PROFESORES DE ENSEÑANZA SECUNDARIA · INGLÉS · JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

TEMA

20

Auxiliary and Modal Verbs: Forms and Functions

Los verbos auxiliares y modales: Formas y funciones.

§

NOVIEMBRE DE 2026

Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

Índice

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE AUXILIARY VERB: DEFINITION AND SYNTACTIC CRITERIA

3. THE PRIMARY AUXILIARIES: BE, HAVE AND DO

- 3.1. Be
- 3.2. Have
- 3.3. Do

4. THE MODAL VERBS: FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

- 4.1. Semi-modals and marginal modals
- 4.2. Functions of the modal verbs

5. ENGLISH AND SPANISH: CONTRASTS AND TYPICAL ERRORS

6. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

7. CONCLUSION

Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world," wrote Ludwig Wittgenstein in the Tractatus (5.6, in Ogden's translation), and few areas of English show the point as clearly as its smallest words. A learner can know thousands of nouns and still be unable to promise, to advise, to doubt or to ask politely, because those acts depend on a handful of short, unstressed verbs that carry no lexical content of their own: be, have, do, can, may, must, will. In order to address Topic 20, I will divide it into five main sections. Firstly, I will define the auxiliary verb and explain how it differs from a lexical verb. Secondly, I will describe the primary auxiliaries be, have and do, with their forms and functions. Thirdly, I will analyse the central modal verbs and the semi-modals, again in terms of form and function. Fourthly, I will compare the English system with the Spanish one and list the typical errors of Spanish-speaking learners. Finally, I will reflect on the pedagogical implications of this content within our current educational framework, before closing with a conclusion.

The sources consulted for this topic include Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, published by Longman in 1985; Huddleston and Pullum's The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language, published by Cambridge University Press in 2002; Palmer's Modality and the English Modals, second edition, 1990; and Swan's Practical English Usage, fourth edition, published by Oxford University Press in 2016, as well as the online resources of the Cambridge Dictionary and the British Council. I have also drawn on the LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December), Real Decreto 217/2022 and Real Decreto 243/2022, and Decreto 110/2022 and Decreto 109/2022 of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura.