A LOGICAL APPROACH ON MODAL VERBS

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Abstract:The present article aims at a possible logical approach to discussing the modal auxiliary verb will, including its importance in the English verb and tense system. Being one of the central modal verbs, we argue that will is neither "the future" auxiliary, nor "the conditional" auxiliary, primarily based on the ideas developed by Michael Lewis (1986). Thus we support the idea that the core meaning of will is connected to the concept of inevitability, which comes to complete Palmer's distribution of modal verbs, expressing epistemic, deontic and dynamic meanings.
After presenting will as a central modal auxiliary, we discuss its various uses relying on authoritative sources published for international (English), Hungarian and Romanian students. Possible issues of teaching will are also dealt with, supported by data from a popular TV series containing modal verbs. The conclusion discusses the importance and relativity of number of occurrences, trying to offer a possible teaching option for modals stemming from practice.

Keywords: verb system, expressing future, central modal, inevitability, teaching modal verbs.

1. Introduction

It has never been easy to deal with the English modal verbs, which are typically referred to as 'problematic', 'complicated' or 'messy' (Palmer, 1990, p. 49). One of the reasons is that they are complex verbs in the sense that they should be discussed in at least two separate categories, involving approaches connected to morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics:

a) form and function within the English verb system;
b) meaning connected to the English tense system and speech acts.

The English verb system is one of the central issues in English grammar, and the "basic structure of the English verb is not particularly complicated" and neither "full of exceptions" (Lewis, 1986, p. 7). We have argued (Imre, 2008, pp. 8–11) that – functionally viewed – we may distinguish four verb types:

1. strong (S): I. and II. forms of *be* in the indicative mood, when used without other verbs in a sentence: *am, are, is, was, were*;
2. auxiliary (A): *do* (*does, did*), *have* (*has, had*), *be* (*am, are, is, was, were*) followed by another verb in I.+*-ing* or III. form;
3. modal (M): *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would* (central or core modals); however, due to their form, function or meaning, there are 'marginal' modal verbs (*have to, dare, need, ought to, used to, be to*), or 'modal idioms' (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 137)
4. weak (W): all the other verbs.

The possible combination of these verbs is highly important, as the relatively fixed English word order leads to specific verb combinations: only S or W verbs may be 'alone' in a sentence (W only in affirmative, S in affirmative, interrogative and negative), while verb combinations lead to various tenses or passive structures:

- AW: *Shrek* ***is talking*** *to Donkey.*

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- MAW: *Fiona **will have prepared** breakfast by the time Shrek and Donkey wake up.*
- MAAW: *Shrek **could have been killed** by Dragon.*

By analyzing these 'MAW' properties, linguists have drawn the conclusion that whenever a modal verb is implied in a string of verbs, it is always first, and there is no co-occurrence among central modals (Quirk et al., 1980, p. 75). As modals take over certain auxiliary functions as well, such as forming the interrogative, negative or question tag (Lewis, 1986, pp. 57–58), they are also referred to as 'operators'.

As for their meaning, modals may express the speaker's "personal judgment of the non-temporal features of an action" (Lewis, 1986, p. 138) or the "attitude of the speaker" (Palmer, 1990, p. 2) in the form of specific *concepts* (possibility, necessity, politeness, etc.), leading to various dividing possibilities (e.g. Swan, 2005, pp. 325–327); however, we would like to start with Palmer's summarizing table (1990, p. 37), trying to grasp the core meanings of modal verbs:

	Epistemic	Deontic	Dynamic
Possibility	*may*	*may / can*	*can*
Necessity	*must*	*must*	
?	*will*	*shall*	*will*

Table 1. Palmer's summary of core modal meanings

As the present article focuses on *will*, we rely on Lewis's replacement of the question mark with the core meaning of *inevitability* (1986, pp. 114–120), who also warns us that four modal verbs cause the "greatest potential confusion": *will, would, shall* and *should*. As all of them are central modals, it is worth mentioning their distinctive features.

2. Describing central modals

Central modals have a single form for all persons and numbers, whatever the time reference, so they violate the rule of "concord" between the subject and predicate (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 149). Furthermore, they take over major auxiliary functions (cf. the NICE properties in Huddleston, 1976, p. 333):

- central modals help in forming the interrogative and negative forms, including the question tags (also making it possible to delete the lexical verb in short answers), being always first-positioned in a verb phrase; thus modals are all considered transitive, whose direct object is the weak verb following them (Bădescu, 1984, p. 403);
- central modals are followed – exclusively – by either the short (bare) infinitive (I. verb form) or a perfect infinitive construction (modal + *have* + III. verb form): *will sing, will have arrived*.

