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MODAL AUXILIARIES IN SCOTTISH ENGLISH

The aim of this paper is a modest one, viz., it is an attempt to provide a succinct account of both syntactic and semantic characterisation of modal auxiliaries in Scots, one of the major sub-standard varieties of English. To achieve this goal I draw on the research work done in this specific area in the eighties and nineties.¹

The paper falls into two basic parts, of which the first focuses on the formal criteria of modal auxiliaries in Scottish English, whereas the second one concentrates on their semantic features. The object of my interest will comprise the following items: *will, can, may, must, ought to* and *need*.

1. The syntactic properties of modals in Scottish English

The Scottish modals similarly to the Standard English modal auxiliaries are negated directly. The negation can have either contracted or full forms. The Standard English contracted form *-n't* is realised in Scots by means of the affix *-nae*:

- (1) *He willnae come.*

However, the contracted form never inverts in this variety of English. The equivalent of the Standard English full negative form *not* is *no* in Scots:

- (2) *He will no come.*

Modals occur in the auxiliary negation, when they fall within the scope of negation and the main verb negation, when they don't. However, the occurrence of the Scottish English modal auxiliaries in negative sentences is different while compared to Standard English.

In the case of *could*, the contracted negative form shows the auxiliary negation, while the full negative usually indicates the main verb negation:

¹ The present paper as well as all the examples are based on the results of the research done by the following linguists: J.E. Miller (1993), J.E. Miller & K.E. Brown (1982), K.E. Brown (1991), M. Montgomery & S. Nagle (1993).

(3) **auxiliary negation:**

*She **couldnae** have told him.*

(meaning: *It is impossible for her to have told him.*)

main verb negation:

*She **could no** have told him.*

(meaning: *It was possible for her not to have told him.*)

However, the full form can also be found with the auxiliary negation if the speaker wants to emphasise the negative itself:

(5) *She **could no** have told him.*

Hence, in sentences containing *could* both negations are possible:

(6) *She **couldnae no** have told him.*

(meaning: *It is not possible that she didn't tell him.*)

Having the aspectual auxiliary *have* and *could* with the main verb negation involves the use of the full negative, which can be put before the first auxiliary, after the last auxiliary or between them:

(7) *He **could no have** been working.*

*He **could've no** been working.*

*He **could've been no** working.*

Might, unlike *could*, has a limited distribution because it does not occur with the auxiliary negation. Since it is restricted only to the main verb negation, the double negation with *might* can not be found:

(8) **He **mightnae no** have come.*

That is why in all cases, where *might* cannot be used, appropriate forms of *could* appear.

The use of *can* is similar to *could*, that is to say, it occurs with both the auxiliary and the main verb negations:

(9) *You **canna** do it, even if you want to.*

*You **can no** do it, even if you want to.*

Consequently, the double negation with this modal is possible:

(10) *You **canna no** do it.*

In addition to that, the main verb negation has always the full form:

(11) *You **can no** do it, if you **dinna** want to.*

You **canna do it, if you **dinna** want to.*

Should, *will* and *would* behave similarly with respect to negation. If they appear alone in declarative sentences, the distinction between the auxiliary and the main verb negation is not perceptible:

- (12) *You shouldnae do that.*
You should no do that.
He'll no tell you.
 He **willnae** tell you.

However, this distinction begins to exist in declarative sentences with other auxiliaries:

- (13) *You shouldnae have told her.*
 (meaning: *What you shouldn't have done is told her.*)
You should have no told her.
 (meaning: *What you should have done is not told her.*)

as well as in negative interrogative sentences:

- (14) ***Should he no have told her?***
 (meaning: *Wasn't it his duty to tell her?*)
Should he have no told her?
 (meaning: *Was it his duty not to tell her?*)

Similarly to *might*, *must* occurs only with the main verb negation, which seems to be due to the fact that the meaning 'I conclude that X is not the case' is easily interpretable, as opposed to 'I do not conclude that X is the case', which would sound semantically rather odd. That is why the following examples:

- (15) *He mustnae've gone.*
He must no have gone.
He must've no gone.

have the same interpretation, namely, 'I conclude that he didn't go'. Consequently, the sentences with two negatives are impossible:

- (16) **He mustnae no have gone.*
 **He mustnae have no gone.*

Modal auxiliaries can be also found in tags in Scots. *Could*, *would* and *should* occur in the so-called 'reversed polarity' tags:

- (17) *He couldnae do it, could he?*
He couldnae do it, e (no)?
He could do it, e (couldn't he)?
He could do it, could he no?

Since the contracted *-nae* does not take part in the subject-auxiliary inversion, it can not be used in tags. However, the Standard English contracted negative *-n't* occurs freely in tags

in Scots e.g. *couldn't*, although it is not used in the main clause negations. Moreover, the tag particle *e* is commonly used there. It does not involve pronoun repetition and is unmarked for polarity. It can be noticed that *e* added to an affirmative sentence is equivalent to negative tag forms, whereas *e (no)* added to a negative sentence is equivalent to affirmative tag forms. The tag *no* occurring in e.g. *could he no* derives from a reversal of the polarity value of the sentence, while in the tag *e no* it is the result of copying the polarity value. *Can*, *will* and *must* are found in tagged sentences if they do not have *-n't* forms:

- (18) *He can come, e (*can't he)?*
He can come, can he no?
*He'll come, e (*won't he)?*
He'll come, will he no?

Due to the fact that *might* does not occur in interrogative forms, it cannot also be used in tags:

- (19) *He might come, e (*mightn't he)?*
*He might come, *might he no?*

However, negative sentences with the main verb negation are preferably tagged in this variety in the following way:

- (20) *He could have no done it, couldn't he?*
He could have no done it, could he no?

rather than:

- (21) **He could have no done it, could he?*

This results from the negligence of the polarity of the main verb negation.

Taking the *e* tags of such sentences into consideration:

- (22) *He could have no done it, e?*
He could have no done it, e no?,

it can be observed that *e* is distributionally equivalent to *couldn't*. Although the so-called double negative tags occur in Scots, they are only possible while affirmative sentences form a negative tag together with the main verb negation adding the *no* particle:

- (23) *He could have no done it, couldn't he no?*

Hence, such constructions like the following are not acceptable in this dialect:

- (24) **He could have done it, couldn't he no?*
 (no source for the additional no)
**He couldnae have done it, couldn't he no?*
 (negative sentence requires reversed tag).

In contrast to Standard English, where only one modal verb can occur in a given sentence, the Scots modals co-occur forming the so-called multiple-modal auxiliary constructions. While two modals are combined together they form double modal verb constructions. They are formed according to certain governing rules, which allow to divide these combinations into three groups.

The first group involves constructions with *can* or *could* as the second modal, which is preceded by other modal verbs:

- (25) *He might can (could) do it, if he tried.*
 He **must can (could)** do it.
 He **should can (could)** do it.
 He'll **can** do it.
He would could do it, if he tried.

They are 'non-harmonic' because the first modal carries the possibility meaning, whereas the second expresses ability. As for initial modals in these constructions, there are grounds for supposing that they are gaining adverbial status equivalent to *maybe*, *surely* and *likely*:

- (26) *He might could do it; He could maybe do it.*
 He **must can** do it; He **can surely** do it.
He should can do it; He can likely do it.

Moreover, *will* can occur with other modals to form a triple modal auxiliary construction. In such combinations *will* serves as the first auxiliary, whereas *can* or *could* as the third one:

- (27) *He'll might could do it for you.*
 (meaning: *He might be able in the future to do it for you*).

The second group of double modal constructions uses *can* or *could* after the infinitive marker *to*:

- (28) *He'll have to can do it whether he likes it or not.*
He used to could do it when he was younger.

These constructions are quite common in Scots. However, even in this variety they are limited only to *can* and *could*.

The third group consists of modals followed by semi-modals such as *have to* or *be to*:

- (29) *We'll have to get the roof mended.*
 He **might be to** go tomorrow.

The constructions of this type with *have to* are familiar in Standard English, but those with *be to* are not used.

In double modal auxiliary constructions only the first modal can be moved to the front position to form a question. Inversion of the second modal as well as both of them is not possible:

- (30) *He will can do it.*
Will he can do it?
 **Will can he do it?*
 **Can he will do it?*

Double-modal negative sentences are synonymous if *might* and *must*, which take only the main verb negation, occupy the first position in a verb group:

- (31) *He might no could have done it.*
He might could no have done it.
He mightnae could have done it.
 (meaning: *It is possible that he was unable to do it.*)
He must no can do it.
He must can no do it.
He mustnae can do it.
 (meaning: *I conclude he is unable to do it.*)

With *should* and *would* the situation is different because they can take either the auxiliary or the main verb negation. The contracted negative form shows the auxiliary negation, whereas the full negative form indicates the main verb negation:

- (32) *He shoulnae can come.*
 (meaning: *It should not be possible for him to come.*)
He should no can come.
 (meaning: *It should be impossible for him to come.*)

Hence, in this case the double negation can be found:

- (33) *He shouldnae no could have come.*
He shouldnae could no have come.

The tag questions added to the affirmative sentences with *can* as the second modal are tagged in the following way:

- (34) *He'll can do it, will he no?*
He'll can do it, can he no?

This has to do with the fact that *can* is tagged, when the importance is given to 'ability', while *will* is tagged to focus on 'futuraity'. In Scots *could* is often used as a past participle:

- (35) *Ah would uh could uh done it.*
 (meaning: *I would have been able to do it*)

The *uh* participle is equivalent to 've or *have*.

Here is the data compiled by Montgomery and Nagle (1993: 94) on the occurrence of modal combinations in Scots:

 MODAL COMBINATIONS FOUND IN SCOTS

*will can, will could, would could,
might could, might can, might would, might should,
may can, could can,
mustn't could*

2. The semantics of modal auxiliaries in Scots

WILL

It is used with first person singular and plural to indicate simple future, where in Standard English *shall* appears:

- (36) *I will do that.*
(SE: *I shall do that.*)

In questions *will* implies 'do you wish me to?', where normally in Standard English *shall* is employed with first person singular:

- (37) *Will I go and get one?*
(SE: *Shall I go and get one?*)

CAN

Can in Scots carries the meaning of permission and ability:

- (38) *You can have this afternoon off.*
(SE: *You may have this afternoon off.*)
He'll can help us tomorrow.
(SE: *You will be able to help us tomorrow.*)

In the subject literature *could* is also found with the possibility meaning:

- (39) *She could no have told him.*

MAY

May does not occur as a marker of permission in Scottish English. The Standard English sentence:

- (40) *You may not come to the party.*

can have two interpretations:

- (40a) *You don't have permission ...*
(40b) *You have permission not to ...*

In Scots, the first meaning 'not have permission to' is expressed by the negative form of

can: *can't*, *cannot* and *cannae*, whereas the second one 'have permission not to' by *don't need to*, *don't have to* and *are allowed not to*.

Permission is also conveyed in Scots by *can* (mentioned above), *get to* and *get + gerund*:

- (41) *You **can** have this afternoon off.*
*The pupils **get to** come inside in rainy weather.*
 (meaning: *They are allowed to ...*)
*They **got** going to the match.*
 (meaning: *They were allowed to ...*)

MUST

Must has only one meaning in Scots. It conveys the 'conclusion' (epistemic) meaning:

- (42) *You **must** be exhausted.*
 (meaning: *From the evidence I conclude that you are exhausted*)

The obligation meaning that *must* implies in Standard English is in Scots expressed by *have to*, *need to*, *supposed to* and *meant to*:

- (43) *I **have to** take the cows outside.*
 (SE: *I **must** take the cows outside.*)
*You **need to** paint the house.*
 (SE: *You **must** paint the house.*)
*You **'re supposed to** leave your coat in the cloakroom.*
 (SE: *You **must** leave your coat in the cloakroom.*)
*You **'re meant to** fill in the form first.*
 (SE: *You **must** fill in the form first.*)

Furthermore, *have to* and *need to* express external compulsion. For self-compulsion, Scots uses *will have to*:

- (44) *I **'ll have to** write to Carol because she wrote to us six months ago.*

The Scots *mustn't* implies 'I conclude that not', which is in Standard English expressed by *can't/cannot*:

- (45) *This **mustn't** be the place.*
 (SE: *This **can't** be the place.*)
*I **mustn't** have read the question properly.*
 (SE: *I **can't** have read the question properly.*)

OUGHT TO

To render the obligation meaning of the Standard English *ought to* and *should*, Scots uses *should* or *want*:

- (46) *You **should** learn to look before you leap.*
 (SE: *You **should/ought to** learn to look before you leap.*)
*You **want** to come out and attack right away.*
 (SE: *You **ought to** come out and attack right away.*)
 [the sentence uttered by judo instructor]

NEED

The Scottish *need* operates as a main verb. The Scottish equivalent of the Standard English sentences:

- (47) ***Need** you leave immediately?*
*You **needn't** leave immediately.*

would be:

- (48) *Do you **need** to leave immediately?*
*You don't **need** to leave immediately.*

Similar syntactic features in Scottish English show the verbs: *use* and *dare*:

- (49) *I didn't **use** to do that.*
*She doesn't **dare** to talk back.*

Like in Standard English, Scots can use *need* in its progressive form:

- (50) *They're **needing** to paint the window.*
*You're **needing** to get a haircut.*

As it was mentioned earlier in the paper *need* in Scots expresses obligation as well.

Concluding, it may be worth saying at least a few words concerning what various linguists have to say about the genesis of modal combinations in non-standard varieties of English.

Nagle (1993) rules out the Old English origin for present double modal constructions. He claims that if such combinations occurred, they must have been semantically and syntactically different from today's modal combinations. In his research, the linguist found that most frequent combinations were the ancestral forms of *should ought to*, *must ought to* and *shall/should can* with *ought to* and *can* in its infinitival forms. Moreover, Nagle states that neither of those combinations took the third verb, but they contained nominal complement unlike today's double modals. Besides, they did not occur in their present modal sense, but they carried the following meanings: *ought to* = *own* and *can* = *know*. The linguist rejects also the beginning of current double modals in Middle English. He states that although the modals took the third verb as a complement in modal combinations, the second modal was morphologically marked as an infinitive. The most frequent combinations *shall may* and *shall can* cannot be treated as true current double modal precursors because *may* and *can* were morphologically marked by *-en*, *-n* or *-e*, which are infinitive

inflections and were treated as main verbs. Furthermore, Nagle claims that the Middle English modal combinations cannot yield present double modals because they ceased to exist as a consequence of modal reanalysis in early Modern English when modals underwent full auxiliarization losing their status as 'unexceptional' verbs.

According to Montgomery and Nagle (1993), there is strong historical evidence that the cradle of today's modal combinations found in British and American dialects is Scotland. First of all, the double modals in Scots and Southern American English show many similarities in their use. The varieties use similar combinations, in questions the inversion of the first modal is not possible, in question tags the second modal is copied and in negative clauses uncontracted *not* is only placed after the first modal. Secondly, around 1610 the migration of Scots to the north of Ireland started. The farmers of Scottish Lowlands began to settle in Ulster as the result of colonisation during the reign of James I. In sixty years preceding the American Revolution, 250 000 of Ulster Scots went to North America settling in American South from Virginia to Georgia. The migration facts together with the similarities between the British and American double modals are strong evidence for claiming that present-day modal combinations have their beginning in Scotland.

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