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Modality and Method: A Comparison of Russian and English
Epistemic Modal Verbs through SFL and its Implications for Second
Language Learners.

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Abstract

This study is intended to shed light on similarities and differences in terms of functional structure of the clause when modality is expressed by use of modal operators in Russian and English, in order to arrive at findings which inform, and are applicable to, the process of English language acquisition by the Russian learner. The need for the investigation was prompted by the author's work experience in the field of English teaching, and the lack of explicit guidance in available textbooks currently used in Russian schools and institutions with regard to the particular issue highlighted. While learning the subject of Systemic Functional Linguistics, I drew parallels between the functional structures in the two languages, the purpose of which is to provide a roadmap which facilitates the learning and teaching of English modality to the Russian learner.

The approach of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), focusing on the metafunctions as the correspondence in the sociolinguistic message of the clause, is used as a basis for comparing the functional structures in both languages. The investigation of functional grammar features is carried out in order to spotlight both the similarities and the differences inherent in expressing a degree of probability of an event or statement indicated, not only by the choice of an appropriate modal verb, but also its placement within the clause. The role of the social context in which the text is set is noted as significant for delivering the precise meaning of the message. Hence, the proposition will be pursued through further investigation in the field of modality, and viewed from perspectives of sociolinguistics.

Key words: epistemic modal verbs, modality, the Russian learner, foreign language acquisition, the interpersonal metafunction, the Mood, learning difficulties, Contrastive Analysis, functional approach, SFL.

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1. Introduction

Modality, expressed by the use of modal verbs, has been a focus of scholars representing different cultures and languages for several decades. Modality expresses attitude of the speaker to the statement or event expressed in the rest of the clause and often reflects socio-environment; hence, sociolinguistics is employed when analyzing the patterns of modal verbs behavior.

Being involved in teaching English to Russian learners, I have observed that expressing probability in English by the use of modal operators causes difficulty to many. Very often, the learner is confused by particular structures that reveal unexpected semantic meanings that can be explained by a number of factors, the most obvious of which is that, when representing modality, the significance of sociolinguistics should not be underestimated.

The environment in which the process of ESL acquisition takes place for majority of Russian learners is different from those of West European learners, or for those who have an opportunity to learn English in the country where it is their mother tongue. Hence, real-world, social communication with native speakers may be substantially different from that described by SLA scholars like Krashen, who strongly advocates that practicing the target language can bring benefits to the learner in facilitating efficient language acquisition.

The role of explicit knowledge gained from language input may be greater than that in many other European countries and this is due, to some degree, to the fact that the two languages belong to two different branches in the Indo-European language family – the Germanic branch in the case of English, and the Balto-Slavic branch in the case of Russian.

Russian students often ask their teachers questions on grammar issues, and English modality is one of the difficulties they most frequently encounter in my experience. The misperception of aspects of probability is, in my opinion, a significant problem and is caused by projecting parameters of L1 onto L2. When similarities emerge to a high degree, the nature of L2 language may become obscure; in the case to be examined in this essay, it is a system of epistemic modals, and the effect of the positive transfer diminishes.

This analysis is inspired by Halliday's perception of language, more precisely, the grammar in the interrelation with vocabulary that constitutes "the inner core of language" which is defined as "lexicogrammar" (15). Among various versions of theory of functional grammar, Halliday describes Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which "gives priority to paradigmatic relations: it interprets language not as a set of structures but as a network of SYSTEMS, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (ibid).

The paper seeks to shed some light on the issue of modality as expressed by the use of modal operators in Russian from the perspectives of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and compares it with the English system of epistemic modals, in order to highlight substantial lexico-grammatical differences between the two languages. I will analyse modality indicating a degree of probability in the clause and therefore special attention will be paid to a part of the clause in which modality is constituted, namely the Mood.

As mentioned, the languages belong to two different language branches of the Indo-European language family. Consequently, I will argue that they have similarities and differences in the functional structures which can result in ambiguity of semantic meanings when expressing probability if similar structures are perceived, without consideration of the semantic meanings that the structures reveal. The semantic meaning is also influenced by the nature of language as it reflects the social environment. Hence, the lexical choice of a correct modal operator is often based on the context, or the situation in which the text is involved.

The study is carried out with possible benefits for the Russian learner in mind, and for whom the English system of modality may seem both familiar and perplexing in equal measure, and who would like to gain 'grammatical competence' which

"means that they are able to use the rules of the language automatically to produce grammatical sentences. It also means that they are able to make accurate judgments regarding the grammaticality of the sentences they hear and read" (Cowan, 5).

Chapter 2 aims to outline the need for developing linguistic approaches which investigate language from socio-linguistic perspectives, that is to say, the perception that language, in addition to the aspects that are described by traditional grammar, has functions that inform us of the social environment. I will expound the main aspects of SFL, and also discuss the SLA

approach known as “Contrastive Analysis” (CA), within the framework that will be employed in the study.

Chapter 3 concerns the methodology used in the study, specifically, the collation and processing of my primary data. The central aspect of my study – the degree of probability expressed by modal operators in Russian and English – will be considered from perspectives of SFL, and chief principles of an SLA approach, known as “Contrastive Analysis”, will be applied. Chapter 4 is devoted to the investigation of functional structures of the clause when probability is expressed using modal operators in Russian and English. The research aims to find segments that are similar in the two languages and which may be seen as positive transfer in the process of SLA, and negative transfer, which might cause misunderstanding or confusion to the Russian learner. Since SFL is employed as the main theoretical basis for the analysis, the functional parameters, particularly the Mood of the clause and its constituents, will be examined in detail.

In order to simplify navigation within the analysis of Russian clauses, I will present some Russian verbs which constitute the modality and, therefore, appear in the Mood.

The chapter is divided into subchapters where I will describe and analyse:

- interpersonal metafunctions of the clause and its role in the indicating probability;
- epistemic modals in the target languages, their position within the clause and its impact on the semantic meaning;
- distinctions in tense aspects;
- a distinct aspect of Russian modal verbs which can be employed within a verbal group representing an adverbial causing a change in the structure of the Mood and, as a result, tense rearrangements and possible impact on semantic meaning;
- the means of expressing positive and negative modal statements;
- correlation between the functional structure and semantic meaning of the clause.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings of this research and their possible contributions in informing the processes of ESL acquisition by the Russian learner in aspects of modality as expressed by modal operators. Referring to scholars like Halliday, Vygotsky, Meisel and Saville-Troike, I will consider the CA notion that, in the process of L2 acquisition, the learner, to some extent, projects L1 parameters onto L2, and that analysis of segments of grammatical features of the two languages

should inform teachers and, thereby, ultimately bring benefits to the learner in the process of communicative competence acquisition.

Taking into account some specific aspects of grammar of the two languages, I will suggest that presentation of English modality to the Russian learner, particularly the features of probability, should be made having regard to cultural features inherent within English grammar. Since the Mood “carries the burden of the clause as an interactive element”, thus, as it defines the modality of the clause and evaluation of the proposition, it is suggested to be a stepping stone in the articulation of modality during the process of ESL acquisition (Halliday, 77).

In the Conclusion section, I will summarise the findings of this paper. With regard to modality, the most significant common feature of the two languages is that it is located in the Mood. There, distinctive features such as tense aspects, lexical choice and placement of a means of modality within the Mood, should be made with consideration of the nature of the target language and the likely sociolinguistic implications when decoding the message.

The ultimate aim of L2 acquisition – presumably, communicative competence – may be achieved by the collaborative presentation of traditional grammar aspects and sociolinguistic factors representing the core of the message and indicating the attitude of the speaker to the event or statement.

