

# Impact of Contrastive Linguistics on Grade of Knowledges in Foreign Language (Example on Modal Verbs)

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**Abstract**—We would like to point out the importance of contrastive linguistics in this article. The results of contrastive analysis regarding comparison of two languages are taking advantage of linguistic description by using of teaching process of foreign language as well as in the lexicography or in translation process. The article is focused on important part of linguistic – on modality, which is an element of morphology, syntax as well as of lexicology. The formulation of modality by using of modal verbs is appropriate in the language, for that reason, that we are investigating the equivalents of German modal verbs in Slovak language. The results of contrastive analysis indicates, that in German language, Slovak language as well as in English language exist the considerable differences in the field which we are going to introduce in this article.

**Keywords**— contrastive linguistics, modality, modal verbs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE contrastive linguistics deals with the parallelism between languages and is a sub-section of comparative linguistics. The contrastive linguistics is comparing among all language sub-systems the identical phenomena in the language synchronically and diachronically. It means, that the phonetic, phonologically, morphologically, syntactic, lexically and semantic are investigated on the base of two or more languages. The contrastive linguistics compares the two languages on the principle of contrast / antinomy. Such linguistics method is analysing in detail the occurrence of concrete grammatical aspects in both languages. This way of comparison demonstrates multidimensional equivalents and it leads to cognitive perspectives [1]. And yet the contrastive linguistics is not a theoretical discipline, but it deals with usage of language phenomenon in the practice. Such way detected fields of usage of certain languages phenomena are used in teaching process of foreign language, in translation process or by processing of bilingual lexicons.

## II. METHODS AND DATA

There exist two possibilities in contrastive comparison how to compare the languages. The Comparison as a method how to gain the new language knowledges (confrontation as method of investigation) and Comparison as a method used for

description of linguistic findings (confrontation as periphrastic method). The new linguistic findings are gained by confrontations as an investigation method. By this comparison is usually the language L1 the object of description of a certain language, the language L2 acts as relational quantity, and the language L2 is a deciding factor for description of certain language system. Both analysed languages are equivalent, because of the fact, that both languages are analysed and described in common as well as in different signs. We do not want to interest in theory of contrastive linguistics in our article, but we would like to focus on practical using of contrastive linguistics by learning and using of foreign language. Here we can see the importance of contrastive investigation and studies: it is necessary to gain the informations and to specify the tools and their usage, by means if these tools can be pointed out, how differences are in the languages and in which field of language system can be observed. These knowledges can help to the students of foreign languages as well as to knowledges can be used in translation process and in concrete practice.

Pörings – Schmitz [2] see the spheres of contrastive linguistics usage in the teaching process of foreign language and in translation process. This linguistics investigates the well-known tools and elements in the language, for example the concrete words, parts of sentences, special semantic fields and type of texts. The acquired informations about vocabulary are result of an extensive investigation process of possible variants regarding using of certain language unit or some idiomatically term: they consist from parole (code name) as well as from its variants in translation process.

For such art of investigation is important the parallel corpus, because another sources have to be used the contrastive analysis too, not only the dictionaries or essays in lexicon. Our database in this paper is ParaSol (A Parallel Corpus of Slavic and other languages) [3]. ParaSol is a parallel aligned corpus of translated and original belletristic texts in Slavic and some other languages. ParaSol focuses on post-war belletristic texts, translated from a variety of languages to balance priming effects. It based on Slavic languages, but not exclusively; many texts are available also in French, German, English and Italian as well as in a range of other languages. ParaSol focuses on texts that are translated into many (Slavic) languages, so that subsequent addition of further translations of can build on already included translations.

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### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the German language and Slovak language belong to the indo-german languages, they origin in a different groups (german and slavic language), which have own particularities in the whole language system. In spite of it we can see parallels in using of some language tools, which are given on historic base and geographical location. The particularity of each Slavic languages summarized in the monograph B. Comrie and G.G. Corbett [4]: They describe the language system of each Slavonic language. The research of modal verbs in Slavic languages realised mostly Hansen [5]: he describes the main means of expression of modality in Slavic languages in synchronicity and diachrony. Heine [6] and de Haan [7] are comparing the English modal verbs and their means of expression in Slavonic languages. These essays offer an attractive differences in the languages, which form the linguistic as a degree of grammatikisation of modal elements. A similar research was realised by van der Auwera/Schalley/Nuyts [8]. They have investigated some of the Slavonic translation equivalents for some English modal verbs and adverbs. A study of Čermák/Klégr [9] focuses on four most frequent Czech adverbial particles of possibility and the Czech conditional mood marker *by* in the texts and their equivalents. All these studies are important impulses for the contrastive analysis. But of equal importance is the methodological message: to show that parallel corpora is important.

