POSSIBILITIES FOR *SHOULD* IN TRANSLATION ENVIRONMENTS

Attila IMRE[1]

Abstract

Gouadec – among others – has foreshadowed the end of PRAT compared to CAT. This new age of translation offers the possibility of investigating a larger database fed into the translation memory and term base of a translation environment, such as Trados or MemoQ. Thus we will try to offer an insight into the translation of the English *should* and *ought to* into non-Indo-European languages, such as Romanian.

Keywords: translation memory, term base, modal verb, should, ought to

Introduction

The problematic aspect of the English modal verbs is often brought into question. One of the main reasons may be the fact that their categorization, especially in terms of their selectional restrictions, tends to be arbitrary and at times forced in order to conform to the criteria established for certain investigation (cf. Greere – Zdrenghea 2000:35).

Many grammar books and dictionaries include modal verbs on the list of irregular verbs (e.g. Bădescu 1984:367) in the 'standard' format, which means that for instance *can* appears in the first column (Infinitive), *could* in the second (Past Simple), whereas the third column only has a dash (Past Participle). We cannot agree with this type of categorisation, as one counterexample on the irregular verb list may endanger the understanding of the entire system. In case of *can* and *could* let us offer here two counterexamples for being placed in the Infinitive (more or less Present Simple) column and Past Simple column:

You ***can't*** *have done that to me.* (past meaning)
Could *you lend me a hand?* (present/ future meaning)

Greere – Zdrenghea (2000:38) correctly observe that those who hesitate to call the verb after the modal an infinitive could hardly call it a present or past tense form. Instead of arguing about the correct terms, we propose I, II, and III forms of the verbs (Imre 2008). Palmer (1990:3-4) establishes 7 criteria for differentiating modal verbs from other (primary auxiliary) verbs, which includes their behaviour in interrogative and negative forms, as well as their formal characteristics: no *-s* form of the third person singular, no non-finite forms and no co-occurrence. This supports our initial observation regarding

[1] Lector univ.dr., Universitatea Sapientia, Târgu-Mureş

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)

the classification of modal verbs, and although it is convenient to discuss pairs of modals *(can-could, may-might, shall-should, will-would*) for teaching purposes, it is suitable neither for a rigorous presentation nor translating purposes.

Modality may be expressed through any number of grammatical forms or functions such as verbs, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, and particles or other language features such as intonation and inflection (Li 2004: xvi, cited by Kosur 2010:2), although due to the form of the verb phrase in which a modal verb occupies the initial position, grammatical mood is intrinsically connected to the modality expressed by English modal verbs. Modality is the grammaticalized expression of the subjective attitudes and opinions of the speaker including possibility, probability, predictability, necessity, obligation, permissibility, ability, desire, and contingency, and it is external to the content, being part of the attitude taken up by the speaker (Bybee et al. 1994: 176-181; Kosur 2009:1; Halliday 1970:349, cited by Greere – Zdrenghea 2000:29). Modals and 'quasi-modals' are used to express hypothetical meanings as possibility, futurity, necessity, obligation, ability, intention, permission and assertion (Greere – Zdrenghea 2000:33, 91), thus the most flexible concept of modalisation must include both of them. Kosur (2009:1) also states that modal verbs are not the only grammatical categories expressing modality, as in modern English both modal verbs and grammatical mood is defined as a set of inflected verb forms that express modality of an action or state.

However, from the point of view of translation, we are primarily interested whether feeding samples of modal verbs into the translation memory (full sentences) and the term base (words and expressions) enables us to enhance productivity or not.

Translating *should* and *ought to*

At this stage we will look into the translation problems regarding the English modal verbs, as Antinucci and Parisi warn us that modal constructions (especially epistemic) involve some kind of comment on the environment within which a particular act does or does not take place (1971:28-9). Modal sentences cannot be understood at all apart from considerations of their being anchored in some social context (Greere – Zdrenghea 2000:13), which seems to leave no hope for computer-assisted translations (CAT), as no one can expect from a software to take into consideration environment.

