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## **SLOVAK MODAL VERBS POLYSEMY IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

The paper deals with the polysemy of grammaticalized modal verbs in Slovak political discourse from the point of view of cognitive linguistics. The aim of the study is to approach the process of conceptualization of modal meanings of possibility, necessity, certainty and evidentiality in Slovak political discourse via the source domain (natural category) of grammaticalized modal verbs *môct'* (can), *musieť'* (must), *mať'* (to have). In contrast to traditional linguistics, we show the semantic relations (one meaning is derived from the other) and the motivation of a number of modal meanings.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, grammaticalization, political discourse, modality, polysemy

### **1. Introduction**

Language phenomena are closely related to cognition – the ability to regulate the creation and usage of meanings formed by society, culture or nation. Conveying meaning is the key function of language. Modality represents various meanings including possibility, obligation, request, or persuasion. In comparison with other language units (semantic, synsemantic, etc.), this semantic area includes a complex of meanings representing the complicated relationship between person and reality. In language modality is expressed by various means including modal verbs. Research in the field of grammaticalization in geographically related languages shows that modal verbs are a specific type of auxiliary verbs present in Slavic and other languages (Besters-Dilger et al. 2009: 24). The theory of the grammaticalization of modal verb points to both their specific character and difference from other full verbs and auxiliary verbs, not only in the area of morphology and syntax, but also in the area of semantics – the main focus of analysis in cognitive linguistics.

The paper explores the polysemy of Slovak modal verbs as exemplified by Slovak political discourse. The study is based on research related to the grammaticalization of modal verbs (Krug 2000), as well as to cognitive linguistics theory (Langacker 1987, 1991) and Lakoff (1987).

### **2. The grammaticalization of Slovak modal verbs**

The paradigm of basic modal verbs (modal expressions) in Slovak is systematically and semantically qualified and relatively grammaticalized. Modal language units in Slovak and other Slavic languages are grammaticalized but not on the same level as the respective units in English. These modal means do not specify their own nominal arguments (they do not influence the selection of the

subject) but they are mostly dependent on a full verb argument structure in the infinitive. The other aspects of grammaticalization are connected with the fact that these verbs mostly do not have two mode forms and the imperative. Morphological and syntactic qualification of modal expressions is closely related to the so-called modal polysemy. Modal expressions do not have rich semantic structure, which in some modal verbs, especially *môcť* (can) and *chcieť* (want), points to relations with numerous synonyms, most frequently the synonyms with one modal meaning. It is a very unstable and dynamic group, which in Slovak and Czech linguistics is usually referred to as *polomodálne slovesá* (semi-modal verbs) (Oravec and Bajžiková 1986: 55), *modálno-vecné slovesá* (full modal verbs) (Ďurovič 1956: 61) and *modálne slovesá v širšom zmysle* (modal verbs in a broader sense) (Grepl and Karlík [1986] 1998: 153). In comparison with basic modal verbs (modal expressions), these verbs have not undergone the grammaticalization process and only have one modal meaning.

Despite the difference in the degree of grammaticalization between semi-modal and basic modal verbs, it seems that the distinction between them is not always clear-cut. Moreover, even the verbs categorized as basic modal verbs by Dvonč et al. (1966: 366) (*môcť*, *musieť*, *chcieť*, *smieť*, *mať*, but also *vedieť*, *mieniť*, *rozkázať*, *nariadiť*, *nechať*, *dovoliť*) are not grammaticalized to the same degree (see also Ďurovič 1956: 39, Dudová 2014: 44–54). To sum up, the degree of grammaticalization of Slovak modal verb is not the same with all verbs due to differences in the correlation between the grammatical and lexical meaning of the verb. Moreover, polysemy is questionable with the verb *dať/dať sa* (can/could be) and it is completely absent in the monosemic modal expression *smieť* (be allowed to). In view of the above, the analysis focuses on the syntactic polysemy of three modal expressions: *môcť* (can), *musieť* (must), *mať/mať sa* (have).

### 3. The polysemy of *môcť* (can), *musieť* (must), *mať* (have) from the point of view of traditional linguistics

The polysemy of the above modal verbs can be studied from the point of view of both traditional and cognitive linguistics. The former defines polysemy as a lexical phenomenon featuring a wide range of meanings, which just like homonymy, shows a certain degree of ambivalence and ambiguity. In the case of modality, polysemy is considered to be semantic change or dissociation of a modal expression, while sustaining its phonetic (formal) qualities. Our analysis of the polysemy of modal verbs is based on lexicographic analysis, which shows that *môcť* (can) has eleven different meanings, *mať/mať sa* (have to) has eight modal meanings and *musieť* (must) has only six meanings (*Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka* 2003: 318, 341, 345, *Slovník slovenského jazyka* II 1960: 105–110, 185).

The problem of the traditional approach is that it does not account for the number of meanings of a lexical unit, does not focus on the structure of these meanings and cannot state which meaning is central and the most representative. It just tries to find some common abstract meaning for all derived meanings (Lakoff 2006: 402). Since the research of Palmer (1986) and Lyons (1995: 329–331) the

meanings of modal expressions have been semantically analysed into two areas. Palmer (1986), following the research of Lyons, states that all basic modal categories are hierarchically categorised into Wrights' two types of modality – epistemic and deontic modality (Palmer 1986: 26). The terms *epistemic modality* and *deontic modality* have been adopted by the Slavic circle of linguists. Rytel (1982) elaborates on lexical modal expressions in Czech and Polish focusing on their categorization into epistemic, deontic, and alethic modality. According to Rytel, epistemic modality has to do with the certainty or doubt of the speaker whether the statement corresponds to the objective reality. Deontic modality brings forward the possible worlds, which are obligatory, forbidden or permitted via the modal subject (the speaker) (Rytel 1982:14). From the definitions outlined above, we can assume that traditional linguistics aims at defining a modal expression based on a complicated relation between the speaker and the proposition.

In the view of traditional linguistics approach, two semantic centres and representative meanings in the Slovak verbs *musiet'* (must) and *môct'* (can) or four semantic centres in *mat'* (have to) have been identified. In the case of the modal verb *môct'* (can) the dictionary meanings are grouped into two abstract meanings – deontic possibility as a way of concession to another alternative of an action and epistemic low degree of certainty of the speaker about reality. The modal verb *musiet'* (must) is semantically represented by epistemic meaning of high degree of certainty of the speaker and the deontic category of necessity; the speaker thus perceives reality as necessary, needed, requested. The epistemic and the deontic category complement each other: excluding the other alternative shows that the speaker has enough information to be convinced about the existence of only one possibility. The verb *mat'* (have) has the same deontic meaning as *môct'* (can) and *musiet'* (must) but with two contrast modal meanings: necessity and possibility. Another central meaning is the epistemic low degree of certainty as in *môct'* (can). In contrast to the other two verbs it expresses the distance between the speaker and the statement concerning the veracity of the proposition, i.e. it demonstrates the post-modal meaning of evidentiality/reference. In terms of modal polysemy, traditional linguistics approach does not point to multiple meanings in their systematic relations and original motivation. Although it tries to find common meaning (or meanings), it is so abstract and vague that it cannot explain the way of systematic categorization of multiple meanings under one lexical unit (Ibarretxe-Artunano et al. 1999: 32–33).

#### **4. The polysemy of Slovak modal verbs from the point of view of cognitive linguistics**

Cognitive linguistics does not try to find the correspondence between language and reality; however, “it tries to find the original meaning motivated by human perceptive and cognitive capacity“ (Janda 2002: 12). Cognitive linguistics focuses on the study of meaning based on the physical reality of a person in the world. This physical, factual, palpable contact of a person with reality is the basis of our categorization of the world and can be seen in the prototype characteristics, which represent a source domain of polysemic expressions. Cognitive linguistics

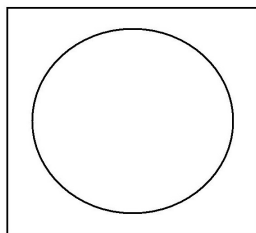
shows that such meanings are the cause and the origin of radial categories, which are structured in the metaphoric and metonymic processes. A radial category has a number of subcategories. There is one central category and non-central extensions, which create variations in the central one. The central model extensions are not coincidental but motivated by the central model and some general principles of extension. As a result, one or two meanings are central, i.e. more representative and their extensions result in polysemy in the form of radial categories. We can study the modal verb *mať* (to have), the meaning of which is the result of the grammaticalization process based on the physical experience of owning, which is part of our cognitive processes (*mieć* in Polish, *mít* in Czech and *měć* in Serbian). Direct interactions with the world become a target domain, which helps us understand abstract concepts of an objective, unphysical domain.