### IV. RESULTS

In this paper we want to direct our investigation to a practice side of this issue. There are many differences in using modal elements in German and Slovak. It is important to recognise this differences and use them correctly, because the right use of language elements and their combination shows a grade of master foreign language.

The most significant differences in using of modal verbs between Slovak language and German language are presented on the base of analysis realised by Mrs. Banášová [10], who analysed the cross-linguistic distribution and behavior of German modal verbs in Slovak. We are presenting the most significant differences between German and Slovak by using of modal verbs. For better understanding is presented the English equivalent too. All presented examples originate from the parallel corpus ParaSol.

Let us now come to the German modal verbs and their equivalents in Slovak:

#### Modal verbs:

German	Slovak	English
<i>können</i>	<i>môcť, vedieť</i>	<i>can, be able to</i>
<i>dürfen</i>	<i>smieť</i>	<i>be allowed to</i>

<i>müssen</i>	<i>musieť</i>	<i>have to, must</i>
<i>sollen</i>	<i>mať</i>	<i>shall, must</i>
<i>mögen</i>	<i>chcieť</i>	<i>to like, may</i>
<i>wollen</i>	<i>chcieť</i>	<i>to want</i>

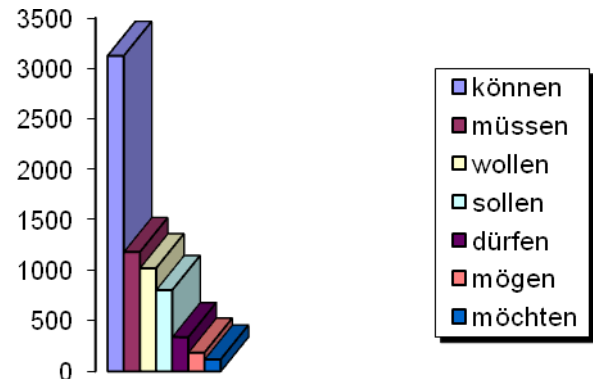


Fig. 1 Participation of German modal verbs in corpus

The results of contrastive analysis show, that the German modal verb is not translated/substituted with identical Slovak modal verb, as we can see on the example:

(1a) "Weswegen *wollen* Sie denn klagen?"

(1b) – A na čo sa *chcete* sťažovať?"

(1c) 'And what *do you want to* complain about?'

There are often used varied lexical tools as modal particle and adverbs, modal phrases, predicatives or morphologically equivalents. By investigation of modal verbs equivalents is needfull to seek in the semantic characters of the verb. The multiple meaning has often an influence on diversity of equivalents in another language. The best example would be the modal verb *können*. German *können*, like English *can*, has three non-epistemic senses: root possibility, permission and ability. Slovak modal verb *môcť* has only two non-epistemic senses: root possibility and permission. An example for root possibility:

(2a) Wie mir schien, war es dem Abt ganz recht, die Diskussion beenden und auf sein Problem kommen zu *können*. [*can*]

(2b) Zdalo sa mi, že opát je rád, že *môže* skončiť túto debatu a vrátiť sa k svojmu problému.

(2c) I felt the abbot was pleased *to be able* to conclude that discussion and return to his problem.

For meaning of the term „ability“ is not used in Slovak the basic modal verb *môcť* = *can*, but the verb *vedieť* = *know, be able to*. In German as well as in English can be used the basic modal verb *können/can*:

(3a) Des Menschen Duft *konnte* er hinreichend gut mit Surrogaten imitieren. [*could*]

(3b) Ľudský pach *vedel* dostatočne dobre imitovať náhradkami. [*knew*]

(3c) He *could* imitate human odor quite well enough with surrogates.

For the Slovak (and the majority of Slavonic languages) is typical, that in the meaning of ability is used no auxiliary verb, but only the form of semantic verb:

(4a) Harry *konnte* Wasser plätschern hören, irgendwo in der Nähe musste ein Bach sein. [*could*]

(4b) Harry poču zurčat' vodu, niekde nablízku bol zrejme potok. [*Harry hears...*]

(4c) Harry *could* hear running water; there must be a stream somewhere close by.

In those cases goes about the collocation of sense verbs (mental state verbs) with semantic verb, when the Slovak language does not need any modal formulation for expression of ability.

