

TEACHING THE ENGLISH MODAL VERBS IN SCHOOL

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Abstract

In order to identify the problems, which both pupils and teachers face in learning and teaching the English Modal Verbs in Moldovan schools, and if the English Modal Verbs are taught with the help of Cooperative Learning Strategies, we have made a quiz and distributed it to the teachers of English from different schools. The results of our investigation are presented in the article. We also suggest interactive, cooperative activities for teaching and practising the English Modal Verbs.

Keywords: modal verbs, cooperative strategies, techniques, quiz.

Rezumat

În articol, autoarele identifică problemele cu care profesorii și elevii se confruntă în procesul predării și învățării verbelor modale engleze în școlile din Republica Moldova și faptul, dacă verbele în cauză sunt predate cu ajutorul strategiilor de cooperare. Cercetarea este făcută în baza analizei răspunsurilor la întrebările unui chestionar, distribuit, în prealabil, profesorilor de limba engleză din diferite școli din țară. Generalizând observațiile făcute, autoarele propun activități cooperativ-interactive care ar dinamiza predarea și învățarea acestor verbe.

Cuvinte-cheie: verbe modale, strategii de cooperare, activități, chestionar.

Introduction

The aim of the present article is not to present theoretical investigation of the topic under consideration, but to show the present situation of the studied problem in Moldovan schools in Bălți. Teachers from different schools were involved in this investigation. Their answers showed whether Cooperative Learning Approach is used when teaching grammar or not.

Modal Verbs are taught in the gymnasium and lyceum cycles. The first acquaintance with the English Modal Verbs children have in the 3rd form. The number of Modal Verbs increases with each form. We have analyzed the school manuals from the 2nd to the 9th forms. The result of our investigation is shown in the following table:

Form	Modal Verbs	The number of Modal Verbs
3 rd	can	1
4 th	Can*, must, may, should/ shouldn't	4
5 th	Can*, may*, may not, must*, must not	4

6 th	have to, need to, must*, should*	4
7 th	Should*/ should not*	1
8 th	Should*, would, could*.	3
9 th	Can*, can not*, may*, must ⁸ , could*, might, to be able to, have to*, ought to, should*, need*.	10

Table 1: *Modal Verbs Used in the Gymnasium Cycle in Moldova*

**Note:* The modal verbs having the sign * are repeated in several forms. The modal verbs underlined _____ are new.

The given table shows that each year appears a new Modal Verb, so by the end of 9th form pupils know almost all the Modal Verbs.

We have analyzed the way the Modal Verbs are presented in different manuals. The Modal verbs are mentioned for the first time in the textbook “Magic English. Pupil’s Book. Third Form” by Iulia Ignatiuc and others. Lesson “I Can Ride a bike”, Module Three, Lesson Six is mostly devoted to the Modal Verb “Can”. The textbooks for the 3rd – 5th forms give some rules for using the English Modal Verbs correctly as for the gymnasium level; modal verbs are presented in exercises. In the 9th form where there is an exercise with 20 sentences where almost all the modal verbs are present: “Fill in with one of the modal verbs”. This exercise is placed at the end of the book where extended grammar exercises are given.

Problems in the Modal Verbs’ Acquisition

In order to identify the problems, which both the pupils and the teachers face in learning and teaching the English Modal Verbs, we have made a quiz and distributed it to the teachers of English from different schools, such as Lyceums: Guțu A., Tomacel S. and Svatuța O. from B.P. Hasdeu Lyceum; Ștefanco A., Procofieva O. and Vizitiu N. from L. Blaga Lyceum; Gordilova O., Sitaila I., Savitskaia S. and Ceahur I. from N. Gogol Lyceum; Cuzmina N., Gurskaia L. and Chiobanu O. from M. Lomonosov Lyceum.

The quiz consists of 10 questions regarding cooperative learning and Modal Verbs:

1. Do you use cooperative strategies in your English classes?

Yes _____ No _____

Explain your answer.

2. How often do you use cooperative strategies in your English classes?

a) Very often b) Often c) Rare d) Never

Explain your answer.

3. What cooperative strategies do you usually use in your English classes?

a) Jigsaw b) Three-step-interview c) Roundtable d) T-chart e) Dialogues f) Problem solving g) Debate h) PIM i) (your answer) _____

4. Do you use cooperative strategies while teaching grammar? Yes _____
No _____

Explain your answer:

5. Do you consider teaching Modal Verbs as one of the most difficult grammatical topics in the gymnasium cycle?

Yes _____ No _____

Explain your answer:

6. What techniques do you use in teaching Modal Verbs? a) Fill in the gaps... b) Write sentences... c) Make up dialogue using... d) Complete the sentences with... e) Paraphrase the sentences... f) Make up a story... g) (your answer) _____

Give arguments:

7. What problems do you meet teaching Modal Verbs? a) Lack of enough hours for reinforcement of the topic; b) Lack of exercises; c) Lack of material; d) (your answer) _____

8. What problems do the pupils face learning Modal Verbs? a) Difficult to memorize the meanings of the verbs; b) Few practice; c) Lack of motivation and interest; d) Lack of similar grammatical form in the native language; e) (your answer) _____

9. Arrange the Modal Verbs according to the level of difficulty the pupils face while learning them: a) Can (could) _____ b) May (might) _____ c) Must _____ d) Have to _____ e) Need to _____ f) Ought to _____ g) Dare _____ h) Should (shall) _____ i) Would (will) _____ .

10. Suggest one cooperative activity for teaching one of the Modal Verbs:

The results of the quiz are the following:

- (1) 100% of the teachers use cooperative strategies at their lessons, explaining that these strategies help students to develop their speaking skills, understanding the rules of usage;
- (2) 98% of the teachers often use cooperative strategies. Students are more active during the lessons, make decisions, solve problems and certainly enrich their vocabulary;
- (3) All of interviewed teachers (100%) usually use *Problem Solving* and *Dialogues* at their lessons. Few of them (20%) use *Three steps interview* and *PIM*. One of the teachers, Savitskaya S., suggested *RAFT system strategy* (The *RAFTs Technique*¹ is a system to help students understand their role as a writer, the audience they will address, the varied formats for writing, and the expected content. Students are

- encouraged to use creative thinking and response as they connect their imagination to newly learned information. It is an acronym that stands for: **role of the writer** - Who are you as the writer? Are you Sir John A. Macdonald? A warrior? A homeless person? An auto mechanic? The endangered snail darter?; **audience** - To whom are you writing? Is your audience the Canadian people? A friend? Your teacher? Readers of a newspaper? A local bank?; **format** - What form will the writing take? Is it a letter? A speech? A poem?; **topic + strong verb** - What's the subject or the point of this piece? Is it to persuade a goddess to spare your life? To plead for a re-test? To call for stricter regulations on logging?¹⁾;
- (4) 85% of the teachers use cooperative strategies while teaching grammar. They help teacher and pupils to find solution and understand the rules. 15% - uses other strategies, motivating that cooperative strategies are more efficient and fruitful in such aspects as: reading, speaking and listening;
 - (5) 70% of the teachers consider “Modal Verbs” as one of the most difficult grammatical topic. There is no equivalent in the native languages. 30% of them say that it isn't the most difficult topic, although pupils meet difficulties;
 - (6) 100% of the teachers use the following techniques: **Write sentences. Complete the sentences with.** 92% of the teachers use **Fill in the gaps.** 76% of the teachers use **Make up dialogue.** 61% of the teachers use **Make up a story.** 53% of the teachers use **Paraphrase the sentences.** Teachers also suggested such techniques as **Unscramble the sentences, Choose the right variant, Analyze the meaning, Translate the sentences;**
 - (7) 61% of the teachers are of the mind that the most serious problem they face is the lack of exercises. 53% of the teachers consider that one of the problems is the lack of exercises. L. Gurskaia pointed out the lack of exercises in the 5th-6th Forms. Also teachers have added the following problems: **Lack of explanation in the book, The wrong structure of the textbooks;**
 - (8) 77% of teachers said that the lack of similar grammatical form in the native language creates difficulties while learning Modal Verbs. 61% of the teachers said that one of the problems which pupils face is the lack of exercises. 23% of the teachers said that it is difficult for the pupils to memorize the meanings of the modal verbs. S. Savitskaya pointed out the great account of specific notes alongside with the main rules.
 - (9) Teachers have suggested the following activities: **Dialogues, Poems, Songs, Situations, Role Play, True/False Game.**

The Analyses of Grammar Exercises for Teaching the English Modal Verbs in Moldovan School Manuals

The result of our investigation shows the following types of exercise for teaching and learning Modal Verbs in the gymnasium cycle. These activities can be classified into 5 groups:

- (1) **Recognition exercises** – children have to recognize the studied grammatical item. This type of exercise is the easiest one. It is mostly used in the 3rd form. For example: Module Three, Lesson Six “I Can Ride a Bike”, Exercise 3: “Read the pictures and write the sentences”²;
- (2) **Creative exercises** – pupils have to make up sentences using the modal verb according to the pictures. This type of exercise is used beginning with the 3rd form. For example: Exercise 1: “Look at the pictures and say what the children can do”, at the same lesson²;
- (3) **Drill exercises** namely **completion** – are introduced in the 4th form and are widely used in the senior forms. Pupils have to choose and put the appropriate modal verbs. For example: the 4th Form, Module Three, Round Up, Exercise 6: “Choose the correct verb”: *I ___ do my homework now. (Must, May)*. The 6th Form, Unit Four, Lesson Four “Computer land”, Exercise 8: “Complete the sentences with *must* or *mustn’t*, *should* or *shouldn’t*” – You ___ leave your disk without protection²;
- (4) **Paraphrasing exercises** – are introduced in the 7th form. Pupils have to paraphrase the sentence using modal verb. For example: the 7th Form, Unit Five, Lesson Four “Sports”, Grammar Part, Exercise 1: “Paraphrase the sentences below using *should* + infinitive” – *The team’s captain ordered the players to leave the play-ground*²;
- (5) **Fill-in exercises** – pupils have to put the missing modal verb in the sentence. This type of exercise is practiced in the 5th, 6th, 8th and mostly in the 9th form. For example: the 5 Form, Unit Four, Lesson Two, The Second Lesson “The Magic World of Literature”, Exercise 9: “Fill in with *may*, *may not*, *can*. Read the dialogue:

Tim: ___ I take your book?
Sandu: ___ you read?
Tim: Yes, I ___.
Sandu: Then, you ___ take the book.
Tim: ___ I draw in it?
Sandu: No, you ___ ___, Tim. If you want to decorate, take some paper or a slate”².

The presented types of exercises help pupils to memorize the Modal Verbs. Practice shows that the pupils are not able to keep in mind all the meanings of the modal verbs. Learning by heart becomes too boring for them. The only solution is to introduce new types of activities which will raise pupils’ interest and will provoke them to study with more interest.

Interactive, cooperative and collaborative learning in which each person's opinion is emphasized, creates an atmosphere of democracy where all opinions are heard, all perspectives are valued, and finally where it builds an atmosphere of community, a classroom community. We consider that several effective exercises may be worth applied in the process of teaching Modal Verbs at the lessons of English: *Problem, Solving exercise, Word Research, Broken Sentences, Songs and Poems, Games, Proverbs and Quotations*.

All these activities are going to be presented and described in this article.

Teaching Modal Verbs in the 9th Form

The analysis of the quizzes shows that the teachers are not satisfied with the number and the types of the exercises introduced in the books. They suggest using songs, dialogues and problem solving activities in the process of teaching and reinforcement of the Modal Verbs. Taking also in consideration that there is an exercise for the reinforcement of the topic: "Modal Verbs" in the manual of the 9th form, which consists of 20 sentences where almost all the modal verbs, which were studied before, are present and also there are 3 Modal Verbs introduced for the 1st time (ought to, to be able to, might). We suggest several activities based on Cooperative Learning Strategies:

- (1) The story "The Origin of Modal Verbs": A simple play on the words could help pupils remember how modal verbs are different from the other verbs³:

The Origin of Modal Verbs

A long time ago it was difficult to be a verb; you had to fill in lots of forms before you could be accepted. A group of words wanted to be verbs, they were: ought to, shall, should, will, to be able to and would.

They filled in all the forms at the verb office, one for past tense, one for future and one for present, one for infinitive and one for gerund. When they went back the next week to inquire about their application, they were told there was a problem.

'There's been a muddle; all the forms have been lost. Sorry, I'm afraid you cannot be verbs' said the chief verb-maker. The words were very unhappy, but at last one form for each verb was found. So it was decided that because they only had one form each they could be not full verbs, but a kind of assistant verb that could be used with other verbs. Because of this muddle, they were known as 'muddle verbs', pronounced 'modal verbs' today, with only one form.

- (2) **Audio-Lingual Approach** – is a contemporary way of teaching a foreign language. It is aimed at teaching the language skills in the order of listening, reading and writing and is based on using drills for the formation of good language habits⁴:
 - a) **Songs** – the usage of songs during the lessons of English has an important influence upon the pupils. Firstly they help to develop such pupils' abilities as listening, speaking and reading. Secondly

songs change the atmosphere in the classroom. We propose verses with modal verbs taken from different well-known songs⁵:

May it be the shadow's call? We might be strangers. I just can't get you out of my head. I know I can be what I wanna be. You mustn't cry. The show must go on. My make-up may be fading.

Exercises:

1. Play the songs and ask pupils to listen and match the halves.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1) <i>May it be</i> | a) <i>be fading.</i> |
| 2) <i>We might</i> | b) <i>cry.</i> |
| 3) <i>I just can't</i> | c) <i>get you out of my head.</i> |
| 4) <i>I know I can</i> | d) <i>go on.</i> |
| 5) <i>You mustn't</i> | e) <i>be strangers.</i> |
| 6) <i>The show must</i> | f) <i>be what I wanna be.</i> |
| 7) <i>My make-up may</i> | g) <i>the shadow's call...</i> |

2. Find the meanings of the Modal Verbs *may*, *might*, *can*, *must*:

S	O	U	P	O	S	S	A	D	V	I	C	E	F
U	R	P	O	S	S	I	B	I	L	I	T	Y	F
P	R	E	B	Q	R	E	I	N	V	P	I	C	E
P	A	R	L	I	D	C	L	A	I	R	O	P	A
O	P	M	I	R	O	H	I	B	I	O	T	Y	R
S	P	I	G	E	R	M	T	I	I	H	T	U	I
I	U	S	A	Q	E	R	Y	L	W	I	S	N	O
T	E	S	T	A	S	T	N	I	N	B	R	T	Y
I	M	I	I	A	M	E	K	T	E	I	O	U	T
O	I	O	O	C	S	N	X	Y	Z	T	C	R	Y
N	G	N	N	N	C	E	R	T	A	I	N	T	Y
R	E	Q	U	E	S	T	B	E	D	O	U	B	T
U	R	E	P	R	O	A	C	H	P	N	M	A	Y

Table 2: *Meaning of the Modal Verbs.*

3. Identify the meaning of the modal verbs:

May it be the shadow's call? _____ *I know I can be what I wanna be.*
 _____ *We might be strangers.* _____ *You mustn't cry.*
 _____ *The show must go on.* _____ *I just can't get you out of my*
head. _____ *My make-up may be fading.* _____

b) *Poems* – the usage of poems during the lessons of English has approximately the same value as songs. They have not only cultural but a linguistic value as well. We propose the following poem:

Blowing in the Wind

How many roads must a man walk down / before you can call him a man? / Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail / before she sleeps in the sand? / Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannon balls fly / before they're forever banned? / The answer, my friend, is blowing in

the wind. / The answer is blowing in the wind. / How many times must a man look up / before he can see the sky? / Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have/ before he can hear people cry? / Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows / that too many people have died? / The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind, / The answer is blowing in the wind. / How many years can a mountain exist/ before it's washed to the sea? / Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist / before they're allowed to be free? / Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head, / Pretending he just doesn't see? / The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind, / The answer is blowing in the wind //

Exercise: In groups make up an acrostic poem for word combination *Modal Verb*.

c) *Dialogue* – the usage of dialogues at the lessons of English will present pupils an example of every day conversation and will help them in improving their speech skills. We propose the following dialogue, which is presented with the help of audio-lingual technique:

- Hi, Staff! / - Oh! Hello, Sabine! / -You sound a bit down. / - Yes, well. We have to do this homework, 3 pages of exercises on obligation modals by next week. / -Obli... what? / - Obligation modals, you know verbs like: must and have to. And now we have to do this homework. / - Shall you don't have to do all those boring exercises. Why don't you come to the party with me? / - A party? But I can't go to parties. I have to do my homework. If teacher real says "you must do your homework" she means business. / - Well, you don't have to come to this party. If you won't to. / - Sabine, I'd love to come to the party. But... / - But you really must come to the party next week. / - Another party? Oh! Let's see during the break. I'll talk to you late, Sabine.

Exercise: In pairs make up a similar dialogue using Modal Verbs.

(3) *Brainstorming* – is considered to be a problem-solving technique. It was first developed by A.F. Osborne in 1941. The main purpose of brainstorming is to stimulate all the members of a group to express their ideas connected with the proposed problem.

a) *Proverbs and quotations* which contain Modal Verbs may be used for the reinforcement of the topic. Pupils will have to comment on one of them in such a way that they will not only memorize the verbs but increase their knowledge about life as well. We propose a number of proverbs for each modal verb:

Can: Anger can be an expensive luxury. Don't put off for tomorrow what you can do today. A close friend can become a close enemy. A man may well bring a horse to the water, but he cannot make him

drink. You can't teach an old dog new tricks. God help the rich, the poor can look after themselves.

Must: Friends are like fiddle strings, they must not be screwed too tight. He that plants thorns must never expect to gather roses. He who leaps high must take a long run. He who would eat in Spain must bring his kitchen along. If two men ride a horse, one must ride behind. It is not enough to run, one must start in time.

May: As the best wine makes the sharpest vinegar, the truest lover may turn into the worst enemy. Have a horse of your own and then you may borrow another's. Every garden may have some weeds.

Have to: You have to take the good with the bad.

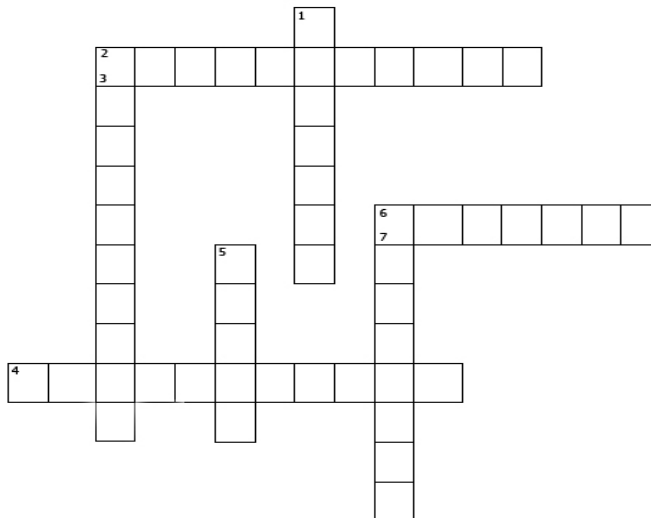
Should: A man should live if only to satisfy his curiosity. Advice should be viewed from behind. Beggars shouldn't be choosers. Children should be seen and not heard.

Might: One might as well be hanged for a sleep as a lamb.

b) **Crosswords** – we suggest to each modal verb a crossword. Pupils will have the task to read the sentence and identify the meaning:

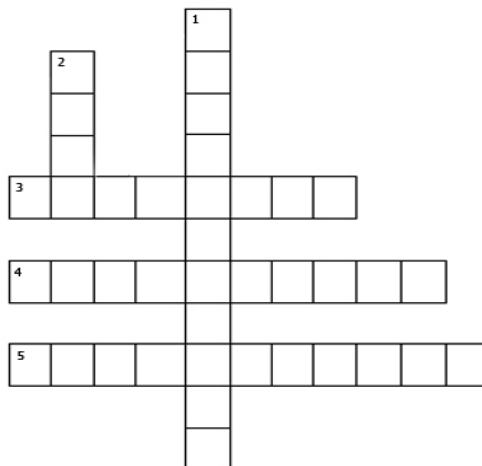
Complete the crosswords using the meaning of the Modal Verb, which it stands in the sentence for⁶:

Can / could: 1. Mary can speak English. 2. Anybody can make a mistake. 3. The teacher said we could go home. 4. You can't cross the street here. 5. He can't be working at this time. 6. Can I have some water? 7. You could at least have met me at the station, couldn't you?



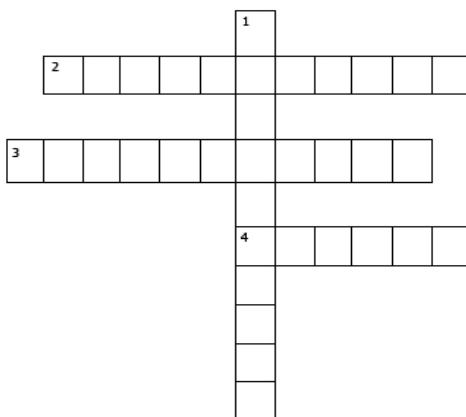
Answers: 1. Ability; 2. Possibility; 3. Permission; 4. Prohibition; 5. Doubt; 6. Request; 7. Reproach.

May / Might: 1. This news is so strange that you may not believe it. 2. The doctor has fears that she may not live much longer. 3. You might at least offer to help me. 4. Might I use your telephone, please? 5. You may find all the books you want in the National Library.



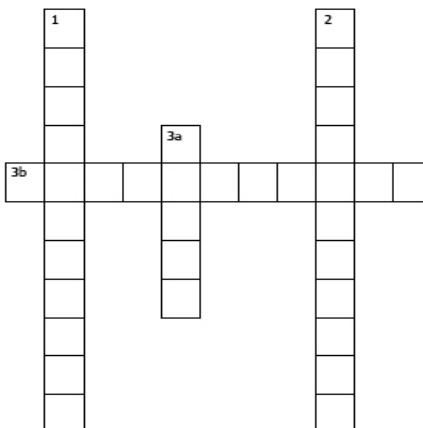
Answers: 1. Supposition; 2. Fear; 3. Reproach; 4. Permission; 5. Possibility.

Must: 1. He must move the furniture himself. 2. The girl mustn't go home alone. It's very late. 3. It must be late as the streets are deserted. 4. You must stop worrying about your son.



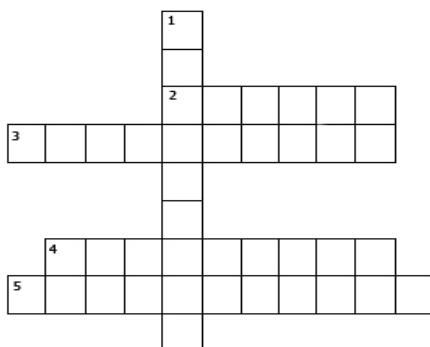
Answers: 1. Obligation; 2. Prohibition; 3. Supposition; 4. Advice.

To be to...: 1. When is the wedding to be? 2. Where is he to be found? 3. A, B. You are to stay here until I return.



Answers: 1. Arrangement; 2. Possibility; 3. A. Order. B. Instruction.

Shall/should: 1. I want that prize and I shall win it. 2. She shall pay for it, she shall... 3. Shall I get you a chair? 4 If you see anything strange you should call the police. 5. The film should be very good as it is starring first class actors.



Answers: 1. Intention; 2. Threat; 3. Suggestion; 4. Obligation; 5. Supposition.

(c) **Situations** - may be used for the reinforcement of the topic. Pupils will not only memorize the verbs but increase their knowledge about life as well.

Exercises:

1. Read parents' instructions for their child's life. Write a child's instruction for parents⁷:

You must say "thank you" and "please" a lot. You must treat everyone you meet as you want to be treated. You should never take actions when you are angry. You need to be able to admit your mistakes.

2. Read the note from your friend Mary. Write a note to Mary. Answer her question⁸:

_____,
I really need my English book! Why haven't you given it back to me? When can you return it? Which pages should I read for homework?
 Mary

3. Make up dialogues according to the pictures using Modal Verbs.

Fill-in exercises

- I. Fill in the blanks with *can, could, be able to, must, have to, needn't, shall* and translate them⁹:

1. *I ___ not go to the theatre with them last night, I ___ revise the grammar rules and the words for the test.* 2. *My friend lives a long way from his office and ___ get up early.* 3. *All of us ___ must be in time for classes.* 4. *When my friend has his English, he ___ stay at the office after work. He (not) ___ stay at the office on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday and ___ get home early.* 5. *___ you ___ work hard to do well in English?* 6. *"___ we discuss this question now?"* 7. *I'm glad you ___ come.* 8. *"___ come and have dinner with us tomorrow?" "I'd love to."* 9. *"Please send them this article." "Oh ___ I do it now?"*

2. Open the brackets and fill in the blanks with the appropriate forms of the verbs *must, have to* and *be to*¹⁰.

1. *John (not tell) him about it. It's a secret.* 2. *It looks like rain. You (take) your raincoats.* 3. *You (not talk) so loudly here.* 4. *In his youth he (work) from morning till night to earn his living.* 5. *He (wait) at the station till it stopped raining.* 6. *The secretary informed us when the manager (come).* 7. *They (leave) on Saturday, but because of the delay with their visas they (book) tickets for Monday.* 8. *.... I (do) it by myself?*

Translation exercises – they help pupils understand the meaning of the modal verbs.

1. Read these sentences and translate them into Romanian (Russian)¹¹.

1. *One Englishman can beat three Frenchmen.* 2. *You can't please all of the people all of the time.* 3. *Life cannot be one endless round of pleasures.* 4. *Good advice can be given, good name cannot be given.* 5. *You can't put new wine in old bottles.* 6. *A man can do no more than he can.* 7. *You never know what you can do until you try.* 8. *God could not be everywhere, therefore he made mothers.* 9. *Where nothing is, nothing can be had there.*

2. Translate the following sentences into English:

1. *Ea niciodată nu poate veni la timp.* 2. *Ei au fost fericiți că au putut să-și ajute prietenii.* 3. *O poți ajuta? – Da, pot.* 4. *El ne-a spus că putem veni în orice zi convenabilă pentru noi.* 5. *N-ar fi trebuit să-i urmezi exemplul toți anii aceștia! Ceea ce-i bine pentru ea, nu poate fi bine pentru tine.* 6. *Nu pot privi televizorul seara, am prea multe de făcut.* 7. *Ea trebuie să fie acasă acum.* 8. *Sora mea poate vorbi cu el.* 9. *Copilul a întrebat, dacă i se permite să privească încă 2 filme în desene animate.* 10. *Ce pot să-ți spun? Regulile trebuiesc respectate¹².*

We have analyzed the exercises included in the school manuals used for teaching Modal Verbs. We have made a quiz and have distributed it to the teachers of English from different schools and found out the difficulties which they meet in teaching Modal. We have created a list of exercises that might serve as a support for school teachers in Modal Verbs reinforcement. The examples are presented with the help of tables, schemes which confirm the theoretical and practical part of our investigation.

Notes

¹<http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/de/pd/instr/strats/raft/>

²Ignatiuc *et alii*, 1999.

³<http://semumf.tripod.com/id7.html>.

⁴<http://es.scribd.com/doc/87818946/27119523-the-Development-of-Language-Teaching-Current-Trends>

⁵<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KcSEnVnQ98>

⁶Кобрин, 1999.

⁷Onofreiciuc, 2008, p. 11.

⁸Onofreiciuc, 2008, p. 37.

⁹Onofreiciuc, 2011, p. 75.

¹⁰Iastremski, 2002, p. 381.

¹¹Iastremski, 2002.

¹²Iastremski, 2002.

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