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# Magisterarbeit

*Teaching  
Modal Auxiliary Verbs  
in English for Specific Purposes  
(ESP)*

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### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 List of Abbreviations

Appendix 2 Contents of *English for the Automobile Industry*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Objectives and Scope

English teaching for adults has largely changed in the last few decades. Traditional English evening classes are still common; however, diversification into new educational markets and a more specific approach to language classes has become evident. The predominant position of English as *lingua franca* in the business world and globalization have resulted in a growing demand for effective and tailor-made in-company training programmes that are supposed to enable learners to communicate appropriately with international colleagues, suppliers and customers.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is usually economically or technically determined; its learners are trained to be objective and concise, as the ability to exchange accurate information by giving impersonal statements is an essential requirement for avoiding misunderstandings and problems. A different kind of purposefulness forms the basis of a range of job-related activities that require, apart from the correct use of language, conversational strategies and cross-cultural awareness in order to build or maintain interpersonal relationships with international business partners.

In this paper, the attempt will be made to exploit a selected area of grammar for ESP learners to support their communicative skills. Therefore, the specific qualities and requirements of ESP courses will be discussed in its first part. After a brief historical overview of ESP, corporate language training programmes will be classified within the general concept of ESP. Subsequently, with regard to the target group of learners and their needs, suggestions for the preparation of ESP courses and materials will be developed.

Research on a group of modal verbs in reference to their underlying modal concepts and their influence on speech acts will be done in the second part. As “[m]odal verbs are used extensively for ‘language acts’ or functions” (Alexander 1988: 222), they have been selected for the purpose of this paper; *can*, *could*, *may* and *might* will be scrutinized, as they often seem to be applied in polite speech which can be critical for international business communication.

First, aspects of grammar teaching in ESP, reasons for politeness in human communication, and basic concepts of modality will be considered and form the basis for the subsequent linguistic analysis. Starting from a general view of the semantic patterns underlying *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* and the consequent potential use of these modals in speech acts, the study will then become more focused looking into a particular type of speech acts: polite requests used in workplace scenarios are analysed to find out how specific illocutionary acts are influenced by the semantic patterns of the modals used.

Considering the fact that communication training takes precedence over grammar teaching in corporate language courses, ESP course books normally offer few activities focussing on particular language structures and their contextual uses. Consequently, the ESP teacher is often invited to find or create supplementary exercises and activities which respond to problems identified in texts and tasks. Therefore, the third part of this paper represents the attempt to develop materials incorporating modal auxiliary verbs on the one hand and considering the specific requirements of ESP classes on the other. First, the ESP course book *English for the Automobile Industry* (Kavanagh<sup>1</sup> 2003) will be assessed in terms of selected qualities for the ESP classroom. This is followed by the attempt to produce supplementary materials containing *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* which, with regard to content, are based on the eight units of the above book. These materials will be supposed to demonstrate how the course development for corporate training programmes in the automobile industry could be modified and enriched by means of teacher-designed language materials.

In this paper, the pronoun *he* and its equivalents in other cases and word classes will be used gender neutrally. The treatment of *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* concentrates on their meanings and illocutionary force in speech acts. Their uses in conditional sentences, backshift in indirect speech and the structure ‘modal plus perfect’ referring to the past are not considered. The linguistic-didactic perspective of this study will focus on semantic patterns and functional uses of lexemes and the reflection of the resulting problems for German learners of English in teaching materials; detailed methodological issues are outside the scope of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Kavanagh has been working for more than ten years for the Audi Akademie in Ingolstadt and is there responsible for teaching programmes, English teacher training, and product development.

## 1.2. Structure

The composition of this paper has been visualised in figure 1.2.:

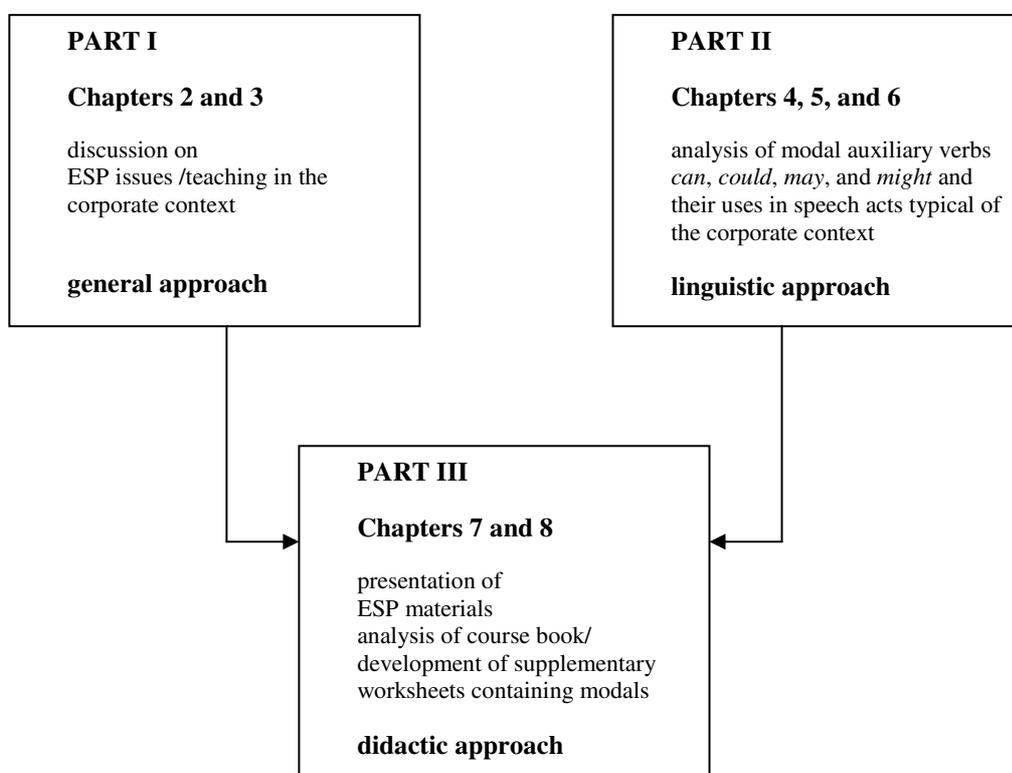


Figure 1.2. Structure of this paper

Part I investigating language as part of the organisational genre ‘ESP’ and part II, where linguistic structures are analysed, provide the analytical framework for the presentation of effective classroom materials in part III.

## **PART I      SETTING THE ESP CONTEXT**

### **2.      Key Issues of ESP**

#### **2.1.    Origins**

ESP is a relatively young branch of Applied Linguistics whose development has resulted from general economic developments since the Second World War. Due to the expansion of international scientific, technical and economic activities and the economic power of the USA in the post-war world, the importance of English as *lingua franca* has increased. The language teaching profession has had to respond to the very special needs and demands of a new group of learners: people working in different areas. Consequently, the design of English courses has become subject to the wishes of people other than language teachers. The second key reason having a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics. Whereas linguists previously had prescribed language features, some of them now began to focus on the ways in which language is used in real life and the difference between spoken and written English. Moreover, not only the method of language delivery, but also the different learning strategies, needs and interests of the learners have become more important, and designing specific courses to better meet these individual needs was a natural extension of this thinking (Hutchinson/Waters 1987: 6-7).

In the 60s, ESP was mainly concerned with English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The first significant written ESP textbook, A. J. Herbert's *The Structure of Technical English* was published in 1965 and written for university students. As described on the back cover, it is concerned with the special structures and linguistic conventions of English used in technical and scientific writing (Dudley-Evans/St. John 1998: 21). Until the early 70s, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) was largely concerned with commercial correspondence courses. Then the focus moved to spoken interactions within the field of business and commerce, with attention "first on a grammatical and then gradually a more functional construct" (1998: 29). Dudley-Evans and St. John indicate that from the mid-1980s, the perspective has broadened and that this development is still continuing. "The interface between language and behavioural skills is being explored [as BW] it is vital for people to communicate effectively across

borders and to bridge cultural gaps” (1998: 30). Therefore, the training of cross-cultural awareness has become an indispensable part of ESP courses.

## 2.2. Definition

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John, “[t]he teaching of English for Specific Purposes has generally been seen as a separate activity within English Language Teaching (ELT), and [...] it has always retained its emphasis on practical outcomes” (1998: 1). Hutchinson and Waters state that ““Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language?”” should be the starting question to any course (1987: 53). Dudley-Evans and St. John indicate that “[t]he answer to this question [...] establishes the primacy of need in ESP. Need is defined by the reasons for which the student is learning English [...] These purposes are the starting points which determine the language to be taught” (1998: 3).

Identifying three absolute and four variable characteristics, Dudley-Evans and St. John modify Strevens’s earlier definition of ESP (cf. 1988: 1-2) and postulate the following:

1. Absolute characteristics:
  - ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
  - ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
  - ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register) skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.
2. Variable characteristics:
  - ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
  - ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
  - ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level;
  - ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners (1998: 4-5).

Assuming that the above enumerated characteristics form a valid definition of ESP, we can find two different notions of the term ‘specific’ in ESP:

- specific language and
- specified aim.

Specific language refers to the vocabulary of the occupational context, the register appropriate to the situation in which a job task is performed and finally, the linguistic skills needed. Specified aim expresses the purpose for which the learner studies English and defines the target situation in the learner's workplace where he has to communicate in the foreign language. This usually goes far beyond specialist vocabulary and the level of style in a well-defined context. For example, the student's goal may be the attendance at an international conference where he will be expected to understand and actively use jargon and business style speech. But moreover, he would need to be able to use the language of everyday informal talk for the chats over coffee with international colleagues during breaks and in the evenings, and to handle intercultural differences. The purpose 'international conference' produces the needs for the different skills the teacher has to consider when he designs the syllabus and materials for the ESP classroom.

### **2.3. Classification**

Following the model suggested by Dudley-Evans and St. John, ESP can be divided into two main areas: EAP and EOP. EAP refers to any English teaching that relates to a study purpose<sup>2</sup>. EST (English for Science and Technology), EMP (English for Medical Purposes) and ELP (English for Legal Purposes) have become established acronyms for such courses. EOP includes English for Professional Purposes (EPP) on the one hand and English for Vocational Purposes (EVT) on the other (cf. 1998: 6-7).

It seems to be, however, more adequate to the current situation to remove the distinction between professionals and non-professionals and to structure the field of EOP as shown in figure 23.1. Nowadays EPP refers to teaching in the corporate context. Growing business and occupational mobility require a good command of English also from non-professionals, but as people in middle-ranking and executive positions with a high level of education form the majority of the learners, the attributive 'professional' is still suitable. Moreover, groups of students are rarely formed strictly according to position in the company so that this heterogeneity would complicate the distinction between the different groups of employees. Therefore, the distinction is made between learners

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'EAP' has diversified and is now also used for 'language of science' (cf. Hyland 2006).

attending a further education course in order to improve selected skills for their jobs (as in EPP) and young people who are trained to obtain a vocational qualification (as in EVT).

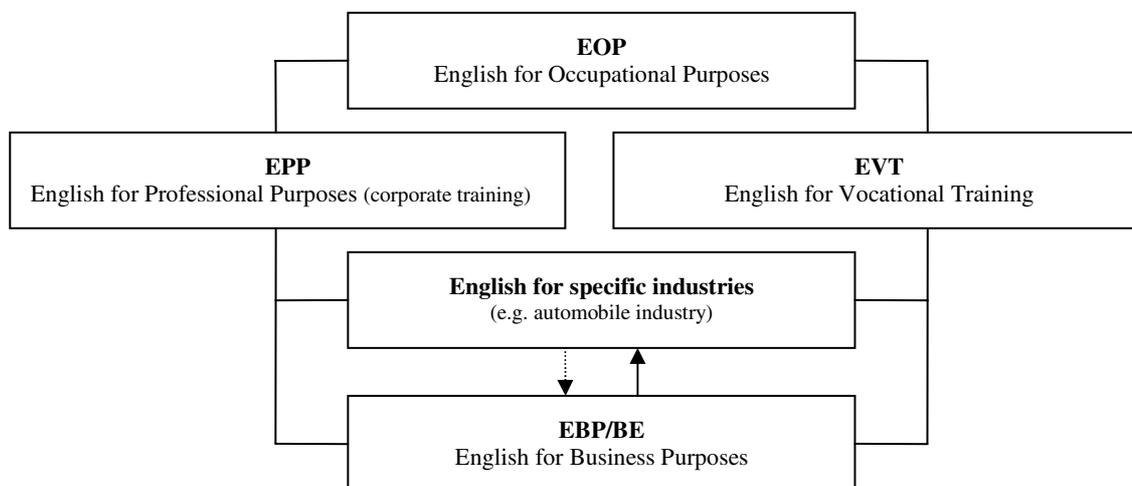


Figure 23.1. EOP classification

Both EPP for employees and EVT for apprentices depend on English for specific industries, based on the subject matter concerned, and English for Business Purposes (EBP), which is frequently called Business English (BE), focussing on functional skills people have to develop for their jobs. These two categories, however, do not restrict or exclude each other. On the contrary, they will almost always overlap and provide together the basis for the EPP or EVT syllabus. Consistent dependency on the other field is found in English classes for specific industries where learning objectives usually include selected business skills that are basically dealt with in the BE classroom. Conversely, business English is based on rather general English, but texts and examples are often chosen from specific industries<sup>3</sup>.

Traditionally, teachers and language institutions do not apply the term ‘EPP’ to describe in-company courses. They use the more general acronym ‘ESP’ which is actually the generic term standing in contrast to EGP (English for General Purposes) but fits perfectly the features of EPP. In order to correspond to this rather authentic expression, ‘ESP’ will stand for ‘EPP’ in the following paper, denoting ‘English language training in the corporate context’.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. examples from the office furniture manufacturing industry in Christie (1996). *Basis for Business*, and from the electrical machinery industry in Hollett (1994). *Business Opportunities*.

### **3. Corporate Language Training**

#### **3.1. Training Variables**

##### **3.1.1. Types of Learners**

According to Sussens-Messerer, “learners can be divided into two groups: pre-experience learners, who have not yet used English in their work, and post-experience learners, who have” (2003: 97). Pre-experience learners often do not have an immediate or clearly defined need but feel that it could be useful sometime if they attended the English course organized by their company. There they refresh their grammar knowledge, learn common business English and general terminology to build up a solid foundation for potential specialist courses. The course content concerning vocabulary and business skills is usually more specific, when a real purpose for the training has been identified.

Most of the post-experience learners, who have often had the opportunity to see what they can and cannot do properly, are already familiar with the basic terminology of their own area of business in English, but they often do not know how to use their specialist knowledge and to convey meanings effectively in authentic business settings. Ellis and Johnson, who call them ‘job-experienced learners’, specify one requirement they have to meet: “the need to be pragmatic. The practical *use* of the language will be more important than theoretical knowledge *about* the language” (1994: 6). On the one hand, post-experience learners often show little inhibition when they speak English, but on the other, they sometimes make fossilized grammatical, collocation and false friends mistakes. They often have already had to communicate for a longer time without any basic grammar knowledge and they have experienced that the frequent arbitrary or inappropriate use of linguistic items does not allow real progress. Some students may lose confidence as a result of insufficient knowledge of grammar, use of tenses and sentence structure, all skills required for communicating in a foreign language. Their need is knowledge of the main rules of grammar and their practice to improve fluency.

Learners in corporate training courses have high expectations of quality and professionalism. They normally attend the course after work or at the weekend and have

to improve their English quickly in order to achieve precise objectives and therefore, they want effective training. Usually disciplined, intelligent and highly-motivated, they are critical of their own work and of the trainer's performance. They are likely to apply the same critical standards to language training and training materials as they do elsewhere in their business lives. Materials which are selected for use in the classroom must take account of it, as the learning environment is permanently influenced by this sense of purpose.

### **3.1.2. Types of Courses**

Due to their specificity, ESP courses are highly diverse. They can, however, be roughly divided according to their duration and intensity, the profile of the participants, and group sizes.

Long-term courses are appropriate for companies that aim to improve the English knowledge of certain groups of employees and to integrate the improved knowledge into their business routine. At the beginning, during the refreshing period, the learning progress is quite high; later in the course, a regular participation allows "skill maintenance" (Zeh-Glückner 2000: 158). Sternkopf assesses that most of the long-term courses "extend over a period of at least six months, with an average of 3-4 lessons a week" (2004: 75). In corporate language training, short, intensive courses are considered to be cost-effective for the company and more manageable for busy employees than longer, extensive courses. Short-term, or 'crash-courses', however, are advisable whenever learners immediately after the course continue using their acquired knowledge in the business reality. This is usually the case when the company commences or expands international business relations, where employees are to be sent abroad and specific tasks will require quick language improvement. Executives who may not want long term agreements because of company commitments may choose intensive, short-term courses either at weekends or during the working week to achieve more rapid results. But practice of the language skills must be guaranteed to ensure success. In comparison, longer and more extensive courses offer the students better prospects of consolidating new forms of expression and functional uses.

In open group courses, learners are assigned to the course according to their level of proficiency, but they often have quite different needs resulting from their job-specific tasks and responsibilities. In closed groups, however, learners have the same specific objectives, but sometimes enormous language differences (cf. Ellis/Johnson 1994: 74-75). This heterogeneity may reduce the quality of the course which can be more successful with a group at a homogenous level of knowledge. Personnel officers responsible for training courses sometimes try to allocate course participants according to executive levels to avoid a comparison of language performance between managers and their subordinates, a course of action only recommendable if the participants in question have similar needs and language competencies. (cf. Sternkopf 2004: 75)

In one-to-one courses, the teacher can deal with the problems of one student, because he is more flexible in specifying the precise objectives of the individual course. “The trainer has only the learner to consider; the learner is not compromised by correction in front of others; the course itself benefits from a mix of intensive and less intensive feedback, and a thorough variety of feedback [...] that is achieved as a result of ongoing dialogue and agreement needs” (Ellis/Johnson 1994: 191). Consequently, the learning progress is higher than in group training where the available time has to be shared between all members of the group. One-to-one tuition is costly, but the ideal form of improving language knowledge within a short period of time for employees with some urgent needs, e.g. a business trip abroad or a presentation to an international audience. Students who do not have very specific objectives benefit from group courses, as they can enjoy the social aspect of learning in a team.

The average group size varies between 4 and 10 participants, which is a reasonable size not only from the cost perspective, but also from a teaching point of view. In such groups, interaction between the participants becomes possible, both in the form of pair work and group work. Pairs and groups can be mixed according to the requirements of the respective tasks and to the different levels of skills. (Sternkopf 2004: 75)

Ellis and Johnson agree that it is important to employ “[a]ctivities which involve learner-learner interaction [...] for increasing the time that each learner can speak” (1994: 188). Besides, there may be less time for the individual to speak in monologue than in a one-to-one course, but students can learn something new just by listening repeatedly to others using the new language patterns without being too involved themselves.

### 3.1.3. Roles of the Teacher

Describing the role of an ESP teacher, one has to consider in what ways his work differs from that of a General English teacher. The first contrast refers to his professional position. The great majority of ESP teachers are freelancers, and they typically work *with*, as opposed to *for*, different language institutes or companies. Hutchinson and Waters observe that “[o]ne of the most important features of ESP in relation to General English is that the status of English changes from being a subject in its own right to a service industry for other specialisms” (1987: 164). Unlike most EGP courses, in ESP learners have clear expectations concerning the achievements of the course. The teacher is accountable to sponsors, personnel managers and subject specialists used to total quality assessment. Ellis and Johnson (1994) state that “[i]t is important for the trainer to establish his or her creditability and professionalism so as to be able to discuss with the learners the best way to structure the course and agree the principles on which to work” (1994: 27).

Brieger suggests using the terms ‘teacher’ and ‘trainer’ interchangeably. He argues that “‘teach’ is the most widely applicable term for general education, while ‘train’ suggests concentration on particular skills intended to fit a person for a specific role” (1997: 122). Dudley-Evans and St. John consider the ESP teacher to be a ‘practitioner’ “to emphasise that ESP work involves much more than teaching” (1998: 13) and identify six key roles:

- teacher (helps students acquire knowledge)
- course designer (plans the course)
- materials provider (chooses suitable published material, adapts and generates material appropriate in level and content)
- collaborator (works together with subject experts to be able to teach the language related to the specific subject or work)
- researcher (does research to understand the discourse of the texts students use)
- evaluator (tests students, evaluates material and the on-going course to adapt the syllabus) (cf. 1998: 13-17).

In EGP, the teacher's principal task is the teaching of language proficiency, whereas ESP trainers pursue an interdisciplinary strategy. They impart language knowledge and skills as well, but moreover, they have to provide some understanding of situations, facts and processes inherent in the target industry. Teachers who have done in-company work for some time are likely to get more quickly a deeper understanding of the work environment but may lack linguistic and pedagogical skills. Qualified English teachers, however, commonly have no first-hand experience of the content and contexts of other disciplines or businesses. Acquiring such knowledge takes time and results are only achieved by study review of the subject matter. But the majority of ESP trainers do not work for only one industry, and consequently, expert knowledge in each subject area is very difficult to achieve. Teachers widen their knowledge and experience of the business world and specific areas through contact with students who contribute their expert knowledge to the course. Due to the multi-disciplinarity of ESP, the following questions arise:

- What kind of knowledge is required of the ESP teacher?
- How much subject-related specialist knowledge does he have to provide?

Ellis and Johnson insist that the ESP teacher is primarily a language teacher and that

he or she does not need to be an expert in any particular business. It is the learners who have the specific content knowledge and who are able to bring that knowledge to the classroom. [ ... ] It is important to focus on the systems, procedures and products that are at the centre of what the learner does in English, and to be able to deduce from this knowledge the language needs of each type of learners (1994: 26).

Indicating to interdisciplinary matters like cross-cultural issues, Crofts adds that

the ESP teacher's most acceptable and effective role, in addition to that of pure language teacher, is not as a pseudo teacher of subject matter students have previously learned or expect to learn in their specialist studies or occupations, but as a teacher of things not learned as part of courses in these specialisms (1981: 149).

Hutchinson and Waters expect of the ESP teacher "the ability to ask intelligent questions" (1987: 163). Eliciting answers and explanations from his students, the teacher activates a two-way knowledge transfer. The teacher acquires some expert knowledge he can profitably use later in the course to ask more specific questions and the learners, giving an informed answer, are taught how to describe items, processes and

problems in the foreign language. For example, working with the class on a text about a four-stroke petrol engine, the teacher could develop the following line of questions:

- What are the main parts called?
- Why does the engine have valves?
- What is the function of the spark plugs?
- What changes take place during the four-stroke cycle?

Considering the fact that there are specialists of various subjects with different job-related responsibilities in the course, the trainer's ability to adapt to the given circumstances is more important than highly specialized subject knowledge. He is, however, expected to have some knowledge of the main principles of the subject area, as only an open and interested approach to the learners' expert fields, tasks and problems at work allows meaningful communication in the ESP classroom.

Dudley-Evans and St. John argue that “[t]he interdisciplinary nature of ESP is both a stimulus and a challenging demand! Being an effective business communicator depends not only on verbal language proficiency but also on personal and interpersonal skills” (1998: 60). To meet these requirements, the ESP teacher should be outgoing, tactful, and genuinely interested in the way the learners' company works: in new technical developments, marketing strategies, or the project the individual learner is working on. The teacher's thirst for knowledge and enthusiasm is likely to produce motivation and pleasure from the learners' side who “should get satisfaction from the actual experience of learning, not only from the prospect of finally using what they have learnt.” (Hutchinson/Waters 1987: 48) Thus ESP can be a highly inspiring and even entertaining business if the teacher manages to create a pleasant feeling in the classroom, because confident learners in a relaxed atmosphere are one key to successful teaching.

## **3.2. Course Development**

### **3.2.1. Course Stages**

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), “[t]he key stages in ESP are needs analysis, course (and syllabus) design, materials selection (and production), teaching

and learning, and evaluation“ (1998: 121). Figure 32.1 provides a basic idea of the course creating process.

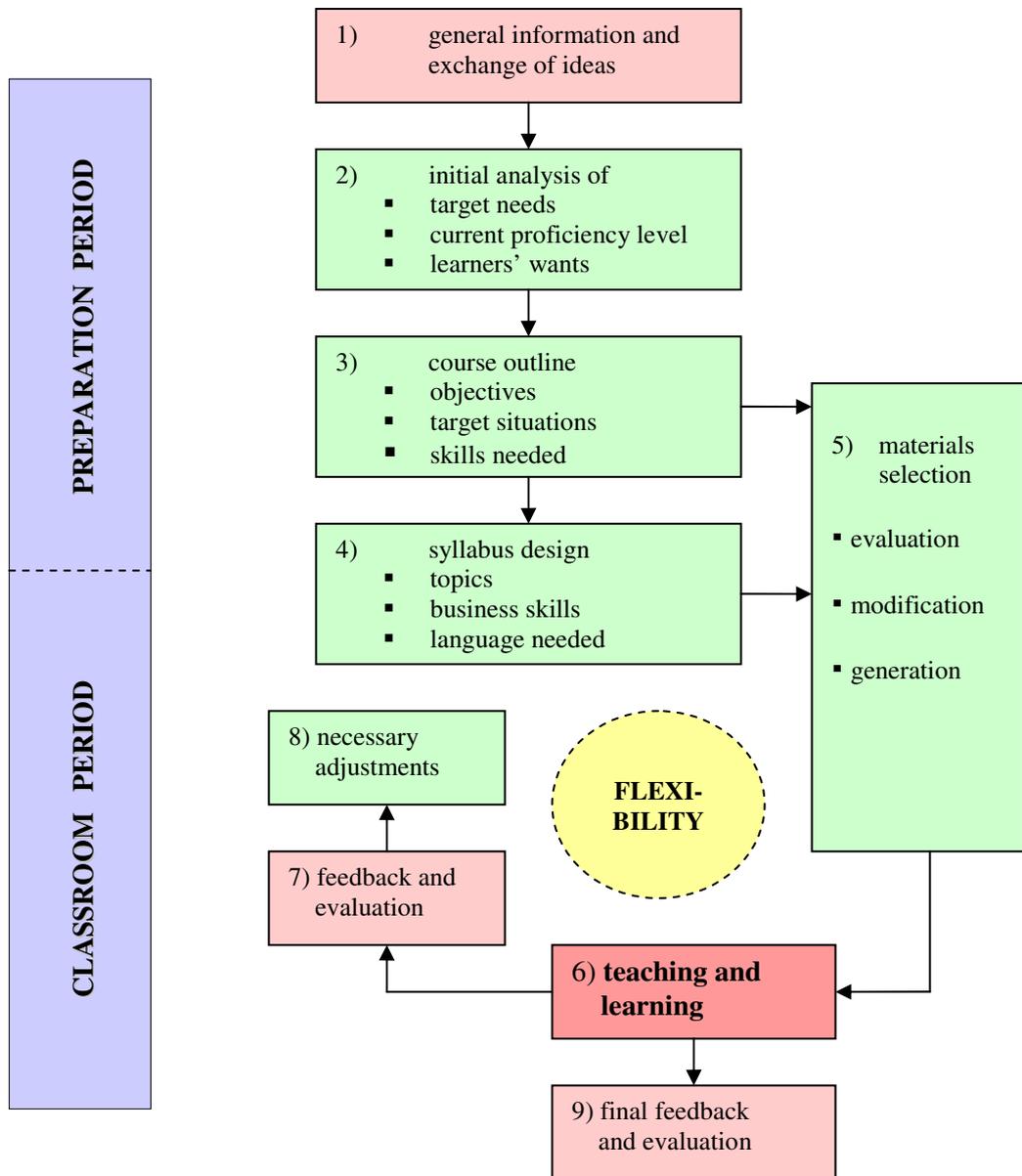


Fig. 32.1. Process of course development

An inquiry from the customer (company) to a language institute or directly to the teacher is normally the starting point of a negotiation aiming at a programme that the company expects to be customized specifically to the needs of the course participants on the one hand and that is feasible according to the teacher's expertise and experience on the other. The company provides the course developer with general information, e.g. on the business field, the structure of the company, the purpose of the English classes,

previous contact of potential learners with English, and their function and position in the company. First ideas about group form and size, intensity and length of the course are exchanged. Moreover, the time available for planning as well as time frames and location of the proposed course are discussed. Sometimes the course designer might be invited to co-decide; in other cases, organizational matters are not negotiable, mostly due to the intended time-scale of the further education project or financial constraints.

The preparation period covers an analysis of what the course participants want to learn and why, an assessment of their proficiency level, the production of a course outline, and the decision on suitable classroom materials. During the preparatory period of an ESP course, the language institute or teacher usually delivers only an approximate course programme, which is part of the contract between the company and the respective language service provider, and draws up a detailed course plan later. A complete syllabus planned thoroughly to the last detail can have a cosmetic role by reassuring sponsors that some preparation has been made in a very competent way (cf. Hutchinson/Waters 1987: 84). Variation occurs consistently, due to alterations of individual corporate activities. Firm points in the course outline usually remain industry-related topics and job-related skills, whereas project-related skills and the urgency of needs may change at short notice. Furthermore, there must always remain space for spontaneous discussions of topical interest or the work on an urgent presentation. The development of the detailed syllabus, the biggest part of materials production and finally, the teaching and learning activities form the classroom period which is accompanied by continual evaluation and modification.

The above activities are not inevitably chronologically completed; they interact and overlap. Initial needs analysis and final evaluation are fixed points, but the trainer's self-evaluation, his response to the learners' feedback and the modifications consequently made are processes by means of which the course development is adapted to new situations. Therefore, in reality, items (4) to (8) of figure 32.1. do not form a cycle whose parts represent separate, successive activities but are in continuous interaction with each other. Learners provide feedback to the teacher's performance and the materials offered and conversely, the learning process and learners' progress is consistently evaluated by the teacher, who modifies the course accordingly.

Ellis and Johnson state that “the objectives for the course and its content will be the product of a negotiating process between the learner (or sponsoring organization) and the trainer (or training organization)”<sup>4</sup> (1994: 6). Understandably, sponsors would like the course participants to show best possible learning results. However, neither the committed teacher nor the motivated learner can compensate for the problem of low language level and time constraints on the one hand, and over-optimistic expectations on the other. The teacher should therefore give a pragmatic orientation by qualifying the level of expectations and avoid promising unattainable objectives despite immediate needs of the learners.

### **3.2.2. Needs Analysis**

Needs are the starting issue to any learning activity and therefore, to any language course. Hutchinson and Waters define needs analysis as the most characteristic feature of the ESP course design:

Thus we had to state in practical terms the irreducible minimum of an ESP approach to course design, it would be needs analysis, since it is the awareness of a target situation – a definable need to communicate in English – that distinguishes the ESP learner from the learner of General English. (1987: 54)

Perspectives on needs analysis in ESP comparable with each other have been formulated from the beginning of the 1980s. Most of the authors mentioned below suggest analysing more than one position to find the actual needs, thus establishing preferably pairs of contrasted views, sometimes complemented by a third item:

- 1) goal-oriented needs/ process-oriented needs (cf. Widdowson 1981: 2)
- 2) necessities/ wants/ lacks (cf. Hutchinson/Waters: 1987: 55-58)
- 3) perceived needs/ felt needs (cf. Berwick 1989: 55)
- 4) objective needs/ subjective needs (cf. Brindley 1989: 65)
- 5) target situation/ learning situation/ present situation (cf. Dudley-Evans/St. John 1998: 123-124).

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis and Johnson refer this statement to courses for post-experience learners, but it can generally be applied to corporate training.

Basically, a target view and a learning view can be identified. The concepts (1), (3), and (4) can be seen as equivalents, the first part resulting from the goal or target situation and taking into consideration the factual information, i.e. the learners' "use of language in real-life communication situations as well as their current language proficiency and difficulties" (Brindley 1989: 70). The second part arises from the learning situation and refers to "affective and cognitive factors, such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners' wants and expectations" (ibid.). Hutchinson and Waters define 'lacks' as the gap between the learner's existing and target proficiency (cf. 1987: 56). Dudley-Evans and St. John suggest a three-dimensional approach with a target situation analysis (TSA), a learning situation analysis (LSA), and a present situation analysis (PSA) (cf. 1998: 123). Figure 32.2. summarizes the aspects of the needs analysis, giving the terms which are basically used in the following chapters to refer to the different needs.

	<b>Items analysed</b>	<b>Information gathered on</b>
<b>TSA</b>	<b>target needs</b>	learner's professional background: target skills, situations and tasks they need English for; subject matter, industry and company
<b>LSA</b>	<b>learning needs</b>	factors affecting the learning process: learning experiences, expectations, attitudes, and problems
<b>PSA</b>	<b>proficiency level lacks</b> (comparing TSA and PSA)	learner's language skills

Figure 32.2. Elements of needs analysis

Data necessary for a needs analysis is usually received from the following main sources of information:

- 1) placement tests
- 2) questionnaires and checklists
- 3) interviews with sponsors or the company the learners work for
- 4) personal interviews with learners
- 5) observation, e.g. company visits
- 6) authentic texts about respective industry and subject
- 7) internet research

Students are grouped either according to the results of initial placement tests, the self-assessment of the potential course participants, or on the recommendation of personnel officers aiming to divide employees with similar functions in the company and/or similar proficiency levels into one group (cf. chap. 3.1.2.). While (2) to (4) are based on the customer's objectives and attitudes, (1), (5), (6), and (7) are subject to the teacher's (or language institute's) search for information and corresponding interpretation. Consequently, the results always depend on individual views and different background knowledge of all people involved. Thus needs analysis is more complex than the equation 'needs analysis = TSA + LSA + PSA', which is only a simplified framework for highly diverse factors influencing the course. The results of the needs analysis provide, nevertheless, a valuable clue about the course objectives and represent the basis for the syllabus design and the selection of classroom materials.

### 3.2.3. Syllabus Design

The needs analysis prepares the syllabus design by defining the learners' target needs and proficiency level and therewith the course and learning objectives. The general subject area of the course is determined by the industry the company belongs to, whereas smaller topic fields depend on the different departments and deal with terminology and expressions specific to the students' particular places of work. Figure 32.3. gives an example of how linguistic features can be deduced from the target situation.

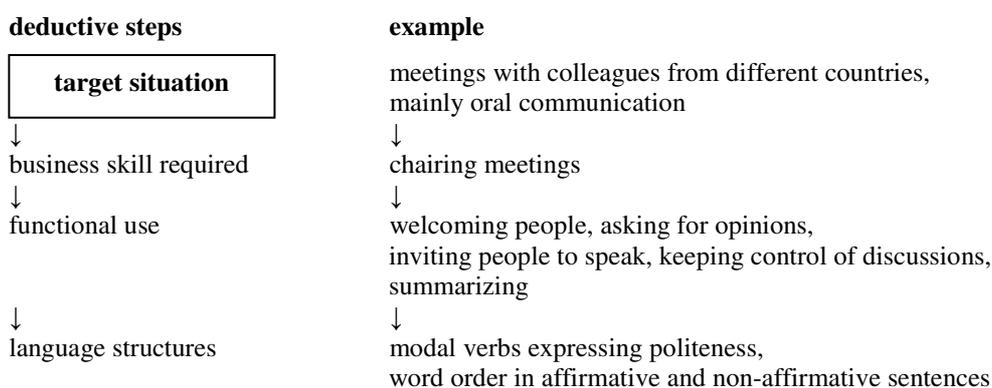


Figure 32.3. Identifying linguistic features for the syllabus

Hutchinson and Waters indicate that the main purpose of a syllabus consists in breaking down "the mass of knowledge to be learnt into manageable units" (1987: 85). They

agree that “the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation”(1987: 12) and that “[t]he identified features will form the syllabus of the ESP course” (ibid.).

Textbooks offer prefabricated course syllabuses with tables of contents. They introduce the logical development of the course, deliver a clear structure for the teacher and make the course programme comprehensible for the learner. Course syllabuses are organized according to a range of criteria, e.g.:

- topics            design, body parts, engine
- skills            improvement of reading efficiency, writing essays
- situations        the workshop, the new secretary
- functions        using the telephone, attending meetings
- structures        demonstratives, yes/no questions
- notions          probability, frequency, time

Few lists of contents are formed by only one of these features. Most ESP textbooks use several of the above introduced criteria and offer parallel syllabuses with one of them being the primary organising principle and the others subordinate to it, as shown in figure 32.4. In this example, the primary organisational principle is functional; the following sub-categories are functional-topic and functional-structural. The scope of the listed items is narrowed down from left to right.

	<b>Unit title</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Grammar topics &amp; skills</b>
<b>Unit 2</b>	Testing components and circuits	Test instruments Using a multimeter Fault finding Placing an order	Modal verbs Decimals, equation Asking for specifications Understanding a flow chart Letter layout

Figure 32.4. Parallel syllabuses with mixed criteria<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Towara, W & Wood, I. (1997). *Electricity Matters*.

Hutchinson and Waters emphasize that a written syllabus displays only the surface structure of the course, whereas the other criteria are inherent as well. Considering the complexity of communication,

every function is realised by one or more structures, thus in writing a functionally organised syllabus, a structural syllabus [...] is automatically produced. Texts must be about something, thus all textbooks have [...] a topic syllabus. Similarly, exercises demand the use of certain language processing skills: so, in writing a sequence of exercises, a skills syllabus of sorts is generated (1987: 89).

In ESP courses, the topic-based syllabus is often preferred, using the specialist content as the primary organising device and serving as a basis for the underlying notional, functional, structural etc. elements. It “deploys the content of the student’s work or specialist study [...] in order to motivate the students” (Robinson 1991: 37). If the topic discussed in the classroom is connected to the learner’s subject in his working situation, he feels both the relevance of the course for his job and self-confidence, because he is already familiar with the topical contents.

The course syllabus can be skills-based in two respects: first, it may focus “exclusively or principally on one of the four traditional language skills<sup>6</sup>” (1991: 37). An example would be a course in commercial correspondence concentrating on writing and practising writing enquiries, offers, complaints etc., or a telephone course, based on speaking and listening skills. Naturally, the other skills are needed, too; in reality, the employee has to understand the contents of the replies to the business letters (reading), and to take notes during the activity of telephoning (writing). In corporate training, the term ‘skill’ may refer to one of the above macro-skills, but normally describes a business skill (connected to a task at work), e.g. discussing problems, writing emails, or participating in meetings. Therefore, beside the topic-based syllabus, the functionally based syllabus is widely used in ESP.

The sequence of the syllabus elements is ordered according to usefulness. Teachers usually start with broad topic and functional fields, closely connected to general English, and introduce or repeat basic grammar and vocabulary needed for later structures, as “using or learning certain language or skills is dependent on others”

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘four skills’ are represented by two forms of productive performance (speaking and writing) and two forms of receptive performance (listening and reading).

(Dudley-Evans/St. John 1998: 163). Alternatively, they might order the syllabus depending on the requirements and interests of the course participants, e.g. if there are constraints like the urgency of a learner's need to fulfil particular job tasks in English very soon. Course books commonly take into account this demand for flexibility, providing syllabuses where the individual units can be treated in any order and independently from each other.

The course syllabus embodies the organised programme for the whole course like the list of contents represents the written plan of a course book. As discussed in 3.2.1., the course syllabus is rarely completed in detail at the beginning of the course, because it has continually to be upgraded by involving the ideas and problems that are produced and occur during the course. Therefore, it is commonly drawn up step by step in the form of separate session syllabuses where the teacher incorporates the basic ideas of the course syllabus and the necessary modifications. On the basis of the course objective, the syllabus establishes the criteria for the vocabulary and texts to be used and for the structural items to be focused on. As materials reflect these guidelines, syllabus design and the selection of classroom materials closely interact.

### **3.3. Classroom Materials**

#### **3.3.1. Materials Purposes**

Materials for the classroom will, to a large extent, determine the success of a course. They comprise a variety of items supporting the learning process: e.g. realia to perform tasks; photographs, posters and other illustrations, textbooks and dictionaries, transparencies, slides and worksheets, audio- and video materials, as well as ideas and information from the Web. Before materials are selected or produced, it should be considered for what reasons they are used. Dudley-Evans and St John list four significant purposes of materials in ESP, namely

- 1) sources of language
- 2) learning support
- 3) motivation and stimulation
- 4) later reference (cf. 1998: 170-171).

(1) Teaching materials contain vocabulary, linguistic structures and communication strategies that are needed in the students' target situations. They introduce new vocabulary, help check existing knowledge, allow revision and are often starting points of work in the classroom offering topics for discussions. Instructions are also sources of language; in view of the fact that most ESP learners are not really beginners, they can be written in English. A supply of additional materials for individual studies at home often needs some preparation in the classroom; advice on how to cope with potential problems will motivate learners to really work through them. As materials support the learners in reducing communication problems in the real professional world, the importance of authentic texts and the degree of their specificity has to be considered. (These issues will be discussed more detailed in chaps. 3.3.2.1. and 3.3.2.2.)

(2) Materials deliver opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills both of the language and the subject matter for making progress. A range of diverse activities at the appropriate level allows learners to obtain knowledge and lasting skills. They should not be too repetitive but stimulate cognitive processes, i.e. learners may be encouraged to find meanings of words, answers to questions and solutions to problems themselves whenever possible in order to develop usable strategies for coping with new linguistic items and communication problems. Finally, the suggested exercises should not be rigid in their order or totally depend on each other, as potential flexibility helps the teacher sensitively respond to the learners' needs, interests and condition of the day.

(3) Teaching materials are able to stimulate the students' desire to gain language competence. The input should discuss a topic the learners are familiar with and then, new ideas and information can be added. Challenging language practice allows enough room for creativity, but does not pressurize the learners to be imaginative all the time. ESP courses commonly take place in the late afternoon when the learners are frequently tired after working. Consequently, tasks should not be totally free but guided, giving at least some basic ideas. A well-structured layout of work exercises is important; it attracts the learners' attention, facilitates work and gives the impression of professionalism and clarity. Visuals can act as positive stimuli and help learners understand exercises better and more quickly.

(4) For later brush-up, learners usually prefer consulting their classroom copies with handwritten remarks to using other sources of reference. Therefore, materials must provide models of correct and appropriate language use as well as clarity that allows revising language knowledge after the classroom period. For more comprehensibility, Dudley-Evans and St. John recommend contents pages similar to the construction of a syllabus in a course book (cf. 1998: 172). A list of contents is certainly purposeful, e.g. at the beginning of a reader, compiled and completed before the course starts. But since in ESP the course syllabus is often shaped through the course development itself with the result that materials are prepared at rather short notice, a fixed content would restrict the flexible approach to the course. Especially ESP learners, who are continually observing what is happening, will certainly compare the initially planned syllabus with its ongoing implementation.

### 3.3.2. Materials Structure

The unit of a textbook or a worksheet covering a particular learning module is divided into different parts which can be assigned to the elements of a standard structure of materials design. The following model of Hutchinson and Waters who define it as “coherent framework for the integration of the various aspects of learning” (1987: 109), identifies the four elements (1) input, (2) content, (3) language, and (4) task.

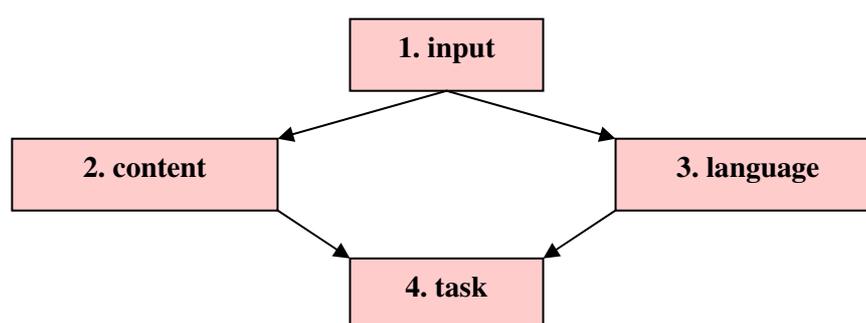


Fig. 33.1. Basic materials design model by Hutchinson and Waters

The input (1) is represented by a piece of communication data, e.g. an authentic or realistic text, a dialogue or diagram, which is selected according to the topic and should serve the general purposes listed at the beginning of this chapter. It should cover a

special part of the subject matter and at the same time language structures to build up meaningful sentences and an understandable, coherent text. Dudley-Evans and St. John claim that “[i]n ESP, any teaching activity, whether its aim is to teach language or skills, is presented in a context” (1998: 11) and that therefore, actually two contents are inherent in the input. They introduce the notions of ‘carrier content’, “an authentic topic which can be used as a vehicle for the real content of the unit” (ibid.) and ‘real content’, the language patterns or structures underlying the text (cf. ibid.).

‘Content’ (2) correlates with ‘carrier content’ and is built on the topic, whereas ‘language’ (3) corresponds to ‘real content’ and concentrates on linguistic structures and practice. Both items are essential for achieving adequate task performance. That is why the learners are provided with a range of activities to obtain the necessary language knowledge and skills, before they are expected to carry out the task where they, finally, have the opportunity to use the skills they have trained in the ‘content’ and ‘language’ stages. The final lesson objective is the task (4) which should simulate activities from the learner’s real situation at work as closely as possible. It meets the needs of the ESP learner to accomplish meaningful and spontaneous communication in his authentic business environment, as task activities are comparable to real-world activities (cf. Skehan 1998: 95).

Tasks usually involve pair or group work where learners have to communicate in order to solve a simulated real-world problem. Working on the same task, but having different information needed to complete the task, students have to perform an ‘information transfer’ in order to bridge an ‘information gap’. (cf. Richards/Rodgers 1986:22). Robinson explains that in role plays, the learner takes on a different role and even identity from his usual one, while in simulations, the environment of the task is created artificially (cf. Robinson 1991: 49). Role plays and simulations are often performed in the same task and establish a clear objective that the participants have to accomplish. A group role-play might involve a discussion of a simulated problem at work in a meeting, with each student assigned to represent a particular, specified point of view.

Although introduced at the beginning of the 1980s, the basic model presented in figure 33.1. has lost none of its general acceptance. It shows the core modules for materials

design and use and can easily be extended, as demonstrated in figure 33.2. (cf. Hutchinson/Waters 1987: 119).

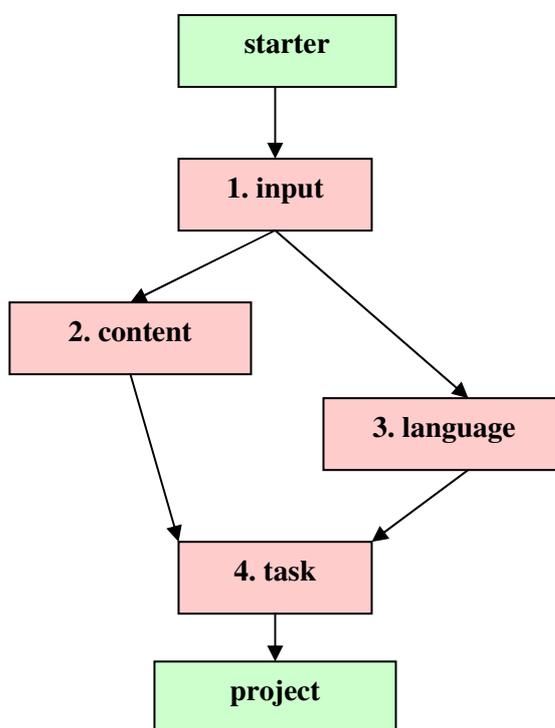


Fig. 33.2. Extended materials design model by Hutchinson and Waters

In addition to the basic model, which offers the four essential elements and the indication of the starting point (input) and the final product (task), the extended model suggests six elements and an order for the learning steps. Like the four basic elements, the starter can be regarded as indispensable, as the work on materials does not usually start with the reading of the input text, but with an introduction to the topic dealt with in the input. In course books, units begin with a warm-up activity, either giving basic information or questions which support some brainstorming about the topic. Even if teacher-generated materials sometimes lack written starters, the teacher will certainly use an introduction to the content of the material for checking existing knowledge, introducing key vocabulary, asking for opinions to find out the learners' special interests, or simply for arousing their interest.

The majority of ESP students may be more interested in the topic than in the form of language. They relate subject matters to their experience and knowledge and can

develop self-confidence that enables them to exploit subsequently a series of structural language activities. It is therefore advisable to introduce content-based exercises before dealing with language structures and uses. The points focussed on in the activities are preferably drawn from the input. They are selected according to the students' needs and on the basis of their usefulness in the task. After the successful completion of the task, the learners could be invited to apply the knowledge they have gained to the specific situation in their own places of work. For example, the students could hold a meeting discussing an issue relevant to the students' company, their contributions would reflect their own points of view and, ideally, they would take on responsibilities they normally carry out at work.

### **3.3.3. Materials Properties**

#### **3.3.3.1. Specificity**

As 'English for Specific Purposes' suggests specificity, it is not surprising that teachers and materials writers are faced with the problem of how specific ESP materials should be. Hutchinson and Waters state that "[t]here is no grammatical structure, function or discourse structure that can be identified specifically with [...] any particular subject" (1987: 166). They argue that even if

[c]ertain subject areas show a higher proportion of particular grammatical or structural forms [...] Although the passive is common in EST, the learner still needs both the active and the passive, and the fact that a form is more common does not make it any more difficult to learn [...] and the rules for their creation and use do not vary with subject (ibid.).

They distinguish between structural (articles, adverbs, etc.), general (common core words), sub-technical (words frequently used in the specific industry), and technical (highly specialised) vocabulary, and deny the necessity of using the latter in classroom texts (cf. 1987: 165-166). The results of an extensive, corpus-based study conducted between 1973 and 1975 shows that in scientific and technical writing, technical vocabulary accounts for only 21% of the total range of lexis (cf. Inman 1978: 246). Considering the fact that these findings are based on research on written English in the seventies and that now the biggest part of the ESP classroom work aims at oral language competence, it can be estimated that the actual percentage is considerably lower. With

regard to the importance of technical vocabulary in ESP, Dudley-Evans and St. John consider the above ideas as oversimplifying. However, it is only the potential occurrence of specified language in texts suggested by the learners they discuss, without assessing its significance for materials selected by the teacher (cf. 1998: 80-82).

ESP teachers are responsible for any vocabulary used in the classroom which helps the students, and they should be able to understand authentic scientific or technical texts and design worksheets on the basis of their content. However, learners who are invited to contribute English texts from their workplace to the course commonly bring emails, their preparation for a presentation, realia from their last business trip, or reports on trends in the company's industry - items rarely containing highly specified words. Besides, post-experience learners usually do not have difficulties with English vocabulary of their specialist field. They are more likely to need typical language structures and common core vocabulary in order to gain fluency and to manage business skills. As all participants of one group usually work in the same industry, vocabulary should concentrate on semi-technical terms from the subject matter and general vocabulary. Hutchinson and Waters recommend avoiding "highly specified materials [...] to give everyone's specialism some chance" (1987: 166).

Concerning business skills and strategies, the redundancy of highly specified materials becomes still more obvious. The world of business is extremely diverse, but the practical functions people carry out in their workplaces are similar to a large extent. For example, many business people have to give presentations, and although the content of such presentations will vary, the functions that people need to perform when giving their speeches are predictable: they will have to welcome their audience, introduce the subject, outline the structure of the presentation, refer to visual aids, conclude, invite questions etc., no matter if they work for an automobile manufacturer or an IT company, in the engine plant or as a software developer.

The training style in ESP is highly specified in some regards. First of all, the teacher has to adjust his classroom performance to the kind of group or person he is teaching. Second, he has to base his work on specified students needs, i.e. he has to combine topic area and skills needed. Moreover, in order to tailor language courses to those needs, he has to find appropriate learning materials to satisfy them. Consequently, ESP has

absorbed various methodologies from General English Teaching (GET) and operates them selectively within the various types of texts and activities. As demonstrated in figure 33.3., the materials system in ESP is composed of elements putting the task at the centre of the methodological focus; thus ESP can be partly regarded as task-based. The task is prepared by form-focused exercises covering structural and functional issues, and skills-centred activities training the individual functional strategies needed for the task. Finally, the input topic follows the subject matter and is therefore content-based, while the learner-centeredness derives from the learners' needs which find expression in the supply of authentic materials, questions and feedback to the course.

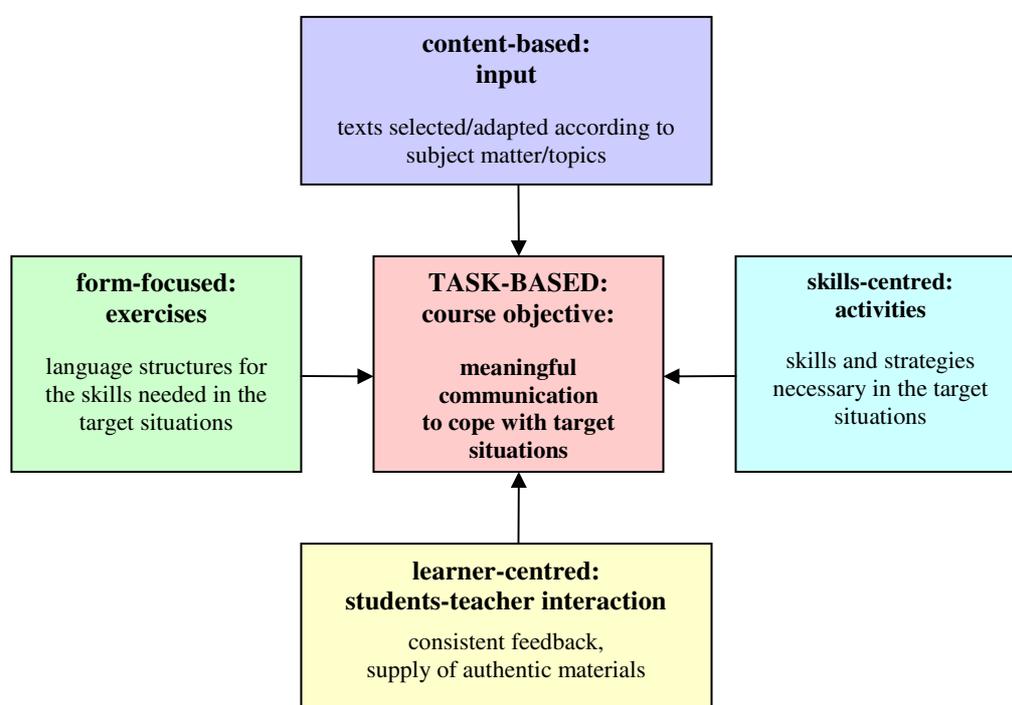


Fig. 33.3. Methodological specificity in ESP materials

### 3.3.3.2. Authenticity

The learners' coping with target situations in the authentic business world is the objective of ESP courses. Therefore, authentic texts are a valuable source of information and authentic discourse and bring the 'real world' into the classroom. But can teaching materials offer authenticity? Hutchinson and Waters deny the existence of authentic texts in the classroom context. They argue that

[a]uthenticity is not a characteristic of a text in itself: it is a feature of a text in a particular context. [...] A text can only be truly authentic [...] in the context for which it was originally written. Since in ESP any text is automatically removed from its original context, there can be no such thing as an authentic text in ESP (1987: 159).

Robinson, however, interprets authentic materials generally as items originally not produced for but used in the classroom.

Basically, when we refer to using 'authentic materials' in ELT, we refer to the use of print, audio, video and pictorial material originally produced for a purpose other than the teaching of language. At one extreme, this can be anything that is available to the language teacher but which was not produced for language-teaching purposes; at the other extreme, of particular relevance to ESP, it will be material normally used in the student's own specialist workplace. (1991: 54)

Even if the authentic business environment cannot physically be transferred to the classroom, the texts are still from the authentic source and deserve therefore the term 'authentic'. It is, however necessary to create carefully simulations of authentic situations in order to maximize their learning effect and practical use.

Authentic texts serve various functions. First, inviting authentic materials from the learners' work environment to the classroom is an offer for assistance, e.g. if learners repeatedly have problems with certain text types. Secondly, the ESP teacher always looks for content-based material which enables him to design meaningful texts that are as close to the learners' target situations in their jobs as possible. Thirdly, authentic texts serve as sources of information for the teacher and may already be collected during the needs analysis period. Newsletters, technical specifications, and brochures show ways, in which the learners have to use English at work; they introduce the subject matter and specific topics to the trainer and provide an overview of the industry.

The Internet has positively affected the teachers' possibilities of gathering authentic, content-specific, and topical materials. Texts from the Web are usually very motivating, as they take up up-to-date figures and information, and the latest news interesting for people working in the respective industries. As they are highly specialised in terms of topicality, they become outdated quickly with the result that they can often be used for only one group. As the exploitation of any authentic text for the classroom requires much time, teachers should check thoroughly the potential of an authentic text in question and balance expenditure time with the expected benefit for the learners.

### 3.3.4. Materials Selection

Careful materials selection is a cornerstone of ESP. Hutchinson and Waters identify three ways of obtaining appropriate materials:

- materials evaluation → selection from existing materials
- materials development → generation of own materials
- materials adaptation → modification of existing materials. (cf. 1987: 96)

Dudley-Evans and St. John insist that teachers must be good providers of materials who are able to

1. select appropriately from what is available;
2. be creative with what is available;
3. modify activities to suit learners' needs; and
4. supplement by providing extra activities (and extra input) (1998: 173).

If there are appropriate books on the market and funds to buy them, both the teacher and the learners will benefit, as the teacher's job is made easier, and the students benefit from having access to individual copies of textbooks. However, materials corresponding to the specific subject area of the course may not be available on the market. As production costs for a limited market product are high, publishers are reluctant to provide course books for very specified subjects; they commonly wish to meet the needs of wider groups of English students. Books covering specific subject areas are likely to treat general topics within this field, so that they can aim at a larger clientele. Nevertheless, course books with a broader scope can often be used as the basis for a course and may be supplemented with further, teacher-generated materials. Ellis and Johnson acknowledge that

[i]n situations where a group of learners is relatively heterogeneous and the objectives for learning are non-specific, [...] a published [...] course book may well provide an effective core of material for a course, provided that its level and methodology are appropriate" (1994: 124).

The teacher has to think about the value of a course book in terms of its effectiveness, (in order to produce the learning result) and efficiency (to do this in a high quality and without any waste of time) for the learners and for himself. He should therefore also estimate how much effort it takes to modify and complement the items in the book.

Hutchinson and Waters suggest considering “which unsatisfactory features are easier to remedy. Is it, for example, easier to adapt content or methodology? You might find it difficult to find alternative texts, while it may be relatively easy to change the exercises based on the texts” (1987: 98).

Once the teacher has found a book for the course where the general subject fits, he is facing the following main questions:

- 1) Does the proficiency level fit?
- 2) What are the main topic areas covered?
- 3) Is the material attractive and suitable for the learners?

(1) Short-listed course books should have the level of difficulty which is supportive of the course. Input which is too easy may reduce the amount of progression; texts which are too difficult, however, could demotivate learners if they felt that their productive skills did not have the slightest chance to keep pace with the receptive input. Course books available on the market are categorized according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The six Common Reference Levels of Proficiency extend from A1 to C2<sup>7</sup> and are based on objective criteria that allow measuring learners’ existing, intended, and achieved language knowledge. The CEFR has been established to harmonize the different educational systems concerned with modern languages in Europe, but it has also become a useful tool for ESP teachers, as “[t]he provision of a common set of proficiency statements will facilitate comparisons of objectives, levels, materials, tests, and achievements in different systems and situations” (<<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework.EN.pdf>>: 16).

(2) If the biggest part of the topics covers the content needs identified in the needs analysis, the teacher will have a reliable source of content materials with basic vocabulary and jargon. Sub-topical requirements, i.e. still more specified subject matters, can be met by means of materials taken e.g. from other published materials, the Internet or brought in by the course participants. It has been proved that flexibility of the syllabus is an important quality and helps customize the order of units to the existing or occurring needs of the learners.

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<sup>7</sup> A1/A2: ‘basic users’, B1/B2: ‘independent users’, and C1/C2: ‘competent users’.

(3) The physical appearance of the book must not be underestimated, as it has quite a considerable impact on the learners' motivation. Both the structure of the whole book and the individual pages should be designed with great clarity. To support the written text and to avoid confusion, illustrations ought not to be too dominant and busy. Lists of vocabulary, technical specifications, concise language skills points, or phrase lists for functional skills are purposeful sources of information for students. Moreover, tests at the end of each unit are useful possibilities for strengthening the learners' motivation, as they demonstrate the students' level of progression. Finally, topicality determines the attractiveness of a course book to a large extent. Hardly any book will be as topical as authentic materials, and especially in the field of technology where development is rapid, the books selected for the classroom should be up-to-date to allow discussions about current trends in the subject field.

It is certainly of advantage if the techniques - guided or free, for group or individual work, receptive or productive - fit exactly the demand and size of the course, but instructions can usually be modified without any problems and tailored to the classroom situation. Much effort can be saved by checking existing materials that cover the needs of the course, at least partly. However, experienced teachers would be able to modify and supplement exercises for practising particular language structures and functions and skills activities. And even if the teacher eventually decides to generate his own materials, "the evaluation of existing materials can provide a good source of ideas (of what to avoid as well as what to do) and techniques" (Hutchinson/Waters 1987: 105).

### **3.3.5. Materials Production**

Materials production is an established tradition in ESP, since identified needs can often not be satisfied by available materials. Hutchinson and Waters believe that "[m]aterials writing is one of the most characteristic features of ESP in practice. In marked contrast to General English Teaching, a large amount of the ESP teacher's time may well be taken up in writing materials" (1987: 106). Figure 33.4. summarizes Jolly and Bolitho's framework for materials writing (cf. 1998: 97-110).

Materials generating is rarely performed from scratch. If a course textbook has been selected, it adds to and consolidates the treatment of issues not covered in the book. If

no published materials are available, the teacher usually starts from a point he finds appropriate according to the content or business skill focus, and exploits this input by e.g. modifying the text and/or developing new activities and suitable tasks. Authentic texts may be presented in their original form to advanced classes or edited for learners at a lower level. Materials can only be tested by use in the classroom. The subsequent feedback from the students and evaluation by the teacher determines whether the materials have to be scrapped, rewritten, adapted, or can be used again in a class with similar needs.

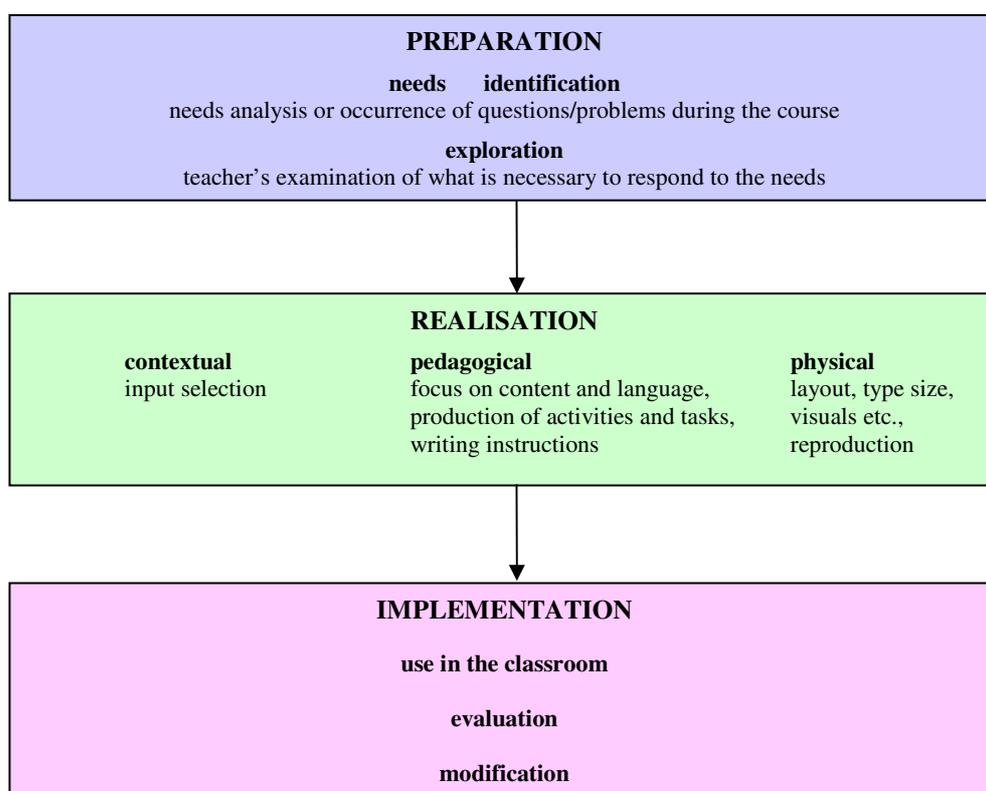


Fig. 33.4. Sequence of activities involved in producing classroom materials following Jolly and Bolitho

On the one hand, materials writing is extremely time-consuming, but on the other hand, it enables the teacher to incorporate his view of language teaching and learning into the activities. Furthermore, he can respond more individually to the needs identified prior to the course or occurring during the classroom period, and thus may maximize the learning success.

### **3.4. Intercultural Awareness**

More and more people find themselves working in international contexts. They have to receive visitors from other countries, work in international teams in Germany or abroad, make phone calls to foreign colleagues and business partners, or negotiate internationally. Competition in the market is tough; misunderstandings and awkward comments may lead to financial disadvantages and expensive mistakes. Consequently, intercultural competence has become an economic factor, and both small companies and large corporations consider highly developed cross-cultural skills of their employees as a key competitive advantage in international business. Therefore, ESP courses employ the discussion about intercultural issues, the training of language awareness and convey strategies to avoid potential cross-cultural problems.

Post-experience learners attending language courses may often have had contact with non-Germans at work and would have found different cultural behaviours frustrating or uncomfortably divergent from the normality of their own cultural patterns. They would notice that members of one nation tended to share similar values and approaches and consequently developed stereotypical images in their minds. But not everyone living in a country has the same attitudes, and a variety of circumstances leave their mark on patterns of behaviour. Key factors influencing the “intercultural cocktail” comprise

- national culture (e.g. language, traditions, religion)
- corporate context (e.g. industry, hierarchy, company policy)
- individual background (e.g. character, age, gender, experience),
- situation (e.g. formality, place) (cf. Gibson 2001,3: 31).

On the one hand, individual thinking and behaviour can only partly be explained by national cultural differences. On the other, the fact that someone is German or British will certainly have an impact on his attitudes. Gibson argues that there are “tendencies that can be observed in a culture; and these are likely to be clearer to the outsider than to the person within” (2003, 3: 29). He compares culture to a river that appears different, depending on the position of the viewer and observes that “[i]t will be different near the riverbank from how it is in the middle” (ibid.).

Therefore, an essential part of cross-cultural learning consists in developing the ability to be self-reflective. It is important to not only discuss other nationalities' typical behaviours, but to reflect how individuals from outside Germany experience their cooperation with Germans. People become aware of their own use of language and the effect it has on their foreign business partners. Reflecting on how communication in their company is going, many Germans are surprised at an actual lack of personal communication. Gibson quotes a French product manager who observes that

[i]n Germany, there seems to be a strict dividing line between these two spheres [personal and business communication BW]. Germans don't talk a lot about their private lives at work. I find this annoying, because I like to work with people I know. I need to trust people in order to be able to work with them, and will do more for them if I trust them (2003, 3: 33).

Furthermore, he provides the example of an engineer from Argentina complaining that Germans only communicate to exchange information and not to keep relationships going. He contends that he has "the impression that people in Germany communicate just when they need something" (ibid.). Consequently, it is important, particularly for German students, to take extra time in the course for the training of informal communication and for exchanging thoughts on a more personal level, as good rational thinking and excellent product knowledge cannot replace interpersonal skills.

In an international context where English is the basic means of understanding, common discourse strategies have to be considered. For example, negative messages are usually 'softened' and diplomatically wrapped (cf. Gibson 2001, 2: 28). For example, using *Actually* or *In fact* at the beginning of a sentence, the speaker announces that a negative answer will follow; *I'm afraid* signals that a message is not pleasant, but unavoidable (cf. Taylor 2003, 7: 32). A native English speaker would automatically apply this technique to make the conversation partner accept a negative response without any hurt feelings. Compared with many other cultures, Germans are more direct in their positive and negative feedback, an approach that is sometimes interpreted as rudeness. Used to low-context<sup>8</sup> communication, they have to learn to apply alternative linguistic devices, as politeness is vitally important in business.

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<sup>8</sup> Syn. for 'explicit'. (cf. Gibson 2003,3: 29)

Moreover, typical structures of business activities are partly influenced by national culture factors. David Hudnut describes the scenario of an international presentation and shows the difference between the German's deductive<sup>9</sup> approach with the inductive<sup>10</sup> show of the American. He contrasts the German's rather factual and serious delivery of information with the American "'audio-centred' style, where the needs of the audience are interactively met", and the American's "efforts to form a personal connection" (2001, 2: 32), implemented in an entertaining way. He concludes that the different presentation styles respond to the alleged viewpoints and expectations of the audience and demonstrates that business contacts easily fail if these factors are ignored or neglected (cf. 2001, 2: 31-32).

The ESP learner usually wants to improve his speaking skills, i.e. he sets priority on fluency and accuracy. But as the above examples show, there is a third essential point in ESP teaching: effectiveness. Brieger defines

[w]hile the key word for fluency is flow, the core of effectiveness is impact. Effectiveness is a stylistic feature of communication. It is at once part of the message and part of the medium. One speaker may kill an altogether interesting message by ineffective delivery; yet an effective communicator can bring even the most mundane message to life (1997: 41).

Obviously, intercultural awareness can increase effectiveness in international business. Better knowledge of a language allows the discovery of connections between cultural values and language patterns. From the very beginning, the ESP teacher should identify points of cultural interest implied in the language study that illustrate what people think and do, and why. Having drawn attention to problematic areas, he can elicit from the ESP students what they would say and do in their mother tongue culture and what adaptations need to be made when using the target language.

As discussions about other cultures might reinforce prejudices and clichés, students ought to be reminded that national culture is only one of the above mentioned key factors and that there is always an interplay between cultures, organizations, situations and the personality of the business partner. Due to all these variables, cross-cultural

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<sup>9</sup> From general to specific information. First, a broad background of facts is given which leads to the main issue at the end of the presentation.

<sup>10</sup> From specific to general information. Most important information is presented at the beginning and then background information is added.

training cannot establish rules or methods for dealing with international business partners or colleagues. It can, however, help develop the learners' self-reflection and widen their view of other cultures. Increased awareness enables them to consider unexpected, perhaps disappointing reactions from members of other cultures not as impoliteness or personal affronts but as expression of different values and beliefs. Owing to his understanding and intercultural skills they should respond in a suitable and polite way for the benefit of the company they are employed by.

## **PART II ANALYSING FOUR BASIC MODAL VERBS**

### **4. Modal Auxiliary Verbs and Related Issues**

#### **4.1. Grammar in the ESP Classroom**

Lewis suggests three concepts of grammatical information needed for a comprehensible knowledge of English:

- facts  
that are non-generative and have to be learnt,
- patterns  
that are generative (i.e. other structures of the same type will follow the same pattern) and have to be understood, and
- primary semantic distinctions  
basing on the idea that “languages make certain basic distinctions”, that are “often dichotomies - they divide an area of meaning into two parts-” and “essentially semantic” (1986: 11).

In ESP, due to the high sense of purpose, grammar is taught according to usefulness, i.e. with regard to the students’ need for particular speech intentions or the frequency of structures in certain functional applications. Therefore, grammar points are generally presented by explaining single items orienting to the immediate practical use. This way of teaching grammar represents “a deductive approach in response to a felt need” (Rivers/Temperley 1978: 275) which often occurs when students need an expression for something they wish to say. The teacher presents the necessary new information; the students are offered a rule and then supposed to apply it. On the one hand, practical implementation of the given hints can be achieved quickly. On the other, the presentation of grammatical structures isolated from bigger relationships may result in over-simplification embedding half-accurate rules in the learners’ mind that have to be modified later.

It is therefore helpful if students learn to see single rules and grammatical concepts as a coherent whole from the beginning and not as a catalogue of exceptions. Lewis believes that e.g. contrasting structures with other structures and a wide range of examples reveals “similarities in things which are apparently different” (1986: 13).

An inductive approach, where language forms are practiced and the learners discover rules and generalizations on their own or with the help of the teacher, is considered appropriate for understanding the interactive nature of a language. This procedure, however, usually takes more time than the deductive approach, and adult students in intensive courses often have practical reasons for wishing to know as quickly as possible how language works. Therefore, the ESP teacher will normally stimulate a mixture of inductive and deductive activities according to the type of students, the degree of difficulty inherent in the problem, and time constraints.

#### **4.2. Politeness**

Major purposes of human communication are the creation (or maintenance) of social relationships and an efficient interaction with other people. One of them, politeness, aims at avoiding the restriction of the above principles. Politeness “is to do with the fact that the speaker tries to conform in certain ways to the listener’s expectations” (1986: 44). It can be represented by fixed rules and is often applied automatically among people of the same society, but it is also consciously used as a communication technique to influence the feeling and thus the responding behaviour of other people. Two main strategies are applied in order to create and support harmonious social interaction: sometimes people are polite by being respectful of others, and sometimes they are polite by being friendly and making the addressee feel like part of the same group.

Brown and Levinson, having studied the politeness phenomena in a number of languages, suggest that, although there may be differences between cultures, (e.g. in terms of reactions to compliments), the politeness principles are universals: they are used in every society to show respect and to avoid Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) (1987: 13-14). They explain the use of politeness with the necessity to preserve some wants that every interlocutor has. In order to characterize these wants, they introduce the notion of ‘face’ as “the public self-image that every member [of a society BW] wants to claim for himself” (1987: 61). In the following, considering their notions of ‘negative face’ (the basic claim to “freedom of action and freedom from imposition” (ibid.)) and ‘positive face’ (the positive self-image including the desire of being appreciated and approved of) as a basis (cf. ibid.), four basic types of politeness

strategies are specified that sum up human politeness behaviour. For example, if an employee saw a pen on his superior's desk and needed it, he could say:

- 1) *I need your pen.*
- 2) *Is it okay if I borrow your pen?*
- 3) *I'm sorry; could I use your pen for a moment?*
- 4) *I could use a pen right now.*

(1) represents the 'bald on-record' strategy which provides no effort to minimize threats to the addressee's face. (2) uses the 'positive politeness' strategy aiming at friendliness and expressing group reciprocity, while (3) pursues the 'negative politeness' strategy focussing on minimizing imposition. (4) exemplifies the 'off-record' strategy which moves the speaker from any imposition by e.g. just giving hints (cf. 1987: 68-71). The degree of formality or friendliness certainly depends on the degree of familiarity, respect, relative social roles in a hierarchy, and the intended impact that the language act might have on the communication partner.

Although Brown and Levinson's theories have often been criticised and reinterpreted, (Watts 1992; Werkhofer 1992; O'Driscoll 1996), as they consider 'face' as an abstract concept, positive and negative politeness can often be found as strategies to reduce or to increase the distance in business communication where "individuals within social groups need to achieve maximum benefits at minimum cost" (Watts 2003: 104).

#### **4.3. Concepts of Modality**

Huddleston and Pullum define that "[m]odality is centrally concerned with the speaker's attitude towards the factuality or actualisation of the situation expressed by the rest of the clause" (2002: 173), i.e. it expresses non-factuality. Reflecting the speaker's individual judgement of the likelihood that something is true, necessary, permitted etc., modality represents "the attitudinal relationship between the language user and what he says" (Dekeyser/Devrient/Tops/Geukens 1993: 84). Thus, *She often goes on business trips* can be regarded as unmodalised, because the speaker mentions her frequent business trips as a fact. However, in *She must go on a business trip*, modality is involved, as he gives his opinion about the necessity of her business trip.

Modality can be realised in various ways, e.g. by use of the imperative (1), the structure main verb + infinitive (2), a subjunctive form (3), an adverb (4), or a modal auxiliary verb (5).

- 1) *Let us meet tomorrow.*
- 2) *I wish to meet you tomorrow.*
- 3) *I wish we met tomorrow.*
- 4) *I will probably meet you tomorrow.*
- 5) *I might meet you tomorrow.*

Different concepts and meanings of modality can be identified. Modal logic is explicated by the two core concepts ‘necessity’ and ‘possibility’. Huddleston and Pullum state that they relate to the strength of the speaker’s commitment with ‘necessity’ involving strong and ‘possibility’ weak commitment (2002: 175). Bache postulates that “[t]here are two types of modal meaning: probability (comprising logical possibility and necessity, hypothetical meaning, beliefs and predictability) and desirability (comprising permission, obligation and volition)” (2000:142). He claims that “[t]he type of modality which concerns probability is termed ‘epistemic’ while that which concerns desirability is termed ‘deontic’” (ibid.). Huddleston and Pullum explain that “[p]rototypically, epistemic<sup>11</sup> modality concerns the speaker’s attitude to the factuality of past or present time situations, while deontic<sup>12</sup> modality concerns the speaker’s attitude to the actualisation of future situations.” (2002: 178).

Both necessity and possibility can be epistemic or deontic. The link between the concepts of possibility/necessity and epistemic/deontic modality is demonstrated by the following examples:

	<b>possibility</b>	<b>necessity</b>
<b>deontic</b>	1) <i>You may go now.</i>	2) <i>You must go now.</i>
<b>epistemic</b>	3) <i>You may be John.</i>	4) <i>You must be John.</i>

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Epistemic’ derives from the Greek for ‘knowledge’; it involves qualifications concerning the speaker’s knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Deontic’ derives from the Greek for ‘binding’, i.e. there is a matter of imposing obligation or prohibition, granting permission etc.

Expressing the speaker's attitude towards factuality, epistemic modality can be paraphrased as 'possible/necessary that', while deontic modality can be paraphrased as 'possible/necessary for', expressing the speaker's attitude towards actuality. In (1) and (2), it is possible to paraphrase the deontic statements by 'It is possible/necessary for you to go now' and epistemic possibility (3) by 'It is possible that you are John'. The paraphrase of (4), \*'It is necessary that you are John', does not exist in ordinary speech, but illustrates the modal concept in terms of a linguistic description (cf. Palmer 1990: 8).

Expressions with modal verbs can be either epistemic or deontic, but communicative and individual usages may produce ambiguity, as shown in the following examples:

	<b>possibility</b>	<b>necessity</b>
<b>ambiguous</b>	1) <i>He may sleep there.</i>	2) <i>He must be polite.</i>

Without the contextual reference, it is not possible to say if (1) expresses a supposition (epistemic) or permission (deontic) and if (2) can be considered as logical deduction (epistemic) or obligation (deontic).

Beside epistemic and deontic modality, Palmer suggests considering dynamic modality, which is concerned with ability and volition, as third kind of modality (cf. 1990: 36-37) and discusses two subkinds of dynamic modality: neutral (or circumstantial) and subject-oriented. Circumstantial modality refers to neutral possibility, while subject-oriented modality is concerned with physical ability of animates (or the inherent quality of inanimates) (cf. 1990: 83-85). Figure 43.1. illustrates the three types of modality and their assigned meanings. The first distinction is made between what is epistemic modality and what is not; the term 'non-epistemic' summarizes the types of modality and corresponding meanings which are not epistemic. As possibility, apart from the general concept, can denote epistemic and dynamic possibility, 'epistemic possibility' and 'neutral possibility' will be used to avoid confusion. These expressions are consistently used throughout the following chapters.

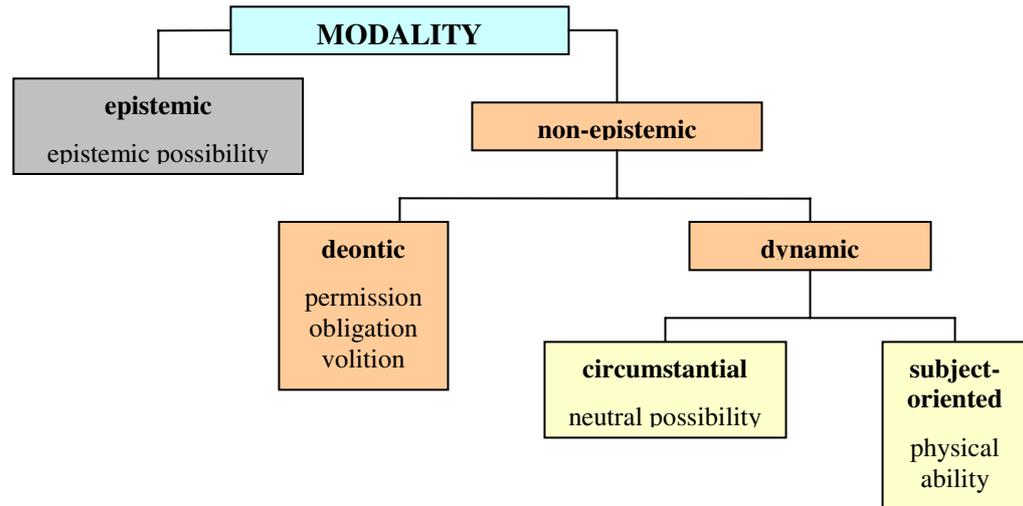


Figure 43.1. Types of modality and modal meanings

#### 4.4. Modal Auxiliary Verbs

##### 4.4.1. Structural Characteristics

In his preface to the first edition of *Modality and the English Modals*, Palmer claims that “[t]here is, perhaps, no area of English grammar that is both more important and more difficult than the system of the modals” (1990: x). He explains this statement indicating to the “vagueness and indeterminacy of the semantic system” (1990:3) and concludes that “as it is not easy to define precisely the semantic range, so it is not always clear precisely what is to be included in the formal system” (ibid.).

English modal verbs are often called ‘defective’ as they differ strikingly from lexical verbs in their syntactical behaviour. The following examples show the ‘NICE’ properties, an acronym applied by Huddleston (1976: 333), referring to four formal categories of modal and primary auxiliary verbs which are listed below.

##### **modal auxiliary verbs**

- 1) *He can't come.*
- 2) *Must he come?*
- 3) *He will come and so will she.*
- 4) *He máy come.*

##### **primary auxiliary verbs:**

- He isn't coming.*  
*Is he coming?*  
*He has come and so has she.*  
*He hás come.*

- (1) Negative form with *n't* or *not*
- (2) Inversion with the subject to form questions
- (3) 'Code' (using the bare auxiliary form is possible if the lexical verb is given by the preceding context)
- (4) Emphatic affirmation realised by heavy stress

Three further criteria distinguish the modal verbs from all other verbs, including the primary auxiliary verbs. They

- do not take an –s in the third person singular present tense, e.g. *\*He mays come*.
- have no non-finite forms, e.g. *\*maying, \*mayed*
- do not co-occur, e.g. *\*He may can come*. To express the idea of *may + can* within one verbal group, *can* has to be replaced by a periphrastic form: *He may be able to come* (cf. Palmer 1990: 4).

On the basis of the above structural characteristics that are always applicable, a list of nine core modals can be identified:

*can, may, will, shall, must, could, might, would, and should.*

Palmer observes that the “formal characteristics of the modals form a complex set” (1990: 5) and believes that “it is plausible to suggest that they have been retained in the language only because native speakers are aware of the modal as a set, and [...] that, in fact, the modals have a great deal in common semantically” (ibid.).

#### **4.4.2. Semantic Patterns**

Modal elements embody a different amount of explicitness: Adverbs articulate the meaning of a word quite clearly (e.g. *probably* expresses that something is likely to happen or to be true). Dictionaries will suggest, however, several different modal uses for *may*, and it is one of the biggest sources of difficulty for German learners that English modal verbs have different functions, e.g. *may* is sometimes used to express epistemic possibility (1) and sometimes to express permission (2):

- 1) *He may be French.*
- 2) *May I smoke here?*

Ideas of finding a basic or core meaning for the modal verbs have created a controversial discussion. Palmer comments that “[i]t is always possible to establish some such meaning, but the more varied the different meanings are, the more vague and uninformative is the core meaning” (1990: 15). According to Lewis, “there is no reason why a particular structural item should have a unique meaning” (1986: 103); but he considers that it would be “almost impossible for a listener to decode sufficiently rapidly to understand natural speech” (ibid.) if there were too many alternative meanings. He argues that a different communicative meaning in different contexts “does not necessarily imply that *may* does not have a fundamental meaning. Communicative meaning is a combination of the primary semantic characteristics and other factors” (ibid.). Finally, he suggests looking for a “single central meaning while at the same time accepting that this may involve recognising a number of marginal examples” (ibid.).

Corresponding to the distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic modality, several attempts have been made to find clear-cut semantic patterns expressing common modal functions. Chalker identifies two general divisions of communicative meanings of modals, “one concerned with possibility and necessity in terms of freedom to act (including ability, permission and duty), and the other concerned with the theoretical possibility of propositions being true or not true (including likelihood and certainty)” (1984: 117). Ungerer’s et al. assessment that modal verbs can be used firstly “to influence a person’s behaviour” (1984: 153) and secondly “to express a supposition” (ibid.) corresponds with Huddleston and Pullum’s definition of modality and represents the practical use of the linguistic notions of ‘actualisation’ and ‘factuality’ (cf. 2002: 173).

#### **4.4.3. Tense and Time Reference**

Modals are often divided into present modals and past modals, i.e. *could*, *should*, *would*, and *might* are often defined as the past forms of *can*, *shall*, *will*, and *may*. Quirk et al. contend that “[a]lthough historically, most of the modals can be paired into past and non-past forms[...], the ‘past tense’ forms are only in some respect usefully classified as such from the point of view of meaning” (1985: 220). Huddleston and Pullum identify *could*, *might*, *would*, and *should* as past forms, listing their three uses ‘past time meaning’, ‘backshift preterits’ and ‘modal remoteness’ (e.g. to indicate tentativeness).

They emphasize the frequent use of the latter and the restricted use of the first as further distinctive property in comparison with other verbs (cf. 2002: 196-198).

Chalker argues that *could*, *should*, *would* and *should* have to be classified as separate modals and not as past forms of *can*, *may*, *shall*, and *will*, as

(a) they are only in reported speech regularly used as pasts, and

(b) all forms have present and future reference.

She concedes, however, that their usage for the expression of hypothesis and for politeness equals that of the past tenses of lexical verbs (cf. 1984: 116).

Lewis suggests seeing modals as present forms at the point 'Now' (not in the sense of the English tense system) and argues that "each modal auxiliary is fundamentally grounded in the moment of speaking" (1986: 102), because it expresses the speaker's judgment or opinion at the moment of speaking. He provides the example *I can't come today, but I could come tomorrow* where, in contrast to the conventional view that *could* basically represents the past meaning of *can*, *could* refers to the future and expresses a weaker possibility than *can* (cf. *ibid.*).

Palmer explains why future reference seems to be more logical than past reference:

The future is the period of time that has the least factual status [...] By contrast, the past is the most factual; we can, and often do, know whether events took place. If, then, modality is concerned with events and propositions whose factual status is in doubt [...] it is not surprising that a modal verb may be inappropriate to refer to past events whose factual status is established, but perfectly appropriate to refer to future events whose factual status cannot be established. (1990: 195)

Instead of dividing modals into modals of present and modals of past, he introduces the idea of remoteness and suggests considering the past reference of *could* etc. as remoteness in time and with their conditional function as remoteness in reality (1990: 13).

#### **4.4.4. Negation**

The main verb statement can be seen as the clear reference for negation in sentences with main verbs. In sentences with modal auxiliary verbs, however, there are two propositions: that of the modal verb and that of the main verb.

The meaning of each sentence containing a modal verb can [...] be broken down into the modal statement itself (the statement of possibility, necessity, etc.) and the statement on which the modal statement comments [...]. Sometimes the insertion of *not* (or *n't*) after the modal auxiliary negates the modal statement [...]. In other cases, the main verb statement is negated. (Leech 2004: 93)

Coates observes that “[i]n nearly all cases where a modal is negated, we find that negation affects the modal predication if the modal has root [non-epistemic] meaning, and affects the main predication if the modal has epistemic meaning” (1983: 238). She acknowledges the exception of *must* where *must not* affects the main predication and not the modality, because it expresses deontic modality. Therefore epistemic *must* cannot be negated with *must not*, and to avoid ambiguity, *cannot/can't* fill the gap in the paradigm (cf. *ibid.*).

The reasons for the reference of negatives to either (1) the modal statement or (2) the proposition can be found in the analysis of the paraphrases:

1) Non-epistemic *I cannot/may not come* can be paraphrased by ‘it is not possible for me to come’ expressing the speaker’s certainty concerning the preconditions. Thus it refers to the modal statement.

2) Epistemic *I may not come tomorrow* means ‘it is possible that I will not come’. This statement is based on a rough assessment of possibilities; its hedging quality removes the speaker from the modal statement and leaves it unaffected (cf. 1983: 134). If this hedging function is of prime importance for main predication negation, it can be assumed that epistemic *cannot/can't* (‘it is not possible that you will come’) represent an exception not only because it follows the paradigm of deontic *must not*, but due to the certainty implied in the statement.

## 5. Semantic patterns of *Can, Could, May, and Might*

### 5.1. *Can*

#### 5.1.1. Core Meaning: Non-epistemic

Coates observes that *can* seems to be far more common in spoken than in written language and that it is one of the most frequently spoken forms among the modal verbs (1983: 24).

Close defines the core meaning of *can* as “what the speaker assumes to be freedom to act” (1975: 269) and postulates that this ‘freedom to act’ depends on (1) own ability, (2) positive permission, (3) what circumstances allow, or (4) lack of opposition (cf. Close 2002: 105). Consequently, there are different ways of expressing *I can* under the headings (1) ‘ability’, (2) ‘permission’, and (3) ‘neutral possibility’:

- 1) ‘I have the ability to’      *I can speak English and Chinese.*
- 2) ‘I am allowed to’      *I can smoke in the canteen, because there is a smoking area (Close 1975, p. 269).*
- 3a) ‘I have the chance to’      *During my vacation in California, I can practice my English again.*
- 3b) ‘I am free to’      *I can meet you tomorrow in my office.*

#### 5.1.2. Ability

The following subgroups denoting different kinds of ability can be specified:

(a) physical ability, (b) verbs of sensation, and (c) general ability.

a) Physical ability is further dividable into (1) natural and (2) learned ability, both of which can be paraphrased by ‘be able to’. For a better understanding of the difference, alternatives are offered in brackets.

- 1) *I can run 1,000 metres in 3 minutes.* (‘I am capable of’)

2) Typical verbs combining with *can* to express learned ability are verbs indicating skills, e.g. *drive*, *play*, and *speak*:

*I can play the piano.* ('I know how to')

In this sense, *can* + verb can be used in the same way as the simple present tense (cf. Alexander 1988: 213):

*Can you play the piano?* ('Do you play the piano?')

b) As *can* + verbs of sensation refer to the actual achievement of an activity at the moment of speaking, Coates explains that this usage substitutes for the unacceptable progressive form with verbs of sensation:

*I can see my colleague over there.* (\*'I am seeing my colleague over there.')

 (cf. 1983: 91).

The same use is common with various verbs of cognition; here, however, it is similar to that of learned ability with the simple present tense meaning:

*I can't believe it.* ('I don't believe it.')

Coates justifies the inclusion of these examples in the 'ability' group, as "*seeing, hearing, understanding* etc. are all inherent properties of human beings" (ibid.).

c) General ability is concerned with "the typical behaviour which arises from the nature or character of a person or thing" (Ungerer et al. 1984: 154). Leech suggests the paraphrase 'sometimes' (1987: 73):

*The weather can be bad at this time of the year.* ('The weather is sometimes bad at this time of the year.')

Alexander indicates that the effect is generally negative when this function is used for people, even if the adjective is favourable: *She can look quite attractive* implies that she not always does (1988: 215).

As the notion of ability is used for inherent characteristics of animates or inanimates existing now, it is not used for a future ability which does not exist yet. In this case, the periphrastic *be able to* is applied:

*\*We can/can't get there much more quickly when the tunnel is built.*

*We will be able/won't be able to get there much more quickly when the tunnel is built.*

(cf. Chalker 1990: 80)

### 5.1.3. Permission

We can use *can* to (a) ask for or (b) give permission, or to (c) express negative permission.

a) Asking for permission, the speaker enquires the freedom to do something for himself (or sometimes for a third person) with (i) requests for permission, or for the addressee with (ii) offers.

i) Requests for permission express clearly the sense of permission as shown by the paraphrase:

*Can I borrow your pen for a moment?* ('Am I allowed to borrow it?')

The negative *Can't I ...* gives the impression of a suggestion and is therefore often used instead of *can* to urge an affirmative answer:

*Can't I stay out till midnight?* ('Wouldn't it be best to say midnight?')

ii) In addition to an underlying sense of permission, offers like

*Can I help you?* ('Am I allowed to help you?')

express willingness ('I am willing to help you.').

b) As permission is commonly given to or withheld from a person addressed, this use is normally concerned with second persons. Coates states that permission-granting utterances with *can* do not commit the speaker to the desirability of the action concerned. "Moreover, they are strictly neutral in terms of the addressee's wishes, though in practice such utterances have the implication that the addressee does want to do the action concerned." (1983: 87) She considers the implication of willingness e.g. in

commands as a pragmatic extension and argues that “[o]ne of the preconditions of any directive is that the addressee should be able [...] and willing” (1983: 98).

i) Commands are a typical field of applications, where the ‘permission’ sense is used to avoid an imperative:

*You can do that alone.* (‘you are allowed and hopefully willing to’)

*You can say that again!* Looks like a command but denotes agreement underlying ‘You have my permission to utter this opinion, as I agree with you’.

ii) offers

*You can drive my car today.* (‘you have my permission’/‘I’m willing to let you drive it’)

c) To express (i) prohibition or (ii) a refusal of permission, the negatives *cannot/can’t* are used:

i) *We cannot/can’t smoke on the premises.* (‘we are not permitted to’)

ii) - *Can I drive your car today?* (‘am I permitted to?’)

- *I’m afraid, you can’t (\*cannot).*

*You can forget about it* implies a sarcastic refusal of permission. Moreover, it can be considered as a command, avoiding the imperative *Forget about it*. In this example, negation is represented by *forget about* meaning ‘not remember’.

#### **5.1.4. Neutral Possibility**

Palmer observes that sentences with neutral dynamic *can* often use (1) impersonal *you* or (2) the passive which support their neutral sense. Moreover, “[t]here is a very common association of *can* [3] with adjectives and adverbs in comparative or superlative forms or [4] modified by e.g. *how*”:

1) *I know the place. You can get all sorts of things there.*

2) *Well, I’ll see what can be done and give you a ring.*

3) *You can get there much more quickly by plane.*

4) *It’s really a matter of how quickly we can get there.* (cf. 1990: 84)

Chalker states that, although *can* cannot express future ability which does not exist yet at the time of the utterance, “[w]here there is a sense of opportunity, rather than ability, *can* is possible for future reference” (1984: 118). She explains that, “*can* is used to make suggestions about future actions when there is nothing in the present that stops them” (1990: 81): *We can meet tomorrow at 11, if you like.*

The following speech acts can be concerned with neutral possibility:

i) requests

*Can you show me the way?* (‘Is it possible for you to help me?’ refers to the addressee’s ability to tell the way, but also to his willingness)

ii) invitations

*Can you come to dinner on Saturday?* (‘Is it possible for you to come?’)

iii) suggestions (commonly with inclusive *we*)

*We can meet after Christmas.* (‘It is possible to meet then.’)

iv) offers

*I can call back tomorrow.* (‘It is possible for me to call back.’)

v) advice

*You can fly via Munich.* (‘It is possible (for you) to fly via Munich.’)

vi) commands

*Can you keep quiet for a moment, please?* represents a ‘softening’ use in order to avoid the bare imperative *Keep quiet, please*; with falling intonation, it is not a question despite the subject-auxiliary inversion and the question mark.

vii) reproach

*Can’t you remember anything I tell you?* (cf. Chalker 1990: 80) (‘is it not possible for you to keep things in mind?’) This application might even have a sarcastic undertone referring to the addressee’s limited capability to keep things in mind (physical ability).

viii) resignation

*It can’t be helped.* (cf. Chalker 1984: 117) (‘it is impossible to change the situation’)

### 5.1.5. Epistemic Possibility

Chalker postulates that “[w]hen we are guessing about something that may possibly be true now but we do not know, *can* is mainly non-assertive, so we use it in questions and with negatives” (1990: 81). Appropriate paraphrases are ‘is it (not) possible that?’ for interrogatives and ‘it is impossible that’ for negatives.

*\*He can be 70.* (appropriate equivalent: *He could/may be 70.*)

*Can he be 70?* (‘Is it possible that he is 70?’)

*He can’t be 70.* (‘It is impossible that he is 70.’) (cf. *ibid.*).

Coates (cf. 1983: 19) and Ungerer et al. (cf. 1984: 155) declare that *can* in its positive form is never epistemic. Chalker thinks that with its epistemic meaning denoting theoretical possibility, *can* is commonly employed in questions, and that other modal verbs have to substitute for the affirmative meaning of *can*:

- *Can that be Tom on the phone?*

- *\*Yes, it can be.* (appropriate equivalent: *it could/may/might be.*)

She concedes that *can* can be used in assertive statements, but only with semi-negatives (e.g. *hardly*): *It can hardly be Bill, - he has only just left* (cf. 1984: 118). Close offers *John can be very annoying, I agree* as an example for epistemic modality, and paraphrases “it is possible that he is” (1975: 275). However, as the sentence describes a habitual aspect, ‘John is sometimes very annoying’ can be suggested as a more appropriate paraphrase, and thus the example seems to carry the ‘general ability’ meaning, belonging to physical ability. But *This can be the answer, I think* (cf. Close 2002: 106) (‘perhaps this is the answer’/‘it is possible that this is the answer’) might be considered to be an acceptable example of epistemic meaning of *can* in affirmative statements.

Epistemic *cannot/can’t* denote logical deduction of impossibility and are used for conveying disbelief or reproach: *You can’t really mean that!* (cf. Chalker 1984: 118) (‘It is not possible that you mean that.’).

*Cannot/can't* represent the missing negatives for epistemic *must*, as *must not* is used only for non-epistemic meaning denoting prohibition. It can be assumed that they are free to supply the missing epistemic *must not*, as they are hardly needed as the counterpart of *can*.

### 5.1.6. Ambiguity and Dissociation

*I can drive the company car* can express (1) ability ('I can drive the car, because I am able to operate the manual transmission'), (2) permission ('I can drive the car, because I have a driver's licence'), or (3) neutral possibility ('I can drive the car, because my boss does not need it today').

Without more detailed information, it is not always possible to decide e.g. whether the speaker intends the inherent properties to be more or less important than the external factors, and if restriction or permission is involved. Coates defines neutral possibility as "the unmarked meaning with respect to the two gradients of restriction and inherency" (1983: 93) and explains that *can* expressing permission is related to *can* expressing neutral possibility "through a gradient of restriction [...] At one end of the gradient [...] a paraphrase with *allow* or *permit* is more acceptable, while at the other end [...] a paraphrase with *possible* is more acceptable" (1983: 88). She argues that without a clear indication either of restriction (referring to permission) or inherent properties (referring to physical ability) of the subject, neutral possibility is the meaning which applies, and suggests the following triad of paraphrases to distinguish between the three non-epistemic meanings of *can*:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 1) physical ability    | 'inherent properties allow me to do it'                    |
| 2) permission          | 'human authority/rules and regulations allow me to do it'  |
| 3) neutral possibility | 'external circumstances allow me to do it' (cf. 1983: 93). |

But there is also an overlap of non-epistemic and epistemic meaning. Chalker observes that this is sometimes the case with verbs of action:

*They can't catch the train* can indicate physical inability, that permission has been refused, or the speaker's meaning on the basis of logical deduction. She states that with the progressive tense, almost certainly logical deduction is referred to:

*They can't be catching the 7:30 train.* ('It is not possible that they will be able to catch train' – because they are having dinner with me) (cf. 1984: 118): the speaker has knowledge of arrangements that have already been made and concludes correspondingly.

The analysis of single sentences with *can* will often result in multiple possibilities of interpretation. In practice, however, the meaning normally becomes clear by the situational context or the conventionalised use of speech acts.

## **5.2. *Could***

### **5.2.1. Core Meaning: Remote Non-epistemic**

Textbooks often indicate that the main function of *could* is the representation of *can* in the past. But “[t]he past forms are typically used not to instruct the hearer to identify a past-time situation but to express a weaker degree of modality, or a different kind of modality, than the present forms” (Bache 2000: 129). With regard to these non-past meanings, Chalker defines “[l]ike *can*, *could* is concerned with what is possible and what one is free to do, either in practice or theory” (1990: 99). Consequently, the main function of *could* seems to be a remote representation of non-epistemic *can*.

Quirk et al. assign the three main meanings of *can* ‘ability’, ‘neutral possibility’, and ‘permission’ also to *could* (cf. 1985: 221-2); they emphasize, however, the specialized use of *could* “in which the past tense form simply adds a note of tentativeness or politeness” (1985: 233). Lewis suggests that *could* conveys more ‘remoteness’ than *can* (1986: 112). Therefore, the use of *could* seems to be preferred in contexts with more remoteness in social relationship, where more politeness is appropriate.

### **5.2.2. Ability**

*Could* expressing ability adopts either

- \*) a hypothetical meaning, or describes
- \*\*\*) ability in the past.

#### a) physical ability

1\*) *I could run 1,000 metres in 3 minutes* implies an imaginary situation in an if-clause leading to the imaginary result in the main clause with *could*, e.g.: *if I was fitter*.

1\*\*) *I could run 1,000 metres in 3 minutes* relates to a general ability in the past and is often accompanied by a temporal adverb/adverbial clause of time introduced by *when*, e.g. *when I was 22*.

Physical ability in the past can also refer to the acquisition of a skill after effort: *I tried again and found I could run 1,000 metres in 3 minutes*. (cf. Alexander 1988: 213)

2\*) *I could play the piano (if I had taken piano lessons)*.

2\*\*) *I could play the piano (when I was a child)*.

#### b) *could* + verbs of sensation

\*) *I could see my colleague over there (if I wore my glasses)*. In this sense, however, there is an overlap with physical ability ('I would be capable of').

\*\*) *Yesterday, I could see my colleague over there on my way home*.

As *could* + verbs of sensation refer to the actual achievement of an activity at a certain point of time in the past, the structure can be paraphrased by the simple past tense ('Yesterday, I saw my colleague over there on my way home.').

c) Like *can*, *could* with general ability is concerned with the typical behaviour of a thing or person and has the same effect in the past:

\*\*) *The weather could be bad at this time of the year*. ('The weather was sometimes bad at this time of the year.')

### 5.2.3. Permission

Chalker (cf. 1984: 123) agrees with Quirk et al. (cf. 1985: 233) that *could* with permission is a tentative and therefore sometimes more polite alternative to *can*. As *could* suggests that the speaker is less certain about what he is saying than when using *can*, it is a more polite way especially of asking for permission and giving orders (cf. Chalker 1990: 99). Bache explains that the use of the past forms in requests makes them less direct – and therefore easier to turn down than if the present had been used (cf.

2000: 143). Leech argues that “[t]he strict force of the hypothetical form here is that the speaker does not expect his/her plea to be granted, the negative inference being ‘... but I don’t suppose I can [...]’” (2004: 129).

a) asking for permission

i) Taking into consideration Leech’s above explanation, the request *Could I have your pen for a moment?* can be considered to be more polite than *Can I have your pen for a moment?*, as it implies ‘I do not suppose you allow me to have it’, which enables the addressee to reject the request without losing his face.

*Couldn’t* in requests for permission is the more polite variant of *can’t* and suggests a positive answer:

*Couldn’t I stay out till midnight?* (cf. Alexander 1988: 216)

ii) Offers like *Could I help you?* create more distance by implying a hedging condition, e.g. ‘if you were so kind as to permit me to’ and are therefore more polite than offers with *can*.

b) giving permission

As *could* suggests the speaker’s uncertainty about what he is saying, *can* is commonly used in permission-granting utterances and speech acts expressing prohibition. Chalker concedes that in giving permission, it is normally more appropriate to use *can*, because *Yes, of course, you can* sounds direct, whereas *Yes, you could* suggests that the speaker does not want to say *yes* (cf. 1990: 99). Leech postulates that “[s]ignificantly, the typical answer to a hypothetical request entails using the corresponding non-hypothetical auxiliary” (1987: 127):

- *Could I leave earlier today?*

- *Yes, you can.* (cf. *ibid.*)

\**You could drive my car today* implies an unreal condition e.g. *if it was not in the garage* and thus expresses the impossibility of permission.

*Could* may ‘soften’ commands; they can even be considered as polite suggestions if *could* is used instead of *can*:

*You could do that alone.*

c) negative permission

\**We couldn’t smoke on the premises* either refers to prohibition in the past or negates the prohibition by implying the inexistence of a condition resulting in the actual prohibition.

#### 5.2.4. Neutral Possibility

On the basis of corpus-based research, Coates emphasizes the primary use of *could* as a hypothetical form expressing neutral possibility (cf. 1983: 107). The unmarked non-epistemic *can* in a variety of speech acts and the potential function of *could* to serve as the more polite alternative might offer one plausible explanation. *Could* denotes less certainty than *can* and suggests a lower degree of possibility. It can be assumed, however, that practically, *could* in speech intentions replacing *can* signals a higher degree of politeness, due to its tentativeness, or to the implied condition ‘if you like’ expressing politeness:

- |      |             |   |
|------|-------------|---|
| i)   | requests    | <i>Could you show me the way?</i>                 |
| ii)  | invitations | <i>Could you come to dinner on Saturday?</i>      |
| iii) | suggestions | <i>We could meet after Christmas.</i>             |
| iv)  | offers      | <i>I could call back tomorrow.</i>                |
| v)   | advice      | <i>You could fly via Munich.</i>                  |
| vi)  | commands    | <i>Could you keep quiet for a moment, please?</i> |
| vii) | reproach    | <i>Couldn’t you remember anything I tell you?</i> |

viii) *Couldn’t* with its implication of uncertainty cannot express resignation, as this feeling follows the real or assumed impossibility of changing a situation; impossibility, however, expresses 100% certainty and therefore excludes any uncertainty.

Further uses of *could* in speech intentions with neutral possibility are:

ix) surprise/anger *I could kill you!*

(‘circumstances are possible/imaginable’)

x) promises (with *could* + never) *I could never leave you.*

(‘I will never leave you, because it is not possible for me’)

### 5.2.5. Epistemic Possibility

Coates defines that epistemic *could* “conveys the speaker’s lack of confidence in the proposition expressed and can be paraphrased by ‘it is possible that’/‘perhaps’” (1983: 165). The controversially discussed (mainly not accepted) use of affirmative *can* with epistemic meaning raises the question about the position of epistemic *could*, the remote form of *can* with non-epistemic and past usage. Coates agrees with Leech (cf. 2004: 130) that *could* is the tentative substitute for *may*, and not for *can*. She suggests that,

while *might* is becoming the main exponent of epistemic possibility in everyday spoken language, and no longer expresses a more tentative meaning but is in most contexts synonymous with *may*, *could* is filling the gap left by *might* and is the new exponent of tentative epistemic possibility (1983: 167).

Chalker distinguishes between (1) hypothesis expressing an unreal fact, and (2) theoretical possibility:

1) *What marvellous weather for March – it could be May.* (‘The weather looks like May, even though it is March’)

2) *The sea could be rough.* (cf. 1984: 123) (‘it is possible that’)

In this case, *could* is not replaceable by *can*. *The sea can be rough* means ‘The sea is sometimes rough’, a meaning classified as general ability (cf. chapter 5.1.2.). The sentence with *could* can also express general ability with past reference (‘The weather was sometimes rough’). With future reference, however, this statement conveys epistemic meaning (‘It is possible that the weather will be rough tomorrow’).

### 5.2.6. Past Usage

*Could* can represent the past of *can* expressing remoteness in time; it has though a limited usage with this function. For example, Ungerer et al. emphasize that “[c]an, *can’t* and *couldn’t* can be applied to denote ability combined with achievement (as opposed to a mere general ability): a person succeeds, does not succeed or did not succeed in carrying out a particular action” (1984: 154). They emphasize, however, that *could* referring to the past cannot be applied in this sense and must be replaced by a substitute such as *be able to*, *succeed in*, or *manage to* (cf. *ibid.*).

Coates assumes that it is usually redundant to talk of the possibility after the fulfilment of the event (cf. 1983: 128). “In contrast, however, the negative form *couldn’t* will always imply that the event did not take place, and *be able to* may be used in past tense positive forms with the implication of actuality. Compare:

*\*I ran fast, and could catch the bus.*

*I ran fast, and was able to catch the bus.*

*I ran fast, but couldn’t catch the bus.*“ (Palmer 1990: 93)

The first sentence is not acceptable, as the actualisation of the event would have been expressed by e.g. *I ran fast and caught the bus* or *I ran fast and was able to catch the bus*, like in the second sentence. The third sentence is acceptable as well, because it is possible to express the non-fulfilment of a possibility.

Coates demonstrates that “the negation of an event results in a negative state, and the negation of a state also results in a negative state” (1983: 129):

	<u>paraphrase</u>	<u>result</u>
<i>He was unable to get back.</i>	‘he didn’t succeed in’	he didn’t get back
<i>He couldn’t get back.</i>	‘it was not possible for him’	he didn’t get back (cf. <i>ibid.</i> ).

Thus, it can be concluded that in the past, the different meanings of *could* and negative *be able to* are neutralised, i.e.

*could* ≠ *was/were able to*, but *couldn’t* = *wasn’t/weren’t able to*.

### 5.3. *May*

#### 5.3.1. Core Meaning: Epistemic

Close specifies that *may* in its primary use refers to permission, and in its secondary use to epistemic possibility (cf. 1975: 274). Differently, starting from the results of a corpus-based approach of both spoken and written language, Coates postulates that “*may* is most commonly used to express epistemic possibility, that is, to express the speaker’s lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition; it can be paraphrased by ‘it is possible that ...’/‘perhaps’” (1983: 103). She complains that “too often in the past *may* has been linked with *can*, as if the two were virtually synonymous” (1983: 24). But as *can* regularly expresses epistemic possibility only in the negative form *can’t*, where it supplies the missing epistemic form *must not*, in the majority of cases, *can* cannot be substituted for *may* (cf. *ibid.*). Like Lewis (cf. 1986: 113), Leech agrees with Coates (cf. 1983: 131-133) on the common epistemic use of *may*, indicating that, although its use is declining in present-day English in general, the epistemic meaning of *may* “is still flourishing” (2004: 76).

#### 5.3.2. Epistemic Possibility

Close, who accepts the use of *can* in epistemic affirmative statements, tries to explain the difference between epistemic *can* and *may*. He alleges that *This can be the answer* refers to one possibility that is open, whereas *This may be the answer* suggests “that there are two or more possibilities, both or all of which are worth considering” (2002: 108). Coates however, specifies that epistemic *may* is often used as a hedge with which “the speaker avoids committing himself to the truth of the proposition” (1983: 134). Chalker emphasizes the concessive function of *may*, exemplifying the meaning of *I may be wrong* (‘Although I don’t think I am, I admit that it is possible.’), which ‘softens’ the speaker’s distance from the content of the proposition for reasons of politeness (cf. 1990: 235).

Epistemic *may* can collocate with the adverbs *possibly* and *perhaps*, and a number of hedging phrases, such as *I suppose*, *I’m not sure*, and *it seems to me*. Coates calls these items ‘harmonic combinations’, as they do not essentially differ in the degree of

likelihood, compared to *may*. She points to the occurrence of *probably*, representing a higher degree of likelihood and, therefore, non-harmonic in this sense, and assesses that, in the actual speech situation, the higher degree of *probably* is accepted as the one intended by the speaker (cf. 1983: 138).

Whereas epistemic *cannot/can't* indicates complete impossibility, epistemic *may not* means 'possibly yes'/'possibly not', an idea represented by "the collocation *may or may not* where the 50/50 assessment of possibilities is made explicit" (Coates 1983: 134):

*They may or may not come to help me.* ('It is possible that they come, but perhaps they don't.')

(Note *\*They can or cannot come to help me.* First, the use of epistemic *can* is questionable; second, epistemic *can't* is a 100% assessment of impossibility.)

Whereas Chalker paraphrases *may well* by 'probably' (*You may well be right*: 'You are probably right.')

(cf. 1990: 236), Coates suggests 'it is possible that'/'perhaps' (cf. 1983: 133). Assuming that the speaker wants to "give the impression that he is not qualifying his commitment to the factuality of his utterance" (1983: 135), she indicates to the quasi-objective sense of epistemic *may*.

### 5.3.3. Permission

Lewis states a relatively rare use of requests for permission in contemporary English and a still rarer use of granting permission (cf. 1986: 113). According to Leech, this is due to the more popular form *can* which is commonly used. He argues that *may* expressing permission is

traditionally considered more polite and 'correct' than *can*, but it is now increasingly restricted to formal contexts [...] A guidebook might say *Visitors may ascend the tower for £2*, but *can* would be more natural in speech: *You can go up the tower for £2* (2004: 76-77).

Close suggests that *may* can replace *can* to express permission where it sounds "more hesitant than *can* and, to some people, more polite" (2002: 108). He states that "in *may* vs. *can*, *can* might be considered as an unmarked form, frequently used in everyday conversation, while *may* is often a marked form deliberately used to stress the fact that permission is being sought and granted" (ibid.), i.e. authority has been involved.

Leech indicates to the different position of authority in statements and questions. He observes that *may* in statements often indicates the speaker's authority (*You may + verb*), whereas in questions, the role is reversed, and typically the authority figure is the hearer (*May I + verb?*). "In other words, when we ask questions, we anticipate the attitude of the person being asked, and use the form appropriate for the reply." (1987: 89)

- *May I ask you a few questions?* ('Do you permit me to ask?')

– *Yes, you may.*" ('Yes, I do')

The following examples demonstrate the practical applications of *may* in (a) enquiries for permission, (b) permission-granting and prohibition, and (c) polite formulas:

a) Asking for permission with *may*, the speaker alleges the addressee's authority to give or refuse permission. Creating a social distance where he is inferior, he demonstrates respect and a higher degree of politeness than with *can*, where the question of authority is left open.

i) requests for permission

*May I borrow your pen for a moment?* ('Do you permit me to borrow it?')

(cf. chapter 5.1.3. *Can I ...?* ('Am I allowed to?'))

Suggestive questions with the negative form *May I not ...?* are considered old-fashioned, and therefore *can't* and *couldn't* are commonly used (cf. Alexander 1988: 216).

ii) offers

*May I give you some advice?* ('Do you permit me to advise you?')

b) Permission with *may* is usually given or withheld to represent the speaker's or writer's authority. Ungerer et al. specify that authority and formal style are represented in official notices, for example in *Visitors may not smoke in the hall* (cf. 1984: 156). Chalker reports that *may (not)* is also used in spoken language in this sense, if it is connected with permission that can be given or refused by the speaker, as in *Ladies and Gentlemen, you may (not) smoke*. But she suggests using the more appropriate *can* if the rule is made by somebody else, in other words, if the speaker is not involved in the

permission-granting process and therefore the utterance is similar to a general statement: *You can smoke in some cinemas, but in many theatres you can't.* (cf. 1990: 235)

c) *May* is used in polite formulas to extend (i) comments or (ii) requests for permission:

i) *Your garden looks lovely, if I may say so.* (cf. Sammon 2002: 104)

ii) *If I may, I'd ask you some questions.*

The conditional clause, where the main verb is ellipped, implies the unreal condition 'in case you permitted me to' and asks very politely for permission to do what is suggested in the main clause.

#### **5.3.4. Neutral Possibility**

Palmer's heading "Dynamic may?" (1990: 109) raises the issue, if neutral possibility with *may* is distinguishable from other meanings of *may* at all. He demonstrates that *may* with neutral possibility can easily be understood either in a 'permission' or an epistemic sense. Moreover, he claims that *can* can substitute for *may* with very little change of meaning (cf. 1990: 110). In order to identify the differences of meaning between *can* and *may*, Leech introduces the subgroups 'factual possibility' and 'theoretical possibility' and contrasts the examples *This illness can be fatal* and *This illness may be fatal*. He explains that "[c]an be fatal merely postulates a theoretical possibility; *may be fatal* envisages the event actually happening" (2004: 82-83) and concludes that *can* in this sense is associated with general statements, whereas *may* could be understood as a warning (cf. *ibid.*).

Coates assumes that the frequent co-occurrence of *may* and passive voice in this sense confirms the formality of *may* and emphasizes that 'neutral possibility' *may* is never found with negation, as non-epistemic *may not* is exclusively used for negative permission (cf. 1983: 142).

Speech intentions with *may* concerned with permission can be assumed to be more polite than with *can*. With neutral possibility, however, they might transmit signals of inappropriate uncertainty or imply an unintended 'permission' meaning. As

interrogative *may* is restricted to first person subjects (cf. 1983: 140), it cannot be used for speech intentions addressing people.

i) requests

*\*May you show me the way?*

ii) invitations

*\*May you come to dinner on Saturday?*

iii) suggestions

*We may meet after Christmas.* ('it is possible, but not really convenient for me')  
(very hesitant suggestion)

iv) offers

*?I may call back tomorrow.* ('perhaps I'll call, perhaps not')

Although grammatically correct, it represents rather a supposition (epistemic meaning) than an offer.

v) advice

*You may fly via Munich.* ('it is perhaps possible for you')

(acceptable for advice, although it can be misunderstood as 'I permit you to', or 'it is not sure yet, but possible that you'll fly' in the epistemic sense)

vi) commands

*\*May you keep quiet for a moment, please?*

(*You may keep quiet for a moment* ('I permit you to stop talking') could be considered as a command, but contrasting the 'permission' sense and the 'obligation' function of commands, it denotes sarcasm and is therefore not appropriate for polite communication.)

vii) reproach

*\*May you not remember anything I tell you?*

According to Chalker, *may as well* is used for rather unenthusiastic suggestions meaning 'there is no point in not doing it':

*We may as well pay now.* (cf. 1990: 236) ('We will have to do it anyway')

### 5.3.5. Quasi-subjunctive

Leech enumerates three uses of *may* “which appear as alternatives to old-fashioned subjunctive forms” (2004: 77): (a) exclamatory wishes, (b) concessive subordinate clauses, and (c) dependent clauses of purpose (cf. 2004: 77-78).

a) Coates comments that *may* expressing (i) benediction or (ii) malediction is “confined to written or stylised spoken language” (1983: 132). Leech indicates to the inversion of subject and auxiliary verb, and to the non-existence of interrogative, negative, and past tense forms.

i) *May God grant you happiness!*

ii) *May he never set foot in this house again!* (cf. 2004: 77)

b) He mentions another rare use of *may* in concessive subordinate clauses starting with *whatever, however* etc., and notes its similarity to the use of epistemic *may*:

*Our task is to deal with the customer’s complaints, however unreasonable they may be.*

(The speaker does not commit himself to the opinion, that there are any unreasonable complaints. Note the difference with *however unreasonable they are*, suggesting that there are some unreasonable complaints.) (cf. 2004: 77-78). Moreover, Ungerer et al. present examples of *may* in clauses of concession where it takes up previous verbs in the present subjunctive form:

*Come what may.* (‘whatever happens’)

*Be that as it may.* (‘even if this is so’) (cf. 1984: 145).

c) *May* + infinitive in subordinate clauses of purpose introduced by *(so) that* or *in order that* occur as an alternative to the present subjunctive:

*We desperately need money so that each of the children in our care may be/be given a start in life.* (cf. *ibid.*)

### 5.3.6. Ambiguity and Dissociation

Coates proposes the paraphrase ‘circumstances allow x’ for *may* with neutral possibility, underlining the semantic link and potential overlap between permission and neutral possibility (cf. 1983: 141). She explains that in contexts identifying some form of authority, or involving rules and regulations, *may* is understood in terms of permission. When, however the constraining factors are not identified with human authority but with external circumstances, *may* is understood in terms of possibility (cf. 1983: 142-143). Ambiguity can certainly not completely be excluded, but comparing the speech acts in chapters 5.3.3. and 5.3.4., it can be stated that overlap can only be expected with permission-granting speech intentions and suggestive utterances with neutral possibility (e.g. advice).

There are important grammatical differences between the ‘permission’ function and the epistemic meaning of *may*: (1) interrogatives are only used for the ‘permission’ sense, and (2) the two negatives are distinctive concerning a different amount of certainty.

1) Ungerer et al. declare that in epistemic questions, “one has to use *might*, *could*, or *can*” (1984: 156):

*\*May Bob know the answer?*

*Might/could/can Bob know the answer?*<sup>13</sup>

2) Epistemic *may not* leaves the addressee in uncertainty, whereas *may not* with permission expresses 100% certainty denoting prohibition:

*The book I want may not be in the library.* (‘but perhaps it is’)

*These books may not be removed from the library.* (‘it is not allowed’) (cf. Chalker 1990: 235).

Leech notes that impersonal phrases such as *it may be noted*, or *we may now consider*, often used in academic writing, seem to be examples of the merged meaning of permission and epistemic possibility. He considers them to be conventionalised expressions used for focussing the reader’s attention (1987: 76).

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<sup>13</sup> Chalker observes that typically indirect questions are used to enquire about a third person’s possibilities: *Do you think Bob knows the answer? Is Bob likely to know the answer?* (cf. 1990: 235).

## 5.4. *Might*

### 5.4.1. Core Meaning: Epistemic

Coates states that “*might*, like *may*, is primarily used to express epistemic possibility” (1983: 146), assuming that *might* is even superseding *may* as the most common expression of epistemic modality (cf. 1983: 147). Quirk et al. admit that *might* “is often preferred to *may* as a modal of epistemic modality” (1985: 223).

### 5.4.2. Epistemic Possibility

Quirk et al. state that *might* is used as a “somewhat more tentative alternative to *may*” (ibid.). Some more linguists (Ungerer et al. 1984; Palmer 1990; Sammon 2002) argue that *might* suggests a lesser degree of possibility than *may*. On the scale of likelihood from 100 to 0 per cent certainty, Brieger and Sweeney indicate a stronger degree of possibility for *may* (50%); compared to *might* (45%) (cf. 1994: 198). Chalker expresses the weaker certainty with *might* by offering the paraphrase ‘it is possible (but not specially likely) that’: *It might rain tomorrow. (but I don’t think it will)* (cf. 1990: 240). Introducing a scale of (un)certainty, Close considers *might* to be the most uncertain of the modal verbs, i.e. more uncertain than *may* and *could*. He concedes, however, that its use might vary in detail from one speaker to another (cf. 1975: 273).

According to Leech (1987 and 2004), *may* and *might* are almost interchangeable in the sense of epistemic possibility. But whereas he writes in the earlier edition that *might* “seems to be used almost as a colloquial variant of *may* [...] without any implication of reduced likelihood” (1987: 127), he concedes later that *might* “seems to be used as a variant of *may* [...] with little implication of reduced likelihood” (2004: 130). Coates observes “that *might* does not seem to express a more tentative meaning than *may*” (1983: 152). She argues that

[*m*]ight, like *may*, is used as a hedge: the speaker avoids committing himself to the truth of the proposition. The assessment of possibilities as roughly 50/50, which we found with *may*, is true too of *might*, shown explicitly by the collocation *might or might not* (1983: 149).

Moreover, she indicates to the similarity between harmonic hedging phrases typically collocating with *may* and *might* and concludes that *may* and *might*, in their epistemic usage, “seem to be semantically interchangeable” (1983: 151-152).

Like *may*, *might* is found in conjunction with *well*. Without indicating any difference, Alexander writes that both *may well* and *might well* mean ‘it is extremely likely’ (cf. 1988: 238). Coates, however, recognizes a distinction and states that unlike *may well* which “seems to be used to give an air of objectivity to the proposition expressed” (1983: 153), *might well* tends “to be used where the speaker wants to express greater confidence in the outcome of the proposition” (1983: 150). She assigns ‘it is possible that’ to *may well* and ‘it is probable that’ to *might well*; in other words, the supplement *well* seems to increase the degree of likelihood for *might* (cf. *ibid.*).

### 5.4.3. Permission

If *might* is used for (a) asking for permission, (b) granting permission or prohibition, or (c) polite formulas instead of *may*, the contrast resembles that of *could* and *can*: *could/might* are regarded as more remote and, therefore, less direct and more polite counterparts of *can/may*. This remoteness of *might* also seems to neutralize the ‘authority’ sense of *may*.

a) Close agrees that, due to its tentativeness, *might* is very polite when asking for permission.

i) He believes that “[*m*]ight expresses the maximum degree of hesitancy in requests for permission” (2002: 109). On a ‘hesitancy scale’, Alexander positions *might* at the most hesitant end. He notes that a request like *Might I borrow your pen for a moment?* is less common than the same kind of questions with *can*, *could*, or *may*, because it is very polite and respectful, and states that negative questions with *Might I not ...?* are rare (although possible in formal style) and with the contracted form *Mightn’t I ...?* unlikely to occur (cf. 1988: 216).

ii) Giving the examples *May I suggest the veal?* and *Might I suggest the veal?*, Lewis claims that the latter offer will sound more natural if *Sir/Madam* is added and that *might*

is therefore seen as more appropriate in situations of remote relationship which supports the idea of the more remote and more polite form (cf. 1986: 113).

b) Close indicates that, similar to *could*, *might* is not a polite way of giving permission. *Yes, you might* as the answer to *Might I borrow your pen, please?* would express “vague possibility, rather than positive permission” (2002: 109) and therefore, the enquirer would not be sure that permission had been freely given (cf. *ibid.*). If a modal verb is used for the answer, then the corresponding non-remote form *may* would be appropriate (cf. *can* vs. *could* in chapter 5.2.3.):

- *May/might I ...?*

- *Of course, you may.* (cf. Brieger & Sweeney 1994: 40)

Close warns against using the negative answer *No, you might not* which could be interpreted as an abrupt refusal (cf. 2002: 109). Alexander indicates to the possibility of giving non-modal answers like *Of course* and *I'm afraid not* (cf. 1988: 216).

Official documents or announcements concerned with permission or prohibition contain *may*, not *might*, as the tentativeness of *might* is not appropriate for the representation of authority:

*Confidential documents may/\*might not be photocopied without prior approval.* (cf. Lewis 1986: 113)

The following example demonstrates, however, that *might* can express permission/prohibition in reported speech structures:

*The managing director said that documents might be photocopied after approval had been given.* (cf. *ibid.*)

c) Like *may*, *might* is frequently used for expressing polite formulas:

*Ladies and Gentlemen, might I draw your attention to ...?* (cf. Sammons 2002: 104)

Alexander notes that *might* is sometimes used to ask indiscreet questions:

*How much did you pay for this house if I might ask?* (cf. 1988: 216)

Creating additional remoteness with hedging conditional clauses, these expressions are also appropriate for covert advice and suggestions:

*If I might offer you my advice, I think you should ...* (cf. Chalker 1990: 240).

#### 5.4.4. Neutral Possibility

Like *may*, *might* has limited usage with ‘neutral possibility’ speech acts. This is due to its high degree of uncertainty and formal restrictions. It could not be found any comment on *might* addressing second persons in interrogatives, but as it represents the remote form of non-epistemic *may*, an analogy can be drawn:

i) requests

\*Might you show me the way, please?

ii) invitations

\*Might you come to dinner on Saturday?

iii) Suggestions with *might* are possible; they are, however, very hesitant giving the impression that the offered solution is the last alternative:

*We might meet after Christmas.* (‘It is possible, but let’s first try and find another appointment.’)

iv) offers

?I might call back tomorrow. (‘perhaps I’ll call, perhaps not’)

Although grammatically correct, it represents rather a supposition (epistemic meaning) than an offer.

v) *Might* is frequently used for advice, as its tentativeness demonstrates respect and the speaker does not sound patronizing:

*If you need more money, you might try and get a holiday job* (cf. Chalker 1990: 240).

Coates (1983) observes that *might* expressing neutral possibility is “often used with verbs such as *say*, *describe*, *call*, when the speaker wants to make clear that alternative descriptions are possible” (1983: 161) and that this device softens the force of what is said (cf. *ibid.*):

*His life in the country might be described as dull.* (‘It might also be seen as peaceful.’)

This example could, however, simply express epistemic possibility (‘it is possible that it is described as dull’).

Coates reports that, with *say*, *add* and *ask*, “*might* is often used to indicate a course of action politely, without giving overt advice” (ibid.), especially in more formal language: ... and *I might add* ...

*Another question we might ask, of course, is ...* (cf. ibid.).

vi) commands

\**Might you post this letter for me, please?* Although commands cannot be conveyed with interrogatives and second persons, they can be given with *might* in statements:

*While you're out you might post this letter for me.* (cf. Alexander 1988: 238)

Leech agrees that *could* and *might* as remote forms can express directives referring to future actions in a more polite way than *can* (cf. 1987: 128)

vi) reproach

Ungerer et al. indicate to a marginal use where “[*m*]ight in statements can express a demand, often with an undertone of annoyance or sarcasm” (1984: 155), e.g. in *You might be more careful not to trample on the flowerbeds, Tony* (cf. ibid.), which is produced by the contrast between the informal situation and the inappropriate politeness of the form *might*. Chalker (1990) calls it the ‘criticism’ function offering the example *You might help me with the washing-up sometimes* (cf. 1990: 240).

The idiom *might as well* is used for various speech intentions. Alexander claims that *may as well* and *might as well* can be used interchangeably to express the idea ‘it makes no difference’: *It is not very far, so we may/might go as well on foot.*

However, if a different course of action is suggested, only *might* can be used:

*What a slow bus this is! We might/\*may as well walk* (cf. 1988: 238).

Chalker identifies the function of denoting reproach with *might as well*:

*The way you treat me – I might as well be a servant.* (cf. 1990: 241) Alexander observes that in this ‘reproach’ function *might* is interchangeable with *could*. He adds that *I might have* + past participle of verbs like *guess*, *know* and *suspect* can reinforce the complaint: *I might have guessed he'd fail to read the instruction.* (cf. 1988: 238)

Close notes that *may/might as well* do not occur in the interrogative or negative. The expression *it might be as well to* for giving advice, however, can be found in questions:

*Might it not be as well to consult a lawyer?* (cf. 2002: 110) ('Perhaps it is advisable to consult a lawyer.')

#### 5.4.5. Quasi-subjunctive

*Might* is sometimes found in subordinate clauses functioning as a subjunctive substitute, a usage which is "confined to an elevated, rhetorical style" (Leech 2004: 119). Ungerer et al. specify that *might* + infinitive occur in (1) clauses after verbs expressing fear, or, like *may*, (2) in adverbial clauses of purpose where modal verbs paraphrase the present subjunctive:

- 1) *They feared that there might be a drastic rise in the price of houses in the near future.*
- 2) *Interest rates were reduced to 5% so that people might be encouraged to take out mortgages.* (cf. 1984: 156)

#### 5.4.6. Past Usage

Close declares that "*might* is only the past tense of *may* in indirect speech", e.g. in *You said I might drive your car* (direct speech: *You may drive my car*). He suggests *You could have driven my car* as past equivalent of *You may drive my car* (cf. 2002: 109). Coates counters the claims of the non-existence of *might* as past form and delivers an example from the Lancaster corpus (written language):

*Brightly painted parrots and macaws perched high in the room appeared very realistic to the visitor below. Deer, sheep and pigs might stand in well-selected outdoor positions.* (cf. 1983: 157)

She admits that this use is very rare and gives reasons:

The rarity of *might* as an independent past tense form can be explained in the same way as *could* [...] That is, where an utterance refers to the fulfilment of a possibility in the past, then simple past tense is the normal mode of expression. But where the main predication refers to repeated or habitual action [...] rather than a single event, then *might*, like *could*, is acceptable. Although it is possible to use *could* in conjunction with negative forms to express the non-fulfilment of a possibility, *might* is not available to express this, since negation has a 100 per cent association with epistemic meaning. (ibid.)

Palmer compares this past usage of *might* with the use of *would* for habitual activities in the past:

*In those days, we might/would go for a walk through the woods* (1990: 110).

Chalker shares Coates' opinion concerning the rare past usage of *might*, but classifies it as 'old-fashioned'. (cf. 1990: 241), whereas Leech clearly defines, that this use occurs rarely and chiefly in British English (cf. 1987: 96). Alexander calls this function "past reference in historical narrative" (1988: 211).

Quirk et al. identify "a rare and archaic use of *might* outside indirect speech in the sense 'was/were permitted to'" (1985: 232) and provide the example *We might leave the school only at the weekends*. (cf. *ibid.*). However, an overlap with the above 'habitual sense' is obvious; it is indicated by the adverbial phrase *at the weekends* implying regular repetition in the past.

## **5.5. Visualization of Main Meanings**

The following illustrations are based on Coates's summaries of modal meanings of *could* (cf. 1983: 107) and *might* (cf. 1983: 147). With her enumerations of main meanings, she emphasized the semantic links between these remote forms and their basic equivalents *can* and *may*. Although this perspective has been taken up, as demonstrated with the remote uses of *could* and *might* and past meaning of *could* in the organigrams below, it has been extended to a general comparison of all four lexemes examined in this chapter. Figures 55.1. to 55.4. illustrate the most important semantic patterns and uses of *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* and offer an overall impression of their differences and similarities.

Main semantic patterns are given according to their assumed importance from left to right, i.e. patterns identified as core meanings are presented on the very left. The presentation of the non-epistemic meanings 'ability', 'permission', and 'neutral possibility' follow the chronological order of their scrutiny in the previous chapters.

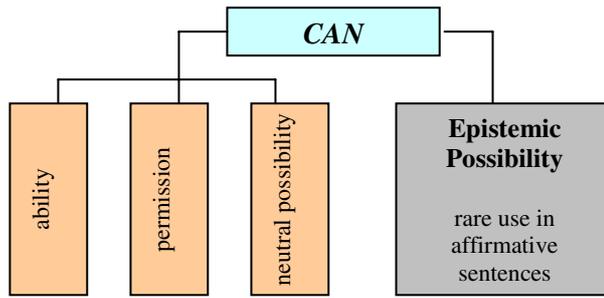


Figure 55.1. Main meanings of *can*

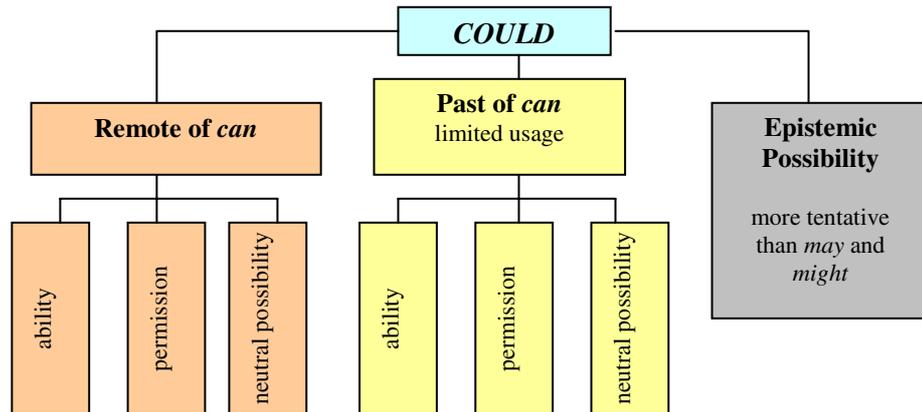


Figure 55.2. Main meanings of *could*

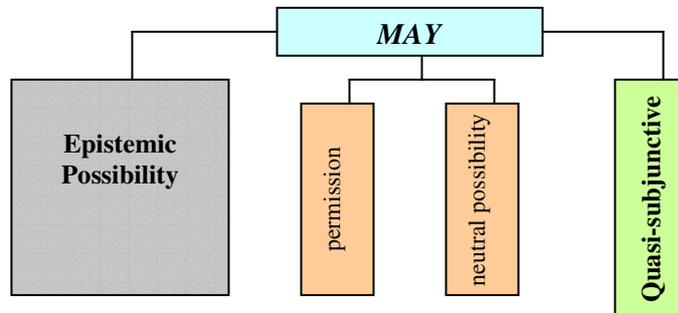


Figure 55.3. Main meanings of *may*

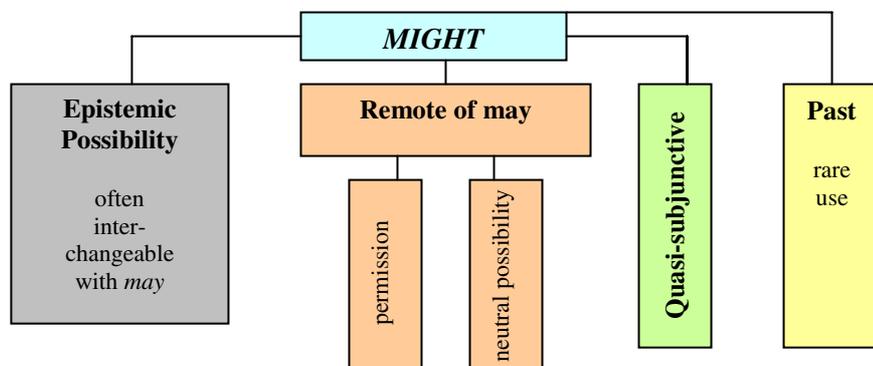


Figure 55.4. Main meanings of *might*

## 5.6. Summary of Findings

Research in chapter 5 on *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* has been carried out by dealing individually with each modal and its distinct semantic patterns. However, it has produced findings demonstrating the coherence of the selected area and the close interrelationship of meanings and uses which are submitted in the following.

The collection of short statements representing the main results from the study corresponds to important qualities and features of the selected modals identified by Coates (1983: cf. chaps. 5 and 6):

- Both *may* and *can* express permission and neutral possibility. But whereas *may* does not denote ability, *can* is rarely used with epistemic meaning which is the main field of applications of *may*. Therefore, in everyday usage, *can* and *may* have little overlap in meaning.
- Where there is an overlap of *can* and *may*, *may* is marked for formality.
- *May* denoting permission is often used pragmatically with conventionalized phrases to perform a ‘softening’ function.
- *May not* covers the meaning of negated permission. It is not free to express neutral possibility negation. Negated *can* supplies the missing form.
- Non-epistemic interrogative *may* and *might* are restricted to first person subjects.
- *May*, *might* and *could* are commonly used as epistemic modals, whereas *can* is rarely applied with epistemic meaning.
- *Could* can be considered as the past time and remoteness equivalent of *can*.
- *Could* and *might* can express past meaning, their past use, however, is limited (especially that of *might*).

- Epistemic *might* seems no longer to be used as the tentative form of *may* but simply as an alternative form. Thus *may* and *might* are considered to be interchangeable when expressing epistemic meaning.
- Epistemic *might* seems to be growing in popularity and to supersede *may* in this function.
- It can be assumed that epistemic *could* represents the more tentative use of *may* and *might*.
- *Might well* seems to express a higher degree of probability than *may well*.
- Epistemic *can't* supplies the missing negative of *must*, as *must not* is concerned with negative permission.
- Implications of remoteness seem to neutralise the more distinctive meanings of the basic forms with 'permission' meaning.

## 6. Requests with *Can*, *Could*, *May*, and *Might* in Business Communication

Business communication often begins with positive politeness. Personal questions and compliments show empathy and emphasize that business partners share common interests and can operate on familiar terms. A different strategy is often used when business becomes more task-oriented: negative politeness shows respect to the business partner on the one hand and tries to regard for own territory on the other. As requests are “one of the most obvious means by which one person can get another to do as they wish” (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 32-33), they are used for expressing wishes and commands in the workplace politely, where combining power with politeness may often be required.

After the semantic analysis of *can*, *may*, *could*, and *might* in chapter 5, the use of these modal verbs in business communication will be examined. First, the attempt is made to differentiate between questions for information and requests. Then four types of requests will be defined and after that examined in terms of politeness, subject use, and speech intentions, on the basis of a corpus of phrases used in typical business situations. Looking into those corporate contexts where requests with the selected modals are commonly used, it will be demonstrated how basic modal meanings change when they are used in requests, and how they are used as tools to produce appropriate language in business communication. In other words, the attempt will be made to look into the ‘black box’ between the modal input and the practical output.

The analyzed corpus of expressions has been taken from the *Business Spotlight*, a language magazine presenting English for international communication for Germans who need English at work. Since its first publication in 2001, each issue has contained an article dealing with one common business situation, and has enclosed a special compilation of phrases focussing on skills basically needed in this context. These phrase lists are based on the authors’ experience and essentially on British English<sup>15</sup> The indication ‘(issue/year/page)’ refers to the source material of the examples quoted; the corresponding articles are listed in the reference chapter of this paper.

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<sup>15</sup> Dignen, B. (personal communication, 5 December 2006).

The corpus data of approximately 11,000 words covers mainly phrases for oral communication which derive from 25 phrase lists (issues 2/2001 to 6/2006) of the *Business Spotlight*. The following table shows the distribution of *can*, *could*, *may* and *might* in the corpus in statements and interrogatives in figures.

	statements				interrogatives			
	<i>can</i>	<i>could</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>can</i>	<i>could</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>
number	50	19	8	6	61	36	15	0

Figure 60.1. Number of selected modals in the corpus

### 6.1. Questions for Information vs. Requests

Both questions and requests are interrogatives, but whereas the purpose of a question is to find out something, a request is the action of asking for something formally and politely. Attempts have been made to distinguish between questions for information and requests, apart from motivations and functional uses. Palmer indicates two formal differences between ordinary questions asking for information, and requests: (1) the use of *some* and *any*, and (2) the position of *please*.

1) He claims that requests will not contain forms such as *any* and contrasts

- a) *Can you give me some information?* and
- b) *Can you give me any information?*

He defines (a) as request for information and (b) as “genuine question whether the addressee can provide information” (1990: 192). But *any* can also denote ‘it does not matter which’ and, in this sense, (b) might be considered as a directive request, while

*Can I offer you anything to drink?* (3/2002/70) is certainly an offer.

2) Palmer states that *please* in questions “can occur only at the end of the sentence, or, less commonly, at the beginning, whereas in a request with a modal it will usually occur after the modal” (ibid.). Thus the position of *please* should be sufficient for interpreting the interrogatives

*Can you ring me, please?* as question for information ('can you tell me if it is possible for you to ring me') and

*Can you please ring me?* as directive ('please ring me').

*Could you please book a room for me at the Hilton, as usual?* (4/2002/70)

is one example from the corpus supporting this assertion. However,

*I'm sorry, may I just ask your name again, please?* (1/2003/71) would be a question for information, according to Palmer. But even without the situational context (customer care), it can definitely be considered as a request, as the expected answer is *yes* together with the desired action. It is conceivable that in the given example from the corpus, *just* in the place of Palmer's 'request' *please*, relocates *please* to the end of the sentence. However, in telephone expressions, *please* (if added) is consistently positioned at the end of the sentence (cf. chap. 6.2.1.).

Formally, one distinguishing indicator for the decision if an interrogative is a request or not, seems to be the response. Assuming that requests are basically *yes/no* questions, the answer will express *yes* or *no* (or the answerer will avoid a clear answer, saying e.g. *I don't know* or *It depends*). A request, however, commonly suggests a positive answer and, correspondingly, the intended action. Nevertheless, there is some overlap. A request can be a true question for information, if permission is granted or not; the answer to a question like *May I smoke here?* can contain *yes* or *no* and is not decisively influenced by the speaker's expectation.

Requests with *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* are commonly made with first or second persons. Their underlying modal concepts are mainly 'permission' and 'neutral possibility', which has determined the structure of this chapter.

## **6.2. Underlying Meaning: Permission**

### **6.2.1. Requests for Permission**

Requests for permission expect a positive answer from the addressee who is expected to be able and willing to give permission. As "[p]ermission is the act of allowing somebody to do something, especially when this is done by somebody in a position of authority" (OALD 2005: 1125), the request for permission should reflect the speaker's

recognition of the addressee's position of power. As the speaker usually asks for permission for himself, requests for permission are commonly made with first person I. In the following, (1) the use of the right form for the appropriate level of formality will be examined. Then, with focus on telephone conversations and contexts where keeping control is important, (2) the functional use behind the permission sense will be looked into and (3) how typical collocations can modify the meaning of requests for permission. Finally, (4) a diagram will illustrate quantitatively the use of modal verb forms for requests for permission in the corpus.

(1) In the corporate context, the notions 'authority' and 'position of power' may play a role in discussions between superiors and subordinates. But it is often generally 'remoteness' in relationship which requires correct and formal behaviour, e.g. on official occasions or in social situations where business people meet for the first time. Here the choice of the appropriate modal verb can be of great significance for the further relationship building. Coates emphasizes that "[w]hat distinguishes *may* from *can* in their 'permission' meaning is formality" (1983: 141). Lewis demonstrates this *can/may* contrast by the pair *Can I smoke here?* ('is it allowed?') and *May I smoke here?* ('do you permit me?'), and defines the difference as follows: "with *can/could* the speaker perceives the existence of a possibility; with *may/might* the speaker is volitionally involved in the creation of a possibility" (1986: 113), which requires the speaker's position of authority. In interrogatives, the positions are reverse: using *may* in a request, the speaker accepts or alleges the higher position (authority) of the addressee and does negative face work, trying to establish a distance. Thus *may* is preferably used in situations marked by formality and where speaker and addressee have a rather remote relationship.

Lewis suggests using the basic modal forms in requests for direct permission. He argues that "[t]his view of the *may/might* contrast is supported by the naturalness of *May I have one?* and the fact that *Might I have one?* although not impossible, appears strange" (1986: 113) and concludes that if "[t]he form is clearly requesting direct permission [...] an immediate, rather than remote, form is more likely" (ibid.). His view is supported by the fact that in business communication, basic forms are commonly used with short, clear requests, e.g. *Can I add something?* (4/2001/76) in discussions and meetings.

(2) Despite the underlying ‘permission’ sense, requests for permission in the business context are rarely made to actually ask for permission but normally imply a meaning expressing their functional, i.e. informative use. In *Can I come in here?* (4/2001/76), the person asking is simply announcing the activity he is about to do. As this activity restricts the freedom of others, a ‘softening’ device has to be applied. Instead of interrupting and giving the message directly, the speaker hides his statement behind a request for permission; the main verb containing the message about which activity will follow is wrapped in a combination of interrogative sentence structure and modal proposition. Hübler explains that

[a]lthough the grammatical forms of questions and assertions are discrete, their functions sometimes overlap. The chief motivation for questions is to be found in a desire for knowledge. [...] Focussing on the idea of function enables us to see sentences as combining both assertive and questive elements (1983: 98-99).

Requests using *may*, *can* or *could* with first person *I* are often employed in telephone conversations. Although they formally ask for permission, they (1) inform about the speaker’s wishes or (2) announce his activity to be followed, as displayed in the paraphrases:

1a) *May I have your name, please?* (2/2001/75) (‘I’d like to know what your name is.’)

1b) *Could I speak to Bob, please?* (2/2006/71) (‘I’d like to speak to Bob.’)

In (1a), the interlocutors do not know each other, thus *may* as the politer form is appropriate. (1b), however, shows a certain degree of familiarity, and *could* (or *can*) can be considered as sufficiently polite and friendly.

2) *May I repeat that?* (1/2003/71) (‘I’ll read that back to you.’)

Here *may* is applied, as the situational context ‘customer care’ suggests a higher degree of politeness.

The fixed phrase *may I ask*, presented in the following sentences, introduces politely the actual message. *May I ask what it’s about?* (2/2001/75) is often used on the phone and invites the caller to indicate the purpose of his call. *May* on the phone tends to give a fourth dimension to the concept of remoteness. Apart from ‘remoteness’ in social relationship, likelihood, and time, it suggests the idea of remoteness in space, where verbal politeness has to compensate for friendly face expressions and body language.

Business people usually try to keep control over the course of discussions. Here the ‘permission’ function frequently supports not only an informative, but also directive intent; these requests actually have the function of (1) commands and/or (2) announcements and are used, e.g. for interrupting people in discussions:

- 1) The chairperson’s *May I stop you there? I’d like to hear some other opinions.* (2/2003/69) in a meeting can be paraphrased by ‘please stop there’ and
- 2) *May I interrupt you for a moment?* (2/2002/69) in negotiations conveys ‘now I’ll give you my opinion’.

Whereas the use of words like *stop* and *interrupt* which express a restriction toward the addressee seems to need the more polite form *may*, the announcement of own activities is made with *can*:

*Can I digress just for a moment?* (4/2001/76) (‘Now I’ll talk about something that is not directly connected with this issue.’)

The same applies to directive requests where vocatives indicate a certain degree of familiarity with the addressee:

*John, can I interrupt you for a moment?* (1/2006/71)  
*Sorry, John. Can I add something?* (1/2006/72)

(3) In *Sorry for interrupting, but can I come in here?* (1/2006/72), the introductory hedge phrase prepares the listener politely for the announcement ‘I’ll interrupt you’ and is therefore a useful tool for avoiding chaotic discussions in telephone conferences.

The ‘softener’ *just* is found in requests to express that the announced activity will cause a minimum amount of inconvenience for the addressee. It can therefore be considered as an intensifier of politeness:

The phrase *May I just take a few minutes of your time?* (1/2004/71) is used as a telesales technique and tries to build responsiveness in the listener; it is polite and suggests that the talk on the phone will not take a long time, because the salesperson shows respect for the customer’s precious time.

(4) Figure 62.1. summarizes the quantitative use of the selected modals in the corpus:

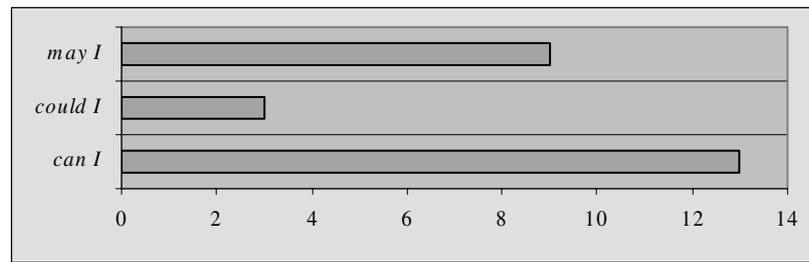


Figure 62.1. Use of modal forms in requests for permission

### 6.2.2. Polite Offers

Polite offers, like requests for permission, use first persons and imply a ‘permission’ sense. Leech & Svartik claim that, “[i]n making an offer, you can make use of questions about the wishes of the hearer” (1994: 175). The following paragraphs will concentrate on (1) the forms mainly used in the corpus and their underlying meanings and concepts and on (2) phrases in the corpus frequently used in visitor care and telephone conversations. Finally, (3) a diagram will show how the application of certain forms in typical expressions determines their quantitative use.

(1) With regard to the underlying ‘permission’ meaning, offers can be paraphrased by ‘am I allowed to do you this favour’ (with *can*) or ‘do you permit me to do you this favour’ (with *may*). Palmer explains that such questions ask “whether the addressee gives permission to the speaker, and, if he does, the speaker is likely to act [...] the speaker verbally puts himself in the position where he needs to ask permission” (1990: 193). For example, the host offering a drink to his guest in *Can I get you something to drink* (4/2006/71) asks for permission, because it is polite for a host to put himself in the inferior position of a servant (cf. 1990: 193).

Apart from permission, offers imply two more modal concepts: willingness and obligation. *May I open the window?* denotes ‘Do you permit me to open the window?’ in a request for permission. With the more extensive paraphrase ‘Would you permit and like me to open the window?’ the above interrogative can be considered as an offer which is an “expression of readiness to do or give if desired” (COD 1990: 823). Thus the successful implementation of an offer requires the willingness of both the speaker

(to act) and the addressee (to let the speaker act). Moreover, with the underlying 'would you like me to', the speaker lays possible obligation on himself.

(2) Offers are social elements; they help build relationship and trust. Making the addressee feel comfortable and welcome, they convey a favourable first impression about a business partner. Small talk prepares 'real' business talk, and being proactive in social situations may be to the speaker's advantage in later negotiations. Beside travel and weather questions, offers of help are indispensable tools for welcoming visitors to the company, e.g.:

*May I take your coat?* (4/2006/71) or

*Can I get you something to drink?* (4/2006/71).

Answering the telephone, the first few moments after the greeting can be exploited for creating a positive atmosphere:

*How may I help you?* (1/2003/71) implies formality and shows respect for customers and superiors, whereas

*Morning, John. How can I help?* (2/2004/70) is appropriate for exchanging brief pleasantries with colleagues.

The following typical telephone phrase can, at the same time, be interpreted as true question, as the addressee has to decide if he accepts or refuses the offer:

*May I take down your telephone number?* (1/2003/71) can be answered positively (*yes, certainly* followed by the telephone number) or negatively (*No thanks, I'll call back later*). Again, *may* is used for politeness reasons, as the caller or at least his telephone number is unknown.

The use of the remote form in *I'm afraid Ms Cunningham is in a conference at the moment. Could I ask her to call you back when she is free?* (1/2003/71) may be explained by the paraphrase 'Would you possibly accept a return call?' asking for a hypothetical desire. Most offers in telephone conversation, however, use the basic form *can*, as they are brief, direct, and task-oriented and promise potential benefit for the addressee:

*Can I take a message? (2/2002/75)*

*Can I give him a message? (2/2002/75)*

*Can I take down your number? (2/2002/75)*

*Can I get him to call you back? (2/2002/75)*

(3) The predominant use of *can* is reflected in figure 62.2. Due to the assumed willingness of both the speaker and the addressee, there seems to be little reason for using the remote form *could* with implications of possible negative responses.

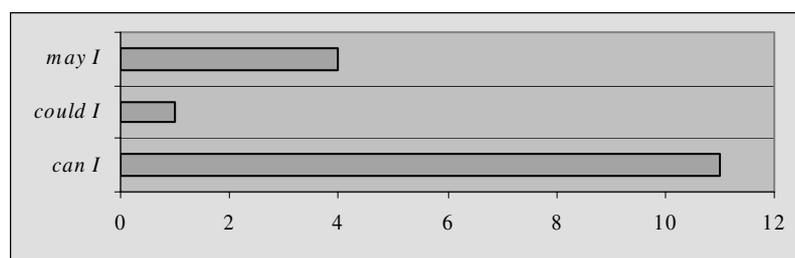


Figure 62.2. Use of modal forms in offers

### 6.3. Underlying Meaning: Neutral Possibility

#### 6.3.1. Suggestions

Suggestions are ideas or plans of the speaker mentioned for someone else to think about and to put into practice. They are, however, less directive than commands in so far as they allow the addressee to give a negative response. Leech & Svartik state that, theoretically, they “leave the decision about what to do in the hands of the hearer. But in practice, they are often tactful ways of giving commands or instructions” (1994: 168). This decision has to be given as a verbal response. As the speaker and the addressee are usually concerned with the result of the decision to be made, inclusive *we* is common. The following considerations show, (1) how formal issues can influence the illocutionary force of the examples from the corpus. Subsequently, (2) a diagram demonstrates the frequency of the modal verb forms used for suggestions.

(1) In business situations, suggestions should not sound too direct or patronizing. Therefore, various techniques are applied to make them polite and at the same time persuasive:

- a) use of implicit *we* involving the speaker
- b) use of interrogatives
- c) use of negative interrogatives
- d) use of remote modal forms

a) All examples in the corpus comprise implicit *we*. The speaker making the suggestion is usually concerned with the result of the decision to be made and therefore, inclusive *we* can be assumed as the natural subject. As suggestions are often made by people in roles where they take responsibility, implicit *we* also supports the feeling of common interests and tries to minimize confrontation. Summarizing the result in a meeting, the chair appeals to team solidarity and consent with implicit *we* and the intensifier *all*:

*OK, so can we all agree to ...? (2/2006/71)*

b) Approximately half of the ‘suggestion’ examples in the corpus are represented by interrogatives. They push the decision if a suggestion is welcomed or rejected, discussed, etc. forward in a polite manner, because a decision has to be made to give a response.

*Can we leave this point for another meeting? (4/2001/75)*

*Can we deal with this next time? (2/2003/69)*

c) *Couldn't we ...? (1/2005/69)* is the only negative form proposed in the corpus. As negative interrogatives encourage positive responses, it can be seen as an intensifier of the speaker’s actually directive intent (cf. chaps. 5.1.3. and 5.2.3.).

d) In the corpus, only the above negative and the following phrase are offered with remote forms: *Could we ...? (1/2005/69)*

(2) Figure 63.1. demonstrates that *can* is commonly used for suggestions, a fact that seems to result from the speaker's involvement in the proposition, expressed by inclusive *we*.

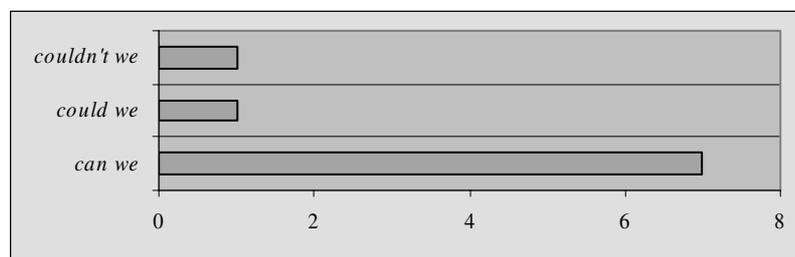


Figure 63.1. Use of modal forms in suggestions

### 6.3.2. Directive Requests

Directive requests imply neutral possibility; the speaker enquires about external possibilities which allow the addressee to follow his (the speaker's) wishes. Furthermore, 'is it possible for you due to external circumstances?' is extended by 'are you able and willing to?' Directive requests are often addressed to the hearer directly and consequently, the subject corresponds to second persons. As *may* and *might* are restricted to interrogatives with first persons, only *can* and *could* are used for this type of requests. (1) Examples from the corpus will be examined according to how commands in diverse work contexts are used with different modal verbs and subjects in order to tone down the directive meaning and to avoid confrontational situations. Then (2) a closer look at meeting phrases will demonstrate the use of different subjects. Finally, (3) a diagram will show the quantitative use of *can* and *could* with different subjects.

(1) As many people have to explain something to others or to give instructions at work, dealing with commands is a central issue in business communication. Although in technical descriptions the imperative is mainly used, in personal communication 'softening' devices are needed and interrogatives are often used for more politeness and in order to make directives sound more suggestive and less superior. Directive requests can be found in diverse job contexts and cover a wide range of speech intentions.

Typical polite commands are requests for assistance, as asking the way or the time:

*Excuse me, could you tell me where I can find ...? (3/2003/69)*

They imply 'do you know' and overlap with physical ability. Similarly, *can* in questions for more detailed information in international negotiations implicitly refers to the business partner's capability of explaining his products:

*High quality? Can you specify? (2/2002/70)*

An interventionist listening strategy is applied with open questions inviting the addressee to continue small talk or to give some more information:

*Could you say a little more about that? (1/2006/72)*

Depending on the context, this request can be interpreted as a suggestion or a command. *Say* certainly allows either interpretation; the strong verb *elaborate* in *Could you elaborate a little on that? (2/2003/69)* defines the context clearly as business talk and the speech act as a veiled command which offers little freedom to the addressee to be evasive.

In telephone conversations, requests act as pieces of information that tell the conversation partner to perform a particular activity. According to the spatial distance, the remote form is preferred:

*Could you speak up a bit? This is a bad line. (1/2003/71)*

*Could you repeat that, please? (1/2003/71)*

*Could you spell that for me, please? (1/2003/71)*

*Could you speak a little more slowly, please? (1/03/71)*

(2) Commands are given to control a situation and/or a group of people and therefore typical of occasions when business people come together to discuss or to make decisions. One aspect of the chairperson's role is to take responsibility for ensuring the agenda is fully covered in the time available. This often involves e.g. moving a group back to the agenda topic during or after a digression. Directive requests in meetings are used with (a) second persons, (b) impersonal third persons, or (c) inclusive *we*.

a) *John, could you keep an eye on the time, please? (2/2003/69)*

*Adriana, could you slow down a little? (1/2006/71)*

*Sorry, John. Could you let Anna finish? (1/2006/71)*

The vocative is applied to get the addressee's attention for task-oriented directives, or to tackle problems immediately (e.g. slowing people down or stopping interruptions).

b) The chair employs impersonal third persons to emphasize that he is talking to all members of the group. This is done e.g. to (1) maintain discipline, or (2) at the beginning of the discussion to introduce rules:

1) *Could people stop talking? I can't hear myself thinking.* (1/2005/70)

2) *Can everyone keep things short and simple?* (3/2006/72)

c) With inclusive *we*, the chairperson makes himself part of the group, balancing task and relationship. Due to his proximity to the instructions he gives, the basic modal *can* seems to be appropriate:

*I think we're digressing. Can we come back to the agenda?* (1/2006/71)

*Can we speed this up a little? We're very short of time.* (1/2006/71)

*Can we think of other ideas?* (1/2005/69)

*Can we fix a time for the next meeting?* (4/2001/75)

(3) Considering the four speech acts examined, commands show the biggest potential for confrontation. Therefore, as shown in 63.2., the remote form *could* is obviously mainly used with *you*, where the addressee is requested directly. Implicit *we* and *could*, however, seems to be contradictory and, consequently, *can* is used in the majority of these cases.

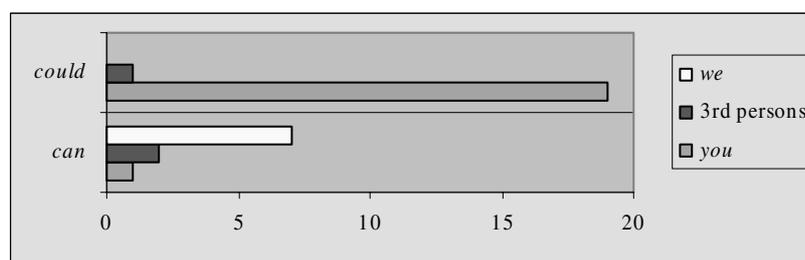


Figure 63.2. Use of modal forms in suggestions

#### 6.4. Classroom Implications

Supposedly due to its high degree of formality, *might* does not occur in the corpus. As exclusive *we* is less personal than *I*, in oral speech it is obviously only used if the

speaker makes requests on behalf of a group of people he belongs to. It seems not to be a stylistic device used for conveying the speaker's loyalty for his company as in written language<sup>16</sup>. Figure 64.1. illustrates the findings from the corpus research in this chapter regarding typical corporate contexts and may not represent a universally applicable model. Lines printed in bold type indicate predominant uses of modals in particular types of request.

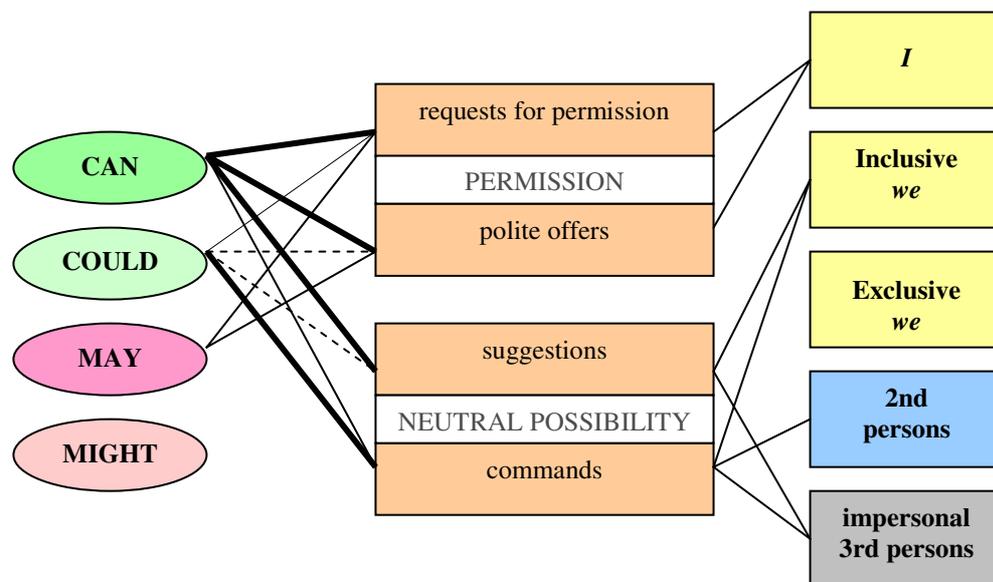


Figure 64.1. Relationship between modal forms, types of requests and grammatical subjects used

Sammon assumes that “[n]owadays, *can/could* is the most usual way of asking for or giving permission” (2002: 103). According to this corpus research, his assertion does not only apply to ‘permission’ requests using preferably *can*, but also to interrogative suggestions and commands, where *can* is mainly employed in the former and *could*, for politeness reasons, in the latter. On the one hand, considering word frequency, it seems to be advisable to apply mainly *can* or *could*, are compatible with all of the requests examined. Consequently, misinterpretation of speech acts causing trouble in communication would automatically be excluded. On the other, learners should realize the effective use of *may* as the more formal choice. In other words, teachers should encouraged them to vary the use of forms for stylistic reasons in contexts where acceptable alternatives are available to avoid over-using one expression.

<sup>16</sup> In commercial correspondence, exclusive *we* is often preferred to *I* in order to demonstrate that the writer represents the company he works for. Interrogatives are usually avoided and statements used instead. As well as *We can/could offer you ..., be + adjective* are used where the adjective emphasizes the willingness of the writer(s): *We are pleased/willing/prepared to offer you a trade discount.* (cf. Clarke, D. & Macfarlane, M. 1999: 152.)

Lewis postulates that “[i]t is the primary distinctions of meaning which combine with other factors to create the communicative meaning” (1986: 45). Therefore, the consideration of basic patterns can lead to a deeper understanding in individual speech act examples. Explanations based on politeness often ignore the impact of the underlying meaning of the form used. For example, *may*, marked for formality, can be used in requests for permission and offers, but not in interrogative requests with neutral possibility, even if a remoteness sense is desired; then *could* has to be applied, perhaps supplemented by further hedge phrases. Moreover, the learner has to notice the potential sense of condescension of *may* in permission-granting utterances.

Function ‘labels’ for basic meanings such as ‘permission’, ‘possibility’, etc. should be used carefully, because some of these terms are ambiguous, e.g. ‘possibility’ can represent neutral or epistemic possibility, or even the superior meaning of general possibility which comprises all four basic patterns of the modals discussed. They might also create confusion, as in reality these categories often overlap, e.g. *cannot/can’t* can express inability or refusing permission which both imply impossibility. Consequently, additional paraphrasing like ‘he is not able to’ or ‘he is not allowed to’ provide learners with a tool for clearer distinctions.

Changing the grammatical subject of the modal can also change the meaning of a speech act. *Can I just sum up where we’ve got to?* (1/2003/71) can be considered as the speaker’s request for permission to do an activity himself; it implies the speech intention ‘announcement’ (‘I’ll just sum up where we’ve got to’). The same sentence with second persons, however, would be a directive request: *Can you just sum up where we’ve got to?* (‘Please sum up where we’ve got to’), is a directive, delegating the task to somebody else.

Understanding the exact meaning of a speech act in practice requires careful attention to the context, for example the precise location of an utterance in relation to preceding and following comments, the physical setting in which the communication takes place and the background knowledge participants bring to the interaction. “Such information is crucial in helping the analyst to unpack the layers of meaning and interpret the significance of workplace talk.” (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 9) Moreover, as English for Germans is intended to international business talk, the meaning and effect of speech acts

has to be considered in an even wider, cross-cultural context. Therefore, preparing role plays and simulations in the classroom, the framework for the discourse and broader contextual issues should be discussed. Consequently, apart from their basic, underlying meanings, further factors involved in the production of speech intentions could be identified and should be discussed in the classroom:

- the degree of politeness modal forms can produce
- the choice of basic or remote forms,
- the use of different grammatical subjects, and
- the role of the discourse context.

In addition to the above issues, learners might find it difficult to come up with the appropriate short answers, as responses to polite requests correspond to rule of politeness and do not follow the clear patterns of short answers. For example, as for questions with remote modals the vague possibility of the remote modal is not a polite response, basic modals are used. Moreover, expected positive answers are often alternative phrases such as *certainly* and *of course*, or they are represented by the suggested activity.

In the corpus, expressions comprising *can*, *could*, and *may* have been found in the following situational contexts at work:

- international telephone calls and audio conferences
- small talk
- meetings
- presentations
- negotiations
- looking after visitors
- customer care
- trade fairs
- sales talk
- talks with colleagues
- brainstorming sessions
- writing e-mails (which often convey the same formality as oral speech)

As the above list covers the main areas of business communication, the appropriate use of the selected modals seems to be suited to support useful business skills. Due to its obvious relevance for real workplace situations, it can be regarded as important for the ESP classroom.

## PART III DEVELOPING MATERIALS FOR ESP

### 7. Analysis of ESP Course Book *English for the Automobile Industry*

#### 7.1. Scope and Structure

Part III of this paper is concerned with two types of materials: it will present the ESP course book *English for the Automobile Industry* (Kavanagh 2003) and teacher-generated worksheets. The latter will be connected with the former in so far as they

- are based on the eight main topics of the book as far as the subject matters are concerned
- are supposed to extend and enrich the contents of the book where needs cannot be covered

Therefore, in chapter 7, the above ESP course book will be analysed in terms of specificity, its potential for allowing authenticity, and the approach to speaking skills and grammar.

*English for the Automobile Industry* has been designed for people working in the automotive industry<sup>17</sup> who would like to improve their English knowledge. It complies with the levels of proficiency B1 and B2 proposed in the Common European Framework of reference (CEFR) and described as the levels of ‘independent users’<sup>18</sup>. The book is divided into eight units each of which deals with one main topic that is closely related to the automobile industry. A variety of teaching materials aims primarily to improve the learners’ communicative skills by introducing and practising vocabulary which is essential for defining parts of the car (units 1 to 3), comparing performance and technical specifications (units 4 and 5), and assessing design features (unit 7). Moreover, the book stimulates discussions on quality problems (unit 2), safety issues (unit 6), and future trends in the automobile industry (unit 8).

Each unit includes three or four subtopics and combines them with the training of useful language and business skills. For example, car production is paired up with the passive

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Automobile industry’ refers to the car industry, whereas ‘automotive industry’, as the broader term, is concerned with the production of all kinds of motor vehicles (COD 1990: 73).

<sup>18</sup> Communication skills are profiled as follows: B1 “Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible ...” / B2 “Can deal with most situations likely to arise ...” (<<http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio>>).

and the description of processes, and telephone skills are considered helpful to dealing with complaints and are therefore assigned to quality issues. The book gives useful expressions and phrases for performing common business tasks such as writing emails, telephoning, attending meetings and making presentations. In principle, the organisation of texts, activities, and tasks corresponds to the materials structure suggested in 3.3.2.

## **7.2. Specificity**

The book bases on lexical resources related to the specific subject matter ‘automobile industry’. However, as seen in 7.1., the topics covered in the eight units take a relatively broad approach to the general topic ‘car’<sup>19</sup>. Concentrating on sub-technical vocabulary, it meets the specificity requirements of ESP materials offered for classroom use by the teacher. It is not a specialist book only for people working in the car industry, but also for employees of other divisions of the automotive industry, as well as for their suppliers and customers who undoubtedly can benefit from discussions concerning e.g. quality management and material recycling. The small size of the book cannot meet the language needs of all the different areas of interest, but it certainly has the quality to cover the basic needs of the majority of people working in the automotive industry. Supplementary to the wide range of topics discussed, the book offers phrases and activities to cope with common business situations and selected language skills to perform them, listed in fig. 72.1. Grammar points are here not mentioned as they are covered later more in detail.

The topics have been regrouped according to commonly practised business tasks and language skills in areas of work that are technically orientated. Whereas items 1 to 6 represent typical business tasks, point 7 are language skills frequently used to predict future trends. Finally, the language skills listed as points 8 to 11 help describe the chronology of procedures and physical properties of objects. This relatively general approach is obviously intended, as the book is directed at “anyone who needs English to communicate with colleagues, customers and business partners in the automotive industry” (Kavanagh 2003: back cover). A closer look at the suggested topics and an increase in materials to meet particular needs of the students and to provide topicality could enrich the basic idea of the book.

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<sup>19</sup> Appendix 2 shows the complete table of contents of the book.

Language/business skills	Number of phrases
1. Making small talk	13
2. Visiting trade fairs	5
as a visitor	5
as a sales rep	6
3. Attending meetings	
Asking for/giving opinions	6
Expressing agreement/disagreement	6
Talking about advantages/disadvantages	6
Making recommendations	7
Making/accepting/rejecting suggestions	10
Interrupting	4
Dealing with interruptions	4
4. Making presentations	
Introductions	6
Structuring	9
Referring to visuals	2
Concluding	4
5. Telephoning	10
6. Writing emails	9
7. Expressing degrees of likelihood	9
8. Describing a process (sequencing)	10
9. Describing position and shape	8
10. Giving dimensions	6
11. Approximating	7

Fig. 72.1. Number of phrases for different business/language skills

### 7.3. Authenticity

As concluded in chapter 3.3.3.2., authentic materials are texts that have not been designed for but are used in the classroom. With regard to this definition, texts in an ESP course book cannot be called ‘authentic’. However, *English for the Automobile Industry* offers a variety of texts taken from real business contexts, as demonstrated in figure 73.1. This may encourage students to talk about a variety of issues contributing their experience and expertise to the classroom discussion. So the texts in the book can be called ‘realistic’, because they are close to real situations in the workplace. In addition to this basic material, the use of real authentic texts can take up issues of topical interest and discuss specialist matters more in detail.

Text types	Number
extracts from magazine articles	9
dialogues	4
extracts from presentations	4
charts	1
tables	1
forms	1

Fig. 73.1. Realistic text types

## 7.4. Oral Communication

Although ESP learners may have to write emails, reports, or invoices in English, in the biggest part of corporate communication they primarily have to display their speaking skills and the capability for responding spontaneously. The book takes account of these needs and offers a broad range of activities focusing on group interaction. 36 activities in the book require team work: 21 suggest pairwork (e.g. comparing the results of a questionnaire) and 15 discussions with more than one partner (e.g. role-plays simulating meetings). The small supply of useful expressions to help learners perform business tasks and train specific language skills (presented in figure 72.1.) indicates that the book wants the learner to communicate immediately, without extensive preparation. The few, carefully selected phrases for diverse corporate contexts may be more suitable for encouraging confident speech than long and complex lists. The ESP teacher is free to provide learners with alternative choices and more nuances.

The number of oral and writing activities has been contrasted in figure 74.1. and visualised in figure 74.2. The illustrations demonstrate that oral communication and exchange of information and ideas takes high priority.

	Number		Number
<b>Oral activities</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Writing activities</b>	<b>8</b>
answering questions after texts	12	Writing emails	3
discussions/comparisons	8	Creative writing	2
role plays	11	Making up lists	2
		Note taking	1

Fig. 74.1. Number of oral and writing activities

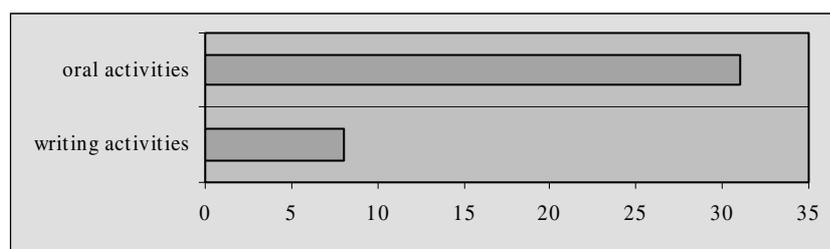


Fig. 74.2. Oral vs. writing activities

## 7.5. Approach to Grammar

In *English for the Automobile Industry*, the 45 vocabulary activities outnumber by far the few explicit grammar points.

The book covers the following grammar areas:

- the passive (cf. Kavanagh 2003: 15),
- modal auxiliary verbs expressing obligation/prohibition (cf. 2003: 30-31), and
- comparatives, superlatives, and comparisons (cf. 2003: 37).

Some activities aiming at practising grammar are not explicitly presented as grammar points but as communication activities. For example, the correct position of adverbs of frequency is trained when the students talk about how often they do particular activities (cf. 2003: 9), and the instruction to find someone in the group whose car disposes of certain interior features is suited to elicit yes/no-questions (cf. 2003: 20).

The above grammar topics are introduced inductively, i.e. the learner is expected to find generalizations or rules by practicing the structures orally or by reading a text. The following example demonstrates how modal auxiliaries are dealt with:

- Step 1a          comprehension exercise (reading)  
7 questions to a technical hotline; 3 of them contain *have to*, 2 *need to*
- Step 1b          comprehension exercise (reading)  
7 answers are given in the wrong order; *can*, *must*, *have to*, *don't have to*, *needn't* and *mustn't* occur once each
- Step 1c          Matching the answers to the questions

So far, the learner has read and translated modal verbs in affirmative and non-affirmative contexts 22 times (11 times intensively by reading activities + 11 times by scanning the text for the matching exercise)

- Step 2          'language box'

The modals from the text and their translations are listed (cf. 2003: 30-31); this 'language box' can be used as summary after the successful completion of the activity or as support during the work.

Two units later, *should* is used frequently in a checklist with statements serving as starting-point for a discussion about safety issues (cf. 2003: 42). Again, there is no previous explanation and the function of *should* (expressing obligation which may not be fulfilled) has to be inferred by the learner. Finally, *may* comes with an activity about expressions of likelihood and has to be identified as suitable for enunciating possibility (cf. 2003: 58).

Figure 75.1. illustrates the ratio of form-focused grammar exercises to activities prioritising the immediate use of grammar structures.

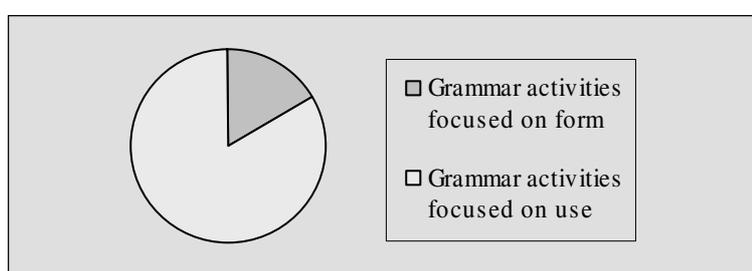


Figure 75.1. Focus of grammar activities

## 7.6. Concluding Remarks

*English for the Automobile Industry* is a motivating and stimulating ESP course book for intermediate learners of English. The eight units do not depend on each other and support the flexibility required in ESP. The input texts offer a wide range of topics interesting for people in the automotive industry in different job areas and focus on technical matters using sub-technical vocabulary. They are realistic in so far as they present examples of oral communication (e.g. dialogues) and written discourse (e.g. magazine articles) close to the job environment. Specificity is provided, as the book combines typical business skills with the specific contents needed by employees of a particular industry. Intercultural issues are only discussed in terms of car design traditions and do not consider social relationships in international business or politeness aspects.

The book offers a variety of demanding and time-consuming team/partner activities and tasks, but much room is left for individual work and vocabulary revision. All texts

require reading activities and serve as excellent starting-points for extensive discussions. The reading comprehension questions after some of the texts ask for the learners' own ideas and opinions and support the communicative approach of the book. The same is true for the few skills phrases and grammar exercises on a basic level that aim to immediate language use. The above findings indicate that the book is based on communicative language teaching where language is seen as a system for the expression of meaning and its major function is for interaction and communication (cf. Richards & Rogers 1986: 71).

The book assumes that ESP learners at B1/B2 level of the CEFR have a basic knowledge of grammar. Some selected points indispensable for certain language skills seem to be covered only for a brief revision of forms and their meanings in a certain context and are not likely to improve the learners' grammar knowledge. For example, the treatment of modal auxiliary verbs, described in 7.5., will hardly result in a discussion on the ambiguity of modal forms, and the selected use of *may* for expressing possibility avoids noticing the overlap with *could* and *might*.

A certain lack of topicality is an inherent weakness of any course book. The preparation of course books takes some time, and as they are designed for the medium term use, they cannot contain the latest trends and discussions. Therefore, based on the topics in *English for the Automobile Industry*, chapter 8 will comprise supplementary teacher-generated worksheets, presenting

- texts of topical interest for people working in the automotive industry,
- texts extending the range of subtopics discussed in the book,
- combinations of subtopics and business skills according to specific needs,
- discussions leading to better intercultural awareness,
- exercises dealing with an exemplified area of modal verbs, *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might*, in a more advanced way, focusing on oral communication.

## **8. Modal Auxiliary Verbs in Supplementary Worksheets**

### **8.1. Introductory Considerations**

#### **8.1.1. Scope**

The following compilation of supplementary materials for the ESP classroom demonstrates how the consideration of modal auxiliary verbs can be involved in the development of a course session and how it supports the performance of the task as the final, complex and meaningful reproduction of work situations from the real business world. The materials take up the eight topics of the individual units of the ESP textbook *English for the Automobile Industry* (Kavanagh 2003) and include discussions of intercultural aspects. Each worksheet has been designed to be completed in one ESP session and therefore sets a time frame of 135 to 180 minutes (3-4 teaching units). The exercises within the sections C (vocabulary) and D (modal verbs exercises) display an intended progression of difficulty. As chapters 8.2.1. to 8.2.8. represent the supplement to *English for the Automobile Industry*, useful vocabulary already introduced in the book is not dealt with again in section C; if necessary for the task, a reference has been made to where it can be found in the book.

The levels of difficulty comply with B1 or B2 (independent users) CEFR and are indicated in brackets next to the sub-chapter headings. The worksheets have been designed mainly for meeting typical needs of executives operating internationally, their assistants, or people working in the middle management of an automobile company.

#### **8.1.2. Structure**

The eight worksheets are structured according to the findings in chapter 3.3. and comprise 5 parts each (A-E):

##### **A WARM-UP**

The warm-up session is a guided communication activity that allows the teacher to assess the learners experience and knowledge regarding the issue to be discussed. To involve the whole group, learners can be encouraged to contribute not only first-hand

experience but also to report what happened to colleagues' and friends and has influenced their opinions. This introductory activity should not be too long and major digressions should be avoided.

## **B TEXT**

All the texts analysed didactically are from the internet and up-to-the-minute relevant for people working in the automotive industry. They are concerned with problems that are of topical interest for people working in the Saxon automotive industry and can, due to their topicality, not occur in a printed textbook. Therefore, they can be considered as an extension to the book not only in terms of grammar, but also of content.

## **C VOCABULARY**

On the one hand, the vocabulary section helps consolidate difficult expressions occurring in the authentic text or exploit groups of words with a similar structure in order to provide development in vocabulary. On the other, they take up, revise and introduce subject-related words to provide learners with specialist terms and ideas for the task discussion.

## **D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS**

This section demonstrates how activities with modal verbs can be incorporated into worksheets based on specified topics. Exercises and activities, where modal verbs are embedded in different structures, focus on semantic patterns and functions analysed in chapters 7 and 8; they are mainly concerned with typical uses of *can*, *could*, *may* and *might*, but also involve other modals that express the same type of modality or perform similar functions. They exploit sentences from the text or use subject-related vocabulary to demonstrate the diversity and similarity of the respective modal lexemes and train business skills that are needed in the task where modal verbs are only one element of communication.

B1 and B2 learners usually have already a reasonable grasp of the basic grammar; the exercises are not designed for teaching them modal verbs from scratch, but for

- checking their knowledge about ambiguity and overlap in meaning,
- filling gaps in their understanding about the creation of speech intentions using modal verbs, and
- stimulating their creative thinking and deeper understanding of semantic patterns and practical use.

## **E      TASK**

Tasks should be guided in so far as the situation is given and an outline of the roles offered. In the role plays, students train to hold their own opinion, but controversial roles present them with points of view with which they might disagree. So they get the possibility to ‘walk in the shoes’ of their business partners who take a different view and argue against them in real life. Diverse importance of roles ensures that the task is a challenge for eloquent members of the group and, at the same time, allows participation of learners with less self-confidence or competence.

The task procedure is divided into three parts: (1) the preparation period, (2) the production and (3) the follow-up.

- 1) To prepare their task roles, learners can (individually, in pairs or small teams) invent facts, discuss and define their points of view, and take notes as support for their argumentation. The teacher should define a time-setting and encourage the learners to keep it.
- 2) Although the teacher is in the observer’s role, he has to make sure that everybody is involved in the discussion and might help with the organization of the discussion. However, he should not interrupt for explanations or corrective remarks.
- 3) The teacher has to make sure that there is some time left for going over some problems again. This allows learners to ask questions that might have risen during the task procedure and to evaluate their own performance. They often feel the need for further discussion on the topic, once they are released from their roles. The teacher should correct the main mistakes made during the production period in general and summarize problematic issues he has noticed and, finally, highlight positive points of the learners’ individual performance.

## 8.2. Worksheets

### 8.2.1. Unit 1: Car Sales (B1)

#### A WARM-UP

Have you ever bought a used car? If so, talk about your experiences. If not, give reasons. Would you do it again?

What do you think are advantages and disadvantages of new cars?

#### B TEXT: New or Used?<sup>20</sup>

What is the right choice for you? While it appears a straightforward decision at first glance, choosing between a new or used vehicle is actually more involved when you examine all the pros and cons. To get a better idea, take a look at this overview before making up your mind.

##### 5 New vehicle advantages

- Factory warranty. A brand new vehicle's warranty has greater coverage.
- Lower financing rate, generally. Remember to compare not only vehicles but also their payments.
- Full range of leasing options. When you buy from a dealership, you will have
- 10 access to more financing options.
- Lemon Law coverage. If you purchase a new vehicle that is defective, you have more protection and a greater chance for reimbursement.
- Freedom to choose your own features and options. You can customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction. You will also have access to the latest safety
- 15 and comfort features.

##### New vehicle disadvantages

- Higher purchase price and higher monthly payments. You pay more for the convenience a new vehicle brings.
- New vehicles depreciate in value rapidly. Many new vehicles lose about 40% of
- 20 their value within three years. After three years, depreciation slows down.

##### Used or "Pre-owned" Vehicle Advantages

- Lower purchase price and lower monthly payments. A used vehicle is generally less expensive.
- Major depreciation has already occurred. The previous owner has absorbed the
- 25 cost of depreciation.
- Greater price variation between similar makes and models can lead to increased savings. Different sellers have different motivations so used vehicles usually have a wide range of prices for similar models.

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<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from

<<http://www.ford.com/en/vehicles/shoppingHelp/shoppingAdvice/gettingStarted/newOrUsed.htm>>.

### Used or “Pre-owned” Vehicle disadvantages

- 30 - Less choice. There is less opportunity to customize your vehicle to your specific needs.
- Other costs. Be aware that you may need to invest in new tires, a tune-up, new seat covers or cosmetic repair jobs.
- Inheriting a vehicle’s past wear and tear. Buying a vehicle without knowing its
- 35 full history could mean you will need to make costly repairs.
- Little or no warranty at all. Used vehicles can have warranties, but they usually are not as comprehensive as the coverage for a new vehicle.
- Limited or no leasing options. You may not encounter the same flexibility in financing as the new vehicle owners.
- 40 - Certified Pre-owned vehicles are a great option to consider if any of the above issues are troubling your purchase decision.

## C VOCABULARY

1. The expressions on the left (1-8) are underlined in the text. Match them with their definitions on the right (a-h).

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1) <u>pros and cons</u> (l. 3)  | a) long-term hiring of goods or facilities   |
| 2) <u>warranty</u> (l. 6)       | b) advantages and disadvantages  |
| 3) <u>coverage</u> (l. 6)       | c) a producer’s promise to repair or replace goods over a specified period               |
| 4) <u>Lemon Law</u> (l. 11)     | d) the loss of a goods value because it wears out or is no longer up-to-date             |
| 5) <u>depreciation</u> (l. 20)  | e) a set of regulations concerned with product liability in the USA                      |
| 6) <u>reimbursement</u> (l. 12) | f) the damage of objects that is the result of normal use                                |
| 7) <u>wear and tear</u> (l. 34) | g) repayment for goods that have faults  |
| 8) <u>leasing</u> (l. 38)       | h) the amount of support and protection provided when the goods turn out to be defective |

2. The expressions below describe safety and/or comfort features. First complete the table, and then work together with a partner to compare and discuss your decisions.

Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) ▪ sun visor ▪ lane departure warning system ▪  
airbags ▪ automatic transmission ▪ seat belt ▪ collision avoidance sensors ▪  
Electronic Stability Program (ESP) ▪ crumple zone ▪ automatic temperature control ▪  
heated front-cup holder ▪ touch screen panels ▪ hands-free communication system ▪  
cabin air-filtration system ▪ power steering ▪ cruise control ▪ retractable steering wheel

safety features

safety and comfort features

comfort features

**D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS**

1. Sales talk.

Rewrite the following sentences applying *can*, *could*, and *may*. Are they used by the customer (C) or the salesperson (S)? Tick the correct box.

Let me show you that new model over there. C S  
.....

Would it be possible to lease the car?  
.....

I'm not able to offer you a discount on used cars.  
.....

I don't know how to operate an automatic transmission.  
.....

I'd like to have a look at the pre-owned cars.  
.....

It is possible for you to go for a test drive.  
.....

I'd like to ask if this car is for your or for your wife.  
.....

Now let's have a closer look at the interior.  
.....

2. Consider the following sentence from the text:

You can customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction. (l. 13)  
(It is possible to customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction.)

How does its meaning change if the modal verb, the subject, or the sentence structure change?

Reformulate the following sentences.

a) You can't customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction.

.....

b) You may customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction.

.....

c) You should customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction.

.....

d) We can customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction.

.....

e) We could customize your new vehicle to your satisfaction.

.....

f) Can I customize my new vehicle to my satisfaction?

.....

g) Could I customize my new vehicle to my satisfaction?

.....

h) May I customize my new vehicle to my satisfaction?

.....

## **E      TASK**

Role play.

Work with a partner and make up a sales conversation. Refer to the text 5 in the book (p. 8) and to the above ideas. Try to use modal verbs as often as possible to ask for permission and to express offers, suggestions, and advice.

### **Student 1**

You are the customer who wants to buy a car.

Your priorities are:

- good safety features
- economical fuel consumption.

You would prefer a well-kept used car and low monthly payments.

### **Student 2**

You are the salesperson. You are eager to sell a new car.

As the new model will be launched in two months, you can offer favourable prices and conditions.

Try to convince your customer of the advantages of a new car.

## 8.2.2. Unit 2: Quality Problems (B2)

### A WARM-UP

Which quality-improvement concepts are applied in your company?  
How would you describe the Germans' attitude to quality and time?  
What are the main problems Germans have when working with the Chinese?

### B TEXT: China's Geely makes its mark in Detroit<sup>21</sup>

It's one of the most viewed displays at this year's North American International Auto Show, but it's not one of the huge spectacles of glitz and glamour put on by the Big Three U.S. automakers. Instead, China's Geely Automobile Company has a rather ordinary display featuring a silver sedan outside the main show room of Detroit's  
5 cavernous ( $\approx$  very large) Cobo Center. But its presence is by no means unimportant.

"This is the first Chinese automobile to participate in the Detroit Auto Show, so we're unique," said John Harmer, vice president and COO of Geely USA. "As auto shows go, this year isn't dramatically different from last year – the most significant change is that Geely is here." Until recently, Chinese vehicle exports were limited to  
10 buses and trucks. But now China's manufacturers have been busy upgrading their technology and production to compete overseas and they are ready to do business in the massive U.S. automobile market with low-priced vehicles aimed at U.S. consumers.

Shufu Li, chairman of Geely, announced here that Geely is on track to enter the U.S.  
15 market in the summer or fall of 2008. But executives at established auto makers say they aren't too concerned about the threat of competition from Chinese brands any time soon, citing quality and other factors. The silver CK sedan on show here is about the size of a Honda Civic and a forerunner of the vehicle that will eventually go on sale in the United States. It gets 25 miles per gallon in the city and 35 miles on  
20 the highway, and Geely says it will be very competitively priced when it goes on sale – below the \$10,000 level. Pricing is an important advantage for Chinese carmakers like Geely. They plan to offer low-priced cars for American consumers and undercut their American and Asian rivals.

One issue for Chinese carmakers is the perception that their products are not up to  
25 par when it comes to safety and reliability. It's a perception problem that Harmer plans to deal with through aggressive marketing. "I've had a number of people come up and say, 'John, how can the Chinese make a quality automobile?' And I tell them I know they can because I know their engineers, and many of them have trained here in Detroit and spent five or ten years with a major U.S. automobile manufacturer. So  
30 they know their industry and they know engineering standards," Harmer said.

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<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from Jones, R. (2006). <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10779158>>.

## C VOCABULARY

1. Find the opposites.

huge	.....	major	.....
ordinary	.....	to enter	.....
significant	.....	to undercut	.....

2. Try to paraphrase (explain in other words) each of these phrases.

to be on track	.....
to go on sale	.....
to be up to par	.....

3. What do the letters in the following job titles stand for? What is the responsibility of the people doing the job?

CEO – CIO – COO – CRO – CTO

4. Work in pairs. Find explanations these quality-related expressions.  
Then compare your results with the other students in the group.

- a) Six Sigma
- b) quality circle
- c) Total Quality Management (TQM)
- d) cause/effect analysis
- e) systems failure analysis
- f) variability
- g) standard deviation
- h) supervisory staff

## D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

1. Make up suggestions for improvement using the passive voice.

The modal verbs *must*, *have to*, *should*, *can*, and *could* should be used at least once.

- a) workers / offer training courses
- b) final assembly / perform / groups of skilled workers
- c) better working conditions / introduce
- d) important components / manufacture in the factory
- e) workers / give more responsibility
- f) purchased parts / deliver just-in-time
- g) frame of the car / weld / robots
- h) workers' suggestions / consider / by the management
- i) production process / organize more effectively

2. Convert the above sentences into active voice suggestions using the following modal verb structures:

We could ...

Can't we ...?

Couldn't we ...?

Perhaps we should ...

It might be worth (verb + -ing)

3. Meeting phrases.

The following expressions with forms of *can*, *could* and *may* are frequently used in discussions. What kind of speech intention do they express? Discuss their levels of politeness.

- a) I'm sorry; may I make a point here?
- b) Can I add something?
- c) If I could just finish this point ...
- d) I'm afraid, but I can't see that.
- e) Could I come in here for a second?
- f) May I digress just for a moment?
- g) I couldn't agree more.
- h) Can we discuss this more in depth?
- i) I can't agree with you at all.
- j) Could you expand on that, please?
- k) I can see your point of view, but ...
- l) Sorry, could you repeat that?

## E TASK

The German company Moselcar is in the highly competitive automotive market. Moselcar have a subsidiary in Shanghai, China, where they produce the lower-priced car model Gulf6. Last year, 7.04% of the cars produced in China had to be reworked or recalled, or were rejected after random checks at the end of the production line.

Today four managers are meeting at the factory in Shanghai to find out why so many defective cars are produced. Two of them are German; the others are Chinese who are familiar with the conditions and problems on the spot. They have to decide what will be done to bring the factory in China up to European quality standards.

### **CEO Germany (German)**

Chairs the meeting and has to make a decision at the end of the meeting.

Has to find out the reason for the poor quality in Shanghai, feels that the problem lies in the mentality of the Chinese workers.

Problem: the company will lose markets if quality is not good enough, but also if productivity targets are not achieved; investment, particularly in automation, has been heavy – would like to avoid further investment in new machinery.

**Corporate Head of Quality (German)**

Thinks that poor quality is due to the attitudes of the workers and argues for further automation and personnel cuts.

Emphasis has to change from rework to prevention;

new quality control systems should be introduced, e.g. launch of quality circles involving motivated and skilled workers.

**Production manager Shanghai (Chinese)**

Basic problem: worker involvement and participation is insufficient.

Level of motivation has to be raised; quality bonuses?

Thinks the German parents company is too obsessed with productivity

Suggests improving safety and working conditions, reducing supervisory staff and giving more responsibility to the workers.

**Personnel manager Shanghai (Chinese)**

Main problem: lack of qualified people.

Employees' frequent absence from work is due to travel problems, personal and family problems, sickness, and high number of work accidents.

Suggests recruitment of employees for a workshop where defects detected before dispatch can be fixed.

### 8.2.3. Unit 3: Communication Systems (B1)

#### A WARM-UP

Have you ever driven a car with a navigation system? Did you find it helpful?  
Can you explain how it works?

#### B TEXT: Voice Control Manual<sup>22</sup>

Voice control enables you to activate important functions of the car telephone and navigation system without needing to operate any controls manually. This enables you to concentrate on the traffic situation, you do not need to divert your eyes from the road ahead in order to check readouts, and the voice control system “converses”  
5 with you.

A number of voice commands are available; with a little experience, you will find them easy and convenient to use. Whenever you issue one of the defined commands with the system active, the voice control system converts your command into a control signal for the telephone or navigation system. The system automatically  
10 recognizes whether your command is directed at the telephone or the navigation system. Your inputs take the form of dialogues or commands. You are guided through the dialogues by announcements or questions. Please familiarize yourself with the functions of your car telephone or mobile and your navigation system before using voice control.

15 The voice control system understands around 50 predefined commands, which need to be given exactly, word for word. You can prompt the system to speak a selection of these commands by activating the system and giving the command >>Help<<. These commands are also shown in list form at the end of this Owner’s Manual; this list can be cut out for added convenience. The help function is integrated as a sub-  
20 function in the areas Telephone, Navigation and Notepad.

Do not use voice control for placing emergency calls. Your voice and habitual tone could be affected by stressful situations, as a result of which the process of establishing the telephone connection could be unnecessarily delayed. You are urged to use the handset instead, or the multifunctional steering wheel, the multi-  
25 information display or the on-board computer if a number for emergency calls is stored in these systems.

The voice control system includes a special hands-free microphone mounted in the roof lining of your car, at the front; this microphone filters out ambient noise. There are nevertheless a few points to observe in making sure you are properly understood:

- 30 1. Speak continuously and at normal volume, avoiding unnatural emphasis and pauses between words
2. Do not speak while the voice control system itself is giving an output

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<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from <<http://www.bmwmotorsports.org/pdf/BMW%20Voice%20Control.pdf>>.

3. Keep doors, windows and the sun-roof closed to avoid noise interference from outside the car
- 35 4. Avoid causing background noise in the car while you are issuing voice commands
5. The hands-free microphone is positioned to pick up the driver's voice. Other occupants of the car could be understood with less accuracy, and are therefore advised to use the handset when making a telephone call.

## C VOCABULARY

1. Word families. Find the noun corresponding to the given verb.

verbs	nouns
operate	
divert	
issue	
recognize	
prompt	
integrate	
affect	
establish	
store	
observe	
advise	

2. Find eight car accessory items in the text and explain what these items are used for. Whenever possible, use the structure in bold from the example:

Example: Voice control is **used for** activating other electronic devices without manual operation.

## D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

1. The following phrases occur in the text. Rewrite them with the modal verbs indicated and discuss in pairs the change in meaning.
  - a) You will find them easy and convenient to use. (l. 6)
 

..... (might)

..... (can't)
  - b) This list can be cut out for added convenience. (l. 18)
 

..... (should)

..... (must)
  - c) Your voice and habitual tone could be affected by stressful situations. (l. 21)
 

..... (may)

..... (will)

2. The imperative is often found in manuals to give instructions. In face-to-face communication, however, it is considered impolite. Try to find the appropriate equivalents for the instructions 1-5 (l. 30-38). Use *have to*, *must not*, or *should*, depending on whether they express obligation, prohibition or advice.

## E TASK

Work in pairs. Simulate a telephone call between a customer and the hotline service. Be brief and efficient, but nevertheless polite and friendly.

**Student A:** Call the free service hotline about your voice control.

**Problem:** You bought a BMW two days ago and have problems with the voice control system. You cannot understand the German manual and can't find an English one.

What you've already tried to do:

Pressed key in the multifunctional steering wheel

→ Telephone functions were activated.

Pressed key again to activate voice control

→ Nothing happened.

Model number: VCS 10050 X (You have to look it up in the car manual.)

**Student B:** You work for the hotline service.

Steps to follow during customer service calls<sup>23</sup>:

1. Ask for customer's name

2. Ask for product details

3. Ask what the problem is

4. Ask what the customer has already tried to do

5. Recommend possible action

If the product still doesn't work

6. Arrange for product to be repaired

7. Ask about guarantee

8. Thank for call

Extract from the English manual:

To switch on voice control, press the Voice Control key in the multifunctional steering wheel:

- Press this key briefly to activate the normal telephone functions.
- Hold the key pressed in (until the acoustic signal is heard) to activate voice control. A brief acoustic signal and the display "VOICE RECOGNITION" in the Check Control indicate that the system is now in the standby mode. Before giving new voice commands, always press the key again.

<sup>23</sup> Idea taken from Towara, W. and Wood, I. (1997). *Electricity Matters*, p. 58.



- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| b) stagehands         | 2) take visitors' vehicles to the car park.  |
| c) teamsters          | 3) erect metal structures.   |
| d) ironworkers        | 4) take care of the exhibition halls and buildings.  |
| e) car porters        | 5) help prepare the platform where something is performed for an audience for the next activity. |
| f) janitorial workers | 6) make and repair wooden objects and structures.  |

The following people work at American hotels. Explain what their jobs include. Guess or find out with a dictionary.

Front desk clerk ▪ room service waitress ▪ housekeeper ▪ bell hop ▪ room maid

2. Check the following meanings.

Exchange ideas with a partner; you can use a dictionary.

- |                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| a) accommodation   | e) dry cleaning service    |
| b) Shuttle service | f) complimentary breakfast |
| c) queen size room | g) pick-up service         |
| d) ATM             | h) vacancy                 |

## D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

1. Answering the telephone. Make up requests using *can*, *could*, and *may*.

- You are offering assistance.
- You didn't hear the caller's name.
- The caller is speaking too fast.
- You want the caller to spell his name.
- You didn't understand something.
- You are offering to transmit some information to another person.
- You want the caller to phone again.

2. Rewrite the following telephone conversation to make it more polite.

A VW Sachsen. What do you want?

B I want to speak to Mr. Schneider.

A He's in a meeting. You can leave a message or call back later.

B Tell him to ring me back.

A Who are you?

B Klaus Volkmer.

A What? Spell it.

B K-l-a-u-s V-o-l-k-m-e-r.

A What's your number?

B 00441270 588977. I'm calling from Crewe.

A All right. I'll give him the message. Bye.

B Bye.

## E TASK

### Student 1

You are assistant to the CEO of Moselcar who will be attending the NAIAS next January. He wants you to book a hotel room for him from Thursday, the 11<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>. You know that it might be difficult to find a suitable accommodation, as your boss decided quite late to go.

He wants

- a hotel near the Cobo Center
- a queen size non-smoking room with breakfast (breakfast inclusive?)
- high-speed internet access
- translator service (he'll meet some managers from Peugeot and can't speak French)
- conference facilities for up to 15 people
- on-site ATM and dry cleaning service
- taxi service from the airport (arrival at Detroit City Airport – price?)
- on-site indoor pool and fitness center

You have the telephone numbers of three hotels in Detroit. Call them and try to find a room which meets your boss's wishes. Inquire about prices.

- 1) **Holiday Inn Express Hotel Detroit Downtown**  
phone **001 877 211.3289**
- 2) **Holiday Inn Southgate-Detroit**  
phone **001 877 211.3347**
- 3) **Hilton Garden Inn Downtown**  
phone **001 877 493.1019**

### Student 2

You are the hotel manager of the

#### **Holiday Inn Southgate-Detroit**

Your hotel is 15 minutes from the heart of downtown Detroit. Entertainment is the top priority at the Holiday Inn Southgate. You can offer

- double-bedded rooms with whirlpool
- non-smoking single-bedded rooms
- complimentary breakfast
- indoor pool, health/fitness center on-site
- complimentary high-speed internet access in rooms on the first floor
- cash machine in reception hall
- lounge with live entertainment on weekends

You have still vacancies and would appreciate a fixed reservation. Be very friendly and polite.

Prices: double-bedded room with whirlpool: \$231  
non-smoking single-bedded room: \$199

### **Student 3**

You are the front desk clerk of the

#### **Hilton Garden Inn Downtown**

Your hotel is within walking distance to Cobo Center. You can offer one single-bedded room from Jan 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> and a queen size room from Jan 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>. No individual airport pickup service, but shuttle buses every 45 minutes. There is a bank next to the hotel. You offer

- Excellent business facilities
- Indoor pool
- Dry-cleaning service

You think the caller is lucky to find any vacancies for the NAIAS period. Be friendly, but very formal.

Prices: single-bedded room \$189  
queen-size room: \$245  
breakfast: \$15 (round table buffet)

### **Student 4**

You are the front desk clerk of the

#### **Holiday Inn Express Hotel Detroit Downtown**

Your hotel is situated next to the Cobo Center.

It offers all the facilities the caller asks for, but you don't have any vacancy in January due to the car show. There might be the cancellation of a reservation in two weeks, but you don't have a waiting list. You are extremely busy at the moment, but remain patient and polite.

Prices: queen size room with breakfast: \$265  
Pick-up service from Detroit City Airport: \$35

## 8.2.5. Unit 5: Effective Marketing (B2)

### A WARM-UP

What would you expect from a car introduced at a car show in 2007? List the technical and safety, comfort and design features that are important for you when you buy a car. What do you typically associate with Australia? What cultural factors might you need to consider if you want to sell cars on the Australian market?

### B TEXT: Fiat Linea – World Premiere<sup>25</sup>

Fiat Linea is an all-new segment C saloon which débuts at the Istanbul Motor show taking place from 2 to 12 November. Produced in collaboration with Tofas, the Turkish joint venture between Fiat Auto and Koç Holding quoted on the Istanbul Stock Exchange, the Fiat Linea will be first manufactured in the joint  
5 venture's Bursa plant in Turkey (at an annual production of 60,000 Units) and marketed in a number of European and non-European countries starting in the second half of 2007. The vehicle will later be produced in other countries by Fiat.

Designed by the Fiat Style Centre, the new Fiat Linea presents an elegant, dynamic external line. The same stylistic attention has been paid on the interior, the lines of  
10 which are harmonious and well balanced with the exterior to create a bright and friendly environment capable of guaranteeing extraordinary interior roominess and superior comfort in terms of ergonomics and space available to the driver and passengers, This impression is confirmed by the car's generous dimensions which set it at the very top of its segment: 4.56 metres long, 1.73m wide, 1.5 m tall and with a  
15 wheelbase of 2.6 m, in addition to having a luggage compartment boasting an impressive 500 litres.

An elegantly functional car, with a strong Italian imprint, the Fiat Linea will be marketed in different equipment levels and equipped with features more usually found in higher segment vehicles as demonstrated by a number of sophisticated  
20 infotelematic devices which improve the comfort and quality of time spent on board.

The Fiat Linea's generous equipment is dedicated to the protection of driver and passengers and the customer can choose from a wide range of gasoline and diesel engines that combine excellent performance, low fuel consumption and absolute respect for the environment, coupled to both manual and automatic transmissions.

25 And in order to guarantee the best price/content ratio, the various combinations of Fiat Linea equipment levels available are all characterised by high value for money.

### C VOCABULARY

1. Find at least 12 adjectives and their reference nouns that highlight positive features of the new Fiat Linea. Use some of the words to describe outstanding characteristics of the product your company makes.

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<sup>25</sup> Retrieved from <[http://www.fiat.com/cgi-bin/pbrand.dll/FIAT\\_COM/news/news.jsp?BV\\_SessionID=@@@@11](http://www.fiat.com/cgi-bin/pbrand.dll/FIAT_COM/news/news.jsp?BV_SessionID=@@@@11)>.

2. Choose the most suitable meaning for the underlined words in the given context.

- a) interior roominess (l. 11)      A the way the car seats allow drivers and occupants to relax  
 B the quantity of equipment in a car  
 C the spacious inside of a car
- b) ergonomics(l. 12)      A the design quality improving people's driving conditions  
 B attitude of drivers towards the environment  
 C the study of how a country organizes its money
- c) wheelbase (l. 15)      A the point where the steering wheel is mounted on the steering column  
 B the lowest part of a tyre touching the road surface  
 C the distance between the front and back wheel of a vehicle
- d) price/content ratio (l. 25)      A relationship between the price and the equipment of the car  
 B relationship between the price and the interior volume of the car  
 C a measurement of how satisfied a person with his car is

**D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS**

1. The list below shows discussion phrases at different levels of directness. Decide if they are strong (+++), neutral (++) , or tentative (+) and give reasons indicating typical features.

	+++ / ++ / +	features
Why can't we ...		
We might ...		
I think we can ...		
May I ask if ...		
I can't see that.		
Couldn't we ...		
I couldn't agree more.		
Do you think you could tell me if ...		
You may be right.		
You can't be right.		

Compare your results first in pairs, and then discuss your ideas in the group. Which of them are appropriate in a meeting with other colleagues?





**Roles:**

**1. Marketing manager (Germany)**

The brand values representing your company are 'reliability' and 'safety'.  
You want them to appear in the text.

**2. Head of Series Planning (Germany)**

You would like to emphasize the state-to-the-art technologies applied and technical features.

**3. Sales manager (Australia)**

You know the Australian market.  
The latest market research figures have shown that environmental friendliness is the most important factor for Australians when they buy a car.

## 8.2.6. Unit 6: Safety (B1)

### A WARM-UP

Do you think that more safety features in the car reduce the danger of accidents?  
What can drivers do to avoid crashes and, in case of an accident, serious injuries?  
Does information on vehicle fatality rates influence your decision to buy a car or not?

### B TEXT: A Closer Look at Vehicle Safety<sup>27</sup>

The midsize-car category covers the widest range of models, from bargain-priced sedans to luxury/performance models. They have going for them a low center of gravity that resists rollover accidents, and also can be equipped with the latest safety features. But their modest size means they begin to be vulnerable in collisions with  
5 larger vehicles, and their diverse owner population includes younger, inexperienced drivers.

Large pickup trucks share many of the same vehicle characteristics as large SUVs, primarily ride height and a heavy frame. But the pickup-truck driver population tends to be younger and less family oriented. It's a higher risk demographic that drives less  
10 prudently, an important factor in the most deadly type of accident affecting trucks and SUVs: the rollover.

Minivans tend to be family vehicles and are driven conservatively by a mature, experienced driver population. The same holds true for large cars. Both have generous crush zones and tend to be equipped with such important safety features as  
15 head-protecting curtain side airbags and antilock brakes.

Vehicles with a high center of gravity are less stable in changes of direction and have the highest incidences of rollover accidents. A prime cause of death in rollovers is ejection from the vehicle. Pickup drivers, statistically, wear seatbelts less often than  
20 drivers of any other type of vehicle.

Compact SUVs also have a tall ride height and high incidence of rollovers, plus a relatively inexperienced driver population. And they are of a size and weight that does not give them a decided advantage in passive safety.

Compact cars are light and small, and while some are relatively costly, most are  
25 expensive transportation for a young, high-risk driving population.

Large SUVs have size and weight on their side, and also are built on sturdy truck frames. That frame enhances their passive crash protection, though this rigid metal understructure, combined with the tall ride height of a full-size SUV, means these vehicles can be deadly to occupants of smaller vehicles in a crash. Large SUVs are  
30 not inexpensive, and so tend to be driven by a mature driver population, as well. Compact pickup trucks combine the least-desirable safety-related characteristics: relatively small and lightweight, tall center of gravity, high incidence of rollovers, high-risk drivers who tend not to wear seatbelts.

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<sup>27</sup> Retrieved from <<http://auto.howstuffworks.com/how-to-buy-a-fuel-efficient-car2.htm>>.

Midsize SUVs include both truck-type wagons, wagons that are built on car frames, and the latest blend of car, SUV, and minivan: the crossover wagon. They also cover a broad range of price ranges, safety equipment, and driver demographics.

## C VOCABULARY

1. Find words in the text to put into the following groups:

- a) car types                      b) car equipment                      c) technical features

2. Match the following expressions from the text (underlined in paragraphs 1-4) on the left (a-j) with their explanations on the right (1-10).

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| a) vulnerable       | 1) avoiding unnecessary risks   |
| b) diverse          | 2) most important   |
| c) ejection         | 3) in a sensible way, like an adult                                   |
| d) incidence        | 4) easily damaged   |
| e) prime            | 5) group of people that is more likely than others to cause accidents |
| f) prudently        | 6) very different from each other                                     |
| g) rollover         | 7) the act of being thrown out of sth.                                |
| h) resists          | 8) the extent to which sth. happens                                   |
| i) mature           | 9) the turning over of a car during an accident                       |
| j) risk demographic | 10) stops sth. from happening   |

## D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

1. Phrases for discussions.

Rewrite each sentence using *might*, *can't* or *must* without changing its basic meaning.

- |                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| a) I'm sure you are wrong.            | You .....  |
| b) Perhaps this is a good idea.       | This ..... |
| c) I'm sure you're not serious.       | You .....  |
| d) I'm convinced that he is wrong.    | He .....   |
| e) It is possible that you are right. | You .....  |
| f) I'm certain that is the answer.    | That ..... |
| g) Maybe that's true.                 | That ..... |

2. Consider the different types of cars in the text. Based on the information given, make up a ranking list of vehicle fatality from lowest to highest. Then compare your results with a partner. Offer suppositions using the structures in bold.

- Perhaps** midsize cars .....
- People driving a compact car **may/might** .....
- SUV drivers **possibly/probably** .....
- It is quite likely that** ..... are mainly driven by.....

## E TASK

Your company produces three different types of cars: minivans, midsize SUVs, and compact cars:

<b>Model group</b>	<b>Currently equipped with</b>
minivans	2 front airbags, 1 side airbag for driver
midsize SUVs	2 front airbags, 1 side airbag for driver
compact car	2 front airbags

You are developing the new models for the 2009 model line. On the basis of the information in the text on safety features, driving behaviour, and vehicle fatality, you have to agree on the equipping of the 2009 models with

- additional side airbags for front-seat passengers
- seat-belt airbags for rear-seat passengers (latest technology, not

### Roles:

#### **Student A**

You are the CEO of the company. On the one hand, more safety would make cars more expensive. On the other hand, your target customers expect the latest safety features in new models, as your company's slogans are 'safety at a reasonable price' and 'much safety for little money'.

#### **Student B**

You are the production manager. You are concerned about the increasing costs for more airbags. Designing and fitting effective side airbags is difficult, and you are not convinced that seat-belt airbags will bring real benefits for back-seat passengers.

#### **Student C**

You are the safety engineer of the design department. You think that your company should make use of as much safety technology available as possible. With regard to safety, your company has always been a trendsetter on the market and increasing customer repurchase can be put down to this approach.

### 8.2.7. Unit 7: Design (B2)

#### A WARM-UP

Think of decisive factors influencing the work of car designers.

What is the difference between the body-on-frame and the unibody layout?

What is the purpose of a prototype?

#### B TEXT: History of Automobile Body and Chassis<sup>28</sup>

During the 1940's, the World War II caused most of automotive industries to be converted into military production, and the automotive technologies had a temporary stop. After the war, in the USA the car manufacturers started to look to performance as the main scope of their research, and the weight reduction became of secondary  
5 relevance. In the meantime in Europe the lack of steel pushed the industry towards the development of lighter cars, with a large diffusion of aluminium alloys both for components and car body panels. The Land Rover (1948) with its riveted aluminium body was a result of this phenomenon.

Starting from the 1950's and for about twenty years, the automotive market demand  
10 was very high: the industries could produce vehicles at a very high production rate, with great benefits in terms of scale economies. This led to the diffusion of the stamped steel unibody structure; the primary material was cheap, the vehicle was easy to produce and assembly at high production volumes, with very competitive costs per unit.

15 During the 1960's the European car makers made extensive use of the steel unibody: at the end of the decade they were able to develop the first internal standards and procedures. In the meantime several researches were performed investigating the use of alternative materials, mainly the new emerging composites. In the USA the body-on-frame solution was still the most adopted structure for producing cars.

20 During the 1970's the market demand showed a need for higher product differentiation, so the auto industries were forced to develop several different platforms. In 1973 the energy crisis changed the perspective of car makers. The Federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standard was enacted in 1975: it required auto makers to meet certain mileage standards across their entire fleet of  
25 vehicles. In order to meet these standards, between 1976 and 1982 the average content of steel per vehicle was lowered from 1035 kg to 795 kg. This was made possible by reducing the vehicle size and switching from body-on-frame to the unibody layout. In addition to this, auto industries started new researches investigating the use of light materials. In 1979, Ford created a prototype, entirely  
30 made of carbon fiber composites: this made it possible to reduce the car weight to less than one third.

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<sup>28</sup> Retrieved from <<http://www.carbodydesign.com/articles/2005-04-13-chassis-history/2005-04-13-chassis-history.php>>.

## C VOCABULARY

1. Explain these phrases from the text:

- the main scope of their research (l. 4)
- in terms of scale economies (l. 11)
- competitive costs (l. 13)
- new emerging composites (l. 18)
- higher product differentiation (l. 20)
- to meet certain mileage standards (l. 24)

2. Complete the following table.

Period	Materials and technologies used	Reasons for design features
1940's		
1950's		
1960's		
1970's		

Summarize the history of design in the respective periods. You can use the simple present tense (narrative function).

## D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

1. Indicate which of the modal auxiliary forms offered could replace the one underlined in the sentence to make a

**suggestion**

**supposition**

a) We can change the body layout.

b) The use of plastic may reduce the weight.

should – can't – could – may – will

must – might – should – could – will

Compare your results with a partner. Discuss the change of meaning in (a), and the degrees of likelihood in (b).

Work on your own. Using modal verbs, invent two suggestions on how to get better mileage and three suppositions about the lifestyle of third age people in ten years.

2. Replace each of the phrases underlined by the appropriate subject + modal auxiliary + main verb structure.

- a) I suggest that we consider plant-based materials
- b) It is possible that people will work until the age of 70.
- c) That is possibly the solution to our problem.
- d) It is advisable for us to meet all regulations and standards.
- e) Perhaps they have more free time.
- f) I think that a lot of components will be redundant.
- g) It is impossible for us to use steel.
- h) I feel that people will have less money.

## E TASK

Your class is going to participate in the American design competition.

In pairs or small groups, discuss (a) to (e). Hypothesize about future, lifestyle, and problems for people over sixty in 2015, and suggest appropriate materials, structures, etc. for their future car. Try to be innovative and make drawings. Introduce the sketches to the whole group and discuss your ideas. Decide on which approach will be the starting point for your submission to the competition.

### **Designer Competition**

The American magazine *Automobiles and Trucks* has organized the 2007 edition of its Design Competition.

Theme:

“The passenger car in 2015 for people in their sixties”

Both user-friendly and technically advanced, it should be safe for the people and the environment and respond to the target group’s lifestyle

The project must take into account:

- a) its overall appearance (design, colour, shape, etc.)
- b) its types of uses (delivery of goods, leisure, commuting, etc.)
- c) its adaptability (use on difficult terrain or in the city)
- d) its functional innovations (on-board electronics, simplicity of maintenance, etc.)
- e) cost factors

## 8.2.8. Unit 8: Environmental Awareness (B2)

### A WARM-UP

What can the government or business do to reduce environmental pollution?  
Which activities could easily be stopped, changed, or replaced by ordinary people in order to do less damage to the environment?  
Think of automotive technologies which could help decrease CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### B TEXT: Volkswagen Recycling<sup>29</sup>

Volkswagen vehicles are designed to have a minimal impact on our environment at all stages in their lives from the manufacturing stage, whilst being used and at the end of their lives. Careful selection of recycled and recyclable materials, optimised construction techniques and the labelling of plastic parts with their material type all  
5 add up to cars which are able to be efficiently recycled.

If we look at the environmental impact during the life cycle of a vehicle, the usage phase is decisive and has the biggest impact compared with the manufacturing or recovery phase. Therefore Volkswagen believes it is particularly important from an environmental viewpoint to optimise the usage phase. The lowest possible fuel  
10 consumption is the central aim of Volkswagen engineers in their work to achieve ecological benefits for the environment and also economic benefits for customers.

The long lifespan of the vehicle is also important. If the vehicle can be used longer, the burden on the limited raw material resources of our planet and also on the owner's wallet will be reduced. At the same time, we have also been working on the  
15 area of servicing. The servicing intervals for modern Volkswagen models are currently up to 50,000 km (with extended servicing intervals depending on the model and the usage of the vehicle). The occurrence of old oil and other used parts is therefore also lower.

Documentation is prepared and made available to the recycling companies to ensure  
20 environmentally friendly recycling at the end of a vehicle's life. At Volkswagen, environmental protection is increasingly becoming an integral part of the whole process chain from product planning and product development to the recovery of end-of-life vehicles. Against this background, when a new Volkswagen is developed, numerous activities not only guarantee the long life of the vehicle, but also improve  
25 subsequent recovery. All engineers involved in the development process use the internal respective guidelines and extensive information as the basis for creating recyclable products. In addition to avoiding the use of hazardous substances, we are also increasingly using recycled materials as well as labelling the materials of all  
30 applicable vehicle components with their material types, to aid identification and subsequent recycling. The environmentally friendly properties of the new vehicle are checked in a recycling analysis. A large range of used parts from vehicle repairs are taken back by Volkswagen and remanufactured on an industrial scale. The

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<sup>29</sup> Retrieved from <<http://www.volkswagen.co.uk/company/environment/>>.

remanufactured parts are sold across the world with a full manufacturer's guarantee under the name "Genuine Parts". Volkswagen also recycles old catalytic converters.  
 35 Valuable metals like platinum and rhodium are extracted and used in new catalytic converters.

## C VOCABULARY

1. Identify all the activities in the text that belong to the following life cycles of a car:

planning and manufacturing

usage

end-of-life-stage

2. Complete the word families with the following adjectives underlined in the text.  
 Use a dictionary to find as many nouns and verbs as possible:

adjectives	noun	verb
minimal (l. 1)		
decisive (l. 7)		
environmental (l. 9)		
economic (l. 11)		
available (l. 19)		
extensive (l. 26)		
recyclable (l. 27)		
applicable (l. 29)		
industrial (l. 32)		
valuable (l. 35)		

## D MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

1. Match the sentences on the left to their functions on the right. Sometimes more than one usage is possible.

1. I think we can get started.
2. Can everybody see that?
3. As you can see on this slide, figures have risen.
4. If I can just sum up the main points, then.
5. I'm sure we can do this by 2010.
6. OK. I think we can finish here.
7. If I could just digress for a second.
8. We may focus on hybrid technology.
9. May I thank you all for being such an responsive audience.
10. I'll deal later with this, if I may.
11. May I say it's a great pleasure to see you all here.

Welcoming the audience

Signalling action

Asking about ability

Asking for permission

Expressing possibility

Suggesting

Finishing politely

2. Now take a closer look at the modal verbs underlined in the above phrases.  
 Work in pairs and decide which of the ideas in the table they imply. Write the numbers of the sentences in the table.  
 Discuss your results in the whole group.

ability	permission	possibility

### E TASK

A group of managers working for the car manufacturer VX in Germany is welcoming a group of environmental engineering graduates from a partner university in the Czech Republic to their German head office. Before they start a tour of the company, the Germans invite the Czech visitors to an informal meeting about environmental issues.

**Students A** (group of German managers) prepare a short presentation on the recycling efforts of their company.

**Students B** (group of Czech graduates) prepare a talk about how environmentally friendly usage of cars can help protect the environment.

1. In two groups, prepare your presentations. Take information from the text, but try to invent own ideas.
2. Start your meeting. One student from group A welcomes the visitors and invites them to some coffee and snacks. After some small talk, another student from group A makes the presentation on recycling; then a student from group B talks about the environmentally friendly usage of cars. The people listening to the other group take notes and ask questions.

Structure your presentations as follows:

- Welcome your audience
- Introduce the subject
- Make the presentation itself
- Summarize
- Invite question
- Thank your audience

## 9. Conclusion

English for Specific Purposes has been growing in importance over the last few decades. In the face of ongoing globalisation, more and more companies do business internationally and consequently, their employees have to speak English at work. Here they are supposed to tackle discussions about problems quite fluently in a friendly and polite way. The objective of this paper was to find an answer to the question if modal verbs could support their efforts to meet these requirements. Based on an analysis of the ESP context, the results of a linguistic research on selected modal auxiliary verbs, and a corpus-based study concerning the use of these modals in business communication, the attempt has been made to offer practical suggestions on how the functional potential of *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* may be effectively involved in materials for the ESP classroom.

Employees typically feel the need for language classes when they already use English at work and suffer from a lack of fluency; that is why Hutchinson and Waters state that “[w]hat distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need” (1987: 53). Moreover, the following main characteristics of ESP courses could be discovered:

- the learners’ special needs which are determined by the industry or special field of an industry the learners are in, and their areas of responsibility
- permanent modification of the teaching programme to newly arisen needs during the course development
- Materials generation due to the limited flexibility and topicality of ESP course books

The ESP syllabus is based on a detailed needs analysis where topics deriving from the subject area and target situations connected with job responsibilities are identified. The key decision on how specified the individual course will be is made on the basis of this needs analysis. The discourse on specificity in 3.3.3.1. and the analysis of an ESP text book in chapter 7 of this paper have shown that topics with highly-specialised vocabulary are rarely discussed in ESP. That permits the conclusion that teachers should interpret the concept of specificity as the effective combination of the particular subject matter with functional skills in defined corporate contexts, supported by activities

dealing with language structures that are needed for these skills. As language structures and phrases needed for diverse business skills are similar, courses may show heterogeneity concerning their learners' job-specific tasks they have to perform in English; their level of language knowledge, however, should be rather homogenous.

Due to changing corporate tasks, the students' needs and course objectives are often subject to changes. ESP teachers obviously have to respond to them and may have to select and/or produce materials for the classroom in addition to the course book. Moreover, transmitting latest information in authentic texts to the classroom fills the 'topicality gap' left in the materials supply of course books. However, both excellent realistic texts from course books and authentic texts are able to create authenticity in the classroom which may be achieved by the experienced teacher who may successfully convert items from outside the course environment into interesting learning materials which enable learners to put their language skills into authentic work practice. Therefore, the purpose of ESP classroom materials is the performance of a task, which should ideally reflect exactly the different job responsibilities and potential workplace situations where the learners have to speak English.

Working internationally demands particular sensitivities. With regard to German learners of English, language training should emphasize the use of language patterns expressing empathy and politeness, as stereotypical German communication putting value on directness, objectivity and honesty may be interpreted as rude, aggressive or uncultivated in countries where polite indirectness is of central importance (Dignen 2005, 4: 67). Learners might face respective problems, and as it could be assumed that the modal verbs *can*, *could*, *may* and *might* are used for polite speech acts, they have been selected for detailed semantic and pragmatic research in the second part of this paper.

First these modal verbs were analysed in order to identify their semantic patterns and to evaluate their potential for common speech acts. This analysis was structured according to the polysemantic approach<sup>30</sup> dealing with different categories of modality for each modal verb. However, the monosemantic approach<sup>31</sup> was included, though without assigning one basic semantic characteristic to each modal but assessing a central

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<sup>30</sup> Represented e.g. by Leech (1987), Leech (2004), and Palmer (1979).

<sup>31</sup> Represented e.g. by Close (1975), Close (2002), and Lewis (1986).

meaning, following Coates who claims that “both categorical and non-categorical approaches are relevant and therefore an adequate description of the meanings of the modals must achieve a synthesis of these two approaches” (1983: 10).

The results of this analysis showed that distinct underlying concepts of modality may produce bigger differences between the uses of one individual modal (e.g. non-epistemic vs. epistemic *may*) than between similar applications of several modals (e.g. epistemic *could*, *may*, and *might* which seem to be undergoing a change in meaning and frequency). Moreover, even if there is an overlap of two lexemes in meaning, the two forms are not interchangeable in most contexts. They vary either according to formality (e.g. non-epistemic *can* vs. *may*), likelihood (e.g. epistemic *could* vs. *may/might*), or frequency in certain contexts (e.g. epistemic *may* vs. *might*). Restricted by their underlying semantic concepts, not all of the modals investigated can be used in all speech acts in question. For example, non-epistemic *may* does not occur in interrogatives with second persons, as the implication of authority would collide with the subject *you*. The main findings from the research on the above modal verbs in this paper correspond to Coates (1983).

Leech alleges that the difficult use of modal verbs lies in the fact that

their meaning has both a logical (semantic) and a practical (pragmatic) element. We can talk about them in such logical notions as ‘permission’ and ‘necessity’, but this done, we still have to consider ways in which these notions become remoulded by the social and psychological influences of everyday communication between human beings: factors such as motivation, condescension, politeness, tact, and irony (2004: 70).

Considering possible speech acts with *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might*, requests as the interrogative representation of different speech intentions have been scrutinised on the basis of a corpus containing speech acts commonly used in international business contexts. The corpus offered only phrases with *can*, *could* and *may* with the underlying concepts of ‘permission’ and/or ‘neutral possibility’. Requests as practical applications of the selected modals have been analysed regarding the influence of the modals used on the speech intention and the level of degree of its politeness.

The research has revealed that, although the linguistic research had shown that ‘permission’ *may* is marked for formality, in business reality mainly *can* seems to be used. Requests are applied to influence other people’s behaviour and are caused by the

speaker's wishes at different levels of intensity. In directive requests, this intensity may be balanced out by means of alternative uses of modal verbs and subjects and the appropriate collocation of language items can have a regulatory function and make the utterance more implicit and polite:

*could* + you → remote form balances out direct address and illocutionary force of command

*can* + implicit *we* → basic form emphasizes closeness of speaker expressed by *we*

Furthermore, the findings from the analysis show that, with permission as the underlying meaning, the more the speaker benefits from the positive answer of the request, the more frequently the politer form *may* seems to be used. Generally, the basic meaning of a modal has still influence on the kind of speech act they might be used for, but the practical application often neutralises these underlying concepts.

The discussion on speech acts in general and requests in particular refers to expressions from an experience-based, written corpus of phrases. But for a realistic interpretation of the illocutionary force of a speech act, it is important to “take account of the surrounding discourse context” (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 37). Speech acts outside the context can almost always convey ambiguity. In practice, background knowledge, prosodic features, body language, facial expressions, and other visual support help interpret statements and questions correctly. Ambiguity there would be produced by lack of information.

In the third part of this paper, printed and teacher-generated ESP materials have been presented. First, the ESP course book *English for the Automobile Industry* has been analysed and evaluated. As expected, grammar points are hardly considered. The book contains structural and general vocabulary to help learners participate in discussions, and sub-technical terms to enable them to discuss subject matters of their industries. Thus the results from the first part of this paper concerning the specificity of ESP materials have been confirmed. Second, a supplement of ESP materials to the above course book has been developed with regard to the field of application where phrases with *can*, *could*, and *may* are used according to the corpus research: they might be frequently employed by white-collar workers who have to attend meetings and may be on the phone to international colleagues, customers, or suppliers. Remoteness in space

often complicates the task on the one hand and requires increased politeness on the other. Consequently, appropriate politeness may make at least partly compensate for insufficient language knowledge. The eight topics are based on the subject areas in the respective units of the book. These worksheets, applicable for courses complying with B1 or B2 of the CEFR, have been structured according to the suggestions offered in 3.3.2. Starting from an authentic text, a 'path of activities' leads to and is supposed to support the performance of the task, the simulation of a workplace scenario. The incorporated exercises with modal verbs try to make learners aware of the fact that often not ungrammaticality, but a change of meaning or inappropriateness for a particular context may be the result of insufficient knowledge of modal verb use.

During the process of completing this study I realised that linguists, on the one hand, are very organised and clear when they provide details on modal concepts and corresponding examples; however, they seem not to be interested in offering adequate examples. Authors of grammar books for practical use, on the other hand, often list a variety of helpful phrases, but their ways of structuring them (sometimes untidily mixing concepts and uses) might confuse learners.

This paper has tackled a broad topic which could provide an area for further research and application. First, in this study, focus was on oral communication in workplace situations. Further research could concentrate on written communication where an increasing amount of emails is influencing features of formality in commercial correspondence. A second approach would be the study of modal verb uses in other varieties of English, as the corpus in the second part of this paper is based essentially on British English.

According to the research and discussion in this paper, it is evident that three of the four selected modal verbs, *can*, *could*, and *may*, are not only suited to the ESP classroom but worth extra attention, as their appropriate use may allow employees communicating internationally to produce politeness strategies and, vice versa, to correctly decode speech acts used by others. This permits the assumption that other modal auxiliary verbs do have a similar potential for the ESP classroom, which suggests a third area of further research.

## **10. Bibliography**

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## **Deutsche Zusammenfassung der Arbeit**

Die vorliegende Magisterarbeit untersucht, wie die Vermittlung ausgewählter grammatischer Strukturen den Englischunterricht in internen, zweckgebundenen Firmenschulungen (*English for Specific Purposes/ESP*) so eingesetzt werden kann, dass sie das Training kommunikativer Fertigkeiten effektiv unterstützt.

Der erste Teil definiert die Zielgruppe der Lerner in *ESP*, ihre speziellen Voraussetzungen, Bedürfnisse und Lernziele, sowie die daraus resultierenden Anforderungen an den Unterricht. Nach einem historischen Abriss und der aktuellen Einordnung von *ESP* in den Bereich des Erwachsenenunterrichts erfolgt eine Beschreibung der speziellen Bedingungen, welche Kursvorbereitung und – durchführung sowie die Tätigkeitsbereiche des *ESP*-Dozenten bestimmen. Folgende Hauptmerkmale unterscheiden *ESP* vom Allgemeinenglisch:

- die aktuelle Notwendigkeit, Englisch im beruflichen Umfeld zu sprechen
- ein spezieller inhaltlicher Bedarf, der vom Industriezweig und dem Verantwortungsgebiet des Lerners bestimmt wird
- ständiges Anpassen des Lehrprogramms an neu entstehenden Bedarf und die Bedürfnisse der Lerner
- die Notwendigkeit für den Lehrer, Lehrmaterial selbst zu gestalten, um dem hohen Anspruch an Flexibilität und Aktualität im Unterricht gerecht werden zu können

Bei der Erarbeitung von Vorschlägen, wie aufgrund der Bedarfsanalyse die Kurs- und Unterrichtsgestaltung erfolgen kann, lag ein besonderer Schwerpunkt auf der Entwicklung einer Struktur für Unterrichtsmaterialien, welche geeignet ist, dem allgemeinen Anspruch der Verbesserung der Kommunikationsfähigkeit in typischen Geschäftssituationen im interkulturellen Kontext und gleichzeitig der thematischen Spezifik jedes einzelnen Kurses gerecht zu werden. Diese Spezifik kann in Einzelfällen in der Anwendung von hochspezialisierter Lexik bestehen, findet aber hauptsächlich ihren Ausdruck in der genau auf den Bedarf der Lerner abgestimmten Kombination von thematischen und funktionsbestimmten Inhalten. Das Zusammenführen beider Bereiche in einer für die Lerner typischen Arbeitssituation kreiert Authentizität im Unterricht,

welche sich idealerweise in der *task* widerspiegelt, der Simulation einer realen Arbeitssituation, in welcher Probleme in der Fremdsprache gelöst werden müssen.

Zu Beginn des zweiten Teils wurden allgemeine Grundlagen erarbeitet, die als Vorbereitung dienen und den Rahmen bilden für die linguistische Analyse der modalen Hilfsverben *can*, *could*, *may* und *might*. Im ersten Schritt wurden die semantischen Grundmuster der exemplifizierten Lexeme untersucht und deren daraus resultierendes Potential für die Bildung von Sprechabsichten dargestellt. Theoretischer Bezug für diese Auswertung waren unter anderem Coates (1983), Palmer (1990), sowie Leech (1987 und 2004). Die Untersuchung ergab, dass der Gebrauch einzelner modaler Hilfsverben aufgrund unterschiedlicher modaler Konzepte größere Unterschiede aufweisen kann als eine funktional ähnliche Anwendung verschiedener modaler Hilfsverben. Auch bei offensichtlicher semantischer Überlappung zweier Lexeme sind diese in den meisten Kontexten nicht austauschbar und unterscheiden sich z.B. hinsichtlich ihrer stilspezifischen Anwendung oder dem ausgedrückten Grad an Wahrscheinlichkeit.

In der nun folgenden, korpus-basierenden Studie, deren Grundlage die seit 2001 im Sprachmagazin *Business Spotlight* erschienenen thematischen Sammlungen von gebräuchlichen Sätzen und Wendungen im Geschäftsleben darstellt, wurde am Beispiel höflicher Bitten demonstriert, welchen Einfluss der Gebrauch der o. g. Hilfsverben auf die Bedeutung und Stilistik von Sprechakten hat und wie diese in typischen Situationen des Berufslebens eingesetzt werden können. Die selektive Anwendung der modalen Hilfsverben *can*, *could*, und *may*, abgestimmt auf das jeweilige Subjekt, scheint in verhaltenssteuernden, interrogativen Sprechabsichten als Regulativ für angemessene Höflichkeit zu dienen. Zugrundeliegende modale Konzepte können den Sprechakt beeinflussen, z.B. bei Bitten um Erlaubnis, werden aber oft in der praktischen Anwendung aufgehoben.

Der dritte Teil konzentrierte sich auf die Entwicklung von Unterrichtsmaterialien unter definierten inhaltlichen Maßgaben und der Verwendung der fokussierten modalen Hilfsverben. Da die Themen der acht Lektionen des kompakten *ESP*-Lehrbuchs *English for the Automobile Industry* (Marie Kavanagh 2003) als Ausgangspunkt für die sich anschließende Didaktisierung geeigneter authentischer Texte dienten, wurde das Lehrwerk eingangs analysiert hinsichtlich seines Grades an Spezifität, der Authentizität

seiner Texte sowie seines kommunikativen und grammatikalischen Ansatzes. Das Lehrbuch entspricht den Ergebnissen aus Teil I dieser Arbeit hinsichtlich *ESP*-typischer Bedarfe und geeigneten Unterrichtsmaterials. Generelle Fachsprache mit Vokabeln, die dem Großteil von Lernern eines Unternehmens verständlich sind, werden eingebunden in Unterrichtsaktivitäten, die vor allem Sprechfertigkeiten fördern sollen.

Das anschließend erstellte Lehrmaterial entspricht strukturell dem erarbeiteten Vorschlag zur Generierung von *ESP*-Unterrichtsmaterial im ersten Teil der Arbeit und vermittelt inhaltlich Erkenntnisse, die während der linguistischen Analyse im zweiten Teil gewonnen wurden. Die acht Arbeitsblätter bilden eine mögliche Ergänzung zum oben genannten Kursbuch, indem der grammatische Teil Übungen und kommunikationsorientierte Aktivitäten mit modalen Hilfsverben enthält, welche versuchen, die Kommunikation des jeweiligen Themas in der *task* bedarfsgerecht vorzubereiten und zu unterstützen. Ziel dabei ist es, die Lerner erkennen zu lassen, dass die ungeeignete Anwendung von modalen Hilfsverben von Gesprächspartnern zwar oft nicht als grammatischer Fehler, dafür aber als Unhöflichkeit empfunden werden kann, was im internationalen Geschäftsalltag negative Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen kann. Außerdem konnten mit authentischen Texten hochaktuelle und für die Automobilindustrie relevante Themen aufgegriffen werden. Die Arbeitsblätter wurden konzipiert für Lerner der Niveaustufen B1 und B2 des Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens (CEFR) mit Kommunikationsbedarf in geschäftstypischen Situationen im internationalen Kontext.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie weisen darauf hin, dass eine fokussierte Anwendung der modalen Hilfsverben *can*, *could* und *may* die register- und stilspezifische Kommunikationsfähigkeit der Lerner in Firmenschulungen unterstützen und verbessern kann. Es ist davon auszugehen, dass andere modale Hilfsverben ein ähnliches Potential für den *ESP*-Lehrplan aufweisen.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **List of Abbreviations**

BE	Business English
CEFR	Common European Framework of References for Languages
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EBP	English for Business Purposes
EGP	English for General Purposes
ELP	English for Legal Purposes
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMP	English for Medical Purposes
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
EPP	English for Professional Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EST	English for Science and Technology
EVT	English for Vocational Training
FTA	Face Threatening Act
LSA	Learning Situation Analysis
PSA	Present Situation Analysis
TSA	Target Situation Analysis

## Appendix 2

### Contents of *English for the Automobile Industry*

UNIT TITLE	TOPICS	USEFUL LANGUAGE AND SKILLS
<b>1 Introduction to the car</b>	Factors involved in buying a car Types of cars Car sales	Opinions and agreeing or disagreeing Recommending Adverbs of frequency
<b>2 The exterior</b>	Exterior car parts Car production A quality problem 8D report	The passive Describing a process Telephone phrases
<b>3 The interior</b>	Interior car parts The instrument panel A delivery problem	Making, accepting and rejecting suggestions Email phrases
<b>4 Under the bonnet</b>	The engine A technical support hotline An international car show	Describing position and shape Trade fair phrases
<b>5 Performance and technical specifications</b>	Launching a new model A road test Materials and their properties	Making comparisons Approximating Talking about dimensions
<b>6 Safety</b>	A magazine article Active and passive safety features Choosing safety features Car recalls	Talking about advantages and disadvantages Making a presentation Meeting phrases
<b>7 Design</b>	Describing car design The design process Constraints Expanding the product range	Making small talk
<b>8 Future trends</b>	The car of the future Environmental awareness Making a presentation Fuel cells	Talking about the future: certainty, probability, possibility

## **Eigenständigkeitserklärung**

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich die vorstehende Magisterarbeit mit dem Titel:

Teaching Modal Auxiliary Verbs in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

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selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Die Stellen, die anderen Werken dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen wurden, habe ich in jedem einzelnen Fall durch die Angabe der Quelle, auch der benutzten Sekundärliteratur, als Entlehnung kenntlich gemacht.