The frequent equivalent of modal verbs in Slovak are the predicatives, which are forming in common cases the impersonal constructions. It refers to conjunction of auxiliary verb *byť* [to be] and nominal phrase (adjectives, adverbs). The auxiliary verb is limited to third person of singular (*je* [is], *bolo* [was]). A typical mark for such constructions is, that they are connecting with infinitive of verb (*nadiktovať* in this example):

(5a) Dies *mußte* er nun dem Schreiber diktieren. [*had to*]

(5b) Už *to bolo potrebné* len nadiktovať sekretárovi. [*It was required...*]

(5c) It remained to dictate it to the secretary.

The most differences in the distribution of German modal verbs is in their epistemic sense. The Epistemic modal verbs based in the speaker's subjective belief toward the proposition. This epistemic sense concerns the speaker's grade of uncertainty about the truth-value of his/her assertion [11]. In this tree languages (German, Slovak, English) this can be expressed in various ways, including modal verbs, modal adjectives and modal particles as in:

(6a) ..., als er plötzlich eine vierte Person in der Nähe bemerkte, die anscheinend gleichfalls den beiden gefolgt war, aber Benno kaum gesehen haben *dürfte*, da er sich eng an den Stamm einer Eiche am Rande des Friedhofs drückte.

(6b) Aj ten sledoval tých dvoch, no Bendika, ktorý sa pritisol ku kmeňu duba na kraji cintorína, *určite* nevidel. [*určite* = *certainly*]

(6c) This person, too, had followed the pair and *certainly* had not noticed the presence of Benno, who flattened himself against the trunk of an oak growing at the edge of the cemetery.

German is using in this sense mostly the modal verbs, Slovak uses the non-verbal equivalents like modal particles. The fact, that in Slovak are used principally the modal particles or another modal means of expression for Epistemic sense (modal verbs not much), is related to their lower grade of grammaticalisation of Slovak modals.

Uneven degree of grammaticalisation of modals in German and in Slovak can be seen in non-modal meanings too, when

the modal verbs reflect the grammatical meanings. German modals *sollen* and *mögen* can have a syntactic function:

(7a) *Sollte* ich etwas Neues erfahren, so werde ich es dir sofort sagen.

(7b) *Ak* sa niečo dozviem, poviem ti to.

(7c) *If* I learn something, I'll tell you.

The German modal verb (here *sollen*) has no modal meaning in those intents, but the verb serves to express the morpho-syntactic categories, in this case, it represents the conditional subordinate clause sentence (real conditions). The Slovak modal verbs do not present such ability, such Slovak sentences are introduced only by conjunctions *ak*, *keď* [if].

The correct using of typical collocation shows the grade of knowledges of foreign language. We understand under the term "collocation" the typical contexts in the field of usage, where the examined verb or idiomatic phrase exists. In every language are specific those relativ stabil phrases. Not in every case are those phrases used in the same way:

(8a) Es war eine meiner vortrefflicheren Ideen, und unter uns gesagt, *das will schon was heißen*. [=it wants to mean something]

(8b) Bol to jeden z mojich lepších nápadov a medzi nami dvoma, *to už je čo povedať*.

[=there is something to say]

(8c) It was one of my more brilliant ideas, and between you and me, *that's saying something*.

By correct using of language is important to know the collocations, which are typical for concrete, very specified situation in communication in the given language, because of specific and unique combinatorial attributes of language units [12].

Equivalents	Slovak equivalents of German modal verbs
verbal equivalent	65 %
non-verbal equivalent	5 %
morpho-syntactic equivalent	3,5 %
modal verb untranslated	15,5 %
another formulation	11 %

Fig. 2 Slovak equivalents of German modal verbs

## V. CONCLUSION

The use of German modal verb is not the same as the one of the Slovak modals. In this paper we wanted to show the main differences in the use of modals in German and Slovak. The most important results are:

- The distribution of German modal verb in Slovak is not the same. The modal elements in the Slavic languages are, compared to German, a much more heterogeneous lot.
- The Slovak equivalents of German modal verbs are dependent on semantic attributes of those verbs. Not in every case is the using of modal verbs in specific point identical in both languages.
- German epistemic modals are reflected to Slovak most by means of modal particles.

- d) This may be a sign of a lower degree of grammaticalisation of Slovak modal verbs.
- e) The Slovak modal verbs are not able to build syntactical constructions like real conditions or time clauses. That is the second sign of a lower degree of grammaticalisation of Slovak modal verbs in contrast to German modals.
- f) The modals in all languages come in different collocations, specified for every single language.
- g) To gain the findings, it should be used the contrastive analysis of parallel corpuses.
- h) One main claim made in this paper is that is very important to know this differences in correct usage of language. The skills of those specifics shows the grade of skills in foreign language too.

Because of that is necessary to include the outputs of contrastive analysis into the teaching process of foreign languages, as well as into the lexicographically descriptions.

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