Sanel Hadžiahmetović Jurida

LINGUISTIC PROPERTIES OF ENGLISH INTERMEDIATE FUNCTION VERBS

The paper is an outline of a particular group of English verbs, the verbs whish are said to have an intermediate function. A variety of English verbs fall somewhere between the broad categories of auxiliary and main verbs, with respect to their morphosyntactic and semantic properties. Modal idioms, semi-auxiliaries and catenative verb constructions exhibit the sort of gradience that refers to the properties of modal and auxiliary verbs, and are presented, discussed and analysed in this paper.

Key words: intermediate function English verbs, modal idioms, semi-auxiliaries

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES

The present paper provides an outline of English verbs of intermediate function – modal idioms, semi-auxiliaries, and catenatives. More specifically, the paper focuses on the properties of English verbs of intermediate status, such as modal idioms, semi-auxiliaries and catenatives.

Most examples in the paper have been taken from Quirk et al (2003). Other sources of data include Leech (1987), Aarts and Meyer (1998), and Palmer (2001). Whilst a vast number of authors have written about the modal verbs in English, English verbs of intermediate function have not drawn the same amount of attention. The paper examines English verbs of intermediate function, i.e., such verbs whose

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status is to a certain degree somewhere between auxiliaries and main (full, 'lexical') verbs.

The main set of verbs that can be placed on a gradient between modal auxiliaries and full verbs (Quirk et al.: 2003:136) includes *dare, need, ought to* and *used to*. The gradience refers to the properties of marginal modals allowing them to behave in a way similar to lexical verbs.

Other verbs of intermediate function include the following:

a) Modal idioms:
  • had better,
  • would rather, would sooner,
  • BE to,
  • HAVE (got) to, etc.

b) Semi-auxiliaries:
  • HAVE to,
  • BE about to,
  • BE able to,
  • BE bound to,
  • BE going to,
  • BE obliged to,
  • BE supposed to,
  • *BE willing to*, etc.

c) Catenative verb constructions:
  • APPEAR to,
  • HAPPEN to,
  • SEEM to,
  • GET+ -ed participle,
  • KEEP+ -ing participle, etc.

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2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Other Verbs of Intermediate Function

2.1.1 Modal Idioms

had better, would rather, would sooner, BE to, HAVE (got) to,

Quirk et al. (2003: 141) place the following four multi-word verbs into the category of modal idioms, as in the examples shown below:

had better, would rather, would sooner, BE to, HAVE (got) to.
> *We'd/had better leave soon.*
> *I'd rather not say anything.*
> *They've got to leave immediately.*
> *The conference is to take place in Athens.*

One common feature of the four modal idioms is that they all begin with an auxiliary verb and are followed by an infinitive (in some cases a *to*-infinitive).

Another feature common to all four modal idioms is non-existence of their non-finite forms. This, on the other hand, automatically disqualifies them from being able to follow other verbs in the verb phrase:

> *They shall have got to leave soon.*
> *The conference has been to take place in Athens.*

It may be argued that one of the reasons modal idioms are said to be verbs of intermediate function is, on one hand, the fact that they do not behave as operators (except in negative statements and questions, where it is usually the first element that acts as operator, as shown below), therefore, they are not entirely like auxiliaries. On the other hand, the common feature described in the previous paragraphs indicates that modal idioms are not like main verbs either.

> *Hadn't we better lock the door?*
> *Would you rather eat in a hotel?*
> *We haven't got to pay already, have we?*
> *I wasn't to know that you were waiting.*

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One of the points of difference that places, e.g. *would rather*, into the category of modal idioms, rather than into the categories of central or marginal modals, is its incapacity of showing active-passive synonymy:

I'd rather rent the house.   **The house would rather be rented by me.*

HAD BETTER

According to Leech (1987: 104), this construction, which is frequently abbreviated in familiar colloquial English to *better*, is similar to *ought to*, in that although it is Past Tense historically, in present-day English it has no Present Tense equivalent. In meaning, it is 'present', rather than 'past'.

In comparison to the central modal *must,* for example, *(had) better* appears not to be as categorical in its force. It arguably signifies strong recommendation rather than obligation:

       You'd better be quick (='I urge you to be quick')
       He'd better not make a mistake (='I warn him not to make a mistake')

Leech further argues that, in familiar speech, past time or past-in-the-future time may be indicated through the use of the Perfect Infinitive:
You'd better not have changed your mind when I call you tomorrow.

