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SKOPJE

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines of varying thicknesses, slanted diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right, set against a blue gradient background.

AUXILIARY VERBS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SENTENCES




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1. INTRODUCTION

Auxiliary verbs are among the grammatical elements that play crucial roles in the construction of grammatical units particularly clauses and sentences. They (auxiliaries) sometimes require the presence of lexical verbs to function within verbal groups; however, that does not deny their significance as grammatical sentence elements. Despite their syntactic dependency, auxiliary verbs enjoy high frequency as far as the use of sentence elements is concerned. So, it is worthy to note that, the auxiliary verbs although require lexical verbs, have semantic indispensability and sometimes some of them function as main verbs in sentences and convey effective meanings on their own.



1.1. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN LEXICAL AND AUXILIARY VERBS

The two most important differences between lexical and auxiliary verbs are these (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.114):

1. In questions, auxiliary verbs can move in front of the subject NP. A lexical verb cannot.
2. The negative particle (not or n't) can attach to an auxiliary verb but never to a lexical verb.

Compare the auxiliary verbs can and be in [1] and [2] with the lexical verbs speak and drink in [3] and [4]:

[1] [a] He can swim. [b] Can he swim? [c] He cannot/can't swim.

[2] [a] He is swimming. [b] Is he swimming? [c] He is not/isn't swimming.

[3] [a] He spoke. [b] *Spoke he? [c] *He spoke not (*spoken't).

[4] [a] He drinks. [b] *Drinks he? [c] *He drinks not (*drinksn't).

The correct forms for [3b–c] and [4b–c], of course, are [b] Did he speak? [c] He didn't speak. [4] [b] Does he drink? [c] He doesn't drink. **which involve the auxiliary verb do.**

We've listed need among the modal auxiliary verbs. In fact, there are two verbs need, one an auxiliary, the other lexical – with a subtle difference in meaning:

LEXICAL

He doesn't need to go.

He doesn't need a drink.

Does he need to go?

Does he need a drink?

AUXILIARY

He needn't go.

Need he go?

As indicated, the lexical verb can take a direct object NP – a drink – so it's transitive. By contrast, auxiliary verbs never take an NP complement (they are always followed by other verbs).

1.1. MODAL AUXILIARIES (MOD)

Modal auxiliary verbs ('modals', for short) are special – quite different from other verbs, both lexical and auxiliary.

For a start, modals are always tensed (finite). They do not have untensed (non-finite) forms. This distinguishes modals from the primary auxiliaries (do, have and be) and from lexical verbs.

PRESENT: can will shall may

PAST: could would should might

You may be surprised to hear that *will* is present tense, since it usually has a future-time meaning. The point is that *will* in the present tense provides one way of referring to what is (at the present) a future point in time. In the past tense (*would*), it provides a way of referring what was (in the past) a future point in time. Compare:

(Present): He says he *will* come.

(Past): He said he *would* come.

The modal verbs *must* and *need* don't even have a past tense form but just the one (present tense) form already given. Compare this situation with that which holds with a lexical verb like *give*. Besides its finite (present and past tense) forms, *give(s)* and *gave*, it has three non-finite forms: (i) *give* (the stem form, as in *to give*), (ii) *giving*, and (iii) *given*.

1.1. THE PERFECT AUXILIARY — HAVE (PERF)

There are two verbs **have, lexical and auxiliary**. The lexical verb is transitive, taking an NP complement, as in *I have a lovely bunch of coconuts*. Auxiliary *have* is described as the ‘perfect’ auxiliary. Perfect *have* is always followed by another verb (ellipsis aside). This was illustrated above:

[a] Daisy has/had *filled* the pool. [b] Max has/had *written* nothing.

Since it is the first verb in the VP in these examples, *have* appears in a finite form: present tense (*has*) or past tense (*had*). Remember, though, that the form of a tensed verb does not always differ from the basic stem. If the subject were not third-person singular, the present tense form would be *have* – e.g. *We have written nothing*.

