CONTEXTUAL FEATURES FOR IMPLEMENTING EPISTEMIC MODALITY

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Introduction. The available theories of modality are based on two approaches: linguistic modality is qualified as the relation of an utterance to the reality or relation of a speech subject to the things being communicated. In terms of some concepts, this contradiction is eliminated by uniting the mentioned interpretations. The paper understands modality as a linguistic category expressing speaker’s attitude to the proposition content being communicated. We consider that a speaker is the central figure for determination of modality as it is the speech subject that establishes the relations between an object and its predicated sign in an utterance. Such understanding of the category does not exclude the fact that modality reflects relation of the proposition basis of an utterance to the reality; such reflection becomes just a particular variety of modality and complies with our recognition of traditional division of the category into its objective and subjective subtypes. In this context, we recognize the conventionality of such division and emphasize relative nature of objectivity being meant. That entails not in actual relations between the proposition content and reality but the speaker’s perception of this relation as the objective or subjective one.

Linguistics has developed polar tendencies in solving a problem of determining semantic volume of the category of modality. In terms of wide approach, modality is attributed to have quite wide range of meanings including such aspects of utterance as its reality or irreality, evaluation of utterance from the viewpoint of reliability, attitude of the action’s subject to the action as well as a communicative focusing, statement or negation, expressiveness and emotional colouring, stylistic aspects, meaning of generalization, clarification, accenting, temporal meanings and other types of relations. In terms of certain research concept, variety of modal meanings may expand by involving practically any type of evaluation. In this context, modality is seen as some comprehensive linguistic category with rather blurred boundaries and quite diversified content.

Narrow understanding of modality is connected with the exclusion of emotional-expressive, temporal meanings, meanings of negativity and target focus of an utterance, meanings of generalization, clarification and other relations from the category of modal ones. Taking into consideration the fact that linguistics took the notion of modality from logics, we believe it to be quite appropriate to study linguistic modal meanings in terms of alethic, epistemic, and deontic possibility and necessity. In this regard, the research is focused on the natural linguistic features of the implementation of these modal meanings. Moreover, meanings of reality or irreality, optativity, imperativity, and evidentiality are to be recognized as the obligatory elements of a semantic system of modality.

There is no unified opinion as for the categorial status of modality in modern linguistics. It is qualified as a syntactic, grammatical, logical-grammatical, notional, semantic, semantic-pragmatic, functional-semantic category. Determination of categorial belonging of modality is that starting point, which in its turn outlines the amount and variety of marked linguistic means representing modal semantics.

We suppose that a functional-semantic approach to the determination of a categorial status of modality is the most optimal one; that approach does not restrict researchers structurally in their selection of linguistic means but allows determining a set of
representatives of the category in some language relying on a general basis – semantic function, contextual purpose of those means.

Traditionally, a category of modality includes objective modality, being a core of this category and expressing the relation of the information being communicated to the reality, and subjective modality, which expresses the speaker’s attitude to the message and represents the degree of his/her being sure in the facts being communicated or determines probability of the adequacy of an idea representing the concrete one. Modality does not describe some features, peculiarities, properties of the world, but features of language use; it belongs to the categories, which have a function of relation between a speaker and his/her utterance.

Nowadays, it is customary for foreign linguistics to distinguish following types of modality apart from the objective and subjective ones: dynamic (according to other terminology, alethic), deontic, and epistemic.

Epistemic modality is referred to a subjective type of modality; it is considered as the connection between a subject and an attribute. This connection is evaluated rationally by a speaker as his/her subjective mental construction rather than objective characteristic of the reality.

Opinions of linguists concerning epistemic modality are of diverse nature. There is no doubt that linguistic interpretation of the category have not avoided the influence of modal-logical considerations, which are the source of the very term epistemic modality, being reflected in certain tries to determine linguistic epistemic modality through the notion of possibility and necessity. Its determination through the notion of probability is connected with the quantitative evaluation of possibility of the fact that the utterance content complies with the reality. Other definitions of the category are connected with the notion of knowledge as well as reliability. Such a modality type is considered to be the category describing speaker’s attitude to his/her communicated propositional content from the viewpoint of reliability of the latter or as the evaluation of truth degree of the message being communicated. In this context, truth is interpreted as a degree of compliance of a propositional content of the reality from the speaker’s viewpoint. The notion of truth is also relative to the epistemic obligation, i.e. the speaker’s obligation relative to the truth of the proposition he/she is communicating. Textual theory of epistemic modality represents it as one of the subtypes of interpersonal modality, which task is to inform a recipient.

The research objective is to demonstrate the alternative ways for expressing epistemic modality. The objective can be achieved by completing the following tasks: 1) analysis of theoretical material according to the research topic; 2) differentiation of the modality types in terms of certain features; 3) identification of traditional means to express epistemic modality; 4) determination of a contextual way of its implementation.

Methods and methodologies of the research. The article objective requires application of several methods such as comparative contextual analysis and general text analysis. These techniques allow us to draw conclusions regarding the means of expressing epistemic modality as reliable as possible. A method of continuous sampling was used to accumulate actual material.

Results and discussion. Currently, the notion of epistemic modality is the object of research of certain national and foreign linguists (M.Ya. Blokh, A.V. Averina, M.V. Petrushina, C. Rossari, E. Moline and others). This is not by accident as it is epistemic modality as one of the main modal grammatical categories that we use to express our views, our certainty value for the world events.

Interpretations of the notion epistemic modality as the very term, meaning it, may vary but majority of linguists recognize that epistemic modality is one of the types of subjective or «indirect» modality, i.e. subjective-modal meaning of evaluation, opinion, judgment, truth or falsity.

In terms of Slavik linguistic studies, we can find wide definition by A.V. Averina who understands epistemic modality as general «speaker’s attitude to the things being communicated by him / her» (Averina, 2010). E.I. Beliaieva sees modality as «the relation of the utterance content determined by a speaker to the reality in term of its truth / falsity and
represents her classification of epistemic modality, in terms of which four types are emphasized: modality of probability (assumption), modality of logical necessity (reasoning), modality of uncertainty (doubt), and modality of certainty» (Belyaeva, 1985). There is similar classification of epistemic modality (Bondarenko, V.N.; Troshina, A.V.), according to which meanings of categorical and problematic certainties are singled out. Categorial certainty involves shades of speaker’s certainty in the proposition; problematic certainty includes different shades of speaker’s certainty in the proposition are of gradual nature and nonrigid boundaries. Hence, many linguists have alike principles of approaches to the category under consideration, which differ more often only in the number of meanings being singled out.

For instance, during their detailed analysis of the motion of epistemic modality, M.Ya. Blokh and A.V. Averina characterize it as follows: «epistemic modality belongs to the system of modal grammatical categories, its semantics contains speaker’s evaluation of a degree of probability for some fact in past, present, future (subjective epistemic modality) or in terms of untensed prospects (objective epistemic modality)». It is pointed out that «epistemic modality can be expressed implicitly or explicitly». Thus, «any sentence can be considered as speaker’s evaluation of a degree of utterance probability» (Blokh&Averina, 2011: 45–46).

Authors of Grammar-80 propose description of a subjective-modal meaning, which in its turn includes evaluative-characterizing and proper evaluative meanings. The latter are «personal, subjective attitude of a speaker of the message content: agreement or disagreement, acceptance or non-acceptance <…>; positive or negative evaluation <…>; different types of will expression <…>; surprise, puzzlement or incomprehension <…>» and many other meanings, which area will be logical to include epistemic meaning as well (Russian grammar, 1980: 216–217).

A problem of subjective modality is studied by M.V. Petrushina who also analyzes a classification of modal meanings singled out by V.V. Vinogradov. It is noted that «the speaker’s attitude to the utterance content is the speaker’s classification of information in terms of truth / falsity (certainty / uncertainty in the truth of the things being stated). They are the essence of the aspect of modality expressed, according to V.V. Vinogradov, by “parenthetical syntagmas” (subjective modality, persuasivity)» (Petrushina, 2010: 26).

In terms of general-rhetoric aspect, some authors mean epistemic utterances as the total of judgments representing subjective attitude of a person to the reality. In terms of informative aspect, epistemic utterances belong to the area of epistemic semantics, which includes the notion of opinion, prediction, assumption, doubt etc. For instance, according to A.S. Potapenko, one of the functions of epistemic modality is its use as a tool to soften self-righteousness of utterances, which is clearly seen in terms of Spanish and English verbs (Potapenko, 2003: 20).

Diversity of foreign concepts of the essence of epistemic modality are united by the fact that they are based on the principles of formal logic and describe it as the indication to speaker’s responsibility (or its absence) as for the proposition truth (Willet, 1988; Palmer, 1986; Coates, 1983), where the proposition may act as obligatory true, obligatory false or possible true. D. Biber sees epistemic modality as speaker’s comment as for the information status in the proposition (Biber, Conrad, Reppen, 1998). Other interpretations of epistemic modality may be divided conventionally into the «narrow» and «wide» ones. According to the «narrow» interpretations, epistemic characteristics of an utterance are understood as the evaluation of the utterance truth from the speaker’s viewpoint (Kozinceva, 2006). Papers by T. Givon (Givon, 1982) and others demonstrate wide definition of epistemic modality where the category under consideration is explained as a complex of information about the evaluation of a degree of utterance truth from the speaker’s viewpoint and speaker’s information concerning the sources of utterance being communicated by him / her, i.e. evidential meaning.

It should be noted that speaking about the types of epistemic modality, some foreign linguists differentiate between objective and subjective epistemic modality. J. Lyons thinks
that objective epistemic modality means objectively evaluated possibility of truth or falsity of the situation being described while subjective epistemic modality means the amount of purely subjective assumptions of a speaker concerning the proposition reliability (Lyons, 1977). According to F.R. Palmer, objective epistemic modality is based on logical conclusions, i.e. its usage indicates that a speaker is making some logical conclusion from the available information. In its turn, subjective epistemic modality demonstrates a degree of speaker’s certainty in the proposition (Palmer, 1986). For instance, according to this classification, some semantically similar modal words and phrases may belong to different types of epistemic modality – objective and subjective, though it is quite often when differences are not so obvious, which cannot but provoke the informed criticism.

Thus, epistemic modality is determined as a category describing speaker’s opinion concerning the proposition, expresses attitude to it from the viewpoint of its truth. In terms of this attitude, it is possible to represent a notion of epistemic modality in a narrower way – as the evaluation of the fact that some possible situation occurred, is occurring, or will occur. The area of epistemic modality includes the linguistic means, with the help of which a speaker identifies the source, or information about that source of information being conveyed in the message. Recently, this area is customary to be singled out into a special modality that is called evidentiality. Following utterances may be the elementary examples of epistemic modality:

Probably, he has already come. He might arrive tomorrow.

R.R. Akhunzarova highlights rightly that the English language is characterized by a greater degree of previous studies of the modality-expression means; though, the problems of general composition and semantic load of these linguistic units still require better solutions. Moreover, currently there are no detailed descriptions of contextual-semantic features of their functioning in typical communicative situations.

The core of the epistemic modality category in English is represented by modal words, being the most frequent means of epistemic semantics expression; the periphery is represented by modal particles.

There are following basic means to express a meaning of epistemic necessity in English: modal verb must and modal verb will (would), modal verbs should, ought to, can (in the context of negation) and modal words evidently, obviously as well as modal words certainly, surely (sure), definitely, of course, undoubtedly.

Markers to express a meaning of epistemic possibility in English are represented by such linguistic units as could and may (might), verb seem, modal particle hardly, and modal words apparently, maybe, perhaps, possibly, presumably, probably.

In terms of English, explication of the meanings of epistemic possibility and epistemic necessity has approximately the same distribution and widespread use in speech.

Generally speaking, epistemic modality is explicated by means of following properly modal markers.

1. Modal verbs expressing a meaning of possibility, capability, probability, necessity to do some actions conveyed by a notional verb. They include can, could, may, might, must and should, а также must, be able to, have to, and be to.

2. Modal verbs expressing speaker’s attitude to the things being communicated and determining certainty, doubt, assumption or subjective evaluation (positive or negative). Traditionally, they can be inseparable (sure, certainly) separable (to be sure, in fact) without any violation of pragmatic and structural integrity of the utterance. Following epistemic adverbs and word combinations may be mentioned here: perhaps, probably, certainly, maybe, obviously, possibly, of course, in fact and some others.

3. Modus verbs where so-called modus meanings “solving the problems of representation of author’s intentions: evaluations of objects and phenomena, their reliability or unreliability from the viewpoint of one or another source of information” are included into the semantic structure of a meaning. These are so-called verbs of opinion, intention, and desire expressing mostly a meaning of problematic reliability: guess, think, seem, appear, believe, suppose etc.
However, our observations make it possible to state that the expression of epistemic modality often goes beyond the framework of traditional methods. Apart from the aforementioned markers, speaker’s attitude to reality can be explicated contextually, i.e. it is the context without using certain verbs, adverbs etc. that is capable of indirect demonstration of one or another epistemic feature. Certainly, perception and understanding of a context is longer in time than perception of the matter-of-fact modal indicators. However, it is indirect representation of modality, which is the context in particular, that is valuable due to abundance of its possibilities. For instance: She has lowered her eyes; it was painful for her to think about his lie.

In this case, we rely on the opinion by A.V. Averina, according to which epistemic modality conveys speaker’s attitude to the facts being communicated (Averina, 2010: 24). There is a great variety of linguistic means to express subjective modality in the structure of sentence and text. Detailed classification is represented by M.Ya. Blokh, A.V. Averina, M.V. Petrushina, authors of «Russian grammar-80»), including such linguistic means in it as modal verbs and particles, special syntactic structures, repetitions, word order, intonation, parenthetical words, parenthetical word combinations, parenthetical sentences etc.

For instance, the English language has following means to express modality of certainty / uncertainty.

1. Adverbs absolutely, admittedly, assuredly, certainly, clearly, definitely, doubtless, evidently genuinely, indeed, inevitably, inexorably, naturally, no doubt, obviously, ostensibly, positively, really, reasonably, rightly, of course, surely, undeniably, undoubtedly, unquestionably, unmistakably, vividly, virtually, visibly etc. In terms of this group of words, semantic invariant is the meaning of certainty. «They absolutely wouldn’t believe it last night when I told them that that murder with the hatchet in the paper was actually my aunt». «Undoubtedly one of Mr. Parker Pyne’s greatest assets was his sympathetic manner». «Indeed, her reaction, to it was very much that of his partner». «They had obviously a very high opinion of Dr. Bryant’s abilities».

2. Thematic series of verbs united by the semantic invariant – meaning of the verb to know (to assert, to ascertain, to affirm, to assure, to establish, to insist, to maintain, to contend, to verify). «She wouldn’t have heard anything and the Inspector assures me that she didn’t suffer».

Modality of opinion – supposition can be expressed by the semantic invariant – meaning of the verb to think (to assume, to consider, to deem, to hope, to reckon, to suppose, to suspect). «Nineteen cars and the church quite full and the Canon read the service beautiful, I thought». «And I suppose you have adopted that attitude from the start».

Modality of doubtful evaluation is expressed with the help of following means.

1. Verbs to seem, to doubt, to hesitate, to vacillate, to scruple, to waver, to halt, to falter. «I mean, it seems to me that Iris will be keener to get rid of me than ever». «I very much doubt it».

2. Adverbs apparently, conceivably, hardly, hopefully, evidently, as if, likely, maybe, perhaps, plausibly, possibly, probably, presumably, seemingly, supposedly, strangely, surprisingly, theoretically, unlikely, vaguely, obscurely, unbelievably. «She ought to be, perhaps, but she will not be». «Maybe she asked for Miss Holland, or perhaps she had brought a parcel».

Attention should be also paid to the expression of epistemic modality by means of the context. It is no doubt that the abovementioned traditional and non-traditional modal markers can function within it; however, there are certain contexts where there are no markers of that kind at all. It means that, on the one hand, their presence is not obligatory for the modality implementation; on the other hand, the context becomes a field to cultivate some new – potential – means for expressing one or another attitude of a speaker / writer to the utterance and the surrounding reality. We have selected several contexts from the novel by M.A. Bulgakov «The Master and Margarita».

1. «Margarita Nikolaevna was not in need of money. Margarita Nikolaevna could buy whatever she liked. There were some interesting people among her husband’s
acquaintances. Margarita Nikolaevna never touched any primus stove. Margarita Nikolaevna knew nothing of the horrors of life in a communal apartment. In a word... Was she happy?» (M. A. Bulgakov. The Master and Margarita, part 2 (1929 – 1940); https://processing.ruscorspora.ru/).

On the one hand, this context demonstrates indirectly the author’s attitude to the heroine being described by him, his evaluation of the degree of probability for one or another fact of her life; on the other hand, the context indicates the heroine’s attitude to her own way of life shown in this case by a series of alternating statements and negations.

2. «Even my heart, as the heart of a truthful narrator but a mere bystander, is sinking at the thought what Margarita went through, when she came back to the master’s little house the next day (fortunately, she had not been able to talk to her husband, who failed to come home at the time arranged) and found that the master was no longer there» (M. A. Bulgakov. The Master and Margarita, part 2 (1929 – 1940); https://processing.ruscorspora.ru/).

Apart from the context on the whole, this fragment helps trace clearly certain potential means for expressing epistemic modality: heart is sinking in the meaning «that’s a pity», fortunately etc.

3. «All those words were no doubt misplaced because, seriously: what would have been changed, if she stayed that night at the master’s? Would she have saved him? It’s ridiculous! – we would exclaim, but we are not going to do that in front of the desperate woman» (M. A. Bulgakov. The Master and Margarita, part 2 (1929 – 1940); https://processing.ruscorspora.ru/).

Here, epistemic modality is implemented by means of author’s successive use of interrogative, exclamatory, and negative components in the text.

4. «Those were the torments, with which Margarita Nikolaevna was living the whole winter long up to the spring. On the same day that witnessed the ridiculous scandal caused by the black magician’s appearance in Moscow, that Friday when Berlioz’s uncle was sent packing back to Kiev, when the accountant was arrested and a host of other weird and improbable events took place, Margarita woke up around midday in her bedroom, that looked out of an attic window of their top-floor flat. Waking, Margarita did not burst into tears, as she frequently did, because she had woken up with a presentiment that today, at last, something was going to happen. She kept the feeling warm and encouraged it, afraid that it might leave her» (M. A. Bulgakov. The Master and Margarita, part 2 (1929 – 1940); https://processing.ruscorspora.ru/).

In terms of the last of the represented contexts, like in the previous three ones, subjective heroine’s evaluation of the situation is being interpreted to some extent in the light of subjective evaluation of the author. In their logical connection, a set of standard (for epistemic modality) words and sentences demonstrates regret, sadness, hope etc.

Thus, it is obvious that epistemic modality can be conveyed contextually. Definitely, such way of its expression has somehow blurred boundaries as opposed to the strictly identified markers; however, it is the thing that makes it interesting as it demonstrates, first, individual possibilities of the implementation of epistemic modality and, secondly, it is the material that can be the basis for the development of new means of its implementation.

Conclusions. Consequently, epistemic modality of certainty / uncertainty in the English language is expressed with the help of thematic series of verbs united by the semantic invariant-meaning of the verb to know, modal words and short adjectives.

Epistemic modality expressing a meaning of opinion – assumption in the English language is represented by the semantic invariant-meaning of the verb to think. Doubtful evaluation is explicated with the help of verbs and modal words united by the same of assumption.

In general, formal implementation of epistemic modality goes beyond the methods called the traditional ones. Attitude of a speaker to the reality, apart from the representatives proved by the linguistic science, can be explicated contextually, i.e. it is the context without use of certain verbs, adverbs etc. that is capable of indirect representation of a certain-type epistemics.
Epistemic modality can be conveyed contextually as well. This type of its expression has somehow blurred boundaries as opposed to the strictly identified markers.

REFERENCES


Abstract

**Background.** The article deals with the consideration that a speaker is the central figure for determination of modality as it is the speech subject that establishes the relations between an object and its predicated sign in an utterance. The **subject** of our research is epistemic modality, which is referred to a subjective type of modality; it is considered as the connection between a subject and an attribute. This connection is evaluated rationally by a speaker as his/her subjective mental construction rather than objective characteristic of the reality.

The research **objective** is to demonstrate the alternative ways for expressing epistemic modality. The objective can be achieved by completing the following tasks: 1) analysis of theoretical material according to the research topic; 2) differentiation of the modality types in terms of certain features; 3) identification of traditional means to express epistemic modality; 4) determination of a contextual way of its implementation.

The article objective requires application of several **methods** such as comparative contextual analysis and general text analysis. These techniques allow us to draw conclusions regarding the means of expressing epistemic modality as reliable as possible. A method of continuous sampling was used to accumulate actual material.
**Results.** Attention should be also paid to the expression of epistemic modality by means of the context. It is no doubt that the abovementioned traditional and non-traditional modal markers can function within it; however, there are certain contexts where there are no markers of that kind at all. It means that, on the one hand, their presence is not obligatory for the modality implementation; on the other hand, the context becomes a field to cultivate some new – potential – means for expressing one or another attitude of a speaker / writer to the utterance and the surrounding reality.

**Conclusions.** Epistemic modality of certainty / uncertainty in the English language is expressed with the help of thematic series of verbs united by the semantic invariant-meaning of the verb to know, modal words and short adjectives. Epistemic modality expressing a meaning of opinion – assumption in the English language is represented by the semantic invariant-meaning of the verb to think. Doubtful evaluation is explicated with the help of verbs and modal words united by the seme of assumption. Formal implementation of epistemic modality goes beyond the methods called the traditional ones. Attitude of a speaker to the reality, apart from the representatives proved by the linguistic science, can be explicated contextually, i.e. it is the context without use of certain verbs, adverbs etc. that is capable of indirect representation of a certain-type epistemics. Epistemic modality can be conveyed contextually as well. This type of its expression has blurred boundaries as opposed to the strictly identified markers.

**Key words:** epistemic modality, means of expression, subjective type of modality, contextual implementation, formal implementation.