

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING GERMAN MODAL VERBS TO ECONOMICS STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Modal verbs are an important chapter in learning German. The paper presents how the modal verbs are thought to the economics students in our university, emphasizing the common mistakes of the students and possible measures the teacher should take in order to diminish the number of learning mistakes. The first part of the paper deals with the theoretical background, thus being such a difficult subject for the Romanian student, the paper brings up even the conjunction differences on this subject, dealing with different verbal tenses in the German grammar. The second part of this paper presents a text full of modal verbs, in different tenses, the students are asked to recognize them. In the paper I will show the mistakes the students usually make and the proportion of the right answers at this task. The following part deals with different exercises, in order to conclude the mistakes and the proportion of the right answers at this challenge. The final part shows the conclusions of this study that reflects on the results of the conducted measurements. The modal verbs play an important role in facilitating an efficient and understandable communication pattern in the society and therefore, they form significant aspect in the human language. Modal verbs add to the text precision and clearance in its meaning.*

Keywords: *modal verbs, economics students, grammar, rules, meanings*

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1. Introduction

The word grammar comes from the ancient Greek. In this language, the word "gramma" means the letter or the written word. Grammar is, in a sense, the operating system of any language, some experts say. Others believe: grammar is the set of rules of a language that is necessary in order to express oneself intelligibly in this language. Grammar means language learning. A grammar includes all the rules necessary to speak the language. It is only with the help of such a set of rules that is possible to communicate and understand each other. Anyone who makes the effort to deal with it will discover the logic and structure of the language.

Grammar plays a major role, of course, because it is essential to know the rules so that students can express themselves correctly in the foreign language. They must know the structures and then use them in verbal expression. Grammar teaching is an important topic in foreign language teaching, but grammatical knowledge is not the main goal of foreign language teaching. Since learners do not usually associate positive emotions with grammar lessons, it is all the more important that teachers design grammar lessons in such a way that they are both fun and successful. Grammar lessons should be motivating enough to enable learners to achieve quick success. (Bolitho, Tomlinson, 1995)

We have to decide which excerpt is the most important for teaching in a particular academic year, since grammar takes up a lot of time in class. In order not to make the students feel overburdened and at the same time to avoid boring lessons, the grammar rules should be carried out in such a way that students can memorize the material. (Ferris, 2002)

The explanation of the grammar rules must not take a long time and the rules must be repeated several times. "It is therefore not a question of conveying the complete system of scientific rules of a language, but rather of selecting specific elements which are directly relevant for the purposes of communication". (Granzow-Emden, 2019: 74) In grammar teaching, then, it is not a question of purpose, but of the means by which we can better understand the foreign language as a whole.

In speaking skills, success is not so easy to experience without knowing the grammar system. Then you can really practice and master the language. This shows "a close relationship between forms and meanings". (Ellis, 2010: 17) The main forms of attentional control are visual processing and grammatical cues within language materials and production orientation, which help learners to further process and perceive existing language deficits.

2. Research method

First of all, I will describe the differences and nuances between the Romanian and German rules of modal verbs and then I will dedicate myself to this topic in the DAF lessons.

After presenting the theoretical part, the economic students are asked to fill in the blanks, using only modal verbs. After fulfilling the task, I will take a look to the mistakes present in the student's papers and draw the conclusions.

The characteristic of the modal verbs in both languages can be described in such a way that another verb also appears most often in the sentence. In German, this verb

appears at the end of the sentence, unlike in Romanian, where the verb is near the modal verb.

3. Aspects of the modal verbs

The meaning of the modal verbs is to forbid, allow or command. The verb “wissen” (to know) in German ranks with the modal verbs because of the same conjugation. There is no imperative in modal verbs. Modal verbs can then be presented in DAF lessons as the modal verbs in all other languages, only the explanations of the meaning should be more thorough and the conjugation must be shown correctly. Modal verbs are called auxiliary verbs. A subordinate verb that is always combined with the "pure" infinitive of another verb and has the same subject area as this one. “These verbs are connected to the infinitive and fulfill the modal function, i.e. reality is not seen, but is offered as possible, desirable, necessary, etc. We recognize six modal verbs - dürfen, können, mögen, müssen, sollen, wollen. They have morphological, syntactical and semantic characteristics. Depending on which modal verb we use, the meaning of the sentence changes.” (Dreyer, Schmitt, 2009: 109-110)

Modal verbs can be divided into three categories according to their meaning:

- Possibility (*können, dürfen*)
- Necessity (*müssen, sollen*)
- Will or desire (*wollen, mögen*).

(<http://www.nthuleen.com>,

<http://www.duden.de/sprachwissen/sprachratgeber/modalverben-und-wissen>)

Dürfen expresses:

- Permission

Die Verteiler dürfen den Verkaufspreis für das Produkt selbst festlegen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

The distributors can set the sales price for the product themselves.

The distributors have permission / have the right / have the authority / have the approval / have (received) consent to

The distributors are permitted to

The distributors are entitled, authorized to

It is allowed / permitted the distributors to set the sales price for the product themselves.

- Prohibition (*nicht dürfen*)

Die Produkte dürfen nicht verteilt werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

It is forbidden / not allowed / inadmissible / prohibited / not permitted to distribute the products. The buyer is not entitled / authorized / empowered to distribute the products.

Können is used in the following situations:

- Ability

Ein guter Leiter kann sich schnell auf wechselnde Anforderungen einstellen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

A good manager is able to adapt / capable of adapting / is ready to adapt quickly to changing requirements.

A good manager is equipped with the ability / has the ability / has the faculty to adapt quickly to changing requirements.

A good manager is in the position to adapt quickly to changing requirements.

- Opportunity

Jetzt kann das Produkt besonders gewinnbringend abgesetzt werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

Now there is a chance, an opportunity to sell the product particularly profitably.

- Possibility

Das Reinigungsprodukt kann mit dem Hausmüll entsorgt werden

The cleaning product can be purchased in any well-stocked specialist shop.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

The cleaning product is easily disposed of with household waste.

The cleaning product is easily to be disposed of with household waste.

It is possible to dispose of the product with household waste.

You have the opportunity / it is possible to purchase the cleaning product in any well-stocked specialist shop.

- Impossibility (*nicht können*)

In dieser Form kann das Reinigungsprodukt nicht auf den Markt gebracht werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

It is not possible / it is impossible / unacceptable to place the cleaning product on the market in this form.

Mögen is used in the following situations:

- Wish

Der Kunde möchte das Reinigungsprodukt vor dem Kauf ausprobieren.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

The customer would have liked to try the cleaning product before buying it.

The customer would like to try the cleaning product before buying it.

Müssen is used in the following situations:

- Necessity

Die Reningungsproduktpalette muss erweitert werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

It is needed / necessary / required / essential / inevitable to expand the cleaning product range.

The cleaning product range needs to be expanded.

There is a need to expand the cleaning product range.

There is no escaping the need to expand the cleaning product range.

There is nothing left but to expand the cleaning product range.

- Compulsion

Aufgrund des verschärften Wettbewerbs müssen die Unternehmen laufend neue Dienstleistungen anbieten.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

Due to increased competition, companies are forced to constantly offer new services.

Companies are forced / see themselves under pressure to constantly offer new services.

It is inevitable for companies to constantly offer new services.

- Obligation

Ein Handelsvertreter muss sich ständig um den Abschluss von Geschäften bemühen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

A sales representative has the duty / is obliged to make constant efforts to close transactions.

A sales representative has to constantly strive to close transactions.

A sales representative is required / needs to constantly strive to close transactions.

- Command

Das Management muss Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der Produktqualität ergreifen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

Management must take measures to improve product quality.

Means are to be adopted by the management to improve product quality.

- Lack of compulsion / duty / necessity (*nicht müssen*)

Bei sachgemäßer Anwendung des Produkts muss kein Augenschutz getragen werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

If the product is used correctly, it is not necessary / essential / required / prescribed to ...

If the product is used correctly, there is no necessity / no obligation / no compulsion to

Wollen expresses:

- Will, intention

Die Supermarktkette will zukünftig auch Produkte aus „fairem Handel“ in die Regale stellen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

The supermarket chain is determined / ready / willing / prepared to put

The supermarket chain plans / intends / is going to put ...

The supermarket chain has the intention / has the plan to put ...

Sollen is used in the following situations:

- Order

Das Management soll Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der Produktqualität ergreifen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

Management is mandated to take action to improve product quality.

Management is given the order / the instruction / the task of taking measures to improve product quality.

- Question of intent

Soll auch für das neue Modell eine 10jährige Garantie gewährt werden?

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

Is it expected / foreseen / required that a 10-year guarantee be granted for the new model?

- Planning

Das Produkt soll bald auch auf dem amerikanischen Markt angeboten werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

It is planned / foreseen / intended to offer the product on the American market soon.

There is a plan / intention to offer the product on the American market in the near future.

- Recommendation

Um das Kunden-interesse zu steigern, sollte auch noch die Produkt-gestaltung optimiert werden.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

In order to increase customer interest, it is recommended / advisable / appropriate / recommendable to also optimize the product design.

In order to increase customer interest, it would be good / better, if the product design were also optimized.

■ Undesirability (*nicht sollen*)

Von der Optik her soll das Produkt nicht nur älteres Publikum ansprechen.

There is another way to rephrase this sentence:

It is not desired / it is not wanted that the product appeals only to an older audience.
(Helbig, Buscha, 2013)

4. Hypothesis testing

All these aspects were presented to the economics students. Most of them are not beginners in studying German, I wanted to know what knowledge of the modal verbs the economics students have, so I prepared the following text. They have 20 minutes to find the best solution. In the following text there are 20 gaps that the students should fill in with the appropriate modal forms. After reviewing the works, I will draw the conclusions.

Die Uhr

Gestern kaufte ich eine neue Uhr. "Sie möchten doch sicher etwas ganz Besonderes", sagte der Verkäufer. Er zeigte mir eine silberne Uhr. "Diese Uhr," sagte er, "..... Ihnen die Zeit in Sydney oder New York anzeigen. Aber das ist noch nicht alles. Diese Uhr kann auch Ihre Körpertemperatur messen.

Und Sie wissen, wie hoch Ihr Blutdruck ist, Sie nur diesen Knopf drücken. So einfach ist das." Ich blickte staunend auf die Uhr.

"Sie mit dieser Uhr ein Fax verschicken und telefonieren. Und wenn Sie jemand fragen, wie das Wetter in China ist: Das ist kein Problem. Die Uhr es Ihnen sogar auf Chinesisch sagen, wenn Sie das"

"Aber ich kein Chinesisch", sagte ich.

"Sehen Sie", sagte er, "deshalb Sie unbedingt diese Uhr haben. Denn diese Uhr auch übersetzen. Von Chinesisch auf Deutsch." "Und wenn ich nur die Zeit wissen"?

Der Verkäufer winkte ab. "Wer heutzutage schon nur die Zeit wissen?"

Ich war überzeugt. Ich diese Uhr haben. Sie kostete achthundert Euro. "Sie sich glücklich schätzen," sagte der Verkäufer. "Ohne diese Uhr werden Sie nicht mehr leben wollen." Er wuchtete eine schwere Bedienungsanleitung auf den Tisch. "Sie nur vorher diese Anleitung lesen", sagte er.

Ich blickte misstrauisch auf das Buch. "Sie sich davon nicht abschrecken lassen. Die Anleitung ist ganz einfach", meinte der Verkäufer. "Jeder Idiot sie verstehen."

Ich ging mit meiner neuen Uhr auf die Straße. Eine Frau die Zeit wissen. Ich sah ratlos auf meine neue Uhr. "Die Zeit hier ich Ihnen leider nicht sagen", meinte ich. "Aber wenn Sie, welches Wetter jetzt in China ist. Das kann ich Ihnen sagen."

After checking, I discovered the following errors:

Only 18% of the students gave the right answers.

- 12% used one incorrect form
- 8% used two incorrect forms
- 14% used three incorrect forms
- 18% used seven incorrect forms
- 8% used ten incorrect forms
- 13% used thirteen incorrect forms
- 9% used fifteen incorrect forms
- 25% could identify the correct verb but the correct grammar form
- 35% could not make the difference between the modal verbs *sollen* and *müssen*
- 12% could not use the verb *können*
- 30% could not use the verb *sollen*
- 25% could not use the verb *müssen*
- 17% could not use the verb *mögen*
- 12% could not use the verb *wollen*
- 5% could not use the verb *dürfen*

5. Summary

The process of learning German especially as a second language is challenging for the Romanian students because of the complicated nature of modal verbs used. Various forms of communications from order to permission usually have varying forms of expression. The modal verbs play an important role in facilitating an efficient and understandable communication pattern in the society and therefore, they form significant aspect in the human language. Modal verbs add to the text precision and clearance in its meaning. (Wilmanns, 2017)

As this study shows, modal verbs are much too difficult for economics students, or students general speaking. Many students usually know the linguistic nuances of the modal verbs, but they do not master the conjugation. When examining their knowledge of the modal verbs, the students are not in very good form, so the teacher

needs to dedicate more time to teaching and practicing the modal verbs. The economics students have great difficulties in dealing with *sollen/müssen* modal verbs. The teacher should practice with the students the conjugation and also the nuances of the modal verbs. A communication pattern without proper modal verb structure is deemed to fail, thus the necessity of having good knowledge on the grammar involved for efficient communication.

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