Nevertheless, as categories tend to be fuzzy in the majority of cases (cf. Eleanor Rosch's protoype theory), even central modals lack minor features. For instance, *can* has no perfective construction in the affirmative, while *may* is not used in present negative constructions, or *must* has no distinctive 'past' form.

A thorough description of modal verbs should mention both form and (communicative) function, but it should include inter-linguistic discussion as well, such as their possible translation(s) into other languages. In this respect, the English modals are rather complex as they may lead to three possibilities (Imre & Benő, 2011, p. 191), exemplified with Hungarian and Romanian:

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1. they may have their 'accepted' equivalents (word for word): *can ~ tud* (Hu. 'able to'); *can ~ poate* (Ro. 'able to', 'it is permitted');
2. they may be 'represented' by a verb suffix: *can ~ -hat, -het* (Hu. suffix to express possibility); *s-ar putea* (Ro. 'it may be possible')
3. they may 'disappear' in translation (e.g. in polite formulations): *Can you help me? ~ Segítesz?* (Hu. 'Do you help me?'); *Mă ajuți?* (Ro. 'Do you help me?').

To make matters worse, there are two opposing views when languages are compared (e.g. translation): "meanings cannot be transferred *at all* from one language to another" and "meanings can *be fully* transferred" (Wierzbicka, 1992, p. 6), even if translators seem not to be intimidated too much by the first statement. A possible explanation comes from Kelly (1979, p. 219): "Had translation depended for its survival on theory, it would have died out long before Cicero."

In these circumstances a justified question is whether modal verbs are 'possible' to describe in a satisfactory (effective) way, as modality is a natural companion to factual information, thus non-native speakers also need them in order to communicate successfully. Lewis is not alone when he claims that modals represent "one of the most complicated problems of the English verb" (1986, p. 99), especially when their meaning is an issue, connected to both the English *tense system* and *speech acts.*

The time reference of modals is 'now', more precisely when the speaker's utterance is voiced, paraphrased as "in the present circumstances, my judgment is that it is possible / necessary / desirable that …" (Lewis, 1986, p. 102), which offers the first important issue connected to *will*: Can we discuss it as the *future auxiliary*?

Before answering the question, we should consider that all modal meanings are context-based, which is at least the length of an entire clause or sentence, if not a paragraph. The fact that not all modals have remote pairs further strengthens the idea that modals are not 'designed' to express only temporal relationships. Authoritative grammars state that English has no future tense, even if it is mentioned that *will* – followed by the bare infinitive – refers to the future. After all, as Palmer correctly remarks that "philosophers have for a long time debated whether the future can ever be regarded as factual, since we can never know what is going to happen." (1990, p. 12). Modal verbs are also interesting because their meaning sometimes refers to 'themselves', but sometimes to the proposition (context-based), which is true for their negative and interrogative forms as well. It is clear that something must be done about it, as one and the same sentence may express both *promise* and *threat*:

***If** you don't finish your spinach, I **won't** give you any chocolate.*

The sentence may conceal further traps: first, we have to know about the possibility to use modals in conditional sentences both in the protasis and the apodosis. Secondly, acceptance from both parties that there is an authority (the speaker or an external one) that can validate the effort, and either the promise (*chocolate*) or the threat (*no chocolate*) is carried out. Sadly, this reminds us the importance of confidence regarding the truth value of the statement (Coates, 1983, p. 41), and it is Lewis who 'dots the i' by stating that "We can never be sure that the range of choices available to each speaker is the same. We can never be sure why the speaker has made a particular choice.", thus "grammar is not only a matter of objective fact" (1986, p. 44).

Modality is often approached from speech acts, as it involves the speakers' subjective expression of opinion and "attitudes" (Greenbaum, 1996, p. 80), "probability and predictability" (Greere & Zdrenghea, 2000, p. 29), or "likelihood of the proposition" (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 219).

