

# A Semantic Analysis of Quasi-Modals in VESAL 10: A Study in Polysemy

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*Abstract*— English modal verbs (both central and quasi-modals) have more than one interrelated meanings. This flexibility in meanings belongs to the polysemous phenomenon, in which it exposes the diversity of meanings within the same lexeme. Due to the importance of using modals in academic writing, this paper aims at analysing fourteen quasi-modals (henceforth QM) in (VESAL 10)<sup>1</sup>, in the shed of the polysemous view. In its conference proceedings book, twenty-one academic papers have been published. QMs have their own importance in the academic atmosphere. They indicate the author's attitude towards any statement within the text. The researcher verifies the hypothesis by presenting the results of the analysis. The current paper aims at identifying the most frequent polysemy of QMs, examining the meanings and the functions of QMs, and presenting a frequency range of QMs in (VESAL 10). The paper ends up with findings that are inferred from the results of the study, where the (be to, need, need to, want to, and have to) are the most frequent QMs, while the (have got to, be supposed to, be bound to etc.) are the least common, since they have recorded zero frequency. Nevertheless, the most frequent meanings of QMs are (necessity, logical necessity, temporal meanings and obligation).

*Keywords*— Polysemy, Ambiguity, quasi-modals, semi-modals, Lexico-Modals.

## INTRODUCTION

Quasi-modals function semantically as central modals, they usually end with infinitive to, as (have to, be to, used to, ought to, need to ...), they are also called: phrasal modals, pseudo modals, periphrastic modals.... Each of the central modals have at least one counterpart, for example CAN has only one counterpart (be able to) while some of them have more than one, as MUST has two counterparts (have to and have got to) (Celce-Murcia, , M., Larsen-Freeman, D. & Williams, H., 1999:139)

Modal	Phrasal Modal
Can, could	Be able to
Will, shall	Be going to, be about to
Must	Have to, have got to
Should, ought to	Be to, be supposed to
Would (=past habit)	Used to
May, might	Be allowed to, be permitted to

Biber & Quirk (2007) use the term semi-modals, accordingly; unlike central modals, they can be marked for person and tense, they can also take place as non-finite forms. Yet with infinitive form, they sometimes co-occur with central modals verb or another semi-modals, as in the followings (p.484):

- 1- He had to call the police. (CONV)
- 2- I think the teachers are gonna have to be there. (CONV)
- 3- I know you have to protect your eyesight. (FICT)
- 4 - The county council will have to ask colleges to bid for money on its behalf. (NEWS)
- 5- Maybe she needs to grow up a bit more. ( CONV)
- 6- You might need to get back quick. (FICT)

7- He needed to be sure that current arrangements were working as well as

possible. (NEWS).

Quasi-modals share the syntactic and semantic behavior of central modals, they occur in situations similar to central modals, for example one can replace have got to with MUST (Vincent, 2014).

Linguists have dealt with quasi-modals differently. Perkins (1983) uses the term: quasi auxiliary modal expression, while

the terms (marginal, modal idioms, and semi-auxiliaries) have been used by Quirk et al (1985). Additionally, Palmer (1990) uses the term: semi-modals, moreover, the term 'phrasal modal' used by Francis et al (1996) and Celce-Murcia, M., Larsen-Freeman, D. & Williams, H., (1999). Meanwhile Biber (1999) use both marginal and semi-modal terms. Accordingly, marginal modals include: (had) better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to, and be going to. Collins (2009) divides them into semi-modals and lexico-modals. Semi-modals include: be to, had better, would rather, have got to. While lexico modals include: be able to, be about to, be bound to, be going to, be supposed to, have to, need to, want to. The following table from (Vincent, 2014:43) shows the classes of quasi modals:

Table 1 Classes of quasi-modals

study	Terms	items included
Perkins (1983)	quasi-auxiliary modal expressions	have (got) to, need to, had better
	marginal modal	dare, need, ought to, used to
Quirk et al. (1985)	modal idioms	had better, would rather/sooner, be to, have got to
	semi auxiliaries	have to, be about to, be able to, be bound to, be going to, be obliged to, be supposed to, be willing to
Palmer (1990)	semi-modals	would rather, had better, be bound to, be able to, have to/have got to, be going to
Francis et al. (1996)	phrasal modals	be able to, have got to, would rather, be unable to, had best, have to, would just as soon, used to, had better, be liable to, would sooner, would do well to, be bound to, be meant to, be supposed to, be going to, ought to, be sure to
Biber et al. (1999)	marginal auxiliaries	dare (to), need (to), ought to, used to
	semi-modals	(had) better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to, be going to
Collins (2009)	semi-modals	be to, had better, would rather, have got to
	quasi-modals lexico- modals	be able to, be about to, be bound to, be going to, be supposed to, have to, need to, want to

## 1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper aims at identifying QMs in VESAL 10, in the polysemous view. Where the importance of using of QMs are presented, besides the frequent QM and the most common

meanings have been shown. Nevertheless, The paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the most frequent polysemy of QMs in VESAL 10?

2. What are the most frequent meanings and functions of QMs in VESAL 10?

The Importance of QM in Academic Writing

QMs occupy a quite range in Academic writing, as they address the most used notions like: possibility, necessity, ability, prediction, obligation and permission. They have their own importance in academic writing. They show the author's attitude towards any statement within the text, and express the writer's role as the "understood agent," someone who is reporting his or her own views. (Hykes, 2000).

Modals are the English speaker's most used auxiliaries for the purpose of showing: possibility, permission, obligation. Besides, they show the author's point of view, especially when the writer expresses his/her own attitudes towards any issues (Najim, 2019).

#### Characteristics of the Quasi-Modals

Quasi modals as central modals have some properties, below are some from Biber & Quirk (2007) and (Collins, 2009):

Sometimes they are called semi-modals, because they have the same meanings and functions as central modals, but they differ in forms.

Only the first element is considered auxiliary, for example:

(Had I better...?), besides; they have no non-tensed forms (c.f. \*we will must/have to tidy up; \*the game has should/been to start soon).

The negation of had better and would rather, sometimes take the auxiliary in its scope and sometimes not. For instance: (c.f. they wouldn't rather/would rather not intervene; they hadn't better/had better not intervene).

#### Characteristics of Lexico-Modals

Lexico-modals (be able to, be about to, be bound to, be going to, be supposed to, have to, need to, and want to) are a set of idiomatic expressions, they express the modal meanings, and their properties according to (Collins, 2009) can be listed as below:

They display voice-neutrality. For example: (c.f. Australia is bound to accept the refugees ~ the refugees are bound to be accepted by Australia).

Non-tensed form, unlike central modals they have ability of non-tensed form. For example: (I will have to quit; many employees are having to quit; the company has had to fire many employees).

#### Semantics of Quasi-Modals

Quasi-modals do not follow the same grammar rules of central modals because they contain a modal within another verb, adverb or preposition. They represent the meanings of

ability, obligation, necessity, advice, probability, and permission. Sometimes they behave like central modals, following (Quirk, et al., 1985, Biber & Quirk 2007, et al., 2007, Collins, 2009, Leech, 2013, Vincent, 2014 and Machová, 2015); their meanings are listed below:

#### Ought to

Semantically, ought to is close to central modal should, they both present the meanings of obligation and permission. The degree of subjectivity cases is higher in ought to because the speaker/writer is giving advice authoritatively. Moreover, deontic ought to is popular in the expressions of duty. In the epistemic ought to, a shadow of the deontic meaning always lies beyond the epistemic meaning. Additionally, the negation of ought to = ought not to, oughtn't to. Below are examples:

8- You ought to see the Erbil citadel someday. (advice) and (recommendation).

9- I think you ought to turn back. (necessary)

10- We ought to arrive in the next morning. (probably)

11- Oughtn't he leave the airport? (negative)

Nonetheless, Quirk, et al. (1985) declare that in assertive contexts, the (to-less) form is unacceptable:

12- We [ought to/\*ought] give him another chance.

While ought to occurs with do is treated as a main verb, as in:

13- \*They didn't ought to do that sort of thing.

14- \*Did we ought to have done it? (Quirk et al., 1985).

#### Need/ Dare

Need and Dare have the same meanings and function, Need can occur as both modal and lexical verb. As in:

15- She needn't be in the home.

16- She doesn't need to be in the home. (Machová, 2015:89)

The epistemic need conveys the meaning of logical necessity, meanwhile; the deontic and dynamic need is similar to must, have to, and have got to (Collins, 2009).

However, need and dare treated as the same, they can be used as main verb (to-infinitive, inflected ~s, -ing, and past form), or as modal auxiliaries within restricted conditions (with bare infinitive, and without inflects). Quirk, et al., (1985:138) summarize it in the following table:

Table 2 Need/dare as modal auxiliary and main verb.

	Modal Auxiliary Construction	Main Verb Construction
Positive	—	<b>He needed/dared to escape.</b>
Negative	He needn't/daren't escape	<b>He doesn't need/dare to escape.</b>
Interrogative	Need/Dare we escape?	<b>Do we need/dare to escape?</b>
Negative-	[ Needn't he escape after all? Dare he not escape?	[ <b>Doesn't he need to escape after all?</b> <b>Doesn't he dare to escape?</b>
interrogative		

Need can earn epistemic and deontic meaning, while need to only has deontic meaning. need commonly used in negative sentences, declaring the lack of necessity and obligation (Vincent, 2014). As in:

17- He needn't know about this.

18- You needn't have sent, I told him I would arrive.

19- Need we be worried about her?

The use of need in present day English has declined in American and British English, while the use of "need to" increased (Collins, 2009).

Need to

The case of need to is more common than need, its deontic meaning declares necessity, while its epistemic meaning

expresses the logical necessity. It behaves like a full lexical verb, in such constructions as (need +to +infinitive), as in:

20- Does he need to ...?

21- She didn't need to...?

Besides, it can also occur with present and past tense endings, as in:

22- He needs to eat.

23- He needed to eat.

Semantically, need to is located between SHOULD/ought to and MUST, it earns necessity or obligation. Additionally, like need; it takes external negation, as in: do not need to ... interprets to 'it is not necessary for...'. (Quirk et al, 1985).

Have to

Semantically, the quasi-modal Have to is equal to central modal MUST. The modal have to among other semi-modal is the only one starts with have, it expresses the meanings of obligation and logical necessity, below are examples from (Quirk, et al., 1985:145):

24- These days you must work hard if you want to succeed.  
[have to =

25- In those days you had to work hard if you wanted to succeed. 'obligation']

26- There must be some solution to the problem.  
[have to =

27- There had to be some solution to the problem.  
'logical necessity']

Have to has deontic meaning, whereas it expresses necessity, as it is with MUST, Leech (2013) offers three meanings of have to:

Obligation: the obligation meaning of have to is almost equal to those meanings that central modal MUST have. For example:

28- You have to tell the truth = (it is obligatory ...).

Requirement: the requirement meaning of have to, is close to MUST, it interprets to 'it is necessary to' or 'it is essential to'. For example:

29- The ministry of Education will have to rethink its policy toward the new curriculum = (it is necessary to the ministry ...).

Logical Necessity: using have to as logical necessity is mainly common in American English, the modal have to has negative and question forms, besides; it can be used in mathematical and scientific writing, an example of have to used as logical necessity is:

30- You have to be kidding.

The figure below from (Leech, 2013:78), declares the relations between MAY, MUST, CAN and have to.



Figure 1 Relations between CAN, MAY, MUST and have to (Leech, 2013).

MAY and CAN, in the figure above both present possibility and permission, while have to and MUST express obligation, requirement and (logical) necessity, accordingly one cannot interchange the two verbs, because there are slight differences between them. Moreover, the negation of have to unlike MUST/MUSTN'T occurs outside the scope of the modal, as in: (you don't have to call him twice).

Have got to

Have got to has similar meanings of logical necessity and obligation, as with have to. The semi-modal have got to is often reduced in daily speaking (American English) to gotta, which is informal. Semantically the deontic meaning of have got to expresses the obligation, and can alternate have to, while the epistemic meaning for have got to expresses necessity, especially in British English, for example:

31- Ali's got to wake his mother every morning.

Had better

In present day English, had better is frequently abbreviated to 'd better or just better (especially in speaking), its negative form is had better not. And its main meaning is advisability, as in:

32- You'd better be quick.

33- He'd better not leave the school.

Accordingly, this can be regarded as monosemic, But its , 'warning' meaning makes it to be polysemous (Leech, 2013). As in:

34- He's better pay his bills on time or ... (warning).

Be supposed to, be bound to and would rather.

The forms of these quasi modals don't reflect its real meaning, because they are idiomatic. Besides, they can be used in epistemic and deontic senses, they express the meanings of obligation and logical necessity. Below examples from (Leech,

2013:100), declare the relation between be supposed to and SHOULD/MUST:

35- Civil servants, as the name suggests, are supposed to be servants of the public.

(compare should = 'obligation')

36- They say it's supposed to snow here by the end of the week.

(compare should = 'probability', weakened, 'logical necessity')

37- Everyone has these rights, and I'm bound to respect them.

(compare must = 'obligation')

38- Working in the same building, they're bound to meet fairly often.

(compare must = 'logical necessity').

Be to

It is one of the semi-modals expressing strong deontic necessity meaning, it can be compared to deontic MUST. It also uses for temporal meanings, especially to a planned event (Leech, 2013). As in:

39- The ships are to depart in ten minutes.

40- She is to finish the project by next month.

41- She is to get promotion in work.

Be able to

be able to can only express the idea of ability. For Leech (2013:99): "be able to is more transparent than the idiomatic modals". Moreover, for Coates (2015) be able to can express:

Ability, as in:

149- I'm able to drive.

Permission, as in:

42- but it is a bit ridiculous that I should be able to work in another college and not allowed to work in my own (p:124).

Possibility, as in:

He will now be able to have the pen to write an essay. (= there's nothing to prevent you...).

Be going to

Be going to+infinitive is common in informal spoken, it is the most strong way to express futurity after WILL, although its use reduces to gonna (Leech, 2013). Violation meaning of be going to is common, while its prediction meaning is less common, besides; be going to is more common in conversation than in academic writing. Semantically, be going to expresses both epistemic and deontic meanings, demonstrates futurity, intention and prediction meanings. An essential characteristic of the meaning of be going to, both epistemic and deontic, is that the future event in the main predication is happening very soon after the moment of speaking and as being related to the present. It is this which distinguishes be going to from WILL and SHALL, for example:

44- I'm going to tell the truth.

45- She's going to begin now.

One of the polysemous views toward be going to is a fuzzy set diagram proposed by (Coates, 2015:198), it declares intention and prediction meanings:

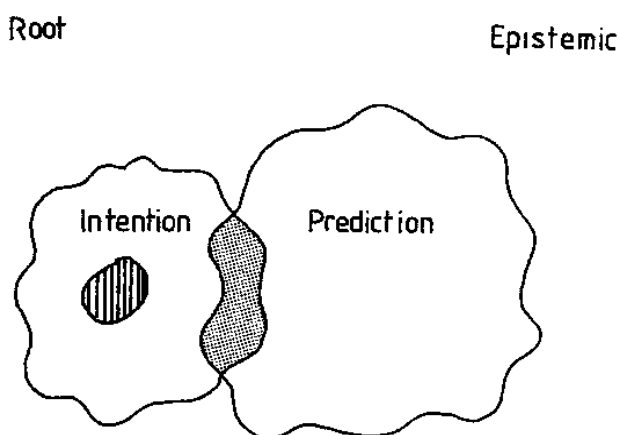


Figure 2 (Coates, 2015)'s fuzzy set diagram of be going to

Want to

The quasi-modal want to is often reduced to wanna, especially in spoken English. Semantically want to is the same as WILL and be going to, in its dynamic form, it deals with volition but it is not strong as willingness WILL. For example:

46- It depends on the situation whether you want to play or not.

While in its deontic form, 'want to' refers to strong recommendations (Collins, 2009).

Data Analysis and Discussion of the Results

The total number of the QMs in VESAL 10 is 143, the most frequent QMs are (be to, need, need to, want to, AND HAVE TO). **THUS, INDICATE THE NOTIONS OF NECESSITY, LOGICAL NECESSITY,**

OBLIGATION, TEMPORAL MEANINGS, AND VOLITION). THE TABLE BELOW SHOWS THE QMs FORM, WITH THEIR SEMANTIC CLUSTERS, INDEX (I.E. THE OCCURRENCE PLACE), AND THE NUMBER OF THE OCCURRENCES.

Table 3 The Frequencies of all QMs.

	QM Forms	Semantic Clusters	Index (pages)	Occurrences	Total
1	Ought to	Obligation	195	1	6
		Necessity	19, 49, 56, 56, 84,	5	
	Need	Obligation	134, 191, 195, 179	4	
2		Logical necessity	93,93, 99, 101, 102, 103, 123, 126, 134, 141, 163, 170, 173, 189, 195, 196, 198, 214	18	22
3	Dare	Obligation	87	1	1
	Need to	Necessity	41, 46, 56, 138, 148, 162, 179, 195, 198, 204, 207, 207, 207, 207, 210	15	
4		Logical necessity	27, 113, 134,134, 141, 170, 179, 189, 195, 196, 209	11	26
5	have to	Obligation	48, 53, 82, 122, 142, 173, 174, 174, 204	9	20
		Requirement	53, 94, 137, 137, 172, 173, 179, 201	8	
		Logical necessity	90, 97, 102	3	
6	have got to			0	0
7	had better			0	0
8	be supposed to			0	0
9	be bound to			0	0
10	would rather	Logical necessity	122, 127	2	2
	is to	Necessity	81, 96, 99, 127, 165, 168, 173, 174, 189, 191, 195, 202, 203, 214, 214, 216,	16	
11		Temporal meaning	18, 18, 22, 29, 38, 56, 72, 79, 87, 93, 107, 120, 122, 135, 140, 155, 161, 161, 201, 202, 210, 210	22	45
	are to	Necessity	43, 121, 136, 174, 214	5	
		Temporal meaning	73, 174	2	
12	be able to	Possibility	43, 102, 174, 191	4	9
		Ability	54, 80, 82, 102, 207	5	
13	be going to			0	0
14	want to	Volition	49, 49, 64, 64, 92, 97, 141, 142, 204, 204, 210, 213	12	12
<b>Total</b>				<b>143</b>	<b>143</b>

The numbers of the QMs have been used in the corpus of this study are 143 modals out of 21 academic papers. The most frequent QM is be to (is to and are to), mainly because this QM expresses the notions of strong deontic necessity and temporal meanings, especially to a planned event. Most of the occurrences where is to occurred in, were in the section of (the aims of the paper). As in this section the researcher plans to do the study, whereas the temporal meaning of is to should be used. Here some samples from VESAL 10: “the purpose of the paper is to find out the difficulties which occurred in transcribing final consonant clusters” (p. 38). “The aim of this project is to design the new technology infrastructure for AQUAS system and quality assurance cycle which, etc.” (p. 72). “The aim of the study is to explore the direct speech used in the selected stories to, etc.” (p. 79). “The aim of the present study is to investigate the linguistic features of Kurdish legal documentary texts.” (p. 135). And so on.

The QM be to (is to and are to) occupied 32% in the corpus of the paper, therefore it is the most frequent modal.

Considering the frequency ranges of QM in VESAL 10, it could be determined that the QM Need to is the second common one among the others, since it occupied 18% of the corpus. The least frequent QMs are (have got to, had better, be supposed to, be bound to, and be going to) since they are used rarely with 0%. The following table is representing the whole results. This result refutes the notion that, all QMs are commonly used in academic writing, it seems this hypothesis is right for native speakers, while the non-native speakers may use only the familiar ones.

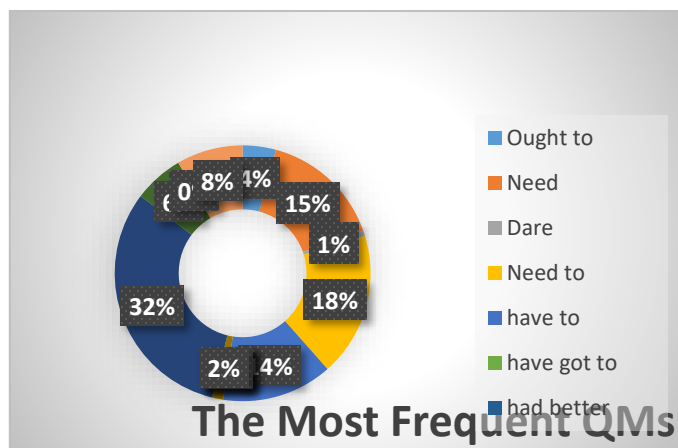


Figure 3 The most frequent QMs.

The ‘Necessity’ is the most frequent meaning among all the meanings used in the present paper. It occupied 31% of the used corpus. Mainly because most of the QMs such as (ought

to, need to, and be to) can express the notion of necessity. The second common meaning which is similar to the previous is ‘logical necessity’, it occupied 26%. This notion can be expressed by the QMs such as (need, need to, would rather, and have to).

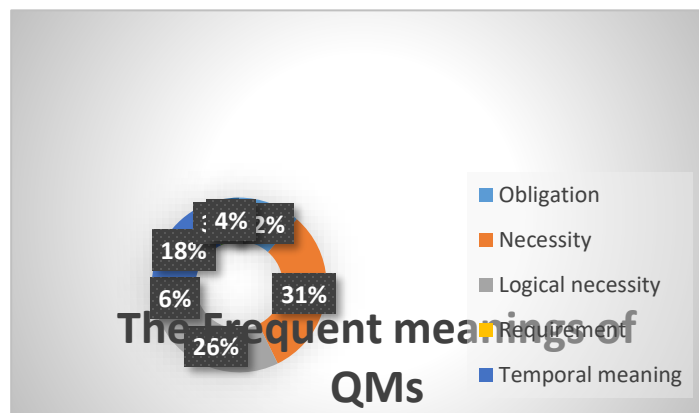


Figure 4 the frequent meanings of QMs

The least frequent meanings are (possibility, probability, advice, and permission) since they are used rarely with 0%.

## Conclusion

English QMs are polysemous because they own more than one interrelated meaning, their semantic cluster changes according to the situation. They have an effect on academic writing, mostly because they express notions as ability, possibility, permission, necessity and obligation. The most frequent QM in VESAL 10 is be to (is to and are to), mainly because this QM indicates the notions of strong deontic necessity and temporal meanings, especially to a planned event. It is presented that most of the occurrences where is to occurred in, were in the section of (the aims of the paper). As in this section the researcher plans to do the study, whereas the temporal meaning of is to should be used. The least frequent QMs are (have got to, had better, be supposed to, be bound to, and be going to) since they are never used. This result refutes the hypothesis that considers all QMs as the widely used auxiliary verb in academic writing, besides it verifies that some of the QMs are actually most common for academics. Hence, the researcher suggests that there should be a degree for determining the frequent qms in academic writing, even not only for the qms, yet the meanings of each of them should include. As presented that, the ‘necessity’ is the most frequent



meaning among all the meanings used in the present paper, while the least frequent meanings are (possibility, probability, advice, and permission) since they are never used with 0%.

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