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# THE SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUASI-MODAL *HAVE TO* IN ENGLISH

**Quasi-modal frequency in Present-day English**

Bolinger (1980:297) once actually observed that "the moment a verb is given an infinitive complement, that verb starts down the road of auxiliariness." This process can be clearly seen in the development of so-called "quasi-modals" (Coates 1983: 52; Perkins 1983: 65; Leech 1987: 73), "semi-modals" (Palmer 1979: 17-18; 1987: 128), or "semi-auxiliaries" (Quirk et al. 1985: 137) in the history of English.

One of the observed changes in the modal system of PDE is a decrease in frequency of the core modals (see Krug 2000, Leech 2003, Smith 2003, Leech *et al*. forthcoming). Leech (2003) investigates modal usage in the Brown quartet of corpora, and observes that the decrease in modal usage is apparent in 13 out of 15 categories ranging from a decline of 31.2% (D, religion) to a decline of 0.5% (H, Miscellaneous).[1] In the remaining two categories, there is a small and non-significant increase; in J (Learned) of 2.4% and L (Mystery Fiction) of 8.4%. Furthermore, the British and American corpora show a decrease over time (from 1961 to 1991) in the case of every modal (individual modals differ in frequency), except *can* and *could* which show an increase of 2.2% and 2.4%, respectively, in BrE. Leech's results also show that the infrequent modals *shall, ought to,* and (in BrE) *need* have decreased drastically, and a similar decline has taken place in the mid-frequency modals *may* and *must*; while w*ould* and *should* have decreased less drastically. Finally, *will, can, could* and *might* have not significantly changed. The results presented by Leech *et al.* (forthcoming) also confirm that the modals which show the steepest decline are the less common modals.

***Core modals vs. quasi-modals***

Mair and Leech (2006) point out that although many changes involve a competing construction or constructions, there is not necessarily a correlation between the form(s) losing ground and those gaining. On discovering a decrease in the frequency of the core modals in the Brown family of corpora, Leech (2003: 229) suggests that perhaps the semi-modals are - gradually usurping the functions of the core modals, but concludes that this is not the case because, although semi-modal usage is increasing overall, some semi-modals are actually declining (for example, *be to, (had) better, (have) got to* and *be going to* in FLOB), and most semi-modals are much less frequent than the core modals (for example, *will* is about ten times more frequent than *be going to*). These results are supported by Krug (2000), and also by Smith (2003: 249) who states that "the rise of [*have to*] ... by no means makes up for the shortfall in *must*."

**The semantics of modals**

Modality has been traditionally defined as the grammaticalization of the speaker's opinions and attitudes (Palmer 1979/1990:1-2; Vihla 1999:17-19).

Discussion on English modality has concentrated on the modal verbs, since they constitute the only coherent class of expressions which can be identified with the help of distinctive morpho-syntactic characteristics, i.e. the NICE properties (see Palmer 1974/1988:16-25; Quirk et al. 1985:121-128; Gotti et al. 2002:25). There is, however, some



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gradience, and only the central modals share all the formal features. Semi-modals include marginal modals, which fulfill some of the criteria, and modal idioms, i.e. multi-word verbs, which semantically resemble the central modals but hardly share any of their formal features. So there is cline between the central modals and the other verbal expressions of modality. This cline is not only formal but also semantic.

Linguists agree that the most striking semantic properties of the central modals are their subjectivity, i.e. the speaker is involved, and their lack of subject selection (cf. Perkins 1983:60-61; Palmer 1986: 16-17).

The semantic independence of the subject is reflected in three ways (Quirk et al. 1985: 126-127). First, there are no semantic restrictions between the subject and the modal verb. Second, the construction with epistemic *there* is possible. Third, the central modals usually allow the change from the active voice to the passive without any change of meaning, if the other conditions for the passive are fulfilled. There is, however, some variation between different central modals, and, for example, in certain contexts some of them fail the active-passive test. Hardly any main verbs pass all the three tests.

