New Look upon the Grammatical Functions of Some English Modal Auxiliaries and Semi-modals Expressing Obligation and Necessity

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Abstract

The article is an attempt at taking quite a different view at the grammatical status of some modal constructions, namely have (got) to and have to, in the grammatical system of the English language. Traditionally they are included into the system of modal verbs. The authors of the article treat such constructions from another linguistic angle, they include them into the system of the category of voice and treat them as analytical passive forms of the verb expressing non-actualized and actualized actions of caused agents in mediated causative situations.

Keywords: causation, mediated causative situations, actualized actions, functional-semantic field, passive of mediated causative situation
1. Introduction

1.1 Russian and Tatar learners of English face a kind of difficulty in mastering the correct usage of modal verbs. One of the stumbling blocks are the constructions have (got) to + infinitive and have to + infinitive. Since the verb get is often dropped in some contexts the students confuse these two constructions, they are not quite sure of the correct usage of the auxiliary verb do with them in negative and interrogative sentences.

Different authors of grammar books treat these constructions differently. They treat them as “fixed idiomatic phrases” [LGSWE 2000:484] expressing obligation and necessity. They used to be given different names, such as “modal verbs” [Hewings 1999:46; Murphy 1997:62], “Modal auxiliaries” [Leech and Svartvik 1983:111; Quirk et al., 1982:55], “semi-modals” [LGSWE 2000:484]. In some grammar books the verb have in have to and have got to is called “a modal verb” [Gordon and Krylova 1974:93], which seems doubtful.

1.2 The research hypothesis

There can be one more approach to such expressions, including even “central auxiliary modal verbs” must and should [LGSWE 2000:483] expressing obligation and necessity. To our point of view they take the position between the “functional-semantic fields” [Bondarko 1983:40-47] of modality, voice and causativity as analytical passive forms of the verb expressing non-actualized and actualized actions of mediated causative situations.

Though the category of causativity is not distinguished as a morphological category in the majority of English grammar books, English has a system of lexical units, i.e. verbs of “facilitation and causation” [LGSWE 2000:363] which express this category. They are the following verbs: allow, cause, enable, force, help, let, require and permit. English, like French, also has the analytical form expressing this category, e.g. make/have smb. do (smth.). This analytical construction occupies the nucleus, or the core, of the functional-semantic field of causativity. Other lexicalized causative verbs build up lexico-syntactic constructions which occupy the periphery of this field. Thus all these means build up a multiple gradual opposition presenting the category of causativity.

2. Methods

2.1 On the category of causativity

Let us try to prove our hypothesis. For this purpose we will have to resort to the method of crosslinguistic comparative analysis of non-kindred languages and to the method of translation. Some languages have special morphological means of expressing this category, e.g. the Tatar language (which belongs to the group of Turkic languages). In the Tatar language this category is expressed by the following agglutinative suffixes, or inflections: -м, -мыр-/мер, -мар, -дыр-/дер, -дар-, -кар-/кер, -ыр-/кер, -гер-, -ар-/ар-, -ыр-/ер-, -кыз/-кез-, -гыз/-гез-, -гез-, -ыз/-ез-, -сем-. But in Tatar this category is included into the generic category of voice as a specific category of causativity [Zinnatullina 1969:199-202].

According to W. Croft [Podlesskaya 1994:148] there can be distinguished 4 types of causative situations: 1. the impact of mental entities upon physical ones: I broke the stick; 2. the influence of one mental entity upon another one: I persuaded him to come; 3. the influence of a physical entity upon a mental one: This tune makes me sad; 4. the impact of a physical entity upon another physical entity: The storm ruined the house.

Each of the entities, taking part in a causative situation can act on the surface structure of the sentence either as a syntactic subject or as a direct/indirect object. According to W. Croft there are special morpho-syntactic devices of coding the semantic roles, and the system of voice
voice is a regular expression by the form of the verb of the correlations between the units of
syntactic and semantic levels [Kholodovich 1972:286-287].

The causative actions in the first and the fourth types of causative situations which are carried
out in contact can be called the actions of immediate causation and the actions in the second and the
third types of causative situations can be characterized as the actions of mediated causation. A. G.
Shanidze calls them immediate and mediate contacts in the category of contact [Kordy 1988:109-
110].

L. Talmy divides all the causative verbs into 3 types including have and make and calls them
“surface verbs”. They express 3 types of causative situations: “the situation of ‘intended
persuasion’, which does not entail the acquiring of intent (urge, instruct, order and so on); the
situation of ‘persuasion’, which entails the acquiring of intent but not necessarily performance
(persuade, convince, talk into, decide (someone to…), determine (someone to ...) and so forth) and
the situation of ‘caused agency’, which in addition entails performance (induce, cause, get, have,
make, force and so on)” [Talmy 2000:535].

Our objects of investigation are the language means expressing the situations of mediated
causation where the “experiencer”, or the semantic object of causation (the “caused agent” by L.
Talmy), is due to perform, or performs certain actions under the influence of some other situation
caused either by mental or physical entities. This causative situation is called by W. Croft “a
stimulus” [Podlesskaya 1994:148]. When the experiencer (the “caused agent”) performs the
function of the syntactic subject of the sentence and its theme, the English language resorts to the
following means:

When a causative situation is not actualized, i.e. when the experiencer has not performed any
action, the English speaker uses the “central” and “marginal” modal auxiliary verbs of obligation
must, should, ought to and “semi-modal auxiliary phrases” have to and have got to (but it
should be kept in mind that in these phrases the verb have is a static one). Cf.: He must / should /
ought to / has to / has got to complete the task as soon as possible.

It is well known that the verbs must, should and ought to are used when the speaker thinks it
necessary to do something. F. R. Palmer writes, that “the difference between must and have (got) to
would lie essentially, thus, in the deontic “source”; with must it would often be the speaker, with
have got to it would never be the speaker (Palmer 1979:106). M. Hewings also believes that “we use
must when the speaker decides it is necessary” [Hewings 1999:46]. R. Murphy supports their
views too: “must is personal. We use must when we give our personal feelings” [Murphy 1997:62].
The use of these verbs makes the referent of the subject of the sentence a semantic object, an
experiencer. Using the terminology of L. Talmy, it becomes a “caused agent” [Talmy 2000]. Of
course, we can speak of a caused agent when the referent of the subject is a “sentient” or mental
entity. Consequently, the constructions with such “personal” modal verbs are active in forms but
passive in their meanings. Such a type of the passive could be called the passive of a static causative
situation (the static passive) created by the speaker. It is static due to the fact that the action of the
object of causation (of the experiencer) has not been actualized, performed yet.

As for the semi-modal auxiliaries have to and have got to they express obligation and
necessity not of personal character but of impersonal one. M. Hewings writes that “using have (got)
to suggests that someone else or some outside circumstances or authority makes something
necessary” [Hewings 1999: 46]. Thus the speaker is not involved in the described causative
situation; he is his objective observer and describer, e.g. – Aren’t you going to go on talking? –
Can’t I’m afraid. I’ve got to do some work [Waugh E. 1980]. He had to get up early next morning;
at midnight he slipped away to his bed at the inn [E. Waugh 1980].
Quite another form of expression can be used when we deal with actualized causative situations, i.e. when the action of the experiencer is being performed, is performed from time to time, used to be performed every now and then, was performed once in the past, has just been performed, will be performed, etc. To express such actions the English language resorts to the “semi-modal” construction have to with the dynamic verb have which can often be replaced by get, e.g. “How often do you get to say that about a government project?” (The press of Atlantic City, Nov., 2011). This will be one of the reasons why in interrogative and negative sentences as well as in emphatic constructions this semi-modal is used (British English inclusive) with the auxiliary verb do, e.g.: Why did the situation have to be such a sad one? [Mc Callum 1978]. You ought to thank your stars you don’t have to make calls [E. Glasgo 1981].

This semi-modal construction “have to + infinitive” expressing actualized causative situations can be looked upon as the analytical passive form of the verb which expresses mediated actualized causative situations with the experiencer performing the function of the syntactic subject. The dynamic verb have can be looked upon as the auxiliary verb of this analytical form. It is not accidental that have to is called “a modal auxiliary” in the communicative grammar book by G. Leech and J. Svartvik [Leech and Svartvik 1983:111].

Like the form of the traditional passive form be + participle II, the form of the passive of mediated causation has almost all the tense-aspect paradigms, e.g.: What one has to put up with in furnished flats! [A. Huxley 1971].

“I’m having to divide them between four of you as I have a committee meeting at the Town Hall unfortunately” [Miss Reed 1984].

“I’ve had to give up working at the hotel” [N. Lewis 1957].

“As a matter of fact” he said “I’ve been having to spend some time with the research people” [E. Gordon and I. Krylova 1974].

You had to make decisions about the trusting [E. Hemingway 1981].

She had to tell the truth. It didn’t seem worthwhile to lie [S. Maugham 1981]. She had got a run in her stockings, when she broke the heel of her shoe and had had to change her clothes [S. Maugham 1985].

They were so eager to get going that their parents were having to hold them back by force to prevent them from climbing over the gates [R. Dahl 2010].

I’ll have to think about money in a few minutes [N. Lewis 1957].

“I’m going to have to get used to going without that harness” [J. Steinbeck 1984].