The process of mapping from the source onto the target domain is based on conceptual schemes, metaphorical models, which depend on the common orientation of a person in the world and correspond to one's physical experience. The verb *mať* (to have) is present in many proverbs and expressions denoting unphysical phenomena deeply rooted in somatic processes such as *Kto nemá v hlave, má v päťách* (A forgetful head makes a weary pairs of heels), *Lož má krátke nohy (ďaleko neujde)* (Lies have short legs), *Strach má veľké oči* (Fear doubled all) (Habovštiaková–Krošlaková 1990: 165, 177, Záturecký 2005: 430). However, it is possible to find this meaning of the verb *mať* (to have) also in texts with political focus where it indicates ownership of political advantages, preferences and authority:

- (1) *Ani jedna strana však nechce podceniť ťažkosti, ktoré bude treba prekonať pri realizácii mierového plánu v Sýrii, zdôraznil šéf nemeckej diplomacie po rokovaní s čínskym partnerom a dodal, že **jasný mandát má teraz v rukách Bezpečnostná rada OSN (BR OSN).***

(No party wants to underestimate the difficulties, which will be necessary to overcome in order to negotiate a peace plan in Syria, the chief of German diplomacy stressed after negotiations with Chinese partner and he added that **the United Nations Security Council had the apparent mandate in its hands** now.) (MPPS [published on December 19, 2015])

The examples above show that the conceptualization of ownership in the source domain has been realized by a metaphorical model of a *container* – by the idea of inside, borders, and outside from one's own body (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. The container schema (after Lakoff 2006: 441)*

The semantic potential of *mat'* (to have) in these texts shows that the subject matter of a container tends to extend the idea to other specific meanings (e.g. financial means, political programme) and abstract meanings (e.g. time). State organizations, governments, or political parties own these extensions, as we can see in the examples from political discourse below:

- (2) *Ak by sa toto podarilo, možno by sa konečne dosiahlo to, aby sa zdravotníctvo prestalo zadlžovať a malo by finančné prostriedky na svoj ďalší rozvoj.*

If this were successful, maybe it would be finally achieved that public health would stop to increase its debt **and would have financial means** for its next development. (ZLF [published on December 18, 2015])

- (3) *SDKÚ má nový program pre zdravotníctvo.*

**SDKÚ has new programme for public health.** (ZLF [published on December 18, 2015])

*Vláda má už len necelé tri mesiace, aby si splnila povinnosť a nominovala nového člena správnej rady ústavu.*

The government **has only less than three months** to perform obligation and nominate new member of the office administration board. (BT [published on December 20, 2015])

This conceptualization in the source domain shows that the meaning of ownership connected with the idea of human body is the source of origin of further radial categories such as duty and obligation, the possibility to perform an action. In the process of the metaphorical formation of the verb *mat'* (have) based on the idea of a *container*, there is a central category represented by a full verb, non-central extensions represented by a modal auxiliary verb. All mentioned phraseological constructions (*mat'* + appellative/proper noun) with an idiomatic meaning can be transformed into a state or an action *byť* (to be).

The following examples (4) and (5) from political texts show variations and extensions of the central category. The ownership moves from the idea of substance to the idea of an action (its reality or unreality), which is either allowed or excluded by the speaker.

- (4) *Ak musí prísť k dohode, čo musí, mali by sme túto príležitosť využiť na také zmeny vo fungovaní EÚ, ktoré budú vzájomne prospešné pre všetkých.*

If it **must come** to an agreement, what must, **we should utilize** this opportunity for such changes in the EU functioning, which will be reciprocally helpful for all. (FB [published on December 18, 2015])

- (5) *Policajti by mali pôsobiť v Macedónsku od polovice januára do konca februára 2016. Policemen should operate in Macedonia from mid-January to the end of February 2016* (CPMP [published on December 21, 2015])