2. Literature Review

The process of L2 acquisition evokes more and more interest from scholars all over the world concerning various linguistic approaches. This phenomenon may be explained by globalization, and the fact that English is considered to be a business language draws special attention to it. The ways L2 is acquired vary depending on many factors including closeness of L1 and L2, a learner’s age etc. and “while there are interesting similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition, the process cannot be equated, nor can multilingualism be assumed to involve simply the same knowledge and skills as monolingualism” (Saville-Troike, 8). However, scholars are content that there are some universal rules or mechanisms which, while they are

often different from those of L1, nevertheless contribute to L2 acquisition. Studies of traditional grammar could not answer some questions that researchers posed on the subject of language functions. Hence, in the early twentieth century, a new approach concerning analysis of functions of language was originated in the Prague School of linguistics.

Functionalism, as it is called, considers “language primarily as a system of communication rather than a set of rules”(Saville-Troike, 52). It focuses on both structural and pragmatic functions. The former concerns the functional roles that every structural element plays in the clause in order to organize and deliver a semantic meaning of a message. The latter, on a general scale, conveys sociolinguistic aspects. The two functions are considered to be interdependent. Hence, the structure of the text depends, among other aspects, on a sociolinguistic environment which determines the lexical choices that a speaker makes in order to communicate.

As Tomlin states, the “scope of concern goes beyond the sentence to include discourse structure and how language is used in interaction, and to include aspects of communication beyond language” (cit. Saville-Troike, 53).

2.1. Functional Approaches

One of the influential approaches, Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), investigates the “interrelated systems of choices that are available for expressing meaning” (Saville-Troike, 53). The approach, based on Malinowski’s idea, has been developed by M .A. K. Halliday. One of the main concerns is that the purpose of language acquisition is perceived for communicative use, therefore, “learning language is learning how to mean” (Halliday, 345).

SFL identifies three metafunctions which make the meaning of the clause content: **experiential, interpersonal** and **textual**. The functions correlate in such a way that the ordering of the clause reveals the message the speaker intends to deliver. Due to cohesion of the text, the clauses are interdependent in terms of the functional structures; hence, context often reveals a precise meaning of the message and so the semantic meaning often derives either from a preceding or following text, or the situation involved. My focus will lie within the interpersonal function.

2.2. The interpersonal metafunction and modality

The interpersonal metafunction describes the clause from a perspective of an interaction, exchanging meanings. It identifies two main components of the clause: the Mood (M) and the Residue (R). It is the Mood that may make an interaction continue particularly in informal language since it consists of the two elements, the Subject (S) and the Finite (F) which, in some cases, may constitute a clause as a whole. The definition of the Subject in SFL, although close to the traditional one, is distinguished in terms of the constituency: it may be represented by a nominal group which is either complex, or includes a postmodifying embedded clause, or an embedded clause as an equivalent to a nominal group (Tompson, 43).

The Finite, which is represented by a small number of verbal operators, expresses either tense or modality. It is the latter which will be the main focus of this paper and so attention will be directed chiefly to the Finite and the Mood as the entirety of the function of interaction. Among the three main types of modality - probability, usuality and obligation – the former is investigated in this paper, particularly probability expressed by the use of modal operators.

The modal operators *may*, *might*, *must*, *cannot* and *could*, which are employed for the purpose of expression of probability, are called **epistemic** modals. The same modals are incorporated in a group of **root** modals which express, among other aspects, will, ability and obligation: these are the aspects that present difficulties for the ESL learner. Epistemic modals are defined as “speaker-oriented”, while roots modals consider “some states of affair” (Barbiers, 1). The precise semantic meaning encoded in the Mood often derives from the **context** since:

each of the modals can express more than one meaning; in fact some have four or five. Furthermore each modal can appear not only as a simple form (alone with a verb stem), but also in the perfect aspect – in a construction with HAVE plus –EN. But the structural forms and semantic coverage do not correlate perfectly ... An understanding and appreciation of the limitations on the patterns of perfectibility can be a useful shortcut for the ESL students, who need a feeling for these patterns (Bowen , 283).

2.3. Systematic Linguistics in the Process of Presentation of Modality

When investigating modality and the use of modal verbs, consideration should be given to the semantic meaning which derives from the context which, in turn, requires what Saville-Troike refers to as “pragmatic competence”, which she defines as “what people must know in order to interpret and convey meaning within communicative situations” (134). When analyzing modal verbs, Bowen underlines the uneven pattern of structural and semantic correlation of modal operators and warns against perceiving modals without considering a context of the text:

if syntactic considerations take precedence over semantic ones in the teaching presentation, such incorrect generalizations are almost inevitable. And because the resulting sentences are structurally correct, the serious communicative error may not be readily recognized by the learner. (284)

The two languages, English and Russian, have some similarities in expressing modality, the most significant one is the fact that modality is expressed in the Mood. However, the nature of the languages are distinct in terms of the number of modal operators, tense definition and social perception of modality. Thus, the process of SLA should take into consideration aspects of traditional grammar, along with SFL, in order to avoid semantic incorrectness and, by doing so, enable the acquisition of a language which allows the learner deliver and receive correct meanings.

In terms of traditional grammar, the tense aspects may present difficulty to the learner since they are distinct in the two languages. However, taking into consideration that, at the stage of language acquisition when the learner is introduced to modality expressed by modal operators, the learner is supposed to have acquired knowledge related to main tense aspects; hence, the tense issue will mostly be related to features of the correlation between the modal operator and auxiliary verbs such as *be* and *have*. We will assume that it is generally the realization of the relationship **modal operator + verb (infinitive form) + respectively tensed verb (optional)**.

The syntactic structure needs the support of a semantic realization of the meaning. At this stage, SFL approaches may be useful having regard to the scale of probability; hence, the

attitude of the speaker to the proposition is embedded in the Mood. This reflects the sociolinguistic aspects that exist within the language. The relatively wide scale of evaluation options when choosing a modal verb of the proposal followed in the rest of the clause indicates the sociolinguistic nature of the use of the language which is distinctive to the Russian learner. The semantic meanings of probability expressed by the modal verbs should be given special attention, e.g. how the choice of a modal operator, combined with a tense aspect, affects the semantic meaning and validity of the proposition expressed in the rest of the clause.

2.4. Modality in Russian

Modality expressed by use of modal verbs in Russian is distinctive in many ways, the most prominent of which are:

- the smaller number of modal verbs than in English;
- use of modal verbs as adverbials in a Modal Adjunct;
- tense aspects.

How does Russian smaller vocabulary in term of modal verbs compare to the wider spectrum of use of English modals? The answer is that it is partly through combining modals with the auxiliary verb *быть* (English analogue *be*), and partly through the syntactic change within the clause (Kachalova, 231). The semantic meaning of the same modal verb may change when representing the Finite or a Modal Adjunct; furthermore, the position of the adjunct within the Mood may define the scale of certainty when probability is expressed.

The semantic meaning contained within two Russian modal operators *может* and *должен* comprises a wide scale of probability described by two metafunctions: **interpersonal** when shifting from the Finite to a Modal Adjunct, and **textual** when taking position as the Theme, or within the Rheme.

In a declarative clause, the speaker proposes the validity of the information embedded in the rest of the clause – the Residue. The hearer may accept, reluctantly or willingly, or reject, the validity by giving their evaluation via the Mood. Thus, negotiation is carried through the Mood where lexical forms may differ but, in terms of their function, they remain the same since it is **evaluation** which continue as the focus of modality. The scale of evaluation may

vary in different languages, depending on the nature of the language, the number of modal operators and their use.

