



POSUDEK OPONENTA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk a literatura (dvouoborové studium)**

Název práce: **Polysemy in English modal verbs**

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Short characteristics of the thesis

The thesis addresses the issue of polysemy of English modal verbs, which is both a semantically and pragmatically interesting concept encouraging an enquiry into authentic language data.

The goals set out in the thesis include:

1. to quantify the polysemy of English modal verbs by drawing on the corpora of spoken (BASE) and written (ukWaC) English (thesis abstract);
2. to discover the most frequent modal senses in which the selected modal verbs are used (thesis introduction);
3. to determine what type of modality is most commonly used (thesis introduction);
4. to compare and verify information obtained from grammar books with the results obtained (thesis introduction).

The thesis comprises five key sections introducing and discussing: modality, kinds of modality (entitled as Modality in the form and its meaning), polysemy of modal verbs, modal verbs, and an empirical part of the thesis called Frequency research of modal verbs. A Conclusion follows. The thesis is supplemented with an Appendix listing data samples from both corpora. The work excluding the List of references and the Appendix totals 58 pages.

Overall assessment

The thesis presents a reasonable review of the meanings and use of the modal auxiliaries. As such, it has the potential to contribute to the discussion of how modal verbs convey speakers' attitudes to factuality and actualization. Although the themes of factuality and actualization are not addressed explicitly, a number of authentic data examples introduced lend themselves to this line of interpretation.

The thesis draws on a number of relevant resources. While these are not always exploited to the maximum of their potential, it needs to be appreciated that a considerable effort has been made to set out the key notions and to organise these into logically ordered sections. To this end, the thesis also presents a number of conceptual charts, e.g., pp. 14, 16, 18, and 27. It is assumed that these are the author's creation. If they are indeed, the authorship is nowhere declared nor assigned, which is clearly a failing.



In my view, the goals set for this thesis have been achieved only partly. Methodologically, the thesis fails to establish the relationship between the frequency search and how it may potentially inform the understanding of polysemy of modal verbs in English. A degree of vagueness also surrounds the methodology regarding the identification of the individual kinds of modality as well as the interpretation of the figures obtained. For example, consider the discussions on pp. 42 and 46 where the report on different kinds of modality invites the question of what the representation means in the context of the two corpora and what the findings may imply. In other words, while the analysis produces numerous figures, their interpretation in the context of the polysemy of English modal verbs has not been clearly established. Apart from this fairly limited insight into the polysemy of English modals, goal number four (as stated above), I believe, has not been attended to.

The overall level of written production is rather weak. Errors include violations of formalised conventions including: inaccuracy in stating sources, e.g., Huddleston, Pullum 2002 p. 11 vs. Huddleston and Pullum 2002, same page, or Radden, Dirven (2007) p. 13, both cited incorrectly repeatedly; inconsistency in referencing, e.g., cf. vs. Cf.; wrong spelling – not a frequent shortcoming though, e.g., Brithish, p. 60; if not an overlooking on my part, listing of sources that were not referred to in the text, e.g., Viebahn and Vetter (2016). Both clumsy and stylistically inappropriate sentence constructions are unfortunately frequent, e.g., “Another important aspect which should be mentioned here”, p. 13, “Apart from that, as another example, we can name negation of permissions which includes negated forms like with may not and can’t” (p. 15), “In conclusion,” occurring in the middle of the paragraph, followed by a sentence starting with “However”, and another one opening with “What is more”, pp. 15-16, which is where the paragraph finishes; “In this chapter, it is discussed the settings of both corpora”, p. 33; “it makes more difficult to understand”, p. 34; “These numbers introduce us the fact that”, p. 35; “BASE, in other words, the corpus of British Academic Spoken English”, p. 52; “the disposition and intrinsic modality were put into account” p. 54, “The graph above shows the whole numbers of all modal representations”, p. 54, etc. More careful planning of the text and of the individual arguments presented would enhance considerably the contribution made in this thesis.

In sum, there are a number of areas where I feel the student has failed to discuss the topic of polysemy of English modal verbs sufficiently, nor has he presented his arguments in such a way as to make the most of his studies. However, I would like to express appreciation of attempting to apply theoretical concepts to the analysis of what is an essentially pragmatic phenomenon. The author did take the time to work with authentic data and made the effort to conceptualise and explain the individual variations of meaning. A sufficient amount of work has been undertaken and enough discussion points raised to meet the general requirements for BA theses.

Areas for discussion:

1. Can you explain what you were trying to say in the following paragraph and what relevance this has to your study? “These numbers introduce us the fact that even though the corpora are of different length, there are means how to compare them. In addition, the numbers point out that some of the modals are comparable



- in their instances per million, namely ought as it has the lowest difference and *should*". (p. 35)
2. What motivated your choice to examine polysemy of English modals across two contrasting corpora, ukWaC and BASE? Did you hypothesise that the frequency and occurrence of modal verbs meanings would be different in the written and spoken genre? If so, what was your hypothesis? While you provide information on absolute and relative frequencies of occurrence, you do not discuss the reasons behind these. Can you comment on the trends identified?
 3. Which of your findings do you consider most original and why?

Práci **doporučuji** k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **dobře**

30. května 2019

Datum

Podpis