In (4) and (5), the verb *mať* (have) has the meaning of both excluding (obligation) and allowing (possibility) another alternative of an action. While example (4) excludes the possibility of not utilizing the opportunity for reciprocally helpful changes in the EU functioning (it stresses the necessity/obligation to do something), example (5) allows the possibility of policemen operating in Macedonia from mid-January to the end of February. While necessity in Slovak political discourse is bonded especially with left oriented home politics, possibility is bonded more likely with foreign political scene, eventually with right-liberal politics. We can clearly study the counteractive relationship between the verb *môcť* (can) (allowing some other possibility of an action) and the verb *musieť* (must) (excluding the other possibility). In some Slavic languages, this relationship is realised in the idea of semantic equality (can = do not have to, must = cannot) as can be seen in the examples (6) and (7) from political discourse:

- (6) *V každom prípade sa **budeme musieť** dohodnúť s Veľkou Britániou (= nebudeme môcť sa dohodnúť)*

In any case, we must come to an agreement with Great Britain (= we cannot afford not to come to an agreement) (FB [published on December 18, 2015])

*S požiadavkou na obmedzenie sociálnych dávok pre pracujúcich, ktorí nie sú z Veľkej Británie, však podľa Fica **nemôžeme súhlasiť** = musíme nesúhlasiť)*

According to Fico, **we cannot agree** with the request for limitation of social benefits for employees who are not from Great Britain. (= we must disagree) (FB [published on December 18, 2015])

- (7) *Zaviedla sa obligatórna väzba, na základe ktorej súd **bude môcť** zobrať osobu obvinenú z trestného činu súvisiaceho z terorizmom do väzby bez uvedenia dôvodov.*

Obligatory arrest was established, on the basis of which the Court of law **can arrest** the person, accused of a crime related to terrorism without giving reasons. (PZSD [published on December 18, 2015])

The modal verb *mať* (to have) has a similar function in the sentences (8) and (9):

- (8) ***Mali by sme** túto príležitosť **využiť** (musíme túto príležitosť využiť = nemôžeme túto príležitosť nevyužiť) na také zmeny vo fungovaní EÚ, ktoré budú vzájomne prospešné pre všetkých.*

**We should utilize** this opportunity (we must utilize this opportunity = we cannot afford not to utilize this opportunity) for such changes in the EU functioning, which will be reciprocally helpful for all. (FB [published on December 18, 2015])

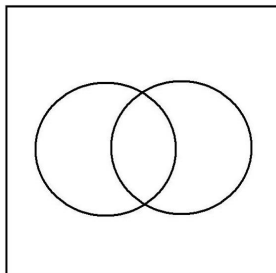


- (9) *Policajti by mali pôsobiť v Macedónsku od polovice januára do konca februára 2016. Policemen should operate in Macedonia from mid-January to the end of February 2016. (CPMP [published on December 21, 2015])*

In sentences (4) and (6), the speaker does not extend the subject matter of the container while in sentences (5) and (7), the speaker seeks other possibilities and thus extends the container. On the basis of the source domain of ownership, motivated by the conceptualization of one's own body as a container, we can understand the target domain of possibility as extending the ownership, wealth, and obligations when the tendency to extend a container is annulled.

These two ways of knowing/owning the world (its actions and states) develop the central model and they participate in creating a so-called radial category. The radial systematisation of possibility and necessity/obligation of the modal verbs *môcť* (can), *musieť* (must) and *mať* (have) can be seen in the etymology of the verb *mať* (have), which originated from the Old Church Slavonic *imati* (IndE. *imā-mi*) and its derivatives *iměnyje* (*imétje* in Slovenian, *majetok* in Slovak, *majetek* in Czech and *majątek* in Polish) (Machek 1971: 366). Similarly, the modal verb *môcť* (can) probably comes from the Indo-European *mog-otb* in Modern Czech *mohutný*, Moravian *mochnější*, *zá-možnejší* and other derivatives such as *vel'mož* (magnate) (the old title of an emperor) but also the Old Slavonic *zmotati se na niečo* (to achieve something with difficulty) and *vъz-mošti* (to gain strength). In contrast, the Moravian-Slovak *nemoha* suggests the idea of weakness, laziness (Machek 1971: 371). The Old Czech *nemoc* means weakness as well. This is the negative form of the verb *musieť* (must). In its old forms *mositi*, *mušeti*, the alternative vowels *u/o* appeared pointing to the foreign vowel *ü* in the German verb *müssen*. From the three analysed verbs, only *musieť* (must) does not have a full lexical meaning in Slovak (its meaning is suggested by the words *nemoc*, *nemohúcnosť*—illness, weakness) (Machek 1971: 383–384).