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The shortest possible definition is that modality deals with *non-factual* or *not actualized* things, actions or events (Aarts, 2011, p. 275), while a well-summarized definition is that modality "refers to a speaker's or a writer's attitude towards, or point of view about, a state of the world. … modals are used to say whether something is real or true, or whether it is the subject of speculation rather than definite knowledge" (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 638).

As *will* is primarily connected to *inevitability*, it is important to see a possible system of speech acts and the place of *inevitability* within. Although the illustration below is ours, it has been created by authoritative sources (Graver, 1986, pp. 20–34; Carter & McCarthy, 2006, pp. 679–713; Leech & Svartvik, 2002, pp. 128–151; Lewis, 1986, p. 102):

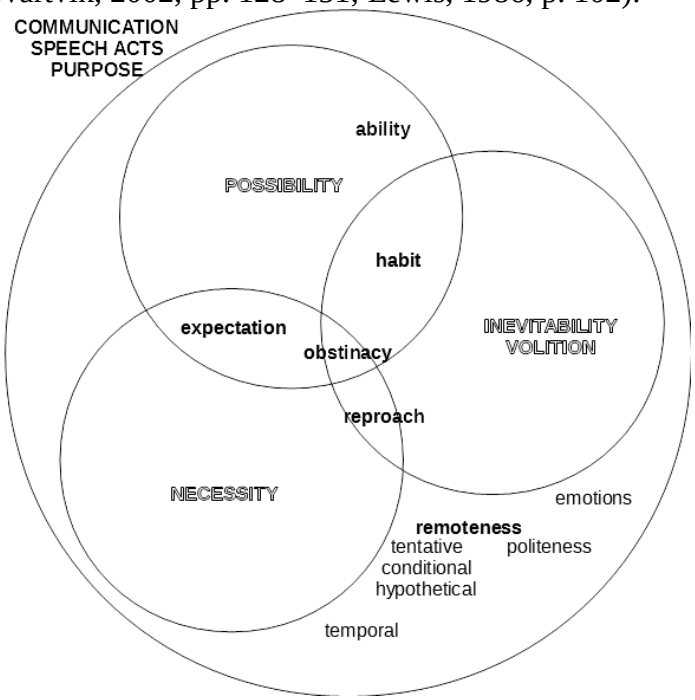


Figure 1. Modality and speech acts

The figure clearly shows that speech acts are subjective, leading to overlaps; for instance, *expectation* may be connected to both necessity ('I expect something because it must be done') and possibility ('I expect it because it can be done'); *obstinacy* may stem from *volition-refusal* ('although I have to do it, I won't'), *ability-refusal* ('I am able to do it, but I won't'), *logical deduction-refusal* ('I know this is going to happen, but I won't change anything about it').

The concept of *remoteness* (Lewis, 1986, p. 102) highly simplifies the way modal verbs are discussed, offering a logical solution how the modal 'pairs' should be treated: although we know that they are not the 'present' and 'past' pairs (*can-could*, *may-might*, *will-would*, *shall-should*), contradictions are used to prove it:

***Will** you help me? **Would** you help me?* ('now' or in the 'near' future)

The most logical explanation we have found so far is that each and every modal verb "is fundamentally grounded in the moment of speaking, at the point of Now" (Lewis 1986: 102), so the concept of 'remoteness' describes the relationship between the pairs, understood on multiple levels:

- remote in time: *can* 'present / future' *could* 'past'; when either *can* or *could* is followed by the perfective *have* + III. verb form, the context is past;
- remote in possibility / from facts: *tentative, conditional, hypothetical* constructions (*If you*

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can show me…; *If you could just show me…*);
- remote in volition / emotion: *insistence ('will) – indifference (could as well)*;
- remote in relationship: *politeness* (*Can you tell me…? Could you tell me…?*)

In the following we focus on describing *will* as a modal auxiliary verb.

3. Describing *WILL*

Although many scholars make it clear that – grammatically speaking – English has no future tense (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 208; Thomson & Martinet, 1986, p. 187; Quirk et al., 1985, p. 213; Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 405), this is often neglected, as native speakers have no problems with that, while non-native speakers wishing to improve their knowledge find the discrepancy between *time* and *tense* disturbing.

However, the names of tenses further offer the convenient parallel even if there are many counterexamples that 'past', 'present' or 'future' tenses do not always refer to past, present and future time:

*If you **understood** it …* → past form, present meaning
*We **have** a test on Monday.* → present form, future meaning
*I **won't** help you.* (now or ever) → 'future' form, present or universal time

Once we accept that there is no 'future' tense, we also have to accept that *will* is not the auxiliary for future. Yet, Palmer discusses *will* under six separate headings: *volition, power, habit, futurity, conditionality,* and *epistemic*, while Aarts (2011, pp. 285–286) under five sections: *future, prediction, dynamic volition, predisposition* and *obligation*. However, Lewis convinces us by stating that even if most *will* examples refer to future time, not all of them do, offering counterexamples of '*general truth*', or *likelihood / certainty*. He explains that time "is an element of our experience of reality", while "tense is a purely grammatical idea" (1986, p. 47), and it is "a mistake to introduce *will/shall* (or, indeed any other form) as 'the future' in English" (1986, p. 53). Instead, he offers the concept of *logical inevitability,* which correlates with other sources (Eastwood, 1999, pp. 107–128), ranging from prediction to objective facts.

It is also worth highlighting that the speaker may be mistaken in judging the situation as inevitable from a subjective perspective (cf. level of intention, volition, willingness, refusal, promise, etc.), as Lewis observes (1986, p. 116).

Future time may be expressed with the '*going to*' future, present continuous or present simple, all expressing a *fact*, while *will* in 'future simple' expresses the speaker's "judgement, instantaneous perception at the moment of speaking" (Lewis, 1986, p. 117–118); furthermore, the nature of *will* mixes a modal and future meaning, associated with lack of previous planning, arrangement or evidence. This lack of certainty is easily traceable in conditional sentences involving *will*:

*If Fiona loves Shrek, he **will** marry her.*

Lewis draws the conclusion that even if it is possible to talk about future time with the help of tenses, future is not "factually or objectively knowable", so "statements about future time are not statements of fact but predictions, guesses…" (1986, p. 139), even if he speculates that the shortened, unstressed form (*'ll*) may evolve into the English "neutral future tense", still preserving "weak inevitability" and "psychological immediacy" (1986, p. 145).

While all these observations and remarks seem to be true, they are not really viable for teaching

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purposes, which may be an explanation why Lewis's concepts are hardly ever mentioned in other important works on English grammar.

4. Teaching *WILL*

Teaching modal verbs is an eternal challenge, but this does not mean that there are no successful options, starting from theory followed by practice, or concepts (speech acts) first, then exemplified with modal uses. A justified question is *when* to teach them, as describing them involves verbs and tenses. As modals may easily be included in conditional, hypothetical constructions, as well as passive voice and reported speech, we tend to think that it is more successful to tackle modals after these categories are discussed.

The *what* of modal verbs includes their form (affirmative, interrogative and negative), knowing that the interrogative or negative might be more important from the point of view of meaning than others; for instance, the interrogative *need* hopes for a negative answer, while the negation of *must* takes two separate paths.

We may group the functions of *will* around five uses, detailed below.

4.1. Auxiliary function (→ prediction)

Will is strongly connected to future meaning, as – among its modal functions – plays the auxiliary verb for future tenses (used for teaching purposes):

*Shrek **will return** from the swamp in November.*
*Shrek **will be relaxing** next Sunday.*
*I **will have grown** a beard by the time Shrek returns home.*
*In 2024 Shrek **will have been living** in a happy marriage with Fiona for two decades.*

Its auxiliary function is clear when the negative and interrogative forms of these tenses are constructed, making use of *will* and *won't*:

*Shrek **won't (will not) return** from the swamp before November.*
***Will** Shrek **return** from the swamp?*

It is important to observe that futurity is often connected to promises, agreements, hopes, desires, intention or plans. Furthermore, the futurity of *will* is more than prediction future events (detailed below), as it is often associated with conditionality (Palmer, 1990, p. 138). As correctly observed, the future and modal function of *will* and *shall* "can hardly be separated" (Quirk et al., 1980, p. 87).

4.2. Prediction

Although it may be difficult to distinguish auxiliary functions connected to future time and this modal sense, we are inclined to distinguish a certain modal shade in the following senses:

- predictions about both near and distant future events:
  *You **will go crazy** before finishing this book.* (It shouldn't take too long.)
  *Jane **will be** the head of the CIA.* (one day)
- prediction, forecasting, presumption may stem from logical deductions (e.g. excluding other possibilities):
  *This **will be** the shop where I saw the ad.*
  Negative forms may be felt more invigorating:
  *Stress **won't help** in this case.*
  *It **won't** pay.*
  The 'weakened' predictive meaning comes close to ability ((Quirk et al., 1985, p. 229):

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*The bear **will** smash the pen's planks to get to the sheep.* (~ can)

- present state predictions, beliefs, conjectures:
  *That'**ll do**.*
  *That'**ll be enough.***
  *You **will** know that Shrek is hurt, **won't** you?*
- prediction may be found in the main clause of conditional sentences ('conditioned habits'), expressing a considerable degree of certainty or possibility (usually 50–100%); however, it may also refer to characteristic things, habits without any connection to the future (Bădescu, 1984, p. 433):
  *Shrek **will return** to his swamp **if** the mission is over.* (~ in case)
  *Fiona **will cry if** you mention Christmas to her.* (~ whenever)
- prediction may be associated with habitual events based on 'world knowledge', universal truths, common sense or inevitable things (this is the way of life):
  *Boys **will be** boys.* (a favorite example for many books, e.g. Budai, 2007, p. 199)
  *A drowning man **will clutch** at a straw.* (proverb)
  *Accidents **will happen** in the best regulated families.* (proverb)
  *Shrek **will prevail**, as usual.*
  General characteristics may also express impatience, complaint or annoyance regarding them (cf. Budai, 2007, p. 198):
  *He **will drink** his beer in that corner of the pub every afternoon.* (Whatever you do.)
- *will* combined with the perfective construction (*will* + *have* + III.) results in either Future Perfect Simple or – in rare cases – a logical deduction referring to the past (Bădescu, 1984, p. 433), similarly to *must:*
  *Lord Farquaad **won't have heard** the news, I presume.*
  *Shrek **will have completed** the mission by now.* (less typical)
  *Shrek **must have completed** the mission by now.* (more typical)

However, Palmer questions the probability aspect of *will*, arguing that instead of belief, it expresses judgement, similarly to *must*, concluding that *will* may be paraphrased as "reasonable to expect" (1990, pp. 57–58). Thus *will* refers to a reasonable conclusion and *must* to the "only possible conclusion" based on the available evidence:

*Shrek **will be** happy to return from the mission.*

The sentence reflects a highly probable conclusion, which is nevertheless associated with "envisaged, planned, intended, hoped" (Palmer, 1990, p. 140) and even desired, supporting the modal aspect of *will*.

4.3. Volition (dynamic → intention, willingness, insistence)

In this sense *will* may refer to:

- weak volition, willingness, acceptance, resignation, promise, intention, remembering that modality and futurity are intertwined:
  *I **will** talk to Jane about the mission.*
  Palmer offers a detailed analysis of *will*, stating later that *will* and *shall* "are fully modal" (1990, p. 133). *Will* may be combined with *if* to express acceptance:
  ***If** the Does **will insist** to return to Burma, let them go.*
  A more literary use expresses preference (Preda, 1962, p. 313):
  *I **will have** a biscuit instead of wafers.*
- Certain stock phrases with *will* express concession:

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Try as you will, *but I don't think you can make it alive.*
Say what you will*, I am still satisfied with the results.*

- intermediate volition, (quick) decision taken 'on the spot', at the moment of decision, or intention (Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă, 1995, pp. 245–249):
  *As the plane's landing, we****'ll fasten*** *the seat-belts.*
  *OK, if you give me a discount, I'****ll buy*** *three of them.*
- strong volition, habit resulting in determination, obstinacy, or insistence (Bădescu, 1984, p. 432):
  *I '****will build*** *my own house.* (Whatever happens.)
  *I '****will marry*** *Susan.* (Even if her parents disagree.)
  In these cases *will* is stressed and no contracted form is used (Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă, 1995, p. 248). Inanimate objects with characteristic behaviour may be listed here, although they have no strong volition, but 'power' to behave like that:
  Iron ***will rust*** *over time.*
- a special type of insistence is when modal *will* appears in the conditional subordinate clause, or emphasised insistence:
  If *you* ***will keep*** *to your version, I think it's better for me to resign.*
- while the affirmative form reflects willingness, the negative expresses 'unwillingness', 'non-volition', refusal, prohibition or objections in the form of *will not* or *won't*:
  I ***won't marry*** *you!*
  She ***won't help*** *with the household chores.*
  Shrek ***will not accept*** *Farquaard's remarks.*
  Interestingly, this applies to things as well:
  The laptop ***won't*** *start.*

Alternative expressions for *will* are *be willing to* (semi-modal construction) or *want to* (less polite volition), while *be unwilling to* or *refuse to* may replace *won't*.

