

Sentence types and VP head morphology

Overview

See the *Terms* section at the bottom for definitions of basic terms.

For each sentence type, examples of the modality typically expressed in such sentences are presented. For each modality type examples are listed enumerated with Roman numerals.

Examples are supposed to list different grammatical forms of modality expression.

Inability to transform the sentence to Interrogative is the criterion for classifying it Optative, rather than Declarative,

Sentence types and modes

1. Declarative sentences state facts, opinions, beliefs, or hypotheses. Modal subtypes describe the kind of modality expressed in the statement:
 - a. Epistemic modality – indicates degrees of certainty or possibility.
 - i. *Trees bloom* (Gnomic mood)
 - ii. *She **may** be late* (Possibility)
 - iii. *The weather **might** improve tomorrow* (Potential)
 - iv. *He **must have seen** the message* (Certainty)
 - v. *She **might have missed** the bus* (Potential)
 - vi. *That **will** be the postman* (Certainty)
 - b. Deontic modality – expresses permission, obligation, or advisability.
 - i. *You **must** finish your report today* (Obligative mood)
 - ii. *You **may** leave the room* (Permissive mood)
 - iii. *Guests **shall** not enter the restricted area* (Obligative mood)
 - iv. *You **should** study for your exams* (Advise)
 - v. *You **should have** told me earlier* (Advise)
 - c. Dynamic modality – indicates ability or volition.
 - i. *I **would** often walk to school* (Habitulative mood)
 - ii. *I **will** help you with your homework* (Volitive mood)
 - iii. *I **could have gone** to the party* (Volitive mood)
 - iv. *She **can** run very fast* (Ability)
2. Interrogative Sentences ask questions and end with a question mark. Different modal types modify how the question is meant:
 - a. Epistemic – asks about the truth or possibility of a proposition.
 - i. ***Could** he be at home?* Note: Grammatically Interrogative, pragmatically possibility.
 - b. Deontic – requests advice or permission.
 - i. ***May** I open the window?*
 - ii. ***Could** you pass the salt?* Grammatically Interrogative, Deontic modality - expressing polite request
 - c. Rhetorical (indirect modality) – uses question form to imply statement.
 - i. *Who **wouldn't** want a free vacation?* (means Everyone would). Grammatically interrogative, pragmatically - rhetorical.

- ii. *What **are** you doing?* – Grammatically Interrogative, pragmatically - Exclamation
- 3. Imperative Sentences give commands, instructions, or invitations; the subject “you” is often implied. Imperative mood proper is restricted morphologically to base verb forms without explicit subject. Modality here affects the politeness level, urgency, or authority of the command:
 - a. Directive (strong) – expresses necessity or demand.
 - i. *Do your homework now!* – (Imperative mood)
 - ii. *Do not go there!* – (Prohibitive mood)
- 4. Exclamatory Sentences express strong feelings or emotional emphasis and end with an exclamation mark. Exclamations in English are not a grammatical mood, but a sentence type conveying high affect. Their modality tends to be affective, communicating the speaker’s emotional stance:
 - a. Affective epistemic – amazement or disbelief.
 - i. *She must be joking!*
 - b. Evaluative (deontic/volitional blend) – strong approval or disapproval.
 - i. *You really should have seen it!*
 - c. Pure emotive – direct emotional outburst.
 - i. *How wonderful this is!*
- 5. Optative Sentences convey volitional or affective modality, not factual assertion or command. Can be positive (blessing, goodwill) or negative (curse, lament) in tone.

In form of request

- a. [May +] Subject + Base Verb. Expresses goodwill or blessing.
 - i. ***May** you live long.*
 - ii. *[May] God bless America*
- b. Long + Base Verb + Subject. Expressing formal wishes.
 - i. ***Long live** the Queen!*
- c. Let [PRON.PERS.3.DAT] + Imperative Clause (Jussive mood)
 - i. ***Let** him go*
- d. Imprecative mood
 - i. ***Like** hell it is*
 - ii. ***The fuck** you are*

In form of suggestion

- e. Let + Object + Base Verb
 - i. ***Let** the world be at peace*
- f. Have + Object + Complement, other forms.
 - i. ***Have** a great day!* - Imperative in form, illocutionary force – Idiomatic Optative
 - ii. ***How do you do*** - Interrogative in form, illocutionary force – Idiomatic Optative
- g. If only + Clause
 - i. ***If only** I were rich!* – Desiderative mood
- h. Let us + Imperative Clause – Hortative mood
 - i. ***Let us** try it.*

Summary

The relationship between grammatical mood (imperative, indicative, subjunctive, optative) and modality (epistemic, deontic, dynamic) is studied. English language lacks distinct morphological marking for many moods, relying instead on auxiliary verbs and pragmatic context.

Terms

[Speech act](#) - Locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts are three components of a speech act that describe an utterance at different levels.

[Locutionary meaning](#) - literal meaning of what is said; the sentence meaning.

[Illocutionary meaning](#) – what the speaker means: intention or purpose behind the utterance (e.g., to inform, request, or warn); the speaker's meaning

[Perlocutionary meaning](#) – what listener understood or how listener interprets what is said: the effect the utterance has on the listener (e.g., persuading, frightening, or comforting them); the listener's meaning.

[Grammatical Mood](#) - is a grammatical feature of verbs used for signaling modality — that is, a system of verbal inflections or syntactic constructions that express a speaker's attitude toward what they are saying (e.g., statements of fact, command, wish, or possibility). English primarily distinguishes the indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and conditional moods. Mood thus encodes whether a clause describes reality (realis) or non-reality (irrealis), independently of tense and aspect.

Example: “She goes to school” (indicative) vs. “If she were taller” (subjunctive)

[Modality](#) refers to the semantic domain associated with mood. It concerns the speaker's attitude toward the factuality, possibility, necessity, or desirability of the proposition. Frank R. Palmer defines modality as “concerned with mood (subjunctive, etc.) and with modal markers such as English modal verbs (can, may, must, etc.),” treating these as part of a unified grammatical category found across languages. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) specify it as “centrally concerned with the speaker's attitude towards the factuality or actualisation of the situation expressed by the rest of the clause”.

Example: “She must be home” (epistemic necessity) vs. “You must leave” (deontic obligation)

[Illocutionary Force](#) - introduced by J. L. Austin and elaborated by John Searle, describes the type of speech act that an utterance performs — i.e., the intended communicative function such as asserting, questioning, commanding, or promising. The same grammatical clause type can serve different illocutionary forces depending on context.

Example: “Can you pass the salt?” — grammatically interrogative, but its illocutionary force is a request rather than a question.

References

- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). [The Cambridge grammar of the English language](#). Cambridge, UK
- Palmer F.R. (2001) [Mood and Modality](#). 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press;