A construction with the progressive is also possible:
You'd better be working harder than this when the boss comes back.

BE TO and HAVE (GOT) TO

These modal idioms are more like main verbs in that they have an *-s* form and normal present/past tense contrast:
The committee is to meet today/was to meet yesterday.
She has got to leave by tomorrow/had got to leave by the next day {British English (BrE)}.

According to Leech (1987: 102), *be to (am/is/are to)* is similar in meaning to *have (got) to* and the marginal modal *ought to*, and can, therefore, be often substituted for

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either of them. It differs from *have (got) to* in that its principal meaning includes the specific idea of 'ordering' or 'commanding':

He *is to* return to Germany tomorrow (the most likely meaning here is 'He has received explicit orders to return to Germany').

He *has to* return to Germany tomorrow (this could suggest he has received orders, but more likely it means 'Circumstances oblige him to return').

Leech further argues that *be to* may be used in a quasi-imperative way by the person actually giving the orders:
You and the others are to report back to me at dawn tomorrow.

In most other contexts, *be to* loses its imperative flavour, and becomes merely a way of indicating a future happening determined in advance (by a plan, decree, or arrangement):
They're to be married in St. James's church, and Jill's to be bridesmaid.
The meeting is to take place in Oxford.

The verbal construction in this case suggests that the plan has been made by someone other than the subject of the sentence. In addition, the meaning is very close indeed to those of the Present Progressive and Simple Present, but in a future sense only (Leech, 1987: 103):
The Minister is to meet union officials tomorrow.
The Minister is meeting union officials tomorrow.
The Minister meets union officials tomorrow.

The meaning in the examples above is almost indistinguishable except in the case of no time adverbial at the end. It is only the first sentence that would still refer to a future meaning (with no time adverbial in the sentence).

Finally, *be to* with the interpretation 'plan for the future' is typical of newspaper reports, and in headlines, the construction is shortened to *to + infinitive*:

US PRESIDENT TO VISIT IRAQ   MISS IRELAND TO MARRY FILM BOSS

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As far as the *have (got) to* construction is concerned, Leech (1987: 78) argues that its meanings correspond closely to those of *must*. The form with *got* is normally substitutable for the one without *got* in colloquial BrE, except that there are no non-finite forms:

(to) have got to

The meaning of *have (got) to* differs from the 'obligation or requirement' sense of *must* in that the authority of the speaker is not involved. *Have got to* expresses obligation or requirement generally, without specifying the person exercising power.

They've got to be here at 6 o'clock.
(='it has been agreed for them to be there at 6 o'clock, and not because the speaker says so').
They must be here at 6 o'clock.
(='it is my specific order that they be here at 6 o'clock).

In addition, *have (got) to* is less usual than must in the 'logical necessity' sense, especially in BrE:

There has (got) to be some reason for her absurd behaviour. ('no other explanation is possible')

Leech (1987:80) concludes that the two meanings of this modal idiom tend to merge, especially in scientific and mathematical writing. For example, the sentence

Every clause has to contain a finite verb.

can be interpreted either 'Every clause is obliged/required (by the rules of the language) to contain a finite verb', or 'It is necessarily the case that every clause contains a finite verb'. In such examples, the boundary between 'obligation/requirement' and 'logical necessity' is an indistinct one.

In addition to the four modal idioms illustrated in the preceding paragraphs, the following sentences illustrate less common idioms that may be placed in the same category (Quirk et al. 2003: 142):

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> *I would sooner leave the decision to you.*
> *I would (just) as soon eat at home.*
> *We may/might (just) as well pay at once.*
> *You had best forget this incident.*

2.1.2. Semi-Auxiliaries

HAVE to, BE about to, BE able to, BE bound to, BE going to, BE obliged to, BE supposed to, BE willing to, etc.

According to Quirk et al. (2003: 143), the verbal constructions marked semi-auxiliaries consist of a number of verb idioms that express modal or aspectual meaning. They are normally introduced by a primary verb *have* or *be*, as shown below, whose meanings are illustrated in some of the examples that follow (Longman, 2000: 55):

be able to	be bound to	be likely to	be supposed to
be about to	be due to	be meant to	be willing to
be apt to	be going to	be obliged to	have to

Some of the staff are apt to arrive late on Mondays.
(='they have a natural tendency to arrive late')
As a result of falling profits we were obliged to close the factory.
(='we had to lose it')
Treat him with the respect that is due to a world champion.
(='the respect is owed to him because he has the right to it, he deserved it')
Don't lie to her. She is bound to find out about it.
(='she is very likely to find out about it because she knows how')

It may be argued that the boundaries of this category are unclear as they may be extended to include, for example, the negative *be unable to, be unwilling to, be unlikely to*, etc.

SEMI-AUXILIARIES INTRODUCED BY *BE*

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According to Quirk et al. (2003: 143), all of the above semi-auxiliaries introduced by *be* meet the first seven criteria for auxiliary verbs (see Appendix 1: necessity, obligation, possibility, ability, permission, volition and, other) in the sense that, *be going to* has *be* as an operator in inversion and negation, rather than *do*-support:

> *Ada <u>isn't</u> going to win.*
> **Ada <u>doesn't</u> be going to win.*
>
> <u>Is</u> Ada going to win?
> <u>*Does</u> Ada <u>be</u> going to win?

However, this is primarily due to the fact that the first word of the semi-auxiliary construction is *be*. If *be going* to were to be compared entirely to an auxiliary, it would have to form its negation by *not* following the second or third word:

> **is goingn't to*   or   **is going ton't*

Quirk et al. (2003: 143) find the justification for describing these semi-auxiliaries as auxiliary-like by referring to a special interpretation of the operator criteria (a-e), which still appears vague.

On the other hand, they further argue that the semi-auxiliaries introduced by *be* very much resemble auxiliaries in allowing synonymous passives and *there*-constructions following the subject-independence criterion:

> *Brazil <u>is going to</u> win the World Cup.*
>   *The World Cup <u>is going to</u> be won by Brazil.*
> *Several home teams <u>are going to</u> be beaten tomorrow.*
> *There <u>are going to</u> be several home teams beaten tomorrow.*

Further evidence can be provided of a resemblance to auxiliaries rather than main verbs. These semi-auxiliaries have non-finite forms been going to and to be bound to, and can therefore be combined with preceding auxiliaries:

> *James <u>will be obliged to</u> resign.*
> *We <u>have</u> always <u>been willing</u> to help.*

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Another interesting feature of these semi-auxiliaries is that they may occur in sequence, including two semi-auxiliaries introduced by *be*:

We *are going to have to* tell him the truth.
They *are* all *unlikely to be able to* recognise him.

The occurrence of non-finite semi-auxiliaries is said to mean that these idioms can fill slots in a modal verb paradigm where modal auxiliaries of equivalent meaning cannot occur (Quirk et al., 2003: 144):

could
We haven't *been able to* solve the problem. [can='ability']

can
To *be allowed to* speak freely is a human right. [can='permission']

It needs to be noted here that *be meant* to and *be supposed to* have meanings similar to that of the marginal modal *ought to*, and are not to be confused with passive constructions.

SEMI-AUXILIARY *HAVE TO*

Have to appears to be the only semi-auxiliary introduced by *have*. The basic point of difference between *have to* and the semantically parallel *have got to* lies in the fact that *have to* occurs in a number of non-finite forms (Quirk et al., 2003: 145):

I *may have to* leave early. (*I may have got to leave early.)
People *are having to* boil their drinking water during this emergency.
The administration *has had to* make unpopular decisions.

As shown in the examples above, *have to* is found in modal, perfective, and progressive constructions. In all of these cases it would not be feasible to replace *have to* with *have got to*.

As for its meaning, *have to* is quite similar to the central modal *must*, and can serve as its substitute in past constructions:

One *must* work hard if one wants to succeed. [have to='obligation']
Back in the 70s people *had to* work hard if they wanted to succeed.

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There *must* be some solution to the problem. [have to='logical necessity']
There *had to* be some solution to the problem.

With respect to operator constructions, have to patterns either as a main verb or as an auxiliary:

Do we have to get up early tomorrow? (American English (AmE) and BrE)
Have we to get up early tomorrow?   (BrE-old-fashioned)

In comparison to *have got to*, have to tends not to have habitual meaning, rather is likely to have the force of a directive, particularly when combined with a dynamic verb, in which case it tends to refer to the future, as shown in the examples below:

Jim's got to check the temperature every 12 hours.
Jim has to check the temperature every 12 hours.

