

# PROCEEDING BOOK



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## BALKAN 11. ULUSLARARASI SOSYAL BİLİMLER KONGRESİ



BALKAN 11th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES  
APRIL 4 - 7, 2024  
SKOPJE

Published by Academy Global Publishing House



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*BALKAN 11TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES  
APRIL 4 - 7, 2024  
SKOPJE*

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*Issued: 15.05.2024  
ISBN: 978-625-6830-98-1*

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01.12.2023

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İlgi : 29.11.2023 tarihli ve E-53120705-000-2300381989 sayılı belge.

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## AUXILIARY VERBS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SENTENCES

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## ABSTRACT

Several researchers have pointed out that the verbal group, being an obligatory element of the clause structure, carries high syntactic and semantic loads. As such, it is an area of maximum divergence and one of the most difficult aspects to master particularly by learners of English as a second language. On this note, this paper discusses the English auxiliary verbs, being integral components of the verbal group. The discussion is done through reviewing the works of different authors on the auxiliaries distinguishing the two sets - the primary auxiliaries (have, be and do) and the modal auxiliaries (can, could, dare, may, might, must, need, ought, shall, should, will and would). Each set of the auxiliaries are discussed with much emphasis on different usages to illustrate how crucial the auxiliaries are, as far as the conjugation of the verbal group is concerned.

*Key Words: Primary Auxiliaries, Modal Auxiliaries, Verbal Group*

### 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

#### AUXILIARY

He doesn't need to go.

He needn't go.

He doesn't need a drink.

Does he need to go?

Need he go?

Does he need a drink?

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).

So when need behaves like an auxiliary – in accepting negation and moving in the question – it can't take an NP complement:

\*He needn't a drink. \*Needs he a drink?

Notice that, following the lexical verb need – but not auxiliary need – the following verb is introduced by to. This then illustrates another distinction between auxiliary and lexical verbs: when a verb follows a lexical verb, it can be introduced by the infinitive particle to but not when it follows an auxiliary verb. For example, *hope and forget* are lexical verbs and, when they are followed by another verb, that other verb is lexical and is introduced by to: *He hopes to pass but he forgot to study.*

## 1.2. 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*.

Notice that, in contrast to auxiliary *need*, lexical *need* does have a past tense form. *He needed to go* (preceding the infinitive particle *to*) and *He needed a drink* (taking an NP complement) are fine. A further peculiarity of modals is that they never show subject-verb agreement. They don't change their form in the present tense – not even with a third-person singular subject NP (so we have *She can go*, not *\*She cans go*). Recall that it's always just the first verb in a sequence of verbs that is finite (tensed). It follows from this that, since modals are always tensed, they always come first in any sequence of verbs. It also follows that, in a sequence of verbs, there can be only one modal verb (*\*He could would go*, *\*He will must go*).

We've mentioned that every auxiliary verb determines the form of the following verb. The verb that follows a modal auxiliary always appears in its basic (non-finite) stem form. This applies whether the following verb is lexical – as in, (*would*) *fill* and (*can*) *write* – or another auxiliary.

## 1.3. 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*.

You will have noticed in [a–b] that, even though *have* is in the present tense, those sentences refer to past time. This is a prime example of the lack of correlation between time and tense, mentioned earlier. There are more ways of referring to the past than using the past tense. The perfect auxiliary *have* provides a way of referring to past time independently of past tense. Perfect *have* in the present tense allows us to refer to a present state of affairs resulting from a past event, as in *He has gone*. Contrast this with *He went* – simple past tense – which refers just to a past event. With perfect *have* in the past tense (as in *had written*), we have a reference to a period of time that was past at a past point in time – the ‘past in the past’.

The verb that follows perfect *have* always appears in its (non-finite) perfect participle form. This applies whether the following verb is lexical or another auxiliary. Written in [b] is the perfect participle form of *write*. Participle forms are non-finite. We’ve called it the ‘perfect participle’ to highlight the fact that this form is determined by the preceding perfect *have*. As noted, *write* belongs to a group of verbs that are irregular in that their perfect participle form clearly differs from their past tense form (*written* vs. *wrote*). Other verbs that pattern like *write* in this respect are *forbid, give and go*. And the verb *be* – the most irregular verb in the language – is no different in this respect. By contrast, with many verbs – in fact, with all regular verbs (e.g. *fill*) and some irregular verbs (e.g. *put*) – the perfect participle form is identical to the past tense form:

V	past tense	perfect participle	
<i>forbid</i>	<i>forbade</i>	(have) <i>forbidden</i>	} irregular
<i>give</i>	<i>gave</i>	(have) <i>given</i>	
<i>go</i>	<i>went</i>	(have) <i>gone</i>	
<i>be</i>	<i>was/were</i>	(have) <i>been</i>	
<i>put</i>	<i>put</i>	(have) <i>put</i>	
<i>fill</i>	<i>filled</i>	(have) <i>filled</i>	regular

Figure 3.3 Regular/irregular verbs (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.117)

How can you tell whether you're dealing with a (finite) past tense form or a (non-finite) perfect participle form when – as in the last two *put and fill* – the two are identical? Easy. It is finite (past tense) only if it's the first verb in the sequence (because only the first verb in the sequence can be finite). If the verb is preceded by perfect have, then it must be the non-finite, perfect participle of the verb. We mentioned earlier that there are two verbs have, the transitive lexical verb and the perfect auxiliary.

Here are examples that include both:

*Adam has had a little chat with the doorman.*

*By two a.m., I had had enough.*

In the first example *has* is the perfect auxiliary (present tense) and it is followed by the lexical verb in the perfect participle form (*had*), which happens to be identical to the past tense form of *have*, as illustrated in the second example.

Remember, though, that PERF will only have the tense feature if it's the first verb in the sequence. Now that we've introduced MOD and PERF, let's give examples in which they both occur and in which PERF is not the first verb in the sequence:

Milan *will have* filled the pool.

Maxim *could have* written something.

As explained, the lexical verb comes last. And, again as explained, the modal auxiliary (MOD) comes first. It must come first because modals are always tensed. Hence, when perfect *have* cooccurs with a modal, it follows the modal. It's an unbreakable rule of English that perfect *have* precedes the lexical verb and modals precede perfect *have*:

#### **MOD before PERF before Lexical V.**

As already noted, MOD demands that the following verb appears in the basic (non finite) stem form; this is the form of perfect *have* in the examples below.

### **1.4. 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*.

It might seem that this example includes progressive *be* followed by a lexical verb (*worry*) in the progressive participle form. Not so! The verb *worry* is transitive – it requires a direct object. But there is no dO in the example. So, *worrying* here is not the verb. It's the adjective. Notice that in the example *it* can be modified by *very*. This means that it is not the progressive auxiliary. Progressive *be* is always followed by further verb – but here *be* is followed by an adjective (more strictly, an AP) complementing *be*. So, *is* in [*This turn of events is worrying*.] is the intensive lexical verb (the copula).

But, just as with perfect *have*, PROG will only have the tense feature if it's the first verb in the sequence. Having introduced MOD and PERF, we can give examples in which PROG co-occurs with MOD, with PERF and with both MOD and PERF:

[1] You *may be* wondering about the future. (MOD + PROG)

[2] Millie *has been* using the bleach. (PERF + PROG)

[3] Bill *might have been* teasing you. (MOD + PERF + PROG)

Following the modal in [1], progressive *be* appears in its (non-finite) bare stem form. Following perfect *have* in [2] and [3], it appears in the (non-finite) perfect participle form (*been*). Again, the ordering of the verbs is absolutely fixed.

**MOD before PERF before PROG before Lexical V** (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.119).

### 1.5. 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'.

We've not adopted that term here because it suggests the form has something to do with past tense. It doesn't. But notice, in passing, that the passive option introduces no new form into the language. Economically, it just recombines forms anyway required for the formation of the perfect and the progressive:

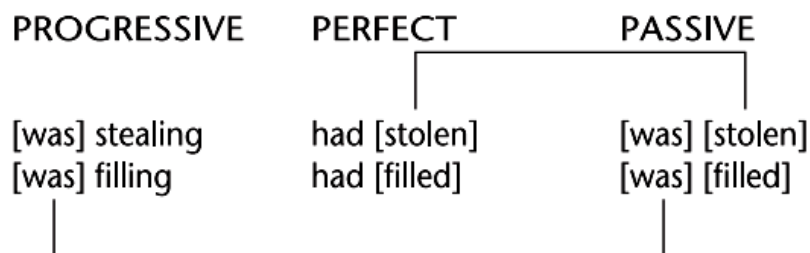


Figure 3.4 The perfect, the progressive and Passive (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.120)

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.

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