

## SEMINAR 4 – PRIMARY VERBS AND MODAL AUXILIARIES

### Verbs as operators

**Auxiliaries** become **the operator** when they occur as **the first verb of a finite verb phrase**. The **main verbs “be”** and **“have”** are also **operators** when they are the **only verb** in the verb phrase.

Characteristic features of operators:

- a) to make a negative, we put “not” immediately after the operator
- b) to make questions, we put the operator in front of the subject (subject-operator inversion)
- c) the operator can carry nuclear stress, e.g. Won’t you try again? – I will try again.
- d) the operator is used in elliptical clauses., e.g. Won’t you try again? – Yes, I will.

If there is no operator in positive sentences, the operator “do” is introduced:

- a) negative - She saw him. – She *didn’t* see him.
- b) questions - He wants to come. – *Does* he want to come?
- c) Expressing emphasis – But I *do* listen to you.
- d) Short answers – Do you use a computer? – Yes, I *do*. No, *don’t*.

### Modal auxiliaries

- are followed by the bare infinitive, e.g. I will help you.
- cannot occur in nonfinite functions, i.e. as infinitives or participles
- have no –s form for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg of the present tense
- their past forms can refer to present and future time, e.g. I think he *might* be outside.

## PRIMARY VERBS

### BE

- a) functions as a main verb (copular verb), e.g. Carol *is* a pretty girl.
- b) Functions as an aspect auxiliary for the progressive, e.g. She *is* learning French.
- c) Functions as a passive auxiliary, e.g. She *was* asked to leave. Our team has never *been* beaten.

### Note

! **Ain’t** is a nonstandard contraction used especially in AmE in place of am not, is not, are not (but also has not and have not)

! **Aren’t** is the standard contraction for am not in questions, e.g. Aren’t I tall? I am your friend, aren’t I?

### HAVE

- a) functions as a main verb, normally takes a direct object, e.g. I have no money.
- b) Functions as an auxiliary for perfect aspect, e.g. I have finished.

**In stative senses** *have* is used as an operator. There is also the informal *have got* construction.  
e.g. We haven't any butter. – We have some.  
We haven't got any butter. – We've got some.

**In dynamic senses**, *have* is used with *do* (negative, questions), *have got* is not possible.  
e.g. Do you usually have coffee in the morning? – No, I don't.

## DO

- a) functions as a main verb ( has nonfinite forms – *doing* and *done*)
- b) functions as an auxiliary; as an aux. it has no nonfinite forms, only present and past forms

!Especially in informal speech, the main verb *do* is used a transitive verb, e.g. Let's *do* the dishes.

## MODAL AUXILIARIES (central v. marginal)

*Central modal auxiliaries*: **can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must**

*Marginal modal auxiliaries*: **used to, ought to, dare, need**

### Used to

- always takes the *to*-infinitive
- occurs only in the past tense
- normal interrogative and negative are formed with *do*

### Ought to

- normally has the *to*-infinitive, but *to* is optional following *ought* in ellipsis, e.g. Ought I to stop smoking? – Yes, I think you ought (to).

### Dare and need

- can be used either as modal auxiliaries (with bare infinitive and without the inflected forms) – mainly in negative and interrogative sentences
- or as main verbs (with *to*-infinitive, inflected –*s*, –*ing* and past forms) – can always be used, it is more common

## MODAL IDIOMS AND SEMI-AUXILIARIES

**Modal idioms** – are combination of auxiliary and infinitive or adverb: *had better, would rather, have got to, be to*. They do not have nonfinite forms.

**Semi-auxiliaries** – are introduced by primary verbs *have* or *be*: *be able to, be about to, be bound to, be due to, be going to, be likely to, be supposed to, have to*. They have nonfinite forms.