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A COMPARATIVE LINGUOCULTURAL STUDY OF MODAL WORDS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

Jo'rayeva Lobarxon

Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages

juraevas07@icloud.com

Sanjarbek Jamoldinov

Academic supervisor

Abstract

This article presents a comparative study of the semantic, pragmatic and linguocultural features of modal words in English and Uzbek. It examines the concept of modality and the role of modal units in expressing certainty, probability, assumption, doubt, necessity and inference. English items such as perhaps, maybe, probably, certainly, undoubtedly and apparently are analysed alongside Uzbek expressions such as ehtimol, balki, chamasi, albatta, shubhasiz, aftidan and demak. The article also demonstrates that modal meanings in English are conveyed not only by modal adverbs but also by modal verbs, whereas Uzbek makes extensive use of modal words, grammatical forms and intonation. Particular attention is paid to similarities and differences between the two languages, context-dependent usage and shifts of meaning that may arise in translation. From pragmatic and linguocultural perspectives, the study explains how modal units communicate the speaker's stance, politeness and communicative intention. The findings suggest that modal expressions should not be interpreted solely through dictionary equivalents; context, communicative situation and cultural conventions must also be considered. The comparison is of theoretical and practical value for English and Uzbek language learning, translation and the development of communicative competence.

Keywords

modal words, modality, linguoculturology, comparative analysis, semantics, pragmatics, English, Uzbek.

Introduction

Language is not merely a means of exchanging information; it also reflects a community's worldview and cultural experience. For this reason, the study of linguistic units requires attention not only to their grammatical and lexical meanings but also to their use in particular communicative situations. Modal words are among the units that perform this function.

Modal words express the speaker's attitude towards the proposition being communicated. They may indicate confidence in a statement, doubt, probability or an inference. For example, the statements "He will come today" and "Perhaps he will come today" are similar in basic content, but the second presents the event as a possibility rather than a certainty.

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that English and Uzbek use different linguistic means to express modal meanings, making context essential in translation. The aim of the study is to compare the semantic, pragmatic and linguocultural features of modal words in the two languages. To achieve this aim, the article identifies major modal meanings, analyses examples and considers selected translation differences.

Research methods

The study employs descriptive, comparative-typological and contextual methods. The descriptive method is used to explain the meanings of modal units, while the comparative method identifies similarities and differences between English and Uzbek. Contextual analysis demonstrates how a particular unit functions within a sentence and a specific communicative situation.

1. Modality and modal words

In linguistics, modality is generally understood as a semantic category expressing the speaker's attitude towards the content of an utterance. It covers meanings such as certainty, probability, necessity, possibility, doubt and assumption. Modality can be conveyed through modal words, modal verbs, grammatical forms, intonation and sentence structure.

It is important to distinguish modal words from modal verbs. In English, may, must and should are modal verbs, whereas perhaps, probably and certainly are modal adverbs.

In Uzbek, albatta, ehtimol, balki, aftidan and shubhasiz function as modal words. Thus, modal meaning may be expressed through several grammatical and lexical resources.

2. Features of modal words in English

Modal expressions are common in everyday conversation as well as in formal and academic discourse. Perhaps and maybe indicate possibility or assumption. For example, “Perhaps she will come later” can be translated into Uzbek as “Ehtimol, u keyinroq kelar.” The speaker does not present the event as an established fact but as a possibility.

Probably and possibly also express probability, although their typical strength differs. Probably usually suggests that the speaker considers an event relatively likely, while possibly indicates that it may occur. Certainly, definitely and undoubtedly strengthen certainty. In “I will certainly help you,” the speaker expresses a firm commitment to provide help.

Apparently and evidently introduce an inference based on available signs or information. In “Apparently, the meeting has been postponed,” the speaker draws a conclusion from the information available rather than necessarily claiming direct knowledge. Modal expressions may also soften a request: “Perhaps you could help me” sounds less direct than an imperative.

3. Features of modal words in Uzbek

Uzbek widely uses expressions such as albatta, shubhasiz, ehtimol, balki, chamasi, shekilli, aftidan and demak. Albatta and shubhasiz express confidence or certainty, as in “Men albatta uchrashuvga boraman” (“I will certainly attend the meeting”). Ehtimol, balki, chamasi and shekilli indicate assumption or doubt. In “Ehtimol, ertaga yomg‘ir yog‘ar” (“Perhaps it will rain tomorrow”), the event is presented as probable rather than certain.

Aftidan expresses an inference based on an observable situation: “Aftidan, ular yo‘lga chiqib bo‘lishgan” (“Apparently, they have already set off”). Demak and binobarin introduce a consequence or logical conclusion. Modal words may occur at the beginning or within a sentence, and their interaction with intonation influences the effect of an utterance.

In Uzbek communication, modal expressions can also contribute to respectful and tactful interaction. For instance, “Balki, bu masalani keyinroq muhokama qilsak” (“Perhaps we could discuss this issue later”) presents a suggestion in a less forceful way.

4. A comparative analysis of English and Uzbek

In both languages, modal expressions reveal the speaker’s attitude towards the information being communicated. Meanings such as certainty, probability, doubt and inference are found in English and Uzbek. However, the linguistic resources used to express them are not always identical. English makes active use of modal adverbs as well as modal verbs, whereas Uzbek relies on modal words, grammatical forms and intonation.

Some common equivalents are presented below. They are not interchangeable in every context; the most appropriate translation depends on the meaning of the sentence and the communicative situation.

English expression	Common Uzbek equivalent	Main meaning
perhaps / maybe	ehtimol / balki	assumption, possibility
probably	ehtimol / chamasi	relatively high probability
certainly	albatta	certainty, confidence
undoubtedly	shubhasiz	strong certainty
apparently	aftidan	inference based on evidence
therefore	demak / binobarin	consequence, conclusion

Examples make these distinctions clearer. “She will certainly succeed” may be translated as “U albatta muvaffaqiyatga erishadi.” The meaning of confidence is retained in both sentences. In “Apparently, they have changed their plans,” the Uzbek equivalent “Aftidan, ular rejalarini o‘zgartirishgan” conveys a conclusion drawn from available indications.

Therefore, choosing a dictionary equivalent is not sufficient in translation. The speaker’s intention, sentence intonation and communicative context must also be taken into account.

5. Linguocultural and pragmatic aspects

A linguocultural approach studies linguistic units in relation to a community’s values, cultural experience and conventions of communication. Modal words have such a dimension because they communicate not only the content of a statement but also the

speaker’s attitude towards the listener. The choice of a modal expression may make a statement more definite, cautious or tactful.

In English, expressions such as perhaps, possibly and I think can help a speaker present an opinion cautiously. In Uzbek, balki, shekilli and menimcha may perform similar functions. However, politeness is not determined by a modal word alone. Sentence structure, intonation, forms of address and the relationship between speakers are also important.

The pragmatic function of a modal unit therefore depends on the purpose for which it is used in a particular situation. The same expression may indicate an assumption in one context and a tactful suggestion in another.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that modal words in English and Uzbek share important communicative functions. In both languages, they express certainty, probability, doubt and inference, thereby indicating the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition. At the same time, the means used to convey modal meanings differ.

English frequently employs modal adverbs and modal verbs, while Uzbek makes significant use of modal words, grammatical forms and intonation. Translation should therefore take into account not only the lexical meaning of an expression but also its context and pragmatic function. Studying modal words through comparative and linguocultural approaches can contribute to the development of learners’ communicative competence in a foreign language.

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