2.5. Outline of Contrastive Analysis (CA).

Contrastive Analysis as a linguistic approach which aims “to increase efficiency in L2 teaching and testing” was developed in the 1950s in the USA by R. Lado, who taught and observed foreign students projecting L1 parameters onto L2. Lado argues that

“we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. (qut. in Saville-Troike, 34)

CA considers **positive transfer**, when the learner uses an L1 structure which is appropriate when learning L2, and **negative transfer** when the projected structure is inappropriate in L2. CA comparable segments of language are analyzed and the “information provides a rationale for constructing language lessons that focus on structures which are predicted to most need attention and practice” (Saville-Troike, 35).

The principles of CA will be used in this paper when comparing and contrasting functional structures of the clause on the interpersonal level, particularly the Mood, when probability is expressed by the use of modal operators in English and Russian. Possible difficulties that the Russian learner may encounter in ESL acquisition and solutions will be noted.

3. Methodology

This analysis is a qualitative study which covers grammatical aspects related to the use of modal operators in the two languages, and the impact of grammatical structures on semantic meanings of clauses - the similarities and differences in terms of expressing modality in the Russian and English languages. The phenomenon is investigated from perspectives of SFL, and is intended to provide insights which inform those who are seeking to develop SLA approaches, especially those who are attempting to aid Russian students learning English, and vice-versa. In spite of the fact that the languages belong to two substantially different

branches of the Indo-European language family, the chief principles of expressing modality are similar, though not equal, when viewed from perspectives of SFL. The analysis of patterns of language behavior considers the L2 learner's perception, taking into account similarities which may benefit the process of SLA, and confusion which may occur due to distinctive features in both languages.

Since I, as the author of this paper, am a Russian native speaker who is involved in teaching ESL, the primary data derives from my work experience in small groups of students of varying ages. Questions concerning modality in English often emerge at the level of upper-secondary school, though. I will provide the examples of clauses which frequently cause difficulties to learners when trying to understand the interrelation between the semantic meaning and functional structure of the clause. I will also utilize some excerpts from Russian grammar books oriented at the learner of intermediate level in English.

The data concerns modal verbs operating as means of expressing a degree of probability in Russian and English. Direct translations, as well as possible interpretations, are provided in the investigation, and functional structures related to appropriate topics are examined.

Secondary data is represented by an approach in SFL, as described by Halliday and Thompson, related to the metafunctions of the clause which are "used as the basis for exploring how meanings are created and understood" (Thompson, 28).

The study also uses Contrastive Analysis (CA), the method which is based on the definition and comparison of L1 and L2 segments at different levels in order to predict potential difficulties in the process of L2 acquisition. CA employs terminology such as **positive** and **negative transfer**, which describe the L2 learner's appropriate and inappropriate projections respectively of L1 **parameters** onto L2. Parameters are perceived as being the constituents of **principles** of universal grammar (UG) - properties of every language - which are "points where there is limited choice of settings depending on which specific language is involved" (Saville-Troike, 47).

The clauses expressing probability by use of epistemic modals in the two target languages will be analyzed from perspectives of the functional structure, and then compared and

contrasted in order to highlight similarities and differences applying CA principles. Possible ambiguity in reading is highlighted, and sociolinguistic aspects are considered.

4. Modality and the Mood

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of modality expressed by epistemic modal operators in Russian and English carried out from perspectives of SFL. The interrelation between the functional structure and semantic meaning will be in focus so as to draw parallels, and define distinctions between the two languages considering the L2 learner's perception of the grammar structure.

I will provide a direct translation of Russian clauses into English in order to maintain the functional structure which is examined. In addition, I will propose some interpretations when considering semantic meanings.

4.1. Introducing Some Russian Verbs and their Specialities

In this work, I will use phrases and clauses written in Russian for analysis and compare some types of modality expressed in the two languages. Thus, I intend to introduce some Russian words, namely verbs, since I will focus mainly on verbal phrases consisting of two verbs including a modal. These verbs have analogues in English; however, verbs in Russian change their form according to a gender, tense and plurality (TGP) by adding affixes.

Here is a short list of some English verbs translated into Russian:

- be – БЫТЬ
- will – БУДЕТ (*future form of БЫТЬ; see above*)
- can – МОЖЕТ
- could – МОГ
- may/might – МОЖЕТ
- must – ДОЛЖЕН
- should – СЛЕДУЕТ

It is worth mentioning some specialties of Russian grammar, e.g. Russian *быть*/ (English *be*) is often ellipped in intransitive clauses in present tense, but appears in the past and future tenses. The tense is specified either by the modal or by a following lexical verb; hence, there

are no auxiliaries for such a purpose. The scope of this work does not allow for the examination of tense formation in Russian, so I shall consider only some aspects which are related to the purpose of this investigation.

There are two modal verbs in Russian which are employed for the purpose of speculation: *может* and *должен*, the English analogues of *can/could/may/might* and *must* respectively. The two modals have different patterns of realization as MA or F in a clause; consequently, I consider they should be analyzed separately in this paper. Hence, the degree of certainty in Russian is expressed by two epistemic modals *может* and *должен*, which means that an attempt to adjust English modality directly to that of Russian is unlikely to be successful.

I will analyse the Mood as a unit representing a scale of degree of certainty when speculating in both languages. Thus, the Mood carries out the same function on the interpersonal level considered by SFL though other grammatical aspects within the Mood may significantly differ in the two languages. I will argue that, in order to achieve the same semantic meaning, the means which are used to express possibility in both languages should first be studied separately, indicating the culture of the language and, only then, parallels and translations or interpretations should be made. The Mood, I will argue, carries out the same function in both languages, but it could be the Finite or a Modal Adjunct which are the means of modality, and that is features of the language which emphasise modality by the most appropriate choice of them.

Performing a translation of single sentences from one language into another is, therefore, not always an effective means of L2 acquisition since modality should be considered in a context in order to reflect the semantic meaning expressed in an L2 utterance or text.

4.1.1. The Mood

Mood consists of two main elements: Subject and Finite, (Modal Adjunct is optional). Together, they constitute a basic component of the clause. In functional terms, the Finite brings the proposition made in the clause to an arguable point by defining the time of the speech event and its validity, namely, primary tense and modality respectively, as viewed from grammatical perspectives (Halliday, 75).

Modal operators have **neutral** tense and “typically ... do not belong to the proposition: they are part of what the speaker asserts, rather they express the speaker’s attitude towards the state of affairs described by proposition”. (Brisard, 182)”

Subject is the other of the two basic elements which make a proposition arguable; it “specifies the entity in respect to which the assertion is claimed to have validity” (Halliday, 76). Bearing responsibility for validity that is advanced in the text, the Subject, it could be argued on the interpersonal level, contains a difference from the definition used in traditional grammar, which defines the Subject as “the entity of which something is predicated in the rest of the clause” (Thompson, 44).

The rest of the clause is the Residue which, as Halliday argues, may be called a proposition only for exchanging information, which is the case of the modality expressed for the purpose of speculation (Halliday, 74).

I shall take the following unit, which represents the Mood of the clause, in terms of expressing a degree of certainty in both languages, as a basic constituent for building a clause expressing modality: **Subject + Finite (might/ may/could/must/can’t) = Mood**.