Researches increasingly believe that many of the semi-modals are showing signs of more modal behavior, i.e. grammaticalization. This behavior is still poorly investigated (Facchinetti et al. 2003; Krug 2000:4). The subject of this paper, i.e. *have to*, is one of these emerging modals.

**The domain of obligation and necessity**

The class of English modal verbs have undergone a number of important changes in the history of English, and continue to change in Present-Day English. Studies on current change suggest that the modals are decreasing in frequency, becoming monosemous, and are facing possible competition from rival semi-modals which are increasing in frequency (see Krug 2000; Leech 2003; Smith 2003; Mair and Leech 2006; Leech *et al.* forthcoming).

The modals of obligation and necessity contain, according to most sources, four central modals – *must, need, should and ought* – as well as six semi-modals – *have to, (had) better, (have) got to, need to, (be) supposed to* and *ought to*. This category is less common overall than the other modal categories (Biber at al. 1999:489-495; Smith 2003). Especially the central modals have a lower frequency than the central modals of their categories. Two reasons are suggested for this. First, it could reflect a general tendency to avoid the face threatening force of expression with an obligation meaning. Second, semi-modals have become better established in this domain and have to a great extent, replaced the central modals. *Have to* is the most common of the semi-modals.

As regards root and epistemic meanings, all the central modals and semi-modals of this category, except *must*, are used to mark root rather than epistemic senses most of the time (Biber et al. 1999:494-495). *must* usually expresses epistemic necessity in conversation, whereas in academic prose it is more common marking root obligation. This might be due to the strong directive force this modal has when used in face-to-face interaction, and it has been suggested that the use of *must* has been decreasing because of its strong perspective obligation meaning. The long-term decline of obligation *must* has even been connected to a change in the general world view. According to Myhill (1995) *must* is associated with unequal power, and as the American society has changed to a more equal one, obligation *must* has decreased in frequency. The same kind of process of democratization has also been suggested for British English by Leech (2003) and Smith (2003). These changes my have contributed to the increasing use of the semi-modals of this group as well.



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**The evolution of HAVE TO**

In continuation, I would like to take a look at just one of the semi modals, i.e. *have to.* I will follow the life of *have+to* – infinitive from its birth on the Old English period (its actual birth may well have been pre-Old English) to its puberty in the 'modal' sense in the early Modern English period.

Deontic *have to* entered English around a millennium before deontic *have got to*. This is certainly one of the reasons why only the former has received a considerable amount of attention in the linguistic literature. Arguing for auxiliary status of *have to*, Visser (1969: 1478) describes its semantics and its historical development:

> In this type [ s.c. *I have to write a letter*] the verb *have* is void of any idea of possession, and the object in it is no longer an object *to have* but to the infinitive.
> *To have* is therefore here … merely a function word, or 'auxiliary of prediction' expressing nothing but duty, obligation, compulsion, necessity, etc. The development of this construction from the older constructions A [sc. with a stronger possession reading such as *He that hath little to spende, hath not much to lose* ] and B [sc. Possession alongside obligation such as in *He has a large family to keep*] was very slow, and it is not possible to ascertain when exactly the idiom appeared for the first time on paper.

He then goes on to argue as follows:

> But since the verb *to have* came to function as an auxiliary, it tended to have its place immediately before the infinitive just as the other auxiliaries, so that the word order gradually became *have –infinitive-object.* If this word order is used as a criterion, it will be found that there no examples before about 1200 …, that the usage was fairly rare in Middle English and that it became firmly established in Modern English.

As for the long term history of *have to,* van der Gaaf (1931:180-188) seems to have been the first to describe the rise of deontic *have to* as a transition through several stages. In an unpublished paper, Brinton (1990) offers a detailed grammaticalization study, including discussion of numerous examples from the Helsinki Corpus and from previous research. She substantially refines but in essence confirms the traditional account. Parts of Fischer's analysis 1994:139-145) do not depart as radically from either the traditional view of Brinton's account as Fischer's phrasing sometimes seems to indicate. Both accounts share with the traditional analysis the perhaps most important conclusion that the critical period in the grammaticalization of *have to* is Early Modern English. Five steps in the evolution of deontic *have to* are proposed by Heine (1993).

Table 1. The development of deontic *have to* (adapted from Heine 1993:41f)

| Stage | | |
|---|---|---|
| | I | I have a letter [Possession schema] |
| | II | I have a letter to mail [Purpose Schema: Possession Schema +purpose/goal adjunct] |
| | III | I have a letter to write [the possessive meaning of *have* has been bleached out] |
| | IV | I have to write a letter [*have to* now functions as a unit lexeme expressing the modal notion of obligation] |
| | V | I have to write [the object complement can now be deleted] |



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While the exact timing of each individual stage has been a matter of considerable dispute (see Brinton 1990 or Fischer 1994), it is generally agreed that the stages above square with the chronological order of attested construction types.

The changes involved in the development of the *have to* periphrasis can be summarized as follows:

a) bleaching of the possessive semantics of *have*;
b) fixing of the word order with end position of the object;
c) (partial) auxiliation of *have*;
d) change in the function of the nominal object, from object of *have to* object of the infinitive; and
e) extension of the construction to include intransitive infinitives.

***Have to* constructions in Modern English**

*have to (+ object)*

Most discussions of the modal auxiliaries in Modern English include *have to* on semantic grounds, primarily the similarity of *have to* with modal *must,* but the morphosyntactic differences between the two forms are recognized by the classification of *have to* as semi-modal.

Like *must, have to* can express both deontic and epistemic necessity. The deontic meaning is one of duty or obligation: "to be under obligation, to be obliged; to be necessitated *to do something*":

1. a. *My other sister and I* ***have to*** *do all her work.*
b. *We* ***had to*** *learn everything for ourselves, didn't we, Fanny?*

In these cases, external circumstances, not the speaker, impose the constraint. The epistemic meaning of logical necessity for *have to* is generally considered "rare" (Palmer 1979: 46; 1987: 128; Coates 1983: 57; Bybee and Pagliuca 1985: 67), an "Americanism" (Perkins 1983: 61; Coates 1983: 57, Leech 1987: 79, 83), or a feature of the speech of young people (Coates 1983: 57), but Quirk et al. (1985: 145) note that this usage is now well established in British English:

2. a. *This* ***has to*** *be the biggest ant-hill ever seen.*
b. *It* ***had to*** *be the same boulder that he and Betty had sat upon so often.*

Here the speaker concludes that something is necessarily the case. As Leech notes (1987: 80), however, the deontic and epistemic meanings can blur in a sentence such as *Every clause has to contain a finite verb.* That is, the occurrence of a finite verb may be dictated by the rules of language (deontically) or it may be necessarily the case (epistemically). Sentences with *have to* can also be ambiguous between the two readings: the sentence *Ingrid has to arrive before we do*, can continue deontically with "because she promised to help with the preparations" or epistemically with "because she set out an hour earlier" (Bybee—Pagliuca 1985: 73-74). Coates proposes the unified meaning of 'it is necessary for' for both readings of *have to* (1983: 55, 57). Finally, like many of the modals, *have to* has a future sense; the *OED* suggests that it is a "kind of Future of obligation or duty". [2]

There appears to be almost universal agreement about the semantic contrast between *have to* and *must* in their obligative reading: *must* is generally subjective, while *have to* is always objective.[3] That is, with *must* the speaker is normally expressing his or her authority; the deontic source is the speaker. With *have to* the deontic source is always external to the speaker, either the authority of another or the constraint of circumstances.[4] For this reason, *have to* may be used when the speaker disapproves of the obligation expressed (Palmer 1987: 129) or, for purposes of politeness, when the speaker wants to



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represent "his wish as objective necessity" (Curme 1931: 395; Leech 1987: 79; cf. Fleischman 1982: 59, 172-173). Compare the following examples from Haegeman (1980: 3):

*3. a. My children **must** eat an apple after their meals.*

*b. My children **have to** eat an apple after their meals.*

In (3a) the speaker seems to be compelling the children to eat an apple, while in (3b), some outside authority, or an internal drive, compels the children. *Have to* may contrast with *must* in the logical necessity reading, too; Perkins suggests (1983: 61) that *have to* is used when the statement is based on empirical evidence over which the speaker has no control. Still, *must* is the "normal" and stronger form in the epistemic cases (Leech 1987:83).[5]

The two forms also behave differently under negation: with *must, not* negates the predication, but with *have to, not* negates the modality (Antinucci—Parisi 1971: 35; Coates 1983: 55, 57; Perkins 1983: 61; Palmer 1979: 94-95; 1987: 130):

4. a. *We **must**n't talk politics on this pleasant evening.*

*b. They don't **have to** work for a living.*

Finally, unlike *must, have to* has a past tense form with the past time meaning 'it was necessary for' (Coates 1983: 56-57; Perkins 1983: 62; Leech 1987: 96; Palmer 1987: 129), either past deontic or past epistemic:

5. *a. I felt I **had to** see you, because I want you to know the truth.*

b. *Through the years she sensed that something like this **had to** happen some day.*

The morphosyntactic status of *have to* is considerably less clear than that of *must* . On one hand, van der Gaaf (1931: 184; echoed by Visser 1969: 1478; see also Harris 1986: 355) suggests that in Modern English, *have to* is "to all intents and purposes an auxiliary", while on the other, Coates (1983: 54) asserts that it has none of the seven defining criteria of modal auxiliaries.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine the syntactic status of *have to,* most would agree that *have to* is at least partially grammaticalized in Modern English. Huddleston's (1980) study shows that even the modals do not function as a coherent group syntactically; using his criteria, there appears to be a continuum of verbal forms from full verb to auxiliary, exhibiting auxiliary and modal features to a lesser or greater extent, rather than two clearly defined classes.

The *have* + object + *to* V construction, though it is believed to be diachronically related to the *have to* V (+ object) construction, is rarely discussed in synchronic grammars of English. While some semantic similarity is recognized, the distinction in meaning between the two constructions remains unclear, and they are usually considered to be quite separate constructions syntactically.

The *OED* gives the following definition for *have* + object + *to* V: "to possess as a duty or thing to be done. With object and dative inf. expressing what is to be done by the subject". Van der Gaaf (1931: 180-183; followed by Visser 1969: 1474-1482) establishes three semantic subclasses of the construction: one expressing pure possession (6a); one expressing duty, obligation, or necessity in addition to possession (6b); and one expressing, preponderantly or exclusively, duty, obligation, or necessity. While van der Gaaf (1931: 186) asserts that the pure meaning of obligation correlates exclusively with the order *have to* V (+ object) (6c), Visser (1969: 1482) observes that "nowadays obligation without possession is also expressed in constructions that have the object between *have* and the infinitive" (6d):

6. a. Ursula was happy to **have** somebody **to** look after.

b. I **have** some questions **to** ask you.

c. We **have to** obey orders, whether we agree with 'em or not.



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d. "I suppose Maud could go."—"Maud has her rooms to do."—"Well Elsa."—Elsa **has** her dinner **to** get."

In many cases the meaning of 'possess' in *have* is more or less weakened (cf. Kruisinga 1931: 379; Jespersen 1940: 226).

The syntactic relationship of *have*, the object, and the infinitive also differs in this construction. When the nominal object follows the infinitive, it is seen as the object of the infinitive, and the infinitival phrase is considered the object of *have*. In contrast, when the nominal object is placed between *have* and the infinitive, it is considered the object of have, and the infinitive is taken as an adjectival or adverbial adjunct to the object. However, Jespersen (1940: 226-227) later treats the infinitive in the *have* + object + *to* V construction as "retroactive", that is, as governing the preceding object. The nominal object is thus seen as the object of the infinitive, not of *have*, and the syntactic analysis of the construction is almost identical to that given to the *have to* V (+ object) construction.

**Conclusion**

The development of quasi-modals in English is part of an ongoing process of grammaticalization in which full verb constructions are developing into verbal periphrases. At any synchronic state of the language, then, one would expect to find verbal periphrases in various stages of development. The development of the *have to* construction is a particularly rich example of this process, because in Early Modern English the original construction seems to have split into two separate constructions, which have traveled different distances down the road towards verbal periphrasis. Of the two constructions with modal meaning, *have to* (+ object) is now almost fully grammaticalized, while *have* + object + infinitive is only partially grammaticalized. And the source for both of these constructions, the possessive *have* + object + infinitive construction, exists besides these grammaticalized forms in its original full verb state.

**NOTES**

[1] The term 'Brown quartet' refers to four comparable corpora: the Brown Corpus and Frown (Freiburg-Brown) Corpus from 1961 and 1991-2, respectively, and two matching corpora of British English, LOB (Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen) and FLOB (Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen), again from 1961 and 1991-2, respectively. These corpora each contain a million words in fifteen written text types.

[2] Jespersen (1940: 206) argues that *have to* with *yet* (or *still*) has a pure future meaning, but Kirchner (1952: 384-86) contests this, suggesting that it is a substitute for the negative: thus, *he has yet to learn how to laugh at himself* = 'he has not yet learned to laugh at himself'.

[3] See, for example, Curme (1931: 395), Kruisinga (1931: 380), Visser (1969: 1478), Antinucci—Parisi (1971: 35), Palmer (1979: 58, 93, 106-107; 1987: 128-129), Coates (1983: 55), Quirk et al. (1985: 225), and Leech (1987: 79, 82-83). Haegemann (1980) argues that while with *have to* in the simple tense the speaker denotes an outside authority, with the progressive of *have to* (e.g. *My children are having to eat an apple after their meals*), the speaker disclaims any commitment as to the imposition of obligation (cf. Coates 1983: 56).

[4] Because authority lies outside the speaker and the statement is not performative, Palmer (1979: 92-93, 106) prefers the classification "dynamic" to "deontic" modality for this usage.

[5] Contrasting the sentences *You must be mad to do that* and *You have (got) to be mad to do that*, Palmer (1979: 46-47) argues that the former preferably receives an epistemic reading ('I believe you are mad to do that'), while the latter preferably receives a dynamic (deontic) reading ('It is necessary for you to be mad in order to do that'). Such a clear contrast does not exist for me.



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## RÉSUMÉ


LE VERBE QUASI-MODAL ***HAVE TO*** EN ANGLAIS: VALEURS SEMANTIQUES ET SYNTAXIQUES

*La grammaticalisation des auxiliaires modaux de la langue anglaise a été minutieusement étudiée tandis que l'évolution des quasi-modaux a été presque omise. Dans le contexte du développement des périphrases verbales en général, le présent article étudie l'apparition du quasi-modal* **have to** *suite à l'évolution de* **have + to-infinitive** *dès sa naissance en ancien anglais (sa véritable apparition pourrait être antérieure à l'ancien anglais) jusqu'à sa puberté*
*au sens « modal » de la première période de la langue anglaise moderne. Une compréhension complète de l'origine et du développement de* **have to** *dépend de la détermination de la relation synchronique et diachronique des deux structures telles* **I have a letter to write** *et* ***I*** **have to write a letter,** *auxquelles on avait accordé, dans le passé, des traitements très différents, malgré leur similitude fonctionnelle. Mais, seulement la deuxième structure a été considérée périphrase verbale. En suivant une récapitulation des traits sémantiques et du statut syntactique pour les deux constructions de l'anglais moderne, notre étude propose le développement de ces deux constructions à partir d'une source unique, le verbe notionnel* **have+complément+structure infinitivale** *à sens possessif ; ces constructions ont atteint des étapes différentes de grammaticalisation dans l'anglais moderne. La structure –source est restée, en soi, non-grammaticalisée.*



**Mots-clés** *: verbe notionnel, verbe quasi-modal, périphrase verbale, grammaticalisation.*





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