
Epistemic modality in English and Russian. Comparative aspect.

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Annotation *Linguists view epistemic modality as a tool for managing speaker commitment, ranging from high certainty to speculative possibility, which is central to both conversational interaction and academic discourse (Hyland, 2015). This study investigates the use of epistemic modality in two distinct fictional works – John Galsworthy’s The Man of Property and J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone – alongside their Russian translations. The introduction section presents a list of epistemic modal verbs and expressions with their explanatory examples. The methodology involves a comparative analysis of excerpts from the original English texts and their corresponding Russian editions. The results reveal varying degrees of semantic correspondence, categorized into full equivalence, partial equivalence, and the total omission of epistemic modal expressions. Furthermore, the findings highlight a shift in modal usage between 20th-century and contemporary literature. The discussion evaluates these correspondences in terms of “certainty” – the speaker’s commitment to the truth of an utterance – and “pragmatic force,” which dictates the speaker’s perceived tone. Additionally, the study identifies specific linguistic environments that facilitate particular epistemic meanings.*

Keywords *Epistemic, modality, modal concord, semantic correspondence, pragmatic, hedging, contextual sensitivity*

Ingliz va rus tillarida epistemik modallik: Qiyosiy jihat

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Annotatsiya *Ingliz va rus tillarida epistemik modallik. Qiyosiy jihat. Tilshunoslar epistemik modallikni so’zlovchining o’z fikriga bo’lgan ishonchini boshqarish vositasi deb hisoblaydilar. Bu tushuncha yuqori darajadagi ishonchdan tortib, taxminiy ehtimollikkacha bo’lgan doirani qamrab oladi hamda ham so’zlashuv jarayonida, ham akademik nutqda markaziy o’rinni egallaydi (Hyland, 2015). Mazkur tadqiqot ikki xil badiiy asarda – Jon Galsuorsining “Mulk egasi” (The Man of Property) va J.K. Roulingning “Garri Potter va falsafiy tosh” (Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone) asarlarida, shuningdek, ularning rus tilidagi tarjimalarida epistemik modallikning qo’llanilishini o’rganadi. Kirish qismida epistemik modal fe’llar va iboralar ro’yxati ularga oid izohli misollar bilan keltirilgan. Metodologiya ingliz tilidagi asl matnlardan olingan parchalar va ularning rus tilidagi nashrlarini qiyosiy tahlil qilishni o’z ichiga oladi. Natijalar semantik moslikning turli darajalarini ochib beradi va ular to’liq ekvivalentlik, qisman ekvivalentlik hamda epistemik modal ifodalarning butunlay tushirib qoldirilishi kabi toifalarga bo’linadi. Bundan tashqari, tadqiqot natijalari XX asr va zamonaviy adabiyot o’rtasidagi modal vositalar qo’llanilishidagi farqlarni ko’rsatib beradi. Munozara qismida ushbu mosliklar*

“aniqlik” (soʻzlovchining oʻz nutqi haqiqatligiga ishonchi) va soʻzlovchining ohangini belgilaydigan “pragmatik kuch” nuqtai nazaridan baholanadi. Shuningdek, tadqiqot jarayonida muayyan epistemik maʼnolarning yuzaga chiqishiga xizmat qiluvchi oʻziga xos lingvistik muhitlar ham aniqlangan.

Kalit soʻzlar Epistemik, modallik, modal muvofiqlik (modal concord), semantik moslik, pragmatik, hejing (ehtiyotkorlik ifodalari), kontekstual sezgirlik