The Subject may vary, virtually endlessly, presumably evoking further associations. The Finite should express a scale of certainty in English, which is not always the case in Russian, where the modal verb *может* represents three English modals: *might*, *may* and *could*. The two Russian modals may have different patterns in their presence within the Mood. The modal *может* may define a tense, while *должен* has no past tense, like the English *must*, and is employed in a verbal group *должно быть* – *must be* in English and *быть* takes its place in a Predicator, as I will argue, and defines a secondary tense. The modal *может* may operate in a similar verbal group with the auxiliary *быть* or without it. A distinguishing feature of the Russian modals is that, in order to express possibility, they may be present either in the Finite or a Modal Adjunct. Thus, in the former case, a modal takes a tensed, plurality and genre form *мог* in clause (1.a) (past tense, singular, masculine) leaving the following lexical verb *знать* in an indefinite form:

1. (a) Джон мог знать ответ.

(b) John may have known the answer.

The modal *должен* has a similar pattern of behavior, but only in the present tense:

2. (a) Джон *должен* *знать* ответ.
 (b) John *must* *know* the answer.

In the past tense, the modal *должен* is used in a combination with an auxiliary verb *быть* which, I will argue, constitutes a Modal Adjunct *должно быть* in clause (3.a); hence, the following lexical verb is responsible for the tense, plurality and gender as it does *знал* taking past, singular, masculine form:

3. (a) Джон *должно быть* *знал* ответ.
 (b) John *must have* *known* the answer.

4.2 The Function of the Epistemic Modal Verbs *может* and *должен*.

Besides functions as root modals, modal operators *может* and *должен* may indicate possibility of the proposed event or statement. Depending on their functions, they take a certain position in the Mood. The distinction of the epistemic modals in Russian is the use of the modals in a verbal phrase, hence, their possible presence in a Mood Adjunct.

4.2.1. The Tensed Modal Operator *может*

In this chapter, I will focus on a case when an epistemic modal is present in the Mood as a Finite and defines a tense in a broad aspect. There is only one such modal, *может*, which represents the English epistemic modals *may*, *might*, *could* and *can* in a negative form:

4. (a) Джон *не мог* *знать* ответ.
 (b) John *can't* *have known* the answer.
 / S / F / P / C /
 / Mood /

The modal *может* is employed in the past, masculine gender, singular form and the following verb is present in its infinitive form. The tense is entirely defined in the Mood. This statement relates to the expression of probability of the past event even in passive voice – the main verb is infinite, while the modal defines tense, which is past tense when employed in the plural form.

5. (a) Их *могли* *видеть*.
 (b) They *could* *have* *been seen*.
 / S / F / P /

/ M o o d /

In a general sense, the epistemic modals are employed for the purpose of making clear that the proposition is equivocal, thus the main part of the clause is subject to question and negotiation – the Modal has similar structure in both languages which may be seen as a positive factor for presenting L2 modality to the Russian learner. On the interpersonal level, the functions in clauses (1) and (2) are the same in both languages, while the grammatical features, such as determining a tense, may be different.

4.2.2. Positive Statement Expressed by a Modal Adjunct

Both modal epistemic verbs *может* and *должен* are frequently used in verbal phrases accompanied by the verb *быть*. In the following clauses, a verbal group is present in the Mood as a Mood Adjunct, thus, the Finite is elliptical since the main lexical verb defines the tense in both languages:

6. (a) Джон *может быть* знает ответ.

(b) John *maybe* knows the answer.

/ S / MA / P / C /

/ M o o d /

The MA may appear either after or in front of the Subject in both languages:

7. (a) *Может быть* Джон знает ответ

(b) *Maybe* John knows the answer.

/ MA / S / P / C /

/ M o o d /

In clauses (6) and (7), it is the Modal Adjunct that defines modality; the functional structure is similar since there is an adverb in English that is an analogue to the Russian verbal phrase *может быть* – *maybe*. It is not the case for the modal *должен*, however, since there is no directly corresponding English analogue to the verbal phrase *должно быть* which, presumably, should be ‘*mustbe*’, the imaginary adverb that I will use below in order to interpret the Russian clause:

8. (a) Юлия *должно быть* живёт в Калуге.

(b) Julia ‘*mustbe*’ lives in Kaluga.

/ S / MA / P /Adjunct = A /

/ M o o d /

8. (a) *Должно быть* Юлия живёт в Калуге.

(b) 'Mustbe' Julia lives in Kaluga.

/ M A / S / P / A /

/ M o o d /

The non-existent adverb 'mustbe' is used deliberately in order to draw parallels between the use of the verbal phrases *может быть* and *должно быть* which are present in the Mood as Modal Adjuncts.

4.2.3. Positive Statement Expressed by the Finite

The epistemic modal operator *может* may be present in the Finite in the future, present or past form. The modal has the same form in the future and present tense as it is demonstrated in clauses (9.a) and (10.a), where *может* takes a present/future, plural form *могут*. The past form is different from the present/future and, in clause (11.a), *могли* indicates a past, plural form of the modal. In the three clauses, the modal is the Finite, thus, the following verb remains in its indefinite form:

9. (a) Они *могут* приехать завтра.

(b) They *may* come tomorrow.

10. (a) Они *могут* жить по-соседству.

They *may* live in the neighborhood.

11.(a). Они *могли* приехать вчера.

They *may* have come yesterday.

The other modal operator, *должен*, is used for expressing a high degree of possibility for a future or present event or statement, but without having a specific form – the tense should derive from context. In the future form, and often in the present, it indicates a logical consequence more than a certainty of the speaker of the truth of a statement, therefore, the use of *должен* relates more to the modal *should* than *must* in English:

12 (a) Она *должна* жить где-то по-соседству.

She *must/should* live somewhere in the neighborhood.

13 (a) Они *должны* приехать вскоре.

They *must/should* come soon.

The modal *должен* is present is a present/, feminine, singular form in clause (12.a) and in the present, plural form in (13.a).

4.2.4. Expressing Negative Certainty

Negative statements may be expressed by both epistemic modals *может* and *должен*. The latter is used in a Modal Adjunct embedded in a verbal phrase *должно быть* following a lexical verb in a negative form.

The clause (14.a) is a complex one for a direct translation into English, since the verbal group *должно быть* means *must be*, the expression which is used for indicating a strong belief in a probability of an event or a statement. If it is to be perceived as an alternative to the English adverb *certainly*, the following functional grammar construction is quite coherent, since the following verb, which is present in the Predicator, defines the tense, gender and plurality in Russian, and is tense defined in English:

14. (a) Она *должно быть* не поняла меня.
 * She 'mustbe'(certainly) didn't understand me.*
 / S / MA / F / P / C /
 / Mood /
- (b) She *can't* have understood me.
 / S / F / P / C /
 / Mood / Residue /

Modality is expressed in the Moods of the clauses which, however, consist of different modal components in clauses (14.a) and (14.b): MA and F respectively. The confusing aspect to the Russian learner could be the presence of the modal verb *can't* for expressing improbability of an event or a statement instead of *must* for both positive and negative statements, as happens in Russian, where the modal *должен* is used for such purposes. The common aspect, however, in both languages, it is the Finite that contains the negativity and the Mood that accommodates modality and polarity.

The modal *can* is commonly interpreted as having similar meaning to Russian *может* which, in the negative form, has the meaning of inability or prohibition, indicating a root modal rather than an epistemic, but does not generally imply improbability. The misinterpretation is, presumably, caused by semantic non-correlation between the present and past forms of the modal *can*. It is not used for the purpose of expressing probability in the present positive form. In the clause *She can understand me*, the statement means an ability rather than possibility. However, the use of the modal in the perfect negative form has another semantic meaning (clause (14.b) expressing probability but not ability).

There is, however, a use for the modal *может* in order to express a strong negative statement of probability: in other words, certainty of impossibility of an event. In such a case, a double negative statement is expressed, which is a distinct aspect in the Russian grammar. Thus, when using the modal *может* as a Finite in negative form, the Predicator should also take a negative form:

- 15.(a) Она не могла не услышать меня.
 (b)* She can't have 'not'heard me.*
 (c) She must have heard me. (interpretation)
- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| / | S | / | F | / | P | / | C | / |
| / | M o o d | / | R e s i d u e | / | | | | |

The English clause (15.b) sounds nonsensical – instead of the double negativity, the statement would normally take a form of a strong positive statement expressed by the modal *must* as it is done in the clause (15.c). The clause (15.a) may be translated into English with a degree of interpretation, which reflects the feature of the language and, in this case, functions as an emphatic rebuttal of a presumption to the contrary. Thus, it also should mean that the cause (15.c) may have more than one interpretation in Russian related to the use of modals *должен* and *может*. The placement of the predicator's polarity within the clause might be arguable since it is tense neutral, the Mood does not indicate its tense or polarity, as may be supposed – it is a part of the Residue.

4.3. Possible Misreading of English Modality

Modality expressed by using modal operators has similar functional structures in the two languages - it is expressed in the Mood either by the Finite or a Mood Adjunct. The likeness should positively contribute to the process of L2 acquisition providing that semantic meanings of English modal operators employed for the purpose of speculation are fully understood by

the Russian learner, whose L1 contains fewer modals. What may cause difficulties is a tense aspect which differs significantly between the two languages.

The distinctions in tense definition may lead to ambiguous reading since, unlike Russian, epistemic modal operators in English are mostly tense neutral and “in most cases, a modal operator expresses the speaker’s attitude at the time of speaking” (Thompson, 58). The exception is the use of the modal *could* in order to demonstrate concern about probable troubled circumstances of the preceding event. The clause *She could have fallen off the bike* does not express a degree of certainty of the speaker on the validity of the proposition; it rather expresses a concern about the possible consequences of the preceding event, namely, riding a bike. The tense neutrality of English modal operators is a distinguished aspect in English grammar.

4.3.1. The Distinctions of Tense Aspect

I shall assume that tense aspect is more easily understood by the learner whose L1 belongs to the same linguistic family as English, namely Germanic, rather than Slavic languages like Russian. Let us suppose that modality in terms of expressing probability is presented to the learner after they have been presented with the tense system in English. The learner is presumed to know that, in English, auxiliary operators are used in certain tenses and syntactic structures. The novelty with modality expressed by modal operators is that there may be two operators as it is in the modal clause which describes an event or statement in the past, or an event in a progress. A rather confusing aspect is finiteness of the verb group represented by three verbs such as in the cause: “Jim *might have seen* the film”. I will focus on the first two verbs which are included in the Mood of the clause – might have.

Does *might* represent tense? The answer is *no*, since it is an epistemic modal verb when expressing probability and only indicates the speaker’s attitude to the proposition. Thus, it is non-finite.

Is the following auxiliary verb *have* finite? Not quite, since it does not change the form depending on number, i.e. singular or plural, or other aspects of the tense structure – its only form is defined by the preceding modal operator, as Hudson names it, a non-finite “sharer”

(59). However, as an auxiliary verb, together with the modal operator, it represents the **secondary** tense of the clause.

Halliday defines **primary** and **secondary** tense, where the former is related to “now” and “means past, present or future at the moment of speaking” (75). Modality, however, does not reveal the time of the event or statement, but the “speaker’s judgment of the probabilities, or obligations, involved in what he is saying. A proposition may become arguable ..., its relevance specified in the in modal terms” (Halliday, 75). Since modality does not define the tense of the proposition, it bears the secondary tense, which is often neutral.

There seems to be a discrepancy between Tompson’s statement that “with a modal operator, tense is normally **neutralized** because the operator is inherently present tense” and Halliday’s view, cited above, of the secondary tense. If a modal operator is neutral, is the following auxiliary verb non-finite? Do we recognize the tense of the proposition in the Finite when comparing the clause above with the following: “Patricia *must be* driving home”? We obviously do and the Finite in the Mood seems to represent an aspect of the tense of the proposition followed. That aspect, as it might be assumed, reveals the secondary tense of the Finite. The two Finites “might have” and “might be” do not define the tense entirely, however, they contribute to the tense definition and might be used as a constituent which forms a question, normally a tag question or a negative clause:

Jim *might have seen* the film, mightn’t he?

Jim *might not have seen* the film.

Patricia *must be* driving home, mustn’t she?

Patricia *cannot be* driving home.

The last clause evokes a question of replacement of the modal operator *must* to *can* when expressing improbability of the proposition, the issue which is investigated in the following chapter.

The analysis of the tense aspect in the Mood when expressing modality has an aim to specify the secondary tense of the Mood which is distinguished for the Russian learner; since a modal operator in a Russian clause is either finite or non-finite, it either defines the tense or is neutral, depending on the position of a modal operator in the Mood.

4.3.2. The Choice of a Modal Operator

Expressing negative statements on the subject of speculation in English may seem incomprehensible to the Russian learner, since the modal *can* does not represent a tense, but it is a verbal phrase *can't have* that does it and, yet, only as a secondary tense. When comparing two phrases *cannot have* and *could have*, one may have a difficulty in abstracting the tense aspect in order to understand the semantic distinction lying between the two phrases.

The two Finites, *cannot have* and *could have* represent the so-called 'secondary tense' of the clause and, nevertheless, the same lexeme *can* is used in both cases, followed by the same auxiliary *have*, the past form of the modal does not define a tense – it rather indicates the attitude of the speaker towards the proposal. The former indicates a high degree of certainty of the speaker in improbability of the validity of the proposition made in the rest of the clause, while the latter is used to express a negative perception or interpretation of the past event mentioned in the proposition.

In Russian, the modal *может* defines the tense, thus, when speculating on a past event, it takes a past form as the Finite. The functions of an analogous English modal *can* seem to be not fully understood by some Russian scholars since, while describing the use of English modal *could* in combination with Perfect Infinitive, Kachalova tends to embed the use of it in complex clauses such as:

- a reported speech: "I said that he couldn't have done it";
- conditional sentence: "If he had tried, he could have done it";
- or a proposal, whose meaning is perceived from the context: "You could have asked him about it. Why didn't you do it"(223).

The description of the modal used for a purpose of speculation is missing, revealing a possible misperception of the variety of functions expressed by epistemic modal verbs *can* and *could*. Hence, the modal *can*, and its past form *could*, may represent other semantic meanings which derive from the tense aspects.

4.4. Possible Misreading of Russian Modality

An epistemic modal operator may be present either in the Finite or in a Modal Adjunct in a Russian clause, where it performs as a verbal phrase *должно быть* or *может быть*. The phrase is non-tensed, or rather has neutral tense, as if a pronoun *это* analogous to English *it* were elliptic followed by a lexical verb which defines the tense. However, when the modal operators are used as the Finite, the tense issue is rather a complex, since the two modals have different patterns of behaviour in terms of tense definition.

4.4.1. The Feature of the Modal Operator *должен*

The modal *должен* has no past form and, for the purpose of expressing probability, it is employed as a Modal Adjunct in the verbal phrase *должно быть*, which could be translated into English as *must be*. It has a similar meaning to an English adverb *certainly* expressing strong certainty of the speaker in the proposal. The similarity to an adverb form is indicated by its embedding in parentheses (commas). Strangely enough, in Russian, it may be replaced by an adverb *вероятно* which is translated as *probably* into English. The aspect, I surmise, indicates cultural features in expression of modality. The adverb of mild degree of probability *вероятно/probably* in terms of certainty should indicate the statement as an opinion rather than a fact. Kachalova frequently uses the adverb explaining the use of English modal operator *must*. The following two clauses are analogous in terms of semantic meanings; however, the Mood structure is different:

“They must have forgotten ...”(231);

/ S / F / P /

/ M o o d /

“Они, должно быть (*вероятно*), забыли ...”(231).

/ S / M o d a l A d j u n c t / P /

/ M o o d /

In a clause where an event or statement occurs at the time of speaking, the modal *должен* may define tense if it is present in the Finite. The semantic meaning does not change whether the modal operator indicates modality in the Finite or a Modal Adjunct. A problematic issue is

the presence of an auxiliary verb *быть*, which is elliptical in transitive clauses in Russian, except when it is embedded in a verbal phrase with a modal verb. Hence, when it is used in a Modal Adjunct, the clause's predicator is elliptical, whereas in Finite, it is the Predicator:

“He *must* be in the library now.”

/ S / F / P / A (place) / A (time)

/ M o o d / R e s i d u e /

Он, *должно быть*, (*вероятно*), сейчас в библиотеке. (*)

/ S / M A / A (time) / A (place)

Он *должен* быть сейчас в библиотеке”(**) (Kachalova, 231).

/ S / F / P / A (time) / A (place)

The use of modal verbs may vary in terms of semantic meanings between the two languages, which may be explained by both grammatical and cultural features. The modal *должен* is often used in the clauses whose semantic meanings are expressed in other forms of modality in English which may employ other modal operators such as *will*, in order to indicate likelihood of a future event, or *should* for a prediction or to express a judgment. In both languages, the speaker expresses the attitude towards the proposal followed, often based on some logical calculations.

The translations below seem questionable when the Russian verbal phrase *должно быть* is interpreted as an English adverb *probably* when expressing modality of a high degree of likelihood. Although they both represent modality expressed in a MA, the degree of certainty of the speaker seems to differ, considering the modal *должен* as analogous to the English *must*. I deduce that the cultural feature of the use of the modal *должен* in Russian is reflected in the clauses below – it is more widely used than the modal *must* and, therefore, represents a broader scale of semantic meanings. The English *must* is not used to speculate about a future event and may be replaced by the modal verb *will*. Hence, expressing probability of a future event, the Russian modal verb *должен* is analogous to the English *will*. In the clauses below, there is also shown an alternative adverb *вероятно*, which is translated into English as *probably* – the alternative, in my opinion, has a closer semantic meaning to the given English versions:

“Погода, *должно быть*, (*вероятно*), изменится завтра, ...

The weather will probably change (is likely to change to-morrow),

Лекция, *должно быть*, (*вероятно*), будет интересной.

The lecture will probably be interesting
(is likely to be interesting)“ (Kachalova, 231).

The clauses indicate some feature of the Russian modal operator *должен* which should not always be translated directly into English; the context reveals a more precise semantic meaning, hence, the attitude of the speaker to the validity of the proposition made in the rest of the clause. Speaking about the weather, one tends to make a prediction, thus, the combination of a future form *will* with an adverb *probably* indicates a fairly high degree of probability, primarily based on the belief of the speaker rather than by logical conclusion.

The other example above would probably make more sense if, for the purpose of speculation, the modal verb *should* were to be used. Speaking about the future, *should* may indicate a logical statement: something that the speaker estimates as likelihood.

4.4.2. Multi-interpretations of the Modal *может*

Possible misreading of the modality expressed by Russian modal *может* may occur if a clause is taken out of the context. The ambiguity of semantic meanings has several sources:

- the Russian modal *может* represents several English modals;
- it defines tense when is used as a Finite;
- in a past form, followed by a verb in an infinitive form, it may express a permission, ability or possibility whereas, in English, an *epistemic modal + have+past participle* relates to a pronouncement of possibility or probability.

Moreover, the similarity in functional forms may contribute to misinterpretation, or rather multi-interpretation, of semantic meanings from one language into the other. The modal operator *может* is a complex verb in terms of the functions it conveys when viewed from the perspective of English grammar. Not only does it represent three English modals – *can*, *may* and *might* – it may also be used in a verbal phrase in a combination with a verb *быть* and, by doing so, it shifts from the Finite to a Modal Adjunct. In that case, it remains in the Mood as an indicator of modality, however, diverts the tense to a following lexical verb.

Due to the multiple meanings which the modal *может* represents, some Russian clauses should only be perceived in context even by a native speaker. Being taken out of the context, clause (16.a) may be interpreted either as an utterance of a degree of possibility of the event in the past, as demonstrated in (16.c), or a concern expressed about possible circumstances in the past in clause (16.d):

16. (a) Они *могли* пропустить автобус.
 (b) *They *could* miss the bus.*
 (c) They *may/might* have missed the bus.
 (d) They *could* have missed the bus.

The following clause (17.a) exemplifies an even more complex reading. The modal, as the Finite, has a past, masculine, single form, followed by a lexical verb in an indefinite form. The clause may be interpreted:

- as a mild possibility of an event in the past, indicated by a modal operator *may/might* in (17.c)
- a probable circumstances in the past expressed by a modal *could* in (17.d);
- or a permission given in the past in clause (17.e), which does not employ a modal verb for such a purpose, but a verbal phrase *be allowed to* which, in turn, lies outside the scope of this paper:

17. (a) Ян *мог* пойти в кино.
 (b) *Ian *could/might* go to the cinema.*
 (c) Ian *may/might* have gone to the cinema.
 (d) Ian *could have* gone to the cinema.
 (e) Ian was allowed to go to the cinema.
- / S / F /
 / M o o d /

In a negative statement, the modal *может* may be imbedded either in a single or double negative clause. The former may be interpreted as a negative form of every case of the clause discussed above for a positive statement:

18. (a) Ян *не мог* пойти в кино.
 (b) *Ian *could/might not* go to the cinema.*
 (c) Ian *may/might not* have gone to the cinema.

- (d) Ian *could not have* gone to the cinema.
 (e) Ian was not allowed to go to the cinema.
 / S / F /
 / M o o d /

The double negative, though, has only the semantic meaning of denying the probability of non-occurrence of the event in the past, which should be interpreted into English as a high degree of certainty of probability by using a modal *must*, as in clause (19.c), or an alternative spoken version expressed by a combination of a double negative form of the Finite and the Predicator, as in (19.d), which is a rare case in the frame of traditional grammar:

19. (a) Ян *не мог* не пойти в кино.
 (b) *Ian *could/might not* not go to the cinema.*
 (c) Ian *must have* gone to the cinema.
 (d) Ian *can't have* not gone to the cinema.
 / S / F / P / A (place) /
 / M o o d / R e s i d u e /

The modal *может* is both a root and epistemic modal verb which may indicate an ability, permission or possibility. On a general scale, the semantic meaning of the clause derives from the context.

There are a number of reasons why it is problematic to attempt to align the modality in English to that of Russian, unless the factors, below, are considered:

- how degree of speculation changes depending on a choice of a modal operator;
- correlation with the following auxiliaries/verbs defining tense.

4.4.3. Modality Shifted from the Finite to a Modal Adjunct

Restriction in the number of modal operators to just two, *может* and *должен*, as well as other factors such as tensed and non-tensed modals, leads to implicated interpretations rather than direct translations of modality from one to the other language. Clause (15) is one of the examples where various interpretations are possible, since the modal operators may be

understood differently, depending on the context; hence, in order to maintain a semantic meaning, the means of modality may shift from the Finite to a Modal Adjunct or vice versa. When explaining epistemic use of modal operators, Kachalova frequently gives two versions of translation where modality is expressed either by the finite or a Modal Adjunct:

“He must know her address.
Он, должно быть, знает её адрес.
Он должен знать её адрес. (231)”

The latter version is a direct translation from English, in which the modal verb operates as the Finite, thus, in Russian it takes a present, masculine, singular form following a lexical verb in an indefinite form. The former exploits a Modal Adjunct as a means for expressing probability; notably, the verbal phrase *должно быть* is embedded in commas, which indicates it as a freely moveable part of the clause, just as adverbs can be.

In fact, as an alternative to a modal verbal phrase *может быть*, Kachalova often includes an adverb *возможно* (*perhaps*) embedded in parentheses into translated versions:

“He may know her address.
Он, *может быть* (*возможно*), знает её адрес.
Он может знать её адрес. (225)”

The two Russian clauses above also represent Modality shifting, where the privilege is given to a Modal Adjunct, which may be explained by linguistic-cultural differences: there is not such a wide range of modal verbs which can be employed in Russian to indicate degrees of certainty: adverbs are frequently used instead.

When modality is diverted from the Finite to a Modal Adjunct while exploiting the same verb operator, though in a different configuration, what happens with the semantic meaning? Does it remain to represent the same scale of certainty that the speaker utters? This is unlikely to be the case, as many researchers claim that semantic meaning changes when changing the position of the modal within the clause. Halliday demonstrates the change of the semantic meanings in different placements of an adverb which represents a Mood Adjunct in the

Vedin argues that the primary position of the adverb applies to the evaluative function while, placed after the Subject, the adverbial is more restricted to the logical conclusion (29). The precise semantic meaning might be argued, depending on the adverbials themselves, and cultural features of the language. However, whatever the content of the meaning is, it does not remain when the emphasis of the clause shifts from one to another element. This is proved by the fact that the further dialogue may be based on the evaluation of the proposition by means of a Modal Adjunct alone, as it occurs in English as well when an adverbial is promoted. The clauses may be interpreted into English since there is no modal operator in an adverbial group as there is in Russian. Hence, the Modal Adjunct *должно быть* has an English analogue *certainly*, and the interpretation, which remains the same functional structure, is as follows:

- *Должно быть*, он знает ответ. / - *Certainly*, he knows the answer.

/ M A / S / F (past) / P / C /

- *Должно быть*. / - *Certainly*.

/ M A /

- *Может быть*. / - *Probably*.

/ M A /

- *Вряд ли*. / - *Hardly*.

/ M A /

The distinctive characteristics of Russian modal operators, that may be present in the Finite or a Modal Adjunct, have a scale of evaluation of their own and this could be examined in some future research. My supposition is that this is one of the language features that highlights the lack of modal operators compared to the English modal system.

5. Discussion on Introducing English Epistemic Modal Verbs in the Process of SLA.

“The linguistic input can only provide learners with information about structural properties of the target language if they have available mechanisms allowing them to

assign grammatical interpretations to utterance encountered in the PLD [primary linguistic data]. In other words, even at the onset and during very early phases of the subsequent process of L2 acquisition learners must resort to grammatical knowledge. (Meisel, 92)

Speaking about mechanisms contributing to the process of L2 acquisition, few scholars (Franceschina, Mackenzie, Meisel) define precise devices, but consider various aspects including those that have to be discovered. Many agree that, in spite of the fact that the processes of L1 and L2 have many similar stages and patterns, they are distinguished in the way the learner perceives information of L2. Very often, the learner projects the properties of L1 onto ones of L2. As Meisel notes, the process may develop from part to ‘full transfer’, at which stage “we should expect to find relexification [sic] of entire L1 sentence structures” (96).

The subject of investigation of this paper is the functional structures of probability expressed by the use of modal operators in English and Russian. The aim is to draw parallels and differentiate the structures on two levels: structural and semantic. According to the investigation, the two levels are interrelated in both languages through the pattern of behavior; however, the consequences may vary and semantic meanings brought up by structural changes in one language may be different from those in the other. The process of ESL acquisition may, therefore, cause some confusion to the Russian learner. It is these mismatches that I would like to raise in further discussion. Some points lay beyond the scope of this work and could be an issue for a further research study. I shall focus on the issues of this paper.

When the learner recognizes a familiar pattern of the clause, in our case it is modality expressed by the use of modal operators, the process of acquisition of a certain grammar aspect should present little difficulty. However, while keeping in mind the functional structures that are familiar to them, the learner will have to approach L2 as a wholly new language system, with its own semantic rules and social conventions. The cultural and social features are often reflected in language and such aspects as modality represent a parameter that indicates the speaker’s attitude to the proposal, hence, representing sociolinguistic features of the language.

The so called ‘eureka’ effect of finding a solution for grammar acquisition leads to bridging a gap in a certain aspect of knowledge and its solid position in the epistemology. It should be important to acquire a grammar aspect as a subsystem within the system of knowledge (in our case it is modality), in order to avoid overlapping or leaving a deficit in the whole concept. For instance, when discovering a grammatical analogy in some structures of expressing modality, the learner may assume that the whole aspect of modal or, rather, some of its parts, such as probability and speculation, have similar syntactic structures. The familiarity may incite the learner to attempt to translate directly from one into the other language. This error is often exacerbated by exercises given to students, where single clauses must be translated out of context and instructions do not take into account that a single meaning expressed in L1 may have more than one interpretation in L2, and vice-versa. Moreover, while some of them can be translated directly, others may need specific knowledge of L2 and should be given interpretations which deliver the precise semantic meaning of the message that the clause contains.

5.1 Modality in the Process of SLA, Sociolinguistics and Explicit Input

Language input is necessary for SLA, though its nature is a subject for discussion, particularly the level of explicit knowledge. Viewed from perspectives of Krashen’s theory of SLA, the “comprehensible input” is necessary and sufficient for the process of SLA. As a proponent of language **acquisition**, rather than learning, Krashen argues that “acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances, but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (qtd in Schutz). The remark on “meaningful interaction in the target language” correlates with the suggestion of perception of language as a part of social life: the means of communication. Krashen seems to suppose that the learner is present in the environment of the target language, which should be a perfect solution, but is not always a case in the process of SLA.

We can envisage a class at a comprehensive school in Russia, whose students have no opportunity to communicate with a native speaker on a regular basis, and ask ourselves how they are supposed to acquire or learn this target language to a proficient standard. The learner partly uses their implicit

knowledge and “transfer” L1 parameters onto L2, particularly when they draw parallels between certain patterns of language behavior.

Another aspect which favours a variety of instructions or input is the variety of language itself. The learner is not an individual learning L2 in a particular environment. Saville-Troike points out that a “microsocial focus” influences the L2 variation, thus “contextual dimensions relate to variation in learner language ... even within groups who are supposedly learning the “same” language” (101).

Taking into consideration the aspect which Saville-Troike marks as **variable features**, which were considered earlier as “unsystematic irregularity in language production”, I would like to suggest that, when presenting English modality to the L2 learner, it would be wise to give the learner the opportunity not only to translate directly into Russian, but also to interpret it considering the context in which the proposition is made.

As is discussed in Chapter 4, there are a number of factors which may affect translation or interpretation of clauses containing modal operators, such as inequality in the number of modal verbs in the languages, combination of a modal verb in a verbal group, inserting adverbials instead of verbal groups. These asymmetries influence semantic meaning of the clause; hence, if the learner can draw parallels between the functional construction of the clause and its semantic meaning, it should contribute to his progress in the process of ESL acquisition in order to gain communicative competence.

Saville-Troike points out a challenge for sociolinguists who claim that “social interaction is an essential *causative* force in second language learning” by presenting the fact that “some individuals are able to achieve a relatively advanced level of L2 proficiency without the benefit of any interpersonal communication or opportunity to negotiate meaning in the language with others” in the globally changing environment, when the learner has access to a range of physical and electronic media (116). Nobody knows how many learners use self-teaching instructions in forms of books or the Internet sources. These resources may consist of whole courses of study, or they may just focus on one or more aspects of L2 grammar or vocabulary. When facing lack of interaction which would reveal the social features of the language, more explicit instructions should be available to the learner in order to understand the nature of the language. Among the new forms of instructions given on the subject of modal operators, I propose a methodology in which epistemic modal verbs are presented and perceived as occupying a particular point along a scale or continuum. This would

indicate the degree of probability and the functional structure of the clause as a constituent which embodies the correlation between the grammatical structure and semantic meaning of the modals, the system which changes gradually depending on both factors: modal operators and their position within the functional structure.

Supposing that there are different types of ESL acquisition such as face-to-face interaction in the class and self-teaching (whether partial or complete self-teaching, which is now a feature of the rapidly developing area of online learning), we could ask how much attention should be paid to the instructions considering social aspects of the language production and its variable features. When speaking of modality, it is reasonable to assume that variety will be present, since modality represents a wide scale from strongly positive to totally negative statements, reflecting all possible gradations the speaker may express. Hence, by explicit instructions, I mean the expert mediation which, according to Vygotsky, helps the learner to extend their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which symbolizes:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, p. 86)

Lack of explicit instructions, in my opinion, would sometimes mean a gap in knowledge, even if the learner has the ability to construct a clause in L2 in the right grammatical order; the semantic meaning, which should be revealed in context, is a somewhat important aspect when speaking of communicative competence.

6. Conclusion

Analyzing the use of modal operators in English and Russian clauses expressing probability and comparing them from perspectives of SFL highlights a number of parallels, the most prominent of which, probably, is a significant similarity of the functional structure.

According to SFL, three metafunctions - the interpersonal, experiential and textual - describe the clause as a complete body of a message. As is demonstrated in the paper modality, as the means of expressing the speaker's attitude to the proposition, is described by the interpersonal

metafunction while the other metafunctions relate to other features of the clause. In Russian, the textual metafunction is employed in order to highlight the modality or, rather, to place the aspect of probability in focus when the clause starts with a Modal Adjunct representing the Theme of the clause.

Modality, as evaluation of the proposition of the clause, may be described by a modal operator which represents a degree of certainty of the speaker in the probability of the event or statement that is proposed in the rest of the clause. The chosen degree on the scale of probability represented by a modal operator indicates the speaker's attitude to the validity of the proposition – the feature that seems to be perceived similarly in the two languages. A suggested implication of this is that the aspect of modality in English, expressed by the use of modal verbs, should be introduced from this perspective to the Russian learner. The importance of the perception of the Mood as a representative of modality is, as may be assumed, essential for the Russian learner, since the differences in other parameters of the clause may lead to misunderstanding or misperception of the nature of modality expressed by modal operators as a comprehensive system. The popular method, when every modal verb, its various functions, semantic meanings and use, is described separately, does not locate the coordinated gradation of English epistemic modal operators on the scale of probability. As the analysis demonstrates, the Mood contains the core aspect of modality – the attitude of the speaker to the proposition expressed in the rest of the clause.

The paper underlines the significance of the Mood since, in English, a modal operator is present in the Finite, and the aspect which requires further attention is the tense, which is distinguished in the two languages. A modal verb does not reveal the time of the event - it rather expresses the speaker's attitude to the proposition, and defines secondary tense. In Russian, one of the modal operators is finite and the other is infinite, hence, the Finite may represent primary or secondary tense, unlike the Finite in the English clause which only indicates secondary tense.

One of the 'negative transfers' from the earlier acquired knowledge onto aspects of modality is perception of English modals *might* and *could* bearing past form of *may* and *can* respectively as if presenting a time of the proposition of the clause. This is also projecting L1 grammar parameters onto L2 which leads to confusion when the modal *can*, in the negative

form, expresses negative certainty of the speaker on the probability of an event irrespective the time when it takes place.

The study has identified that an English modal clause containing a modal operator in the negative form may be interpreted by the Russian learner variously using one of the Russian modal operators, thus the degree of certainty may change and different parts of the clause may be emphasized depending on the interpersonal and textual features of the clause. Since the precise semantic meaning often derives from the context, translations of a single clause may vary.

The findings on similarities and differences in the functional structures of Russian and English clauses lead to some suggestions in the field of SLA. Taking into consideration the fact that the languages contain different numbers of modal operators, representing modality in English to the Russian learner should be undertaken with close regard to the following aspects as being distinct in English Grammar:

- a group of epistemic modals constitutes a scale of degree of probability abstracted from the tense aspects;
- the modal operator is always present in the Finite of the Mood and indicates the secondary tense;
- polarity, both in positive and negative statements, is indicated in the Mood;
- apart from direct translation, which does not always reveal the precise semantic meaning of the clause, it is still possible to interpret such clauses into Russian, where a Modal Adjunct is employed as an alternative to the Finite in expressing modality;
- the precise semantic meaning often derives from the context in which the proposition of the clause takes place.

Modality is described by the interpersonal metafunction revealing the main functional term of the clause – social intercourse - when expressing the opinion and discussing the proposition. The sociolinguistic aspects play a significant role in the way that the clause is constructed, both in terms of the lexical choice and the position of the modal operator within the clause, particularly in the Russian language, where a modal operator may be present either in the Finite or a Modal Adjunct. Hence, the knowledge of textual features which reflect cultural

specifics should be useful when emphasizing different aspects of the clause which are distinctive in the languages.

The functional structures representing modality are fairly similar in the two languages. I suggest that this similarity, where modality is expressed in the Mood of the clause, is taken into account when presenting English modal operators as a system of epistemic verbs to the Russian learner. The mechanism of cognitive learning is presented in the correlation between structural and functional features. That is to say, the degree of probability depends both on the choice of a modal verb and on its position within the Mood. While in English it is normally fixed in the Finite, in Russian, the presence of a modal operator in the Finite, or a Modal Adjunct, affects the emphasis of the message. This nuance is worth learning explicitly in order to avoid confusion when socially communicating.

When learning the functional structure as a feature of expressing modality, a clause should be investigated from various angles giving alternative interpretations in the other language if possible. I contend that direct translation is not always an effective approach of L2 acquisition due to the grammatical and lexical features of the languages. When the learner finds a direct translation to the clause given as an example, the recognition of the right answer, in a way, restricts them, since there may be more interpretations depending on the context of the text, particularly speaking of modality. Modal verbs in the two languages belong to two groups: epistemic and root and, therefore, there could be more than one semantic meaning deriving from the clause.

My research suggests that encouraging students to consider different interpretations of clauses which contains modality when transposing between languages may be beneficial in facilitating more accurate understanding and developing communicative competence. The coherence between a grammatically correctly structured clause, and the appropriate socio-lexical choice, would reveal the degree of competence attained in the language as a means of communication. Further research could be undertaken on the subject of ambiguous reading of epistemic and root modals and its possible reflection in the functional structure of the clause. A functional approach to an analysis, which would mean sociolinguistics being involved, may shed lights on the issue of similarities and distinctions in Russian and English, specifically considering the benefit this will bestow on the Russian learner.

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