The other meanings of the above-mentioned modal verbs suggest that possibility/ necessity/obligation function only as target domain, the result of projection A' of the container A scheme. Apart from it, there are also the meanings of strength, intensity of certainty, which originate from the container B scheme where the projections B' are a subcategory of A' as illustrated by Figure 2 below (Lakoff 2006: 442).



**Figure 2.** Two overlapping container schemas (after Lakoff 2006: 441)

The points of intersection correspond to the source domain of ownership. This can be seen in Slovak proverbs, which bring together the idea of certainty with the idea of excluding another alternative (the speaker does not extend the subject matter of a container). We could see this with the verb *musieť* (must): *Kde máš dobrý sed, tam sed!* (Where you have a good sitting, sit there!), *Kto má zdravie, pokoj, chleba, ten má všetko, čo mu treba* (Who has health, peace, bread, they have everything they need), *Drž sa toho, čo máš* (Hold by what you have), *Má od Boha dost!* (He has enough from God) (Záturský 2005: 234, 244, 356).

A great deal of certainty is expressed by *musieť* (must) in example (10), which shows statement of the Slovak Prime Minister at EU leaders negotiations:

- (10) *Ak má dôjsť k nejakým zmenám vo vnútornom fungovaní EÚ, musí to byť dohoda všetkých a do tejto dohody by mala prispieť aj samotná EÚ.*

If it comes to some changes in the internal functioning of the EU, it **must be** an agreement of all, and also the EU alone should contribute to this agreement. (FB [published on December 18, 2015])

In contrast, the verb *môcť* (can) in example (11) suggests the idea of allowing another alternative (extending the subject matter of a container) and expresses a lower degree of certainty on behalf of the speaker:

- (11) *“Môže sa to diať aj úsporami, ktoré vzniknú, ak sa podarí zaviesť systém e-Health [...]. Ak by sa toto podarilo, možno by sa konečne dosiahlo to, aby sa zdravotníctvo prestalo zadlžovať (...),“ povedal Potičný.*

**It can happen** also thanks to savings, which arise, if we manage to apply the system of e-Health [...]. If this were successful, maybe it would be finally achieved that public health would stop increasing its debt ...,“ said Potičný.) (ZLF [published on December 18, 2015])

A great deal of certainty is associated with the idea of a closed container. The more open a container for possibilities, the weaker the degree of certainty. The meaning of a low degree of certainty of the verb *mať* (have) shows the tendency to open a container. Expression of somebody else’s opinion (evidentiality) is very often found in political discourse, as seen in example (12).

- (12) *Reformovať sa má podľa SDKÚ aj ambulatná starostlivosť, kde by sa mal napríklad meniť spôsob preplácania úkonov v ambulanciách.*

According to SDKÚ, outpatient care **should be reformed**, where, for example, the method of reimbursement of outpatient services should be changed. (ZLF [published on December 18, 2015])

These radializations of the factual (source) meaning of ownership are confirmed by diachronic linguistics, which shows that in many languages the idea



of certainty has developed from the meaning of possibility and necessity/obligation (Lyons 1995: 334, Ligara 1997: 68). According to Večerka (1984: 168), the modal meanings of certainty in Old Church Slavonic were developed to a smaller extent than the meanings of possibility and necessity. The same is to be found in Modern Slovak where the verbs *môct'*, *musiet'*, *mat'* demonstrate lower frequency of their epistemic meaning compared to their meaning of possibility/necessity.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the polysemy of Slovak modal verbs has demonstrated how their multiple meanings are related in a natural and systematic way. The process of grammaticalization has shown that high polysemy is the common denominator of basic modal verbs in the Slavic languages. Moreover, it has helped to uncover the primary or original grammatical function of the full verb *mat'* (have) with a factual lexical meaning of possession. The meaning of having something as property, owning something has also been found in the etymology of the modal verbs *môct'* (can) and *musiet'* (must). The analysed examples from political discourse show how the original meaning of such verbs (the source domain) is connected with the physical experience of a person in the world. Through the conceptual model of the container, we have illustrated the tendency of Slovak modal verbs to form radial categories in the following way: concrete meaning of possession → possibility ↔ necessity → low rate of certainty ↔ high rate of certainty → somebody else's opinion.

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