The previous examples also show that there is hardly any dividing line between volition and condition, as many sentences may be completed with an *if* subordinate clause:

I ***won't marry*** *you,* ***unless*** *you sign the prenup.*

4.4. Other Speech Acts

As mentioned before, the auxiliary and modal functions may prove difficult to distinguish, as commands, promises, decisions, intentions are all connected to (near-)future. Thus speech acts with *will* are associated with promise, threat, order, necessity (necessary consequence), detailed below:

- invitation, offer:
  Will *you* ***join*** *me for dinner?*
  Will *you* ***take*** *a seat over here?*
  Sometimes the negative form may be more casual, expressing lack of objection (Preda, 1962, p. 313): ***Won't*** *you* ***join*** *us for lunch?*
- (over-)polite requests (Bădescu, 1984, p. 433) or very modest wishes (Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă, 1995, p. 245) requiring implication:
  Will *you* ***do*** *that for me, please?*
  If *you* ***will be*** *so kind as to listen, I will explain these shards in a minute.*
- requests may start in imperative, followed by a question tag with *will* or *won't*:
  (Just) come over here, ***will*** *you?* (urging)

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*Listen to me, **will you**? Listen to me, **won't you**?*
*You **won't marry** him, **will you**?*
If the third person is used, it expresses an indirect request (Palmer, 1990, p. 130):
*I'm sure Shrek **will have** an explanation for that.*

- negative forms may also express surprise or indignation:
*You **won't have heard** the good news?*
***Won't** you **drink** milk? Why?*
- orders, commands (especially at school, in the army, offices, etc., cf. (Magyarics, 1997, p. 276), instructions expressing power (Palmer, 1990, p. 142):
*You **will have to give me** an explanation for that!*
*Shrek **will do** Lord Farquaad says.*
- warnings (rule, law, regulation), signs, threats:
*Trespassers **will be prosecuted**.* (passive voice)
*Fiona **will get** into trouble with so many thugs.*
*Do it or I'**ll call** John!*
*Don't worry about John. **I'll let** him know about the news.*
- a (spoken) commentary on a formal (state) occasion (Palmer, 1990, p. 142):
*Lord Farquaad **will have** the opening speech now.*

4.5. Weak *WILL*

Although rather restricted, *will* may function as a weak verb expressing wants and wishes (Bădescu, 1984, p. 432):

*Say what you **will,** but Shrek is the best.*
*Try as you **will**, but you can't predict what's gonna happen.*
*Finish the job when you **will**, as it is not urgent.*
*Fiona **willed** herself not to think of Shrek too much.*
*He that **wills** the end **wills** the means.* (proverb)
*Strong-**willed** people like Jane are in great demand.* (adjectival use)

The examples show that it is often difficult to distinguish various uses of *will*, so it may be convenient to refer to it as a *modal-auxiliary*. A more diplomatic formulation is that *will* is formally an auxiliary for future tenses, but with modal meanings:

*Finish this section, **will** you?*
*OK, I**'ll do** that right now.*

4.6. *WILL* in *Castle*

A different alternative from 'theory-first, practice-later' might present learners well-chosen samples, enabling them to formulate possible rules regarding the form and meaning of *will*. In this respect we can recommend a set of quotes and proverbs with *will* as a lead-in activity, or the involvement of multimedia.

TV series may be motivating enough to watch and check modal verb occurrences and frequency. One of our favourites is *Castle*[1], having 8 seasons with 173 episodes (combined) of at least 40 minutes' length each; that is 6,920 minutes, or more than 115 hours. It may be shocking

[1] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1219024/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1, 26.02.2017.