Эпистемическая модальность в английском и русском языках: Сравнительный аспект

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Аннотация Лингвисты рассматривают эпистемическую модальность как инструмент управления степенью уверенности говорящего – от высокой достоверности до предположительной возможности, что играет центральную роль как в разговорном взаимодействии, так и в академическом дискурсе (Hyland, 2015). В данном исследовании изучается использование эпистемической модальности в двух различных художественных произведениях – «Собственник» Джона Голсуорси и «Гарри Поттер и философский камень» Дж. К. Роулинг – в сопоставлении с их русскими переводами. В вводной части представлен список эпистемических модальных глаголов и выражений с пояснительными примерами. Методология включает сравнительный анализ отрывков из оригинальных английских текстов и их соответствующих русских изданий. Результаты исследования выявляют различные степени семантического соответствия, которые классифицируются как: (1) Полная эквивалентность; (2) Частичная эквивалентность; (3) Полный пропуск эпистемических модальных выражений. Кроме того, полученные данные указывают на сдвиг в использовании модальности между литературой XX века и современной прозой. В разделе «Обсуждение» данные соответствия оцениваются с точки зрения «уверенности» (приверженности говорящего истинности высказывания) и «прагматической силы», определяющей воспринимаемый тон речи. Также в работе выявлены специфические лингвистические контексты, способствующие реализации определенных эпистемических значений.

Ключевые слова Эпистемический, модальность, модальное согласование, семантическое соответствие, прагматика, хеджирование, контекстуальная чувствительность

Introduction

Modals can have multiple meanings depending on the context. Expressing personal

opinion, speculating on something, obliging or forbidding can all be expressed with the same modal verb must and if there is no contextual

accompaniment, the meaning can be confusing. As an example, the expression He must read the book demonstrates multiple meanings. We can oblige someone to read the book, or it could be an assumption that he has read the book. On the contrary, in Russian, there is a clear line between the obligation and assumption. The obligation is expressed with the word *должен* (must) solely, while the assumption is followed with the infinitive form of to be – *должно быть*. Он должен читать эту книгу. Должно быть, он читает эту книгу. As well as that, Russian punctuation, unlike English, requires commas to mark the modal word, in various positions in the sentence (beginning, middle and final). While “covert translation” typically uses a cultural filter to maintain functional equivalence across languages (House 1997), the dominance of English often leads to a convergence of communicative norms. In Russian, where the use of epistemic modality diverges significantly from English, applying this filter is crucial to prevent the text from feeling foreign or overly assertive (Kranich, 2009; 27).

As modality encompasses a wide range of meanings, this article examines a specific aspect of the topic: epistemic modality – logical assumptions and speculation expressed with modals. “Researchers coming from different backgrounds have used different terminology to classify modal verbs, but most often the differentiation has been along the line of epistemic vs. non-epistemic” (Mifka-Profozic, 2017; 247). According to Halliday (1999), speakers utilize modality as a “rich source to intrude their own views into the discourse – their assessments of what is likely or typical, their judgements of the rights and wrongs of the situation”.

Below is a list of modal verbs and expressions which imply epistemic meaning. Key epistemic modal verbs and auxiliaries:

Must: expresses the highest certainty, inference and deduction

Example: It must be raining. The dark clouds have covered the sky.

Will/Would: expresses strong probability

Example: That would be the postman.

Around 2 p.m., he usually starts to ride around the village. *Should/Ought to: Expresses expectation and probability*

Example: The meeting is about to start.

They should be here by now.

May/Might/Could: expresses possibility and lower certainty

Example: The day was hot and humid. It might rain later.

Can't/Couldn't: expresses logical impossibility

Example: I met him in the office in the morning. He can't be on his business trip in London now.

Common epistemic modal words (adverbs and adjectives)

These words are often used to soften or strengthen claims:

- Certainty: Certainly, definitely, obviously, undoubtedly, clearly.
- Probability: Probably, likely, presumably, almost.
- Possibility: Possibly, perhaps, maybe, conceivably, potentially.

Other epistemic expressions:

- It appears that...
- According to the evidence...
- It is probable that...

Epistemic modals are primarily used for hedging and inference to express degrees of certainty. Epistemic modality expresses the speaker's degree of certainty or evidence about a proposition. “Providing an arguable point in the text, modality is applied by reference to the judgment of the speaker” (Halliday, 2014; 144).

Examples:

“John must be at home by now” (high certainty)

“It might rain tomorrow” (possibility)

As for the semantics of epistemic modals, “must” expresses a high degree of certainty based on available evidence or reasoning, while “might” expresses a lower degree of certainty or possibility.

Epistemic modals can be analysed using possible world semantics. Must quantify over all accessible worlds consistent with the speaker's knowledge. Might quantifies over at least one accessible world consistent with the speaker's knowledge. "Speakers also make inferences based on what is said, along with visual evidence from their personal lives" (Uzum et al., 2024; 609).

In both Russian and English, modality is expressed by means of modal verbs and modal words. In both languages, modality makes the facts sound either more or less subjective. It enriches the utterance, making it more precise. However, the notion of modal concord with two modals in one sentence brings some confusion. Modal concord, where multiple modals appear in a single clause, can affect the overall meaning.

Example:

Possibly you may pass the test.

In this example, the meaning remains simple: the adverb possibly and the modal may reinforce each other to express a single combined modality, making the statement feel more tentative. The concord illustrates a weakened possibility of someone passing his exam. Meanwhile, in Russian, the same concord emphasises a strong possibility that someone will pass their exam. Researchers must ensure that epistemic judgments are not skewed by semantic underdetermination. In many contexts, epistemic and circumstantial readings entail one another, causing the two meanings

to collapse and making the intended "flavour" impossible to identify with certainty (Yanovich, 2019; 3).

Methodology and Data Collection

The empirical basis of this research comprises a comparative linguistic analysis of epistemic modality markers in English literary discourse and their corresponding Russian translations. To ensure a diverse representation of stylistic and temporal registers, the primary data were extracted from two distinct literary landmarks: John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* (the first volume of *The Forsyte Saga*) and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. These sources provide a robust contrast between the refined, analytical prose of early 20th-century realism and the dialogue-heavy, contemporary narrative style of modern fiction.

The analytical process involved a continuous sampling method to identify instances of epistemic modality – specifically, linguistic units expressing varying degrees of speaker certainty, probability, and doubt, such as modal verbs, adverbs, and parenthetical constructions. These English "source" tokens were then mapped against their Russian counterparts in the translations by N. Volzhina (*The Forsyte Saga*) and the "Rosman" publishing house (*Harry Potter*).

	Page number	Epistemic modal verbs in John Galsworthy's <i>The Man of Property</i> (the first volume of <i>The Forsyte Saga</i>)	Page number	Russian translation by N. Volzhina (<i>The Forsyte Saga</i>)
1	96	Mr. Bosinney said he might come.	179	Мистер Босини хотел заглянуть
2	97	He must be mad to walk like that in this heat.	180	Бежит сломя голову по такой жаре
3	97	She could sleep, but he must lie awake.	181	Вот она может спать, а он лежит не смыкая глаз.

4	108	And where may you have been ?	197	Где же ты была ?
5	113	By displaying towards Irene a dignified coldness, some impression might be made upon her [...]	207	Может быть , холодная сдержанность произведет на Ирэн впечатление ...
6	114	There might be nothing in it.	207	Может быть , все это пустяки
7	118	The sudden flush that rose on the girl's intent young face – she must have seen spring up before her great hope – the sudden sweetness of her smile ...	215	Румянец, вспыхнувший на юном серьезном личике девушки – должно быть , она крепко надеялась на что-то, - ее внезапная мягкая улыбка ...
8	119	Perhaps nothing in this life was more stimulating to him than a Will.	218	Кажется , ничто другое не могло так расшевелить его, как вопрос о завещании...
9	124	... from being merely a joker in search of amusement, George felt that he must see the poor chap through.	226	... Джордж, вначале искавший только случая поразвлечься, решил не спускать с бедняги глаз.
10	126	He may be wandering out there now in that fog, if he's not a corpse.	229	До сих пор, должно быть слоняется в тумане. Если только не отправился на тот свет...
11	127	"My client, Mr. Soames Forsyte, is a gentleman, a man of property, who would be the last to dispute any legitimate claim that might be made against him, ..."	231	– Мой доверитель, мистер сомс Форсайт, джентльмен и человек состоятельный, ни в коем случае не стал бы оспаривать предъявленные ему законные требования, ...
12	128	... the corresponddence showed that whatever he might have said in his evidence, Mr. Forsyte had in fact never contemplated repudiating liability on any of the work ordered or executed by his architect.	233	... переписка доказывает, не смотря на все заявления мистера Форсайта, что последний никогда не отказывался принять работу, выполненную самим архитектором или по его заказам.
13	132	But perhaps there was nothing to confess, even now very likely there was nothing to confess. [...]. Was it wise to put himself into a position where he might have to eat his words? [...]. He might go abroad, ruined men always go abroad.	238	А что если ей не в чем признаваться, может быть даже сейчас не в чем признаваться? ... Благоразумно ли ставить себя в такое положение, если вдруг придется идти на попятный? ... Уехать за границу? Банкроты всегда уезжают за границу.
14	135	Nothing that she could have done , nothing that she had done, brought home to him like this the inner significance of her act.	243	Ни один поступок который она могла совершить , который она уже совершила, не показал бы ему с такой ясностью все значение ее ухода.

15	138	She could not tell him, but she knew. She knew nearly for certain! It was most unlikely ; circumstances had changed!	248	Этого Джун не могла сказать, но она знала. Знала почти наверное , ничего другого и быть не может , все так изменилось.
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Table 1. Contrastive comparison of the 20th-century fiction in English and its Russian equivalent in translation

	Page number	Epistemic modal verbs in J.K. Rowling's <i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i> .	Page number	Russian translation by "Rosman" publishing house.
1	5	It might have been Harvey	8	Вполне возможно , его зовут Гэри
2	12	He couldn't see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on.	13	...ни он, ни Петунья ни в коем случае не позволят втянуть себя в творящиеся вокруг странности
3	12	Mr. Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep.	13	Долгожданный и беспокойный сон уже принял в свои объятия мистера Дурсли
4	10	I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here.	15	По пути сюда я стал свидетелем как минимум дюжины вечеринок и гулянок
5	13	It must have made sense to Dumbledore	19	Однако Дамблдор прекрасно понимал.
6	15	She eyed his cloak suddenly as though she thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.	20	Она внимательно оглядела его мантию, словно ей вдруг пришло в голову, что под ней он прячет Гарри.
7	22	Harry must have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class.	28	Наверное , Гарри стригли чаще чем остальных его одноклассников.
8	62	I think you must have made a mistake	74	Боюсь, что вы ошибаетесь
9	62	I don't think I can be a wizard	74	Я не думаю, что я волшебник... что я могу стать волшебником.
10	153	Malfoy certainly did talk about flying a lot	182	Малфой действительно чересчур много говорил о полетах.

Table 2. Contrastive comparison of the contemporary fiction in English and its Russian equivalent in translation

Results

The influence of English as a global lingua franca increasingly compels target languages to adopt its textual norms, often bypassing the traditional "cultural filter" (House, 1997). This phenomenon is particularly salient in the

translation of epistemic modality into Russian. Without proactive filtering, translations risk a loss of functional equivalence, failing to align with Russian-specific communicative preferences and rhetorical expectations (Kranich, 2014; 27).

Epistemic modality encodes across English and Russian.

Conducting a sophisticated analysis of cross-linguistic influence regarding Russian grammar and translation theory, a distinct divergence in how epistemic modality is encoded in both languages is revealed in the literary excerpts:

Lexical vs. Synthetic Realisation: While English frequently employs specific modal auxiliaries to denote precise degrees of certainty, Russian often necessitates a broader array of functional tools. These include lexical markers (adverbs and verbs), particles (частицы), interjections (междометия), and conjunctions (союзы), which must be carefully calibrated to match the English source.

Punctuation as a modal marker: In several instances, Russian utilises punctuation – specifically the question mark – to emphasize probability, uncertainty, or inference where English would rely on a verbal shift.

The Risk of omission: In translated fiction, epistemic markers are occasionally omitted

entirely. While the “overall” propositional meaning may remain intact, the precise illocutionary force (the speaker’s subjective stance) is distorted, leading to a flatter, less nuanced narrative voice.

Deduction in past contexts: Structurally, both languages mirror each other when expressing deductions about past events; typically, a modal head is followed by a perfective or past participle form of the infinitive to signal the shift in temporal reference. The Perfect Modals pose a challenge for the translator, thereby distorting the overall meaning.

“Should have done” usually corresponds to “следовало сделать”, implying regret or an unfulfilled obligation.

“Must have done” corresponds to “должно быть, сделал” emphasizing certainty about the past.

“Could have done” corresponds to “мог бы сделать” referring to capability that wasn’t used.

English category	Russian equivalent	Semantic correspondence
Modal verbs: <i>might, could, may</i>	Модальные слова: <i>возможно, вероятно, наверное</i>	Partial: <i>English</i> uses verbs, <i>Russian</i> often uses adverbial particles, parentheticals
Deductive “Must”: For strong logical assumptions	Модальное выражение <i>должно быть</i>	Full: High degree of certainty is maintained in both languages
Perfect Modals: Should/Must/Could + Past Participle – Should have done – Must have done – Could have done The meaning is clear without additional clause	Модальные слова в прошедшей форме и последующий инфинитив: – Следовало сделать, – мог бы сделать, – должно быть сделал, но не воспользовался случаем, – упустил случай, – не выполнил. (it is necessary to add the explanatory clause)	Partial: <i>English</i> is self-contained; <i>Russian</i> often requires an explanatory clause to clarify the outcome. Full omission: epistemic markers are occasionally omitted entirely. The meaning is translated without modality.
Modal adverbs: <i>possibly, probably, likely, perhaps</i>	Модальные слова: <i>возможно, вероятно, похоже</i>	Full: Direct semantic functioning overlap between the two languages.

Table 3. Expressions in English and Russian

Domains to employ epistemic modality

The excerpts from John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* provide a fascinating shift in the evolution of epistemic modality. This shift is distributed across four domains to employ epistemic modality:

1. *Frequency and focus of modality.* While both authors use "must," "might," and "could," they use them to create different atmospheres. In Galsworthy's 20th-century fiction, modality is often existential or social. Words like "might" and "must" are used to navigate rigid social structures and the interior "dignified coldness" of characters. There is a heavy focus on what is legitimate or what must be done socially. However, in

Rowling's contemporary fiction, modality is more investigative and psychological. Because Rowling writes a mystery-heavy plot, the "might have been" and "must have made sense" are tools for the reader and characters to solve puzzles. It's less about social duty and more about deciphering reality.

2. *Syntactic complexity.* The structure of the sentences reveals a shift toward more direct communication in modern fiction. Table 2 illustrates a significant difference in the use of epistemic modality between two different periods of fiction. Such features as sentence length, abstraction and verb chains define the core modification and thus the essence of the message.

Feature	20 th century (Galsworthy)	Contemporary (Rowling)
Sentence length	Longer, winding clauses "... would be the last to dispute any legitimate claim"	Shorter, punchier sentences
Abstraction	High: uses modals to discuss abstract concepts like "impression" or "liability"	Lower: uses modals to discuss concrete actions such as haircuts, mistakes, hiding things.
Verb Chains	Complex: "might have to eat his words", "might have said".	Functional: "might be going on", "can be a wizard"

Table 4. *Syntactic complexity between 20th-century prose and contemporary modern fiction*

3. *The Tone of "certainty".* The use of "must" shows a distinct stylistic difference. Galsworthy's "must" often carries a sense of inevitability or fate. When George feels he "must see the poor chap through," it feels like a heavy moral weight. Whereas Rowling's "must" usually denotes logical deduction. "Harry must have had more haircuts..." is a humorous observation based on evidence. It's lighter and more observational.
4. *Subjectivity vs. objectivity.* Galsworthy uses modality to describe a character's state of mind from a distance: "There might be nothing in it". It feels like a formal observation of a soul. Rowling uses modality to bring the reader closer to the character's immediate confusion: "I don't think I can be a wizard". This makes contemporary prose feel more immediate and internal compared to the "dignified coldness" of the early 20th century.

The excerpts from the fictional samples also highlight the stylistic differences in how each author expresses possibility and deduction.

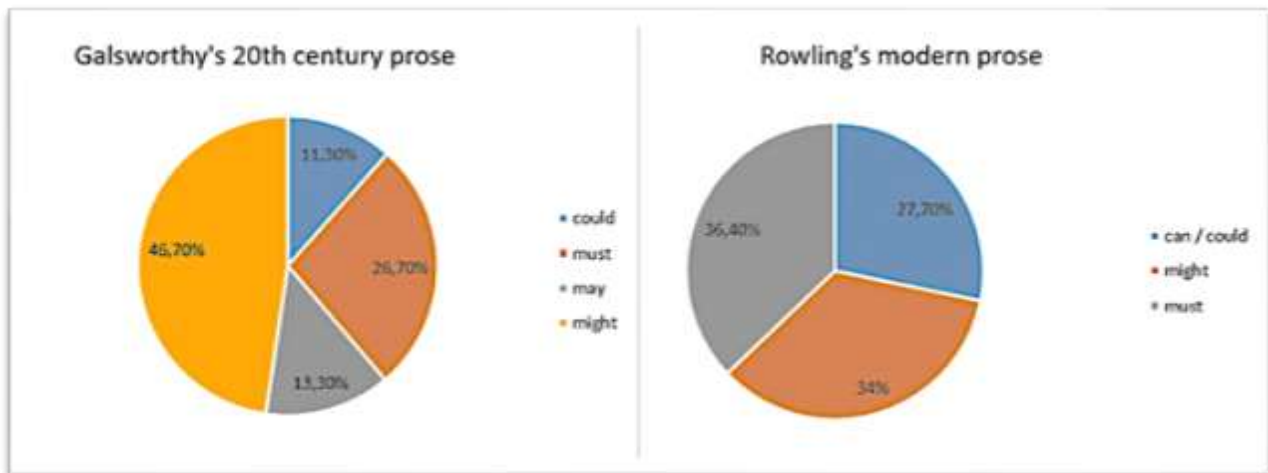


Figure 1. Comparison of Modal Verbs Frequency from two fiction excerpts

Usage of "might": Both authors use "might" frequently, but it is the dominant modal in Galsworthy's early 20th-century prose (46.7%). In *The Man of Property*, "might" often qualifies legal or social obligations: "might have said in his evidence," "might be made against him". In *Harry Potter*, "might" is used more to explore immediate narrative possibilities "might be hiding Harry".

The absence or presence of "may": A key contrast is the presence of "may" in Galsworthy's writing (13.3%), which contributes to a more formal and elevated tone typical of the early 1900s. In the contemporary *Harry Potter* snippets, "may" is entirely absent, replaced by the more modern usage of "can" or "could."

The role of "must": Rowling uses "must" significantly more in proportion to other modals (36.4% compared to Galsworthy's 26.7%). This reflects her investigative style – using modal verbs to help the reader piece together logical deductions about the plot "Harry must have had more haircuts," "It must have made sense to Dumbledore".

Informality vs. Formality: Rowling's use of "can" "I don't think I can be a wizard" brings a conversational, contemporary feel to the text. In contrast, Galsworthy's use of modals like "could" and "might" alongside adverbs like "perhaps" creates a more detached, philosophical atmosphere.

Overall, Galsworthy uses modal verbs to build a world of social obligation and uncertainty, whereas Rowling uses them to build a world of personal discovery and logical inquiry. Modern fiction has stripped away the "wordiness" around modals, making the characters' internal thoughts feel more like a direct conversation with the reader.

Discussion

One key point to emphasise is that there are clear fundamental differences between English and Russian in the field of epistemic modality. As Fontaine (2013) observed, "modality is not easily divided into discrete categories and covers a range of meanings that reflect the speaker's judgement of what he or she is saying", it is essential to recognize that epistemic modals, when translated, convey the general meaning and maintain a broad spectrum of linguistic devices rather than mapping directly to fixed equivalents. The pairing of modal verbs with other modal elements is quite common and typically influences how they are translated. The translation of might, may, can, and must generally falls into several categories: (a) zero translation, (b) modal verbs, (c) modal modifiers (such as adverbs or particles), (d) a blend of modal elements, or (e) a non-literal translation that uses different grammatical means to express the same modality. When discussing epistemic modality in translation, it

is essential to highlight the tension between semantic equivalence and pragmatic force. Semantic correspondence/equivalence implies the degree of certainty with which the speaker relates their utterance to the situation. Pragmatic force implies how the speaker sounds.

The semantic correspondence of epistemic modality – the linguistic expression of a speaker's degree of commitment to the truth of a proposition – reveals a complex interplay of partial and full equivalence between English and Russian. While both languages utilize modal verbs, adverbs, and parenthetical constructions to signal certainty, possibility, or deduction, they diverge significantly in their structural preferences. Full equivalence is most frequently observed in the categorical expression of necessity and possibility, where lexemes such as the English "must" and the Russian "должен" (dolzhen) often serve as mirrors in formal contexts of logical inference. Similarly, epistemic adverbs like "probably" and "вероятно" (veroyatno) exhibit a high degree of functional overlap. However, partial equivalence predominates in the morphosyntactic realisation of these concepts. English relies heavily on modal auxiliaries such as "might," "could," "would", whereas Russian, lacking a comparable system of modal auxiliaries, compensates through a robust array of modal words such as "кажется" – *kazhetsya*, particles, and the sophisticated use of the conditional-subjunctive mood, which often carries epistemic weight that English must render through modal perfect constructions. Consequently, translating epistemic nuances requires a shift from strictly lexical mapping to a strategy that prioritises the "force" of the speaker's commitment over the specific syntactic structure used to convey it.

The concept of pragmatic force is particularly nuanced when examining epistemic modality, as it dictates the speaker's level of commitment to the truth of a proposition. In English, epistemic modality is often characterized by a wide range of modal

verbs (must, might, could) and adverbials that allow for a highly calibrated expression of certainty or doubt. The pragmatic force in English often relies on hedging to maintain politeness or to avoid sounding overly dogmatic. In contrast, Russian epistemic modality frequently employs modal particles such as *же, ли, разве* and parenthetical constructions (*может быть, кажется*) that can convey a different pragmatic weight. While English speakers might use modal verbs to sound "tentative," Russian speakers often utilize word order and specific particles to signal the strength of their conviction. Consequently, a direct translation of an epistemic statement from English to Russian – or vice versa – can lead to a shift in pragmatic force; a speaker might unintentionally sound more assertive or more hesitant than intended due to the differing grammatical tools used to express "knowledge" versus "belief" in each language.

Examples:

English: "He must be at home." (High certainty based on logic).

Russian: "Он, должно быть, дома." (Similar certainty, but the parenthetical "должно быть" can feel more detached or observational depending on intonation).

To consider the scholarly context of the epistemic modality use and its translation with the analyses of these differences, it is helpful to look at the illocutionary point. In epistemic modality, the "point" is to provide a judgment. If the pragmatic force is too strong, using "must" when "might" is appropriate, the speaker sounds aggressive; if it is too weak, they sound uninformed. Translation considerations include the "hedging" gap and contextual weight.

With the "hedging" gap, English speakers frequently "hedge" to be polite: "I might be wrong, but...". In Russian, a similar pragmatic force might be achieved not just through words, but through the Subjunctive Mood (*бы*) to soften the assertion and even with the intonation.

In terms of the contextual weight, a Russian particle such as *же* can add a pragmatic force of “obviousness” that is notoriously difficult to translate into a single English modal without sounding overly aggressive or redundant. The translation of epistemic modality between English and Russian frequently results in a delicate shift of pragmatic force, where the nuanced “strength of belief” expressed in the source text is either diluted or structurally transformed. In English, the system of modal auxiliaries – such as the subtle gradient between *might*, *could*, and *may* – allows a speaker to calibrate their degree of commitment to a proposition with surgical precision. When these are translated into Russian, which often relies on a more diverse toolkit of parenthetical constructions (*вероятно, пожалуй*) and modal particles (*же, ли, разве*), a literal rendering can lead to a “loss of nuance” if the translator fails to account for the subjective attitude embedded in the original modal verb. However, the Russian language demonstrates significant flexibility in compensating for these losses; through the strategic use of word order (TP-structure) and intonation, a translator can restore the speaker’s original epistemic stance. For instance, moving a modal particle to a different position in a Russian sentence can subtly signal doubt or certainty in a way that an English modal verb cannot, effectively “recapturing” the pragmatic intent through the target language’s unique grammatical elasticity.

Another crucial and influential point to consider when translating epistemic modality is the contextual sensitivity – that is, the environment of the discourse. The environment of discourse – whether a formal academic paper, a courtroom, or a casual dinner conversation – acts as a primary filter for how speakers in both English and Russian signal their degree of commitment to a statement. This “contextual shaping” dictates not just the choice of words, but the very frequency and density of modal markers. Modal verbs often overlap in meaning, making “the surrounding

context” essential for determining a speaker’s specific intent (Fontaine, 2013; 121).

The following environments are considered to convey a specific meaning:

1. *Formal vs. informal environments*. In English, formal discourse (like academic writing) often utilises “hedging” through cautious epistemic verbs like *suggest*, *appear*, or *indicate* to maintain objectivity and avoid over-claiming. In contrast, informal English relies heavily on modal auxiliaries like *might* or *could*. Russian formal discourse frequently avoids the first person entirely, opting for impersonal constructions or “parenthetical” markers of high certainty such as *несомненно* (undoubtedly) or *очевидно* (evidently). In casual Russian, however, the environment encourages the use of particles such as *вряд ли* (hardly) or *мол* (so they say), which would be considered too subjective or “folkish” for a professional setting.
2. *Power dynamics and social distance*. The social “landscape” significantly alters epistemic choice: by two ways symmetry and asymmetry. (1) Symmetry (Peer-to-Peer): In both languages, speakers feel freer to express naked uncertainty: “I don’t know, maybe?”. (2) Asymmetry (Superior to Subordinate): In Russian, a superior might use the future tense as a “command-style” epistemic: *Вы это сделаете* – “You will do this”, where the modality of “certainty” functions as a directive. In English, a superior might use “softened” epistemic modality: “You might want to check this” to maintain politeness while still asserting authority.
3. *Professional vs specialized discourse*. In technical environments (legal, engineering or medical), the discourse environment demands high precision: English: Strict adherence to “shall” or “must” to define logical necessity versus “may” for permission/possibility. Russian: Heavy reliance on the conditional mood

(by) to discuss hypothetical risks, or specific legal terminology (вероятно that carries a defined weight in a dossier that differs from its weight in a grocery store. Crucial Observation: When moving between these languages, a speaker must recognize that "polite doubt" in English is often structured through verbs, while in Russian, it is woven into the sentence structure through particles and word order.

Finally, power dynamics can be traced in both the use of epistemic modality and its translation into English and Russian. By power dynamics, the one who has the authority to define reality is implied. In this context, power dynamics in epistemic modality refer to the unequal influence actors (individuals, institutions, or systems) hold in establishing what is accepted as "true" or "known."

In the intersection of translation and epistemic modality, the choice between English

and Russian markers often functions as a subtle instrument of power, reflecting shifting hierarchies of authority. When translators navigate these languages, they frequently engage in epistemic gatekeeping, where the selective translation of modal hedges or boosters – such as the English "might" versus the Russian "возможно" or "должно быть" – decides which perspectives are afforded the status of objective knowledge. This process often necessitates delegated interpretation, wherein the translator assumes the role of an arbiter, imposing a specific epistemic framework onto the target audience to maintain conformity with the dominant discourse of the source text. Ultimately, the systematic calibration of these modalities serves to legitimize particular truths while marginalizing others, transforming the act of translation from a neutral transfer of information into a strategic exercise in authority and epistemic control.

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