Nevertheless, these programs can take into consideration the immediate 'context' of the sentence in question, which means that the sentences prior and after are also checked (*MemoQ Help*). The problem Fillmore presents (cf. 1973: 111) – either polite or ironical meaning of a modal verb – can be tackled, at least partially, by feeding into the translation memory and term base as many instances as possible, for the translator to select the most appropriate meaning. Although Gouadec (2007) foreshadows the end of the PRAT-days (paper and rubber assisted translation) in favour of CAT, this is – interestingly – not a real problem, as large databases, corpora are actually collections of human-translated texts fed into translation memories and term bases. These can be of either top quality or poor one, as in many cases it is difficult to check the source.

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)

We started our investigation by adding instances of the English *should* and *ought to* in 'present' (*modal+I*) and 'past' *(modal+have+III*) to the translation memory and term base of *MemoQ* translation environment with samples from Bădescu (1984), Gălăţeanu – Comişel (1982) and Greere – Zdrenghea (2000). These were completed with negative forms as well (including shortened forms), taking into consideration that negation may refer to either the meaning of the modal or to the meaning of the main verb (Palmer 1968:105). Greere – Zdrenghea (2000:92) say that "it is obvious that negation, questioning, emphasis and combinations of these three processes result in changes of meaning that are not immediately predictable from the negation or questioning or traditionally accepted content of modals". Although epistemic modals have progressive forms, at this stage these forms were not included.

Then a collection of about 1,000 sentences containing English modal verbs was extracted from Asimov's *Foundation* (created by P. Keresztesi and A. Imre), out of which 27 sentences contained either *should* (19) or *ought to* (8). These two modals are very similar, as many scholars agree, so we suspected that their translation into Romanian will overlap. Thus when a possible translation of *should* was fed into the term base (TB), it was extended to *ought to* as well.

The first seven instances have been taken a screenshot in order to easily follow the results; this clearly shows that it is worth putting *should* and *ought to* into the translation memory and term base, but not all their possible translations. The Romanian *(n-)ar trebui să* and *(n-)ar fi trebuit să* are among the most typical translations for *should, shouldn't, should not, ought to, oughtn't to, ought not to, should have, shouldn' have, should have not.*

Further cases of *should* are the ones involving hypothetical constructions or particular constructions, which are also worth adding to the term base: *for fear she should* [de frică să]*, If he should* [Dacă cumva; Dacă se întâmplă să] *, It is necessary that you should* [Este necesar să]*, Should he* [Dacă ar să; Dacă se va întâmpla cumva să; Dacă cumva], *lest he should* [să nu; ca să nu], or *who should I see but* [pe cine s-o văd? Pe; pe cine văd? Pe].

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)

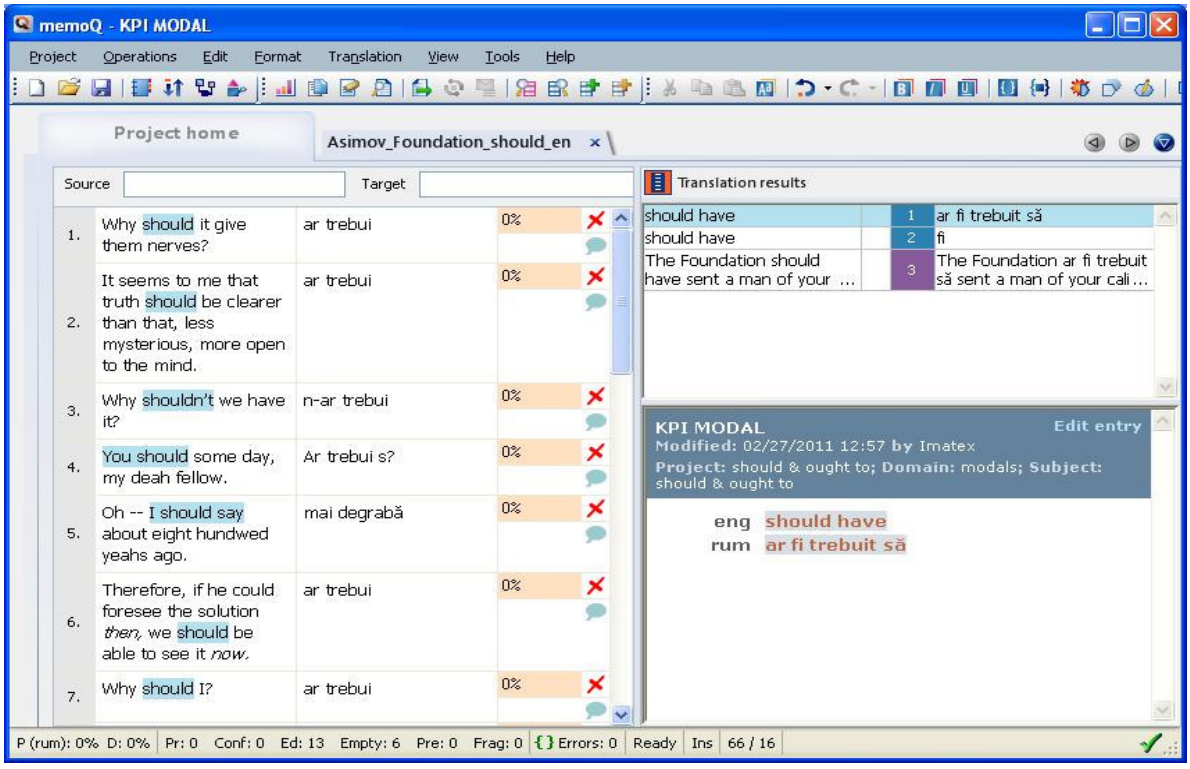


Illustration 1: Term base for 'should'

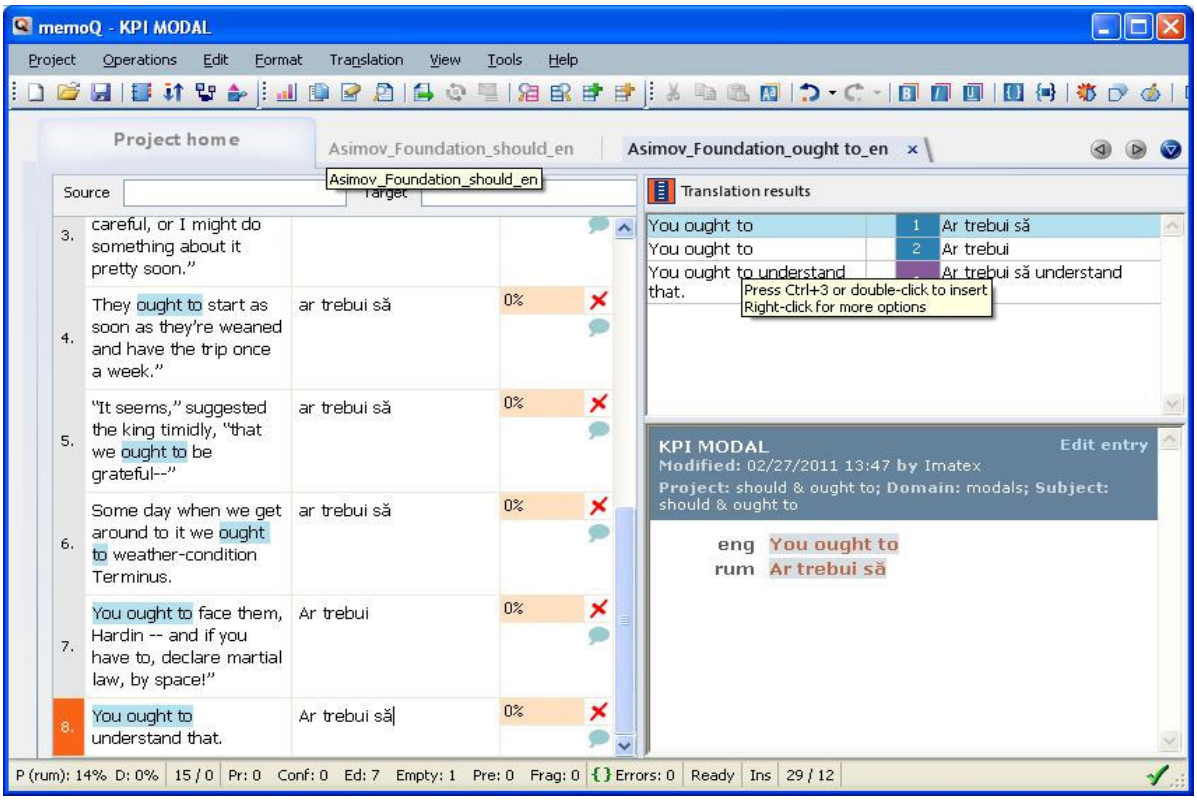


Illustration 2: Term base for 'ought to'

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)

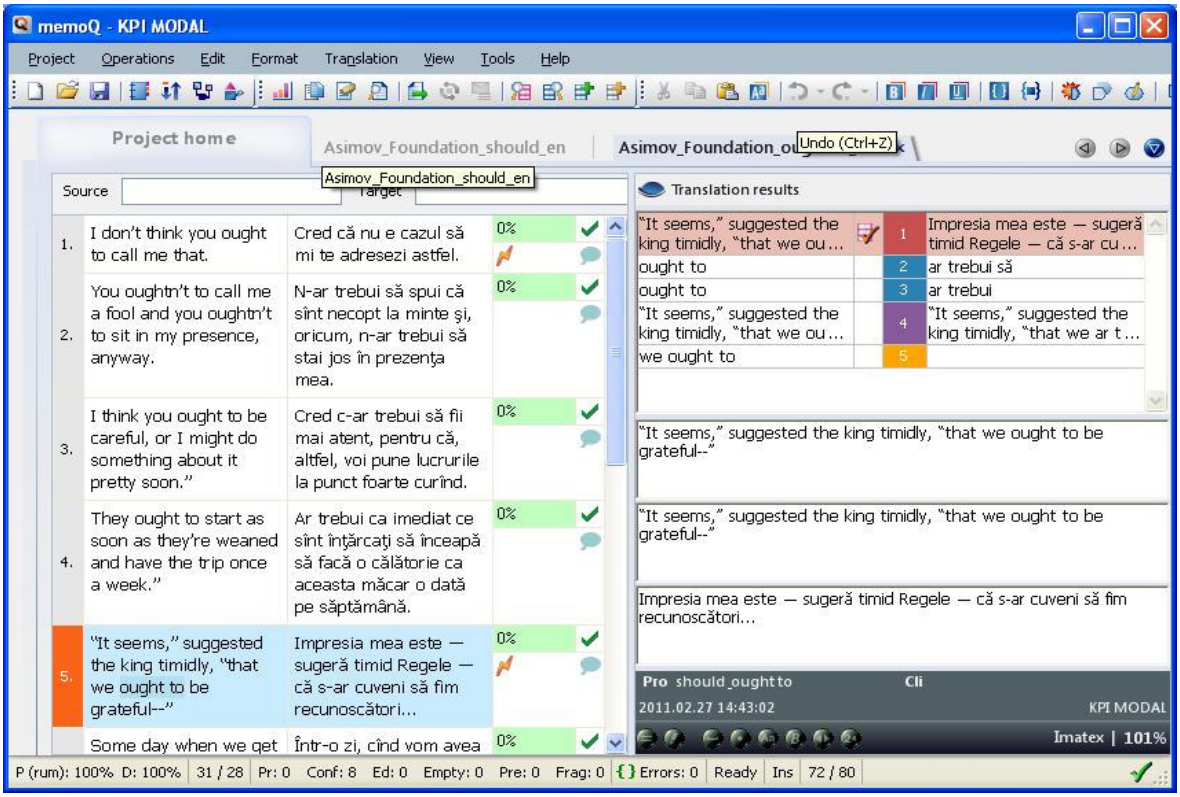


Illustration 1: Translated 'ought to'

Naturally, the larger the samples in the translation memory and term base, the more chance we have to find a correct hit, which is usually the first one offered. Up to 9 hits, they are easy to insert in te translation, using the combination of *CTRL + 1...9* (The right side of the illustrations above).

Results and conclusions

As Greere – Zdrenghea (2000:8) state, constructions in which deontic modals appear are easier to assimilate for Romanian learners, whereas epistemic ones are not. In case of translations, we are not primarily concerned with differentiating epistemic and deontic modals, but we are curious if the chosen software can offer a solution. Seemingly, in case of a large database, the case is solved: both epistemic and deontic samples should be present, although the correct choice may be problematic:

> Modals require the perfect understanding of social relations between participants, of other socio-economic realities, of the status of the participants in the speech act, etc. This is not easily done outside that particular contexts.
>
> (Greere – Zdrenghea 2000:18)

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)

In this respect, it is the ('world'-)knowledge of the translator that may help in selecting the correct option, based on the context (the relationship of modal verbs and the other words in the sentence), as the same modal verb may have various interpretations.

In our case, 10 out of 19 sentences regarding *should* were pre-translated with the term, which was the choice of the Romanian translator as well (52.63% correct hits) and in the case of *ought to* 6 sentences out of 8 were correctly pre-translated (75%). The latter result was, however, to be expected as *ought to* is predominantly the synonym for *should* when this is translated with *a trebui* in either affirmative or negative, past or present reference. If we take into consideration that the chosen text belongs to literature (science-fiction), the results are encouraging indeed, as even the developers of M*emoQ* accept that productivity in case of non-technical texts is 10-30% (*MemoQ Quick Start Guide* 2011). We should mention the literal translation of *ought to* [s-ar cuveni], in which case the Romanian translation is a synonym for *ar trebui,* which should be added to the TB if we want better results.

These results may be further improved if we pay special attention to capital letters, lower and upper cases, as TB is case sensitive, and although it seems strange, if all the combinations of personal pronouns with *should* and *ought to* are fed into TB, the results will be even better.

We may conclude that quality assurance is excellent when CAT-tools are involved, if correct data input is provided; and even if during a later translation previous error is observed, there is a possibility to correct it at any time. As for the version we are presently using (*MemoQ* 4.5.29), the developers are left some work to do: the correct rendering of the specific Romanian diacritical signs is still problematic (*ă, î, ş, ţ, â,* see *Illustration 1*, sentence 4.), although all file encoding possibilities have been tried.

Thus we tend to believe that CAT-tools will hardly ever be able to 'understand' the meaning of a sentence (especially in case of modality or metaphors), but it may offer multiple options. If this is true, we may speak of a human-controlled CAT, which may be accepted by the most ardent supporters of human translation as well.

Acknowledgements

This article has been written with the financial support of Sapientia Foundation – Institute of Research Programs, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, as part of Grant Nr. IPC: 48/8/09.04.2010.

References:

Antinucci, F. & D. Parisi. 1971. On English Modal Verbs, In *Papers from the 7th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 28-39.

Bădescu, A. 1984. *Gramatica limbii engleze,* Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)

Bybee, J., Revere Perkins & William Pagliuca. 1994. Mood and modality. In *The evolution of grammar: Tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world*, 176-242. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Fillmore, C. J. 1973. May we come in?, In *Semiotica*, 9:2, pp. 97-116.
Gălăţeanu, G. & E. Comişel. 1982. *Gramatica limbii engleze pentru uz şcolar*, Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.
Greere, A.L. – Zdrenghea, M.M. 2000. *A Guide to the Use of English Modals and Modal Expressions,* Cluj-Napoca: Clusium.
Gouadec. D. 2007. *Translation as a Profession,* Vol. I-II, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Halliday, M.A.K. 1970. Diversity in Language as Seen from a Consideration of Modality and Mood in English, In *Foundations of Language,* 6:3, pp. 322-361.
Imre, A. 2008. *Logikus angol nyelvtan. Gramatica logică a limbii engleze*, Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.
Kosur, H.M. 2010. Modality and the English Modal Verb System. Unpublished article. Retrieved from http://ilstu.academia.edu/HeatherMarieKosur/Papers/312507/Modality_and_the_English_Modal_Verb_System on 24th February 2011.
Kosur, H. M. 2009. Multiple modals in modern English: Use, history, and structure of periphrastic modal verbs.
http://ilstu.academia.edu/HeatherMarieKosur/Papers/142161/Multiple-Modals-in-Modern- English--Use--History--and-Structure-of-Periphrastic-Modal-Verbs. (28 Sep. 2010.)
Li, Renzhi. 2004. *Modality in English and Chinese: A typological perspective*. Boca Raton, Florida: Universal Publishers.
Palmer, F.R. 1990. *Modality and the English Modals*, 2nd ed., London: Longman.
Palmer, F.R. 1968. *A Linguistics Study of the English Verb,* Miami Linguistic Series 2, Coral Gables.
XXX. 2011. *MemoQ Quick Start Guide*. Downloaded from http://www.kilgray.com on 12th Feb. 2011.

BDD-A2823 © 2011 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 21:00:21 UTC)