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to realize that the first season of 10 episodes alone contains a multitude of modal uses, detailed in the table below:

MODAL	**NR.**	**%**	**MODAL**	**NR.**		**%**	
can	226	18.56	***'ll***	103	182	8.46	**14.94**
could	128	10.51	***will (ing)***	65		5.34	
be able to	11	0.90	***won't***	14		1.15	
capable	1	0.08	*'d*	107	310	8.78	25.45
manage	7	0.57	*would*	203		16.67	
succeed	1	0.08	*shall*	1		0.08	
may	18	1.48	*should*	54		4.43	
might	39	3.20	*ought to*	2		0.16	
allow	1	0.08	*need**	104		8.54	

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permission	3	0.25	*dare**	5		0.41	
must	34	2.79	**TOTAL**	**1218**		**1000**	
have/has/had to	91	7.47					

Table 2. Modal occurrences in Castle, Season 1

For teaching purposes, it is worth checking the instances of *will*: Season 1 contains enough number or occurrences to offer an introductory idea of its uses:

*I'**ll** see you next week. This one **will** end better*. (future time / tense, promise)
*We'**ll** get her back soon.* (promise, near-future)
*It'**ll** grow on you. I **will** make you bleed.* (warning / threat)
***I'll** let you know **if** the client is interested, okay?* (conditional)
*If I tell you, you **will** protect me?* (conditional)
*If you **won't**, I **will**.* (will in if-clause, negative form, threat / promise, inevitability)
*Excuse me, **will** you?* (question tag associated with politeness)
*I **will** have you know that.* (formal, overpolite promise)
*Tonight we'**ll** be tied.* (passive voice)
*They **won't be able** to see you.* (passive voice, negative, central + marginal modal)
***Will** you put that down?* (anger / irritation with polite overtones)
*If you cannot afford one, one **will** be appointed to you.* (passive voice, legal formula)
*Anything you say can and **will** be used against you in a court of law*. (passive voice, legal formula, the so-called Miranda warning)
*We'**ll have to** take your word for, isn't it?* (central modal followed by a marginal one)

Depending on the learners' level, we may start with *will* + I. verb forms referring to future (affirmative, interrogative and negative forms), observing the predominance of *'ll* in the affirmative sentences. The next stage may be passive and conditional constructions, and the combination of *will* with marginal modals, completed with translation into the learners' native language.

Aart's table (2011, p. 280) lists *will, 'll* and *won't* in the top frequent batch of modal verbs:

/million words	**Spoken**	**Written**	**Total**	**Combined**
would	2,581	2,533	5,114	6,572
'd	795	182	977	
wouldn't	394	87	481	
will	**1,883**	**3,284**	**5,167**	**7,289**
'll	**1,449**	**361**	**1,810**	
won't	**232**	**80**	**312**	

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can	2,652	2,533	5,185	6,595
can't	792	222	1,014	
cannot	80	316	396	

A top of 3,000 English words states that *will* is the most frequent modal auxiliary (position 35), followed by *would* (36), *can* (37), *could* (57), *should* (78), *may* (88), *must* (120), *need* (147, but mainly as a weak verb), *might* (151), *shall* (166, 'offer' and 'suggest'), *ought to* (1574), and even *dare* is included (2802).

At this stage we tend to think that the higher the frequency, the more situations are possible for a particular modal verb to be used, but non-modal factors still have to be considered. Learners will soon discover that *will* is a suitable modal to function as the future *operator*, although they still need to distinguish future time from English future tenses, then to find out the relationship between the concepts of *future* and *modality* through the use of *will*.

5. Conclusions

There are many possible conclusions, but we should mention Jakobson's famous statement: "Languages differ not in terms of what they can express, but in terms of what they must express.". Being no other viable alternative, *will* is referred to as the 'future' auxiliary even if technically speaking there is no future tense, resulting in an extensive use combined with various modal functions.

Will is a prominent example expressing the speakers' subjectivity regarding *inevitability*, that is futurity with different shades of meaning (promise, threat, volition, etc.)

As countless books and articles have been written on modality, we cannot claim that the present article brings too much novelty to the issue of modality and modal verbs. Nevertheless, the way we approach them tries to offer a new perspective of *will*, and hopefully a more logical one.

Although the references come from authoritative native speaker authors (Cambridge and Oxford publications), they typically lack an important feature: why and how these modal verbs represent a problematic category for non-native speakers. This is why we extended our research to reputable Hungarian and Romanian publications, trying to summarize all relevant insights into the intricacy of *will.*

We have also seen that despite the extended theory of modals, practice is rather 'biased' towards certain uses. Whether all uses are justified to be taught, it depends on the learner's study level, but in case of translators and interpreters frequency is less relevant, as they should be familiar with a much more extended and marginal uses as well.

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