Finally, a shared feature of the semi-auxiliary *have to* and the modal idiom *have got to* is that they both occur with epistemic (extrinsic) meaning of *must* in sentences such as:

has got to   *'ve got to*
Someone has to   be telling lies.   You have to   be joking.

2.1.3. Catenative Verb Constructions

APPEAR to, HAPPEN to, SEEM to, GET+ -ed participle, KEEP+ -ing participle, etc.

Quirk et al. (2003: 146) use the term *catenative* in practice for the purposes of denoting verbs in constructions such as *come to, appear to, seem to, get to, happen to, fail to, tend to, turn out to*, and *manage to*, followed by the infinitive:

appeared
came
Sam   failed   to realise the importance of the problem.
?got
seemed

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In addition, according to them, the term *catenative* alludes to the ability of these verbs to be concatenated in sequences of non-finite constructions, as in

Our team <u>seems to manage to</u> keep on getting beaten.

This, however, is not confined to catenative verbs only, but is typical of semi-auxiliaries and main verbs followed by non-finite clauses as objects. Hence such unlikely but syntactically feasible sequences as:

We are going to have to enjoy seeming to like listening to his music.

They further argue that the so-called *catenatives* are rather close to main verb constructions concerning their meaning than to semi-auxiliaries. Their meanings are related to aspect or modality but they pattern entirely like main verbs when it comes to employment of *do*-support:

                              come
    Sam *didn't   appear*   to realise the importance of the problem.

On the other hand, most catenatives meet the independent subject criterion for auxiliaries, hence the resemblance with auxiliary constructions:

                                        appeared
                                        came
        The importance of the problem   ?failed   to be realised by Sam.
                                        *got
                                        seemed

There is a number of verbs that resemble the auxiliary *be* that can be included among catenative verbs. This, in particular, is found when they are combined with the –*ing* participle in progressive constructions, or with the –*ed* participle in passive constructions:

                    started out
    The girl   went on   working.
                    kept (on)

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3. CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding sections of this paper an outline of a particular set of English verbs – modal idioms, semi-auxiliaries, and catenatives, commonly marked as verbs of intermediate function, has been presented.

The paper focused on the main properties of these verb constructions as viewed by various authors, both syntactic and semantic properties. The paper provides a brief overview of English verbs of intermediate function, examines verbs whose status is to a certain degree intermediate between main verbs and auxiliaries, whilst at the same time discussing the 'determining' properties of the verb constructions outlined.

In conclusion, this area appears not to be as largely explored as the area involving central and marginal modals. In some cases, modal idioms, and semi-auxiliaries actually take the meaning of particular central modals, in either their epistemic or root concept, proving their very intermediate status.

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APPENDIX 1: Meanings of marginal auxiliaries (Quirk et al.: 2003: 236)

Lingvistička svojstva engleskih glagola s prijelaznom funkcijom

Temporal and aspectual	Modal		Possibility, Ability	Permission
	Necessity	Obligation		
Past	(Committed)	(Committed)		
used to	*need (to)* *have to* *have got to* *be bound to* *be certain to* *be sure to*	*need (to)* *have to* *have got to* *be bound to* *be certain to* *be sure to*	*be able to*	*be allowed to* *be permitted to*
Future	(Non committed)	(Non committed)	Volition	Other
be going to *be to* *be about to* *be due to* *be destined to*	*ought to* *be likely to* *be supposed to*	*ought to* *had better* *be supposed to*	*be willing to* *would rather* *would sooner* *be going to*	*dare (to)* *tend to* *be liable to* *happen to*

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LINGVISTIČKA SVOJSTVA ENGLESKIH GLAGOLA S PRIJELAZNOM FUNKCIJOM

Sažetak:

U ovom se radu daje uvod u zasebnu grupu engleskih glagola – glagola sa prijelaznom funkcijom. Izvjestan broj engleskih glagola nalaze svoje mjesto negdje između općih kategorija pomoćnih i glavnih glagola, imajući u vidu njihova morfosintaktička i semantička obilježja. Modalni idiomi i polu-pomoćni glagoli pokazuju osobine koje se mogu naći i kod modalnih glagola i kod polu-pomoćnih glagola, a u radu se upravo takvi glagoli predstavljaju, diskutiraju i analiziraju.

Ključne riječi: engleski glagoli s prijelaznom funkcijom, modalni idiomi, polu-pomoćni