in the original text. The exclusion of some modal elements in the output may be attributed to the fact that they do not translate to modal elements in English, but the corresponding meaning is

<sup>6</sup> My gratitude to Robert Ryan, English Department, Växjö University and Philip Clover, English Department, Lund University for their valuable comments.

expressed by other means. The exclusion of the modal elements which have an equivalence in English may, on the other hand, be seen as an indication that modal expressions in English pose a particular problem for the Russian speaking subjects. The fact that the subjects tend to underuse modal expressions corresponds to the findings of Holmes (1988), Ciacalone Ramat (1992), Terborg (1992, 1993), and Apfelbaum et al (1991) discussed in Section 5.2. This becomes even more obvious if we consider the results demonstrated in Table 3.

Subject	Editing of modal elements		Lexical editing, total	
<b>Glasha, Part I</b>	2	40%	5	100%
<b>Sasha, Part I</b>	6	86%	7	100%
<b>Sasha, Part II</b>	6	50%	12	100%
<b>Gosha, Part I</b>	4	80%	5	100%
<b>Gosha, Part II</b>	0	0%	4	100%
<b>Grisha, Part II</b>	7	31%	23	100%

**Table 3, Lexical editing**

Table 3 demonstrates how much lexical editing was carried out by each subject on modal elements in the output as opposed to the number of lexical editing in the output as a whole. The subjects had edited modal elements in the output much more often than it could be anticipated in relation to the number of modal elements in the original and the individual outputs. Consider subject Grisha, for example. Keeping in mind that the maximum potential number of modal elements in his output in Part II is 17% (as is in the original text, see Table 1), it is striking that he actually used modal elements in 5,5% of the cases in his output. Even more striking is the fact that the few occurrences of modal elements in the output have been edited in 31% of cases of all lexical editing carried out in his output. This tendency is demonstrated by all the subjects in the experiment, albeit to varying degree.

Subject	Average value		Median value	
	W/W	W/M	W/W	W/M
<b>Glasha</b>	4,693	7,611	1,2	3,7
<b>Sasha</b>	2,700	9,528	0,3	0,6
<b>Gosha</b>	1,224	1,489	0,7	1,05
<b>Masha</b>	1,763	3,490	0,9	1
<b>Grisha</b>	0,842	2,609	0,3	0,6

**Table 4, Pauses**

W/W – pauses between words; W/M – pauses between words and modal elements (Pausing before modal elements is also included in the category W/W (pauses between words)).

Table 4 above demonstrates the difference in pausing between all words in the exercise and pausing between words and modal elements. The figures suggest that the subjects paused more before choosing a modal element than they did when choosing the next word in the discourse. The fact that all of the subjects needed "extra" time before writing down modal elements can be considered to be yet another indication that the English modal expressions are difficult for the Russian native speakers to master.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Incorrect translation of modality</b>		<b>Number of translated modal elements<sup>7</sup></b>	
<b>Gosha</b>	9	35%	26	100%
<b>Sasha<sup>8</sup></b>	3	12%	24	100%
<b>Pasha</b>	11	36,6%	30	100%
<b>Grisha</b>	11	36,6%	30	100%
<b>Glasha<sup>9</sup></b>	8	53%	15	100%
<b>Masha</b>	5	31,2%	16	100%

**Table 5, The use of the modal elements in both parts of the experiment**

Table 5 is the result of interviewing two native speakers about the correctness of the output in terms of modality type used as opposed to the original text. The two native speakers were asked to evaluate the translations on the levels of semantic and pragmatic equivalencies (cf. Widdowson (1979) in Section 5.3.) Surface equivalence and grammatical errors have not been taken into consideration. It appears that the subjects have succeeded in their translation of the type of modality to various degrees. Subject Sasha, for example, has failed to provide the correct equivalent in English in only 12% of the cases. Subject Glasha, on the other hand, has failed in 53% of the cases. The average rate of failure for all of the subjects is 34%. The failure to identify the type of modality in English correctly is taken to be an indication that modal expressions in English pose a problem for the Russian native speakers who participated in the experiment. This also confirms the observation made by Nida (1964) that optional categories are generally difficult to translate (cf. discussion in Section 5.3.).

It must be mentioned here that the degree of the subjects' knowledge of English has not been measured prior to the experiment, and thus it was not included as a parameter in the analysis. The degree of the subjects' knowledge of English may, however, account for the individual variation between the subjects in terms of the number of modal elements used in the translation exercise (Table 1-2), lexical editing (Table 3), the pausing before choosing an appropriate modal element (Table 4), and the number of the modal elements used correctly in the experiment (Table 5).

## **6 Summary and conclusions**

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the use of modal expressions poses a particular problem for the subjects of the experiment designed for the study. The results of the investigation support the hypothesis adopted in this paper that Russian native speakers experience difficulties in mastering modal expressions in English. Thus, modal expressions were underused by all subjects in the output. Furthermore, lexical editing with modal elements was used to a greater extent, than with other lexical items. In addition, the extensive pausing before modal expressions seems to indicate that subjects needed more time to find the required modal expression than they did when searching for other lexical and

<sup>7</sup> The potential maximum number of modal elements in Part I of the experiment is 20; the potential maximum number of modal elements in Part II of the experiment is 32. (See Appendix 2)

<sup>8</sup> Subject Sasha has translated only 8 sentences from Part I of the experiment, the potential maximum number of modal elements in his translation is 9. The translation of Part II by this subject is also incomplete, the potential maximum number of modal elements for this part of the experiment is 31. (See Appendix 2)

<sup>9</sup> Subjects Masha and Glasha have not completed the second part of the experiment. (See Appendix 2)

grammatical expressions. The fact that the subjects have used the wrong (in relation to the original) type of modality in their output relatively often also points to the fact that the subjects' competence in expressing modality in English is insufficient.

It is, however, not possible to draw any far-reaching conclusions about the results of the analysis. A more extensive study is needed in order to make my tentative conclusions (statistically) valid. Another question which has not been addressed in the present paper is whether native speakers of Russian experience more difficulties in mastering modality in English than native speakers of Swedish. Since Swedish is closely related to English, it does not differ from English in terms of the means of expressing modality to the same extent as Russian. Thus according to the CAH, Swedes learning English will experience fewer problems than Russians with respect to the acquisition of modality. If this hypothesis is supported by such an investigation, it may be fruitful to relate the findings to a generative theoretical framework, in terms of parameter setting for the expressions of modality in the three languages in question.

## References

- Apfelbaum, B., Giacomi, A., Stoffel, H., Véronique, D. 1991. "Signalisation de contextes modaux dans le français d'apprenants arabophones", in Russier, C., Stoffel, H. & Véronique, D. (eds). 1991. *Modalisations en Langue étrangère*, 39-59, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'université de Provence.
- Bensoussan, M. & Rosenhouse, J. 1990. "Evaluating student translations by discourse analysis". *Babel* 36:2 65-84.
- Bybee J. & Fleischman S. 1995. *Modality in grammar and discourse*. Typological studies in language 32. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Cinque, G. 1997. Adverbs and functional heads, a cross-linguistic perspective. *Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Venice*, Vol. 7, n. 1-2.
- Dittmar, N. & Terborg, H. 1991. "Modality and Second Language Learning: A Challenge for Linguistic Theory", in Huebner, T. & Ferguson, Ch. (eds). 1991. *Linguistic Theory and Second Language Acquisition*, 347-384, Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Ellis, R. 1994. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giacalone Ramat, A. 1992. "Grammaticalization Processes in the Area of Temporal and Modal Relations", *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 14, 297-322.
- Holmes, J. 1988. "Doubt and certainty in ESL textbooks". *Applied Linguistics* 9/1, 21-44.
- Nida, E. 1964. *Toward a science of translating, with special reference to principles and procedures involved in Bible translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Palmer, F. R. 1988. *The English verb*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London and New York: Longman.
- Palmer, F. R. 1990. *Modality and the English modals*. London: Longman.
- Stoffel, H. & Véronique, D. 1993. "Acquisition de modalités en français et procès de modalisation chez des adultes arabophones marocains", in Dittmar, N. & Reich, A. (eds). 1993. *Modality in Language Acquisition/Modalité et acquisition des langues*, 235-245, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Strömqvist, S. & Ahlsen, E. 1999. "The Process of Writing – a Progress Report". *Gothenburg Papers in Linguistics* 83.
- Terborg, H. 1993. "Elaboration of the Modal Lexicon in German as a Second language", in Dittmar, N. & Reich, A. (eds). 1993. *Modality in Language Acquisition/Modalité et acquisition des langues*, 235-245, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

- Vinogradov, V. V. 1972. *Russkij Yazyk (grammaticheskoje uchenije o slove)*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Moskva: Izdatelstvo "Vysshaja Shkola".
- Widdowson, H.G. 1979. "The deep structure of discourse and the use of the translation", in Widdowson, H.G. *Explorations in applied linguistics*, 101-111. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yartseva, V.N. 1998. *Bolshoj entsiklopedicheskij slovar' yazykoznanija*. Moskva: Nauchnoje izdatel'stvo "Bolshaja Rossijskaja entsiklopedija".

## **Appendix 1**

### **Part 1, sentences**

- 1 Иван должно быть болен.
- 2 Если бы ты подготовился к экзаменам, ты бы их сдал.
- 3 Он, действительно, приятный человек.
- 4 Пойдёшь ли ты завтра на лекцию?
- 5 Собаки могут быть и опасными.
- 6 Денис должно быть проголодался.
- 7 Алекс может приехать в воскресенье.
- 8 Все дети, разумеется, любят мороженное.
- 9 Мария сказала что Иван якобы влюблён в Сару.
- 10 -Напишешь ли ты статью во вторник?  
-Конечно, напишу.
- 11 Я бы хотела научиться играть на пианино.
- 12 Не расскажешь ли ты мне сказку?
- 13 Наш план, кажется, удался.
- 14 У Сары тяжёлые сумки. Ты мог бы ей помочь.
- 15 Вы обязательно должны нас навестить.

### **Part 2, text**

#### *Размышления о счастье*

Что такое счастье? Что бы ответить на этот вопрос, хорошо бы сначала определить что же такое счастье. Состояние ли это души? Удовлетворение ли это потребностей? Может быть, счастье это возвращение памятного, как бы весеннего момента в твоей жизни?

Разумеется, нельзя разделить понятия «счастье» и «смысл жизни». Человек может быть счастлив, когда он работает. Но хорошо было бы, если бы работа была интересной и полезной.

Порой человек вроде бы бывает счастлив, когда он переезжает с места на место. В таком случае обещание нового, воображаемые приключения как бы становятся выражением счастья.

Я, например, самые счастливые часы испытывал в те годы, когда дети мои были маленькими. Да, действительно, я был тогда счастлив, независимо от каких-то бытовых проблем.

Счастье может также быть достигнуто в споре. Я был бы благодарен, если я мог

бы встретить человека, который способен убеждённо спорить. Пусть не соглашается, но понимает тебя.

Время от времени каждому нужно было бы задавать себе вопрос: «Счастлив ли я?» Если человек отвечает: «Да, я счастлив абсолютно», - это, несомненно, значит что человек этот самодоволен, что он утратил нечто очень существенное. Ведь правильно говорят, что полное удовлетворение всегда связано с утратой.

(По Ю. Бондареву)

## **Appendix 2**

### *Gosha, sentences*

Ivan must be sick.

-Will you write an article till Tuesday?

-Sure, I will.

I'd like to learn how to play the piano.

Would you tell me a fairy tale.

Our plan seems to succeed.

Sarah is carrying very heavy bags. You might help her.

You should definitely visit us some day.

If you have prepared to test you would have passed it.

He is a very nice guy, indeed.

Are you going to attend a lecture tomorrow?

Dennis must be hungry.

Dogs happen to be dangerous.

Alexander may come on Sunday.

All kids love ice cream, for sure.

Mary said that Ivan might have been in love with Sarah.

### *Gosha, text*

What is happiness? To answer this question we should better determine at first what happiness is. Is it a state of the soul?

Is it a satisfaction of your needs? May be happiness is a reflection of the memorable, spring, so to say, moment of your life?

Of course, one can't distinguish the notions of 'happiness' and 'sense of life'. A person can be happy while he is working. But it would be great if the job would be interesting and useful.

Sometimes a person might feel happy moving from place to place. In this case the promise of something new, expected adventures become the quintessence of the happiness.

As for me I used to experience the happiest days of my life when my kids were small. Yes, really, I was very happy then, ignoring any kind of everyday problems.

### *Sasha, sentences*

Ivan is probably ill

I would like to learn to play piano

Our plan seems to have worked

You simply must visit us

He really is a nice man

Denis must be hungry

Alexander can come on Sunday  
Mary said that Ivan is, like, in love with Sara

*Sasha, text*

What is happiness? To answer that question one probably needs to define what happiness is. Is it a condition of the soul? Is it satisfying one's needs? Maybe happiness is the return of a memory, of a spring-like instant of your life?

One cannot of course separate the notions of "happiness" and "the meaning of life". A man is happy when he is working. But the work should probably be interesting and of value.

Happiness can also be achieved in an argument. I would be grateful, if I could meet a person who is able to argue with conviction. He may disagree but he understands you.

Sometimes everybody ought to ask himself a question "am I happy?". If a man answers "Yes, I am happy absolutely", it doubtlessly means that this man is self-contented, that he has lost something very important.

One speaks the truth: complete satisfaction is always connected with loss.

*Pasha, sentences*

Probably Ivan is ill.  
Will you write article on Tuesday?  
Of course, I will write.  
I would like to study to play piano.  
Would you tell me a story.  
It seems that our plan succeed.  
Sara's bags are heavy, could you help her.  
You have to visit us.  
If you prepared to exams, you would pass them.  
He is really nice man.  
Will you go to the lecture tomorrow.  
Denis is probably hungry.  
Dogs can be dangerous.  
Alexander can arrive on Sunday.  
All children, of course, like to scream.  
Mary said that Ivan loved Sara.

*Pasha, text*

Reflections of happiness.

What is happiness? To answer this question, it would be better to define first what happiness is. Is it state of soul? Is it satisfaction of needs? Maybe, happiness is a return of important, spring moment of your life?

Of course, it's not possible to share notions of happiness and sense of life. People can be happy while they are working. But it would be good if work is interesting and important.

Sometimes people probably are happy when they move from one place to another. In this case permission of new, expected adventures seems to become

the expression of happiness.

I, for example, experienced the most happy hours in the years when my children were little. Yes, I was really happy, and it didn't depend on everyday problems.

Happiness can be reached in an argument. I would be pleased if I can meet a person who is able to argue convincingly.

Time to time it would be necessary for everybody to ask himself the question: "Am I happy?". If he answers "Yes, I am absolutely happy.", it means definitely that he is self-contented, that he loses something important. Because people say that full satisfaction is always related with loss.

### *Grisha, sentences*

I would like to learn to play piano.

Would you like to tell me a fairy tale?

Our plan seems to have succeeded

Sara is carrying heavy bags. Could you help her?

You absolutely have to visit us.

Ivan seems to be sick.

If you would have prepared to the exams, you would have passed them.

Indeed, he is a nice person.

Are you going to attend the lecture tomorrow?

Denis seems to be hungry.

Dogs can be dangerous.

Alexander can come on Sunday.

All children of course like ice cream.

Mary said that Ivan is in love with Sara.

-Will you write the article on Tuesday?

-Of course I will.

### *Grisha, text*

What is happiness? In order to answer this question, it would be good to define first what one means by happiness. Is it a state of the soul? Is it satisfaction of needs? Or, maybe, happiness is the return of some remarkable, sort of spring moment of your life.

Of course, it is impossible to separate the notions "happiness" and "meaning of life". You can be happy when you work. But it would be good if the work is interesting and useful.

Sometimes you are kind of happy when you move from one place to another. In this case, waiting for something new, imaginable adventures become the expression of happiness.

For example, I experienced my happiest hours when my children were small. Indeed, I was happy in spite of some usual problems.

Happiness can also be achieved during argument. I would be grateful if I could meet a person who was able to argue surely. Let be that he doesn't agree with you, it is important that he understands you.

Sometimes everybody has to ask himself "Am I happy?". If you answer "Yes, I am absolutely happy", then there is no doubt that you are a self-contented person, that you are missing something very important. They are right saying that absolute satisfaction is always a consequence of missing something.



*Glasha, sentences<sup>10</sup>*

ivan is ill,may be.  
will you write the article?  
ofcourse, i'll write.  
i'd like to sturdy to play piano.  
cân't you tell me a story.  
our plân,i think, is sucesfull  
sara has a very hevy bags. can you help to her?  
you shoud to visite us.  
he is very nice persone,indeed.  
will you go to lecture tomorow?  
denis must be hungry.  
the dogs can be dangerous.too,  
alex can come on sunday.  
every children realy like seciam.  
mery said,that sara must be in love with ivan.

*Masha, sentences<sup>11</sup>*

Ivan is ill probabli  
if you did prepared to the exam, you probabli passed it  
he is really a nice person  
Will you go on a lecture tomorow  
Denis must be hungry  
I want to learn how to play a piano  
Could you tell me a fairy tail?  
Our plan is succseed, I guess  
Sara has a heavy bags. You could help her  
You should defenetli visit us  
dogs can even be dangerous  
Alecsander may come on Sunday  
All children like ice-cream of course  
Mare told that Ivan probabli in love with Sara  
will you wright an article on Sunday -Yes,of course

---

<sup>10</sup> Glasha has not translated the text.

<sup>11</sup> Masha has not translated the text.