1.1. THE PROGRESSIVE AUXILIARY — BE (PROG)

Progressive be is easily identified. Look again at:

Daisy **is/was** *filling* the pool.

Max **is/was** *writing* nothing.

In these, the tensed verbs are forms of the progressive auxiliary *be*. As you can see, just as perfect have demands that the following verb has the perfect participle form, progressive *be* demands that the following verb has the (non finite) -ING form. Call this the progressive participle, to reflect its dependence on preceding progressive be. You'll be pleased to hear (but you already knew!) that the progressive participle (-ing) form is completely regular – invariant for all verbs in the language. Like have, be can function either as an auxiliary or as a lexical verb. Lexical *be* is the intensive verb, the copula– as in *Kubla Khan was very extravagant*.

In this example the verb *be* figures twice: *Nanny is being a nuisance again*. Here *is* is the present tense form of progressive be, and *being* is the progressive participle of the copula.

Now look at:

This turn of events is worrying.

1.1. THE PASSIVE AUXILIARY — BE (PASS)

All the examples discussed so far are said to be in the active voice. They don't contain the passive auxiliary. Sentences that include the passive auxiliary verb *be* are said to be in the passive voice. Passive *be* was illustrated in [a–b], repeated here:

[a] The pool is/was filled. [b] Nothing is/was written.

The obvious point to make is that *be* is also the progressive auxiliary. How to distinguish between progressive *be* and passive *be*? The answer lies in the form of the following verb. Following progressive *be*, we've seen, a verb adopts the progressive participle form (V-ing – e.g. stealing).

But following passive *be*, a verb adopts the passive participle form (e.g. stolen). Notice that the passive participle form and the perfect participle form are always the same. Since the two participles are the same with every verb in the language, it's traditional not to distinguish them and call them both 'the past participle'.



Figure 3.4 The perfect, the progressive and Passive (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.120)

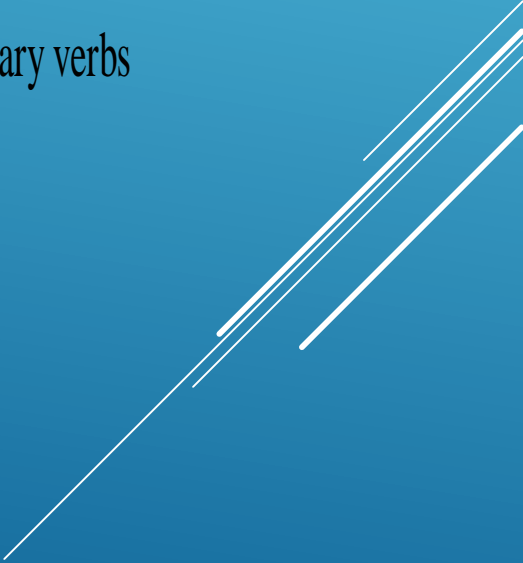
Just as with perfect have and progressive be, PASS will only have the tense feature if it's the first verb in the sequence. PASS can co-occur with any combination of other auxiliaries:

- Your water pistol will be confiscated. (MOD + PASS)
- The pool has been filled by Daisy. (PERF + PASS)
- Otto is being driven mad by all the noise. (PROG + PASS)
- It should have been written by now. (MOD + PERF + PASS)
- It may be being written right now. (MOD + PROG + PASS)
- It could have been being written. (MOD + PERF + PROG + PASS)

As always, it's just the first verb that's tensed and the form of each further verb is determined (in ways outlined above) by the verb that precedes it. It is all very systematic – as is the order of the verbs: **MOD before PERF before PROG before PASS before Lexical V.**

CONCLUSION

The paper talked about the English auxiliary verbs through reviewing some of the relevant points discussed by different authors. It began with an introduction where the importance of the auxiliary verbs has been pointed out. The two main sets of the auxiliaries – primary and modal have been discussed thoroughly and the different forms of verb that are used with different types of auxiliary have been identified. Discussion has also been done on the various meanings attached to the modal auxiliaries before lastly talking about the use of auxiliary verbs in different types of sentences such as reported speech and conditional sentence.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