One more feature distinguishing have(dynamic) to from must and have got to consists in that non-finite forms of the verb can also have the paradigms of the passive of actualized mediated causation built up with the help of this auxiliary semi-modal construction, e.g.

It’s too odd to have to go for a soldier unless they call more classes [E. Hemingway 1981].

“No, I can’t keep still in the daytime. It’s hard enough having to do it at night” [E. Glasgo 1981].

The authors of LGSWE also write that “unlike the central modal verbs, many of the semi-modals can be marked for tense and person and can occur as non-finite forms. In the infinitive they can sometimes co-occur with a central modal verb or another semi-modal” [LGSWE 2000:484].

Cf.:

I may not have to leave the service, but there’ll always be a black mark against me [S. Maugham 1981]. I don’t want to have to say [N. Mailer 1979].

Thus the construction have to is less modal in its meaning than must and have got to. It is accounted for by the fact that it expresses actualized actions. As F.R. Palmer considers, “have got
to is much rarer in the past tense, and may differ in meaning from have to in that only the latter usually implies actuality” [Palmer 1979:92].

As it has already been mentioned above, the “central modal verbs” must, should etc. and the modal auxiliary have (got) to express non-actualized causative situations. The actions of the infinitives used with such modal auxiliaries are prospective, i.e. refer to the future. This can be proved by the language data of other languages. In Russian, for example, non-actualized causative situations are expressed with the help of the modal constructions with the contracted adjective должен (obliged), impersonal predicative надо (it is necessary), c.f. Я должен пойти / I am obliged to go. Мне надо пойти / lit.: For me it is necessary to go.

Actualized causative actions, which are expressed in English with have to are expressed in Russian with the help of the impersonal reflexive verbal predicate приходится (it comes itself), c.f. Отцу приходится ходить туда. / lit.: To father to go there comes (itself). – Father has to go there often.

Let us take another non-kindred language for the sake of comparison, the Tatar language, which belongs to Turkic languages. The language data of the Tatar language also prove the idea of the two types of passives of mediated causation. Non-actualized causative situations which are expressed in English by have (got) to are expressed in Tatar by the possessive construction with the existential verb бар / there is. Cf.: әтинең эшкә барасы бар / lit.: There is my father’s going to work (in future) – My father has got to go to work. Instead of the infinitive the Tatar language uses the adverbial participle of the future tense барасы /going(in future), which can also function as a verbal noun, like a gerund in English.

Actualized causative situations are expressed by the construction: subject-noun (in the dative case) + infinitive + турә килә / it comes straight/really to, e.g.

Ана ма (to my sister) күп (much) эшләргә турә килә (straight/really comes) – Lit.: to my sister to work much comes (usually, every day, etc.). – my sister has to work much (usually, every day, etc).

As we see, for the expression of actualized causative situations the Tatar language also resorts to a dynamic verb with a centripetal orientation, the verb килә / comes. The word combination турә килә is translated as have to.

3. Results

Thus, both in English, Russian and Tatar actions named by infinitives in the passive forms of actualized causative situations are centripetally oriented and imposed upon the referent of the subject of the sentence, who/which is the deep experiencer. The agents of the actions forced upon experiencers are ellipted in the surface structures.

In contrast to the passive of non-actualized causative situations, where the actions are prospective, the passive of actualized causative situations expresses actualized actions. The analytical forms of the passive of mediated causation express semantically-ellipted causative situations, since the real agents or “stimuli” of the causation do not find their corresponding syntactic actants in the surface structure of the sentence.

4. Discussion

Summing up this article, we would like to emphasize its main idea. There can be one more treatment of the syntactic constructions built up with have (got) to and have to , which are traditionally treated as “semi-modals”, “modal auxiliaries”, “quazi-modals” etc. They can be treated as analytical passive forms of the verb expressing the two types of mediated causative situations, those of non-actualized and actualized ones. If looked upon from the viewpoint of the theory of deep cases, the syntactic subjects of such constructions are semantic experiencers, as is the case
with the syntactic subjects of traditional passive forms of the verb, which are deep patients, recipients, etc.

5. Summary
Thus, the English static verb *have* can combine not only with *participle II* to build up the form of the **perfect aspect** but also with the *to-infinitive* to build up the form of the **passive voice** of non-actualized mediated causative situations. In both the cases it performs auxiliary functions, the perfect form expressing anterior actions and the passive of non-actualized mediated causative situations expressing non-actualized prospective (future) actions.

As for the dynamic verb *have*, it combines with the *to-infinitive* to build up the form of the passive voice of actualized mediated causative situations thus expressing actualized actions in the present, past and future.

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References


List of literary sources used for language data: