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MODALITY AND FUTURE TIME REFERENCE

- 1 Note that there may be acceptable alternatives to the following suggested translations.
 - a. Du skulle ikke ha gjort det. → You shouldn't have done it.
 - b. Får jeg ta en titt? → Can/May I have a look?
 - c. Det kan ikke ha vært lett for deg. → It can't have been easy for you.
 - d. De har villet gjøre noe med det lenge. → They have wanted (have been wanting) to do something about it for a long time.
 - e. Du skal ikke tro på alt folk sier. → You shouldn't believe everything (that) people say.
 - f. Det kommer til å bli kjempegøy. → It will be great fun / It's going to be great fun.
 - g. De ville ikke ha forandret på noe selv om de hadde kunnet. → They wouldn't have changed anything even if they had been able to.
 - h. Jeg tror det blir regn snart. → I think it is going to rain soon.
 - i. Flyet til Madrid går om en time. → The plane for Madrid leaves in an hour.
 - j. Om en uke er jeg i London. → In a week I'll be in London.
 - k. Skal du også til England? → Are you going to England too?

- 2 The expressions that have been marked in **red and bold** are the ones that occurred in the original text.

Thousands of fundamentalist Christians across the US are readying themselves for the world to end tomorrow, after a fringe Biblical scholar, Harry Camping, made the prediction several years ago. According to Mr Camping's calculations, tomorrow **is** / **will be*** exactly the 7,000th anniversary of Noah's flood and God is angry again. He warns that huge earthquakes **will strike** / **are to strike** tomorrow as the saved are lifted up to heaven. Everyone else **will get** / **is going to get*** another five months of life before being consigned to eternal damnation on October 21. Gary Daniels, a disciple of Camping's, said his last farewells to relatives on Monday. He told the New York Times: "I know I **don't see** / **am not going to see** them again, but they are very certain they **will see*** / **are going to see** me, and that's where I feel so sad," he said. "I weep to know that they don't have any idea that this overwhelming thing **is coming** / **shall come** right at them like a meteor." (from thedailyedge.com, adapted)

Notes on the phrases marked with an asterisk (*):

- *Tomorrow will be* is possible, as the *will*-future is relatively neutral. But the simple present implies a much greater degree of certainty on the part of the speaker; the anniversary is part of a fixed schedule.
- *Everyone else is going to get* is possible, although the *will*-future is a better match with the verb phrase in the previous sentence. *Going to* suggests that this will happen according to someone's planning.
- *Certain they will see* is possible, again because the *will*-future works as a multi-purpose future marker. The *going to*-future denotes something like "according to present evidence".

3 Explain the difference in form and meaning between the members of each pair.

- a. 1 She must walk in the other direction.
2 She must be walking in the other direction.

The verb phrase in sentence (a2) contains the progressive aspect. This suggests that the modal is epistemic. With the non-progressive in (a1) we have root modality (obligation). Thus (a1) means that her only option is to walk in the other direction. Sentence (a2) conveys the speaker's belief about where she is walking.

- b. 1 I can fix the computer.
2 I'll fix the computer.

In sentence (b1) the modal is *can*, which denotes ability (root modality). The meaning is "I am able to fix the computer". In (b2), the modal is the contracted form of *will*,

denoting either willingness or future. This sentence can function as an offer to fix the computer or as a statement about the subject's future activity.

- c. 1 Peter is supposed to give a presentation.
2 Peter is going to give a presentation.

The difference between *is supposed to* and *is going to* has to do with the planning of the action. *Supposed to* indicates that somebody other than Peter made the plans, and implies a possibility that the presentation may not be given. *Going to* indicates that the subject (Peter) has made the plans and implies a high degree of certainty that the action will take place.

- d. 1 The train will arrive at platform 2.
2 The train is arriving at platform 2.

The *will*-future in (d1) denotes a neutral prediction of a future event. The present progressive in (d2) refers to an action in progress; the train is already on its way into the station.

- e. 1 They can't have made each other very happy.
2 They couldn't make each other very happy.

Sentence (e1) contains the modal *can* followed by *not* and a perfect verb phrase. The perfect means that the action took place in the past and also that the modality is epistemic. The speaker thinks it is unlikely that they made each other happy. In (e2) the modal *could* is followed by *not* and the bare infinitive. This is root modality (ability), meaning that they were unable to make each other happy.

- 4 Read the following text and answer the questions below:

You can't live off a view – but nothing feeds the soul like the wilderness

You *might* (epistemic) think that after 30 years in one of Britain's most isolated homes, Mike and Joyce Simpson, who have just announced their intention to sell up and move nearer civilisation, are about to put their trials behind them. Their house, overlooking the Isle of Skye, is nine miles from the nearest village. There is no road; to get to the village they *have to* (root, obligation) embark on either a three-hour trek or a journey by quad bike and 4x4. A visit to the post office requires an hour-long boat trip.

Mr Simpson, 62, talked about weeks at the mercy of the weather, and the recurring nightmare of gales. But although the comforts of the 21st century *must* (epistemic) come

as a relief, the Simpsons *may* (epistemic) be about to confront the hardest thing about a life in the wild – leaving it.

“Every morning after we left, we woke up and listened to the silence,” I was told by Mike Alexander, an ex-warden of Skomer Island, off south-west Wales. He and his wife missed it terribly. “We would (habitual *would*) lie there and think about the island, and all the birds.” You *can* (root, ability) hear the same story from anyone who has been lucky enough to live in nature’s embrace. Coming down from the hill or off the island is a kind of bereavement.

Of course there are compensations. The Simpsons *will* (root, prediction) never be so cold again. They *need* (root, obligation) not worry about access to doctors; helpful neighbours *will* (root, prediction) be a blessing. They *will* (root, prediction) not be scared again in the way that shrieking wind *can* (root, ability) make you scared. Life is going to seem easy, if rather tame. (From *The Telegraph*, adapted)

- a. The expression *are about to* suggests immediate future. If it were replaced by *are going to*, this immediacy would disappear, and the focus would be on their intention of moving.
- b. The meanings of