

PAPER

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MODALITY RESEARCH IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

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Abstract

As globalization encourages cross-cultural interaction, comparative studies on modality have gained relevance for translation studies and intercultural communication. Translators working between English and Russian face unique challenges in conveying modal meanings accurately, as each language's modal system is deeply rooted in its cultural norms. Comparative studies have become essential for identifying strategies that preserve the original tone and intent of modal expressions, particularly in contexts where misunderstanding could lead to social or professional consequences.

Key words: modality, modal verbs, comparative analysis, social interaction, multifunctional verbs, utterance, personal expression, semantic side, implications of modal expressions.

Introduction

The study of modality has evolved significantly over the centuries, with linguists developing a deeper understanding of how languages encode speaker attitudes, obligations, and hypothetical scenarios. Early linguistic studies in the 19th century focused on syntax and morphology without explicitly identifying modality as a distinct area of research. However, as linguists began to explore how language reflects thought and social norms, modality emerged as a key concept in understanding linguistic nuance. In English linguistics, initial explorations of modality were closely tied to the analysis of modal verbs, which serve as primary tools for expressing possibility, necessity, and permission. "The gradual recognition of modality as a central linguistic feature reflects broader shifts in linguistic theory toward understanding language's role in social interaction and personal expression". This shift set the foundation for more focused studies on modality, especially as linguists recognized its importance in both grammar and pragmatics.

Materials and methods

In Russian linguistic studies, modality gained attention as scholars observed its distinct characteristics within the Russian language

system, which relies less on modal verbs and more on particles and inflections. Russian modality studies began in earnest in the 20th century as Soviet linguists analyzed the social and cultural implications of modal expressions, focusing on how Russian speakers use language to navigate authority, obligation, and interpersonal relationships. This early work laid the groundwork for comparative studies by highlighting the unique features of Russian modality, which differ considerably from English. "Modality in Russian studies emerged as a response to the language's unique structures, with scholars recognizing the importance of particles and verb forms in expressing complex social meanings". This initial focus on Russian-specific modal markers continues to influence studies on modality, as Russian linguists have developed frameworks that capture the language's particular approach to modal expression.

Over time, modality studies in both English and Russian have expanded to include interdisciplinary perspectives, linking linguistics with psychology, philosophy, and anthropology. In English, modality research has increasingly focused on the pragmatic aspects of modal expressions, examining how modal verbs convey politeness, authority, and speaker attitudes. Russian modality studies, meanwhile, have embraced sociocultural analysis, exploring how modal particles and verbs reflect collectivist values and hierarchical social structures. "The interdisciplinary expansion of modality studies has enriched linguistic research, al-

lowing scholars to analyze modality through cognitive and cultural lenses” . This broadening scope has fostered a more holistic understanding of modality as a linguistic feature that operates within and across languages, linking grammar to culture.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the rise of formal semantics furthered modality research by introducing frameworks like possible worlds theory, which views modality as a means for speakers to represent alternate realities. This theory has influenced English and Russian modality studies by emphasizing the mental constructs underlying modal expressions. Paul Portner’s work, for example, connects modality to cognitive functions, illustrating how speakers use language to engage with hypothetical scenarios . These developments in formal semantics have added depth to modality studies in both languages, as linguists examine not only structural differences but also the cognitive processes that shape modal expression. By applying theories from formal semantics, linguists have gained new insights into modality’s role as a tool for representing possibility, necessity, and subjective judgment across languages.

Conclusion

Today, modality studies in English and Russian continue to evolve, with scholars increasingly interested in how globalization and language contact influence modal usage. As English becomes more prevalent in Russian-speaking regions and vice versa, linguistic exchange has led to a blending of modal expressions, particularly in bilingual or multilingual contexts. This recent focus reflects a modern awareness of how language dynamics and cultural exchange affect modality, encouraging comparative studies that bridge English and Russian. ”Globalization has introduced new dimensions to modality studies, prompting scholars to examine how language contact and cross-cultural interaction shape modal expression”. This contemporary focus on language contact underscores the need for comparative studies that address both traditional and emerging trends in modality.

References

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