Polyfunctionality and English marginal modals

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dissertation topic

The talk presents the hypothesis that modal polyfunctionality, i.e. the ability of a modal to express deontic and epistemic readings, has an impact on the morphological and syntactic behaviour of English modal verbs; more precisely on the absence of agreement and operator properties, i.e. ability to combine with clausal negation n't, inversion in questions, or existence in question tags. The presentation focuses on the marginal modals in English, showing that the modals which are not polyfunctional, such as shall, are losing the operator status. Marginal modal need reflects its polyfunctionality by dual morphosyntactic behaviour need vs. need to. The presented hypothesis also explains the idiosyncratic behaviour of dare or ought, which is a result of the clash between the monofunctionality and the historical absence of agreement. Furthermore, the presentation deals with structures such as going to, have got to, and want demonstrating that the polyfunctionality of these structures triggers the morphological behaviour towards central modals, i.e. the formation of non-agreeing forms gonna, gotta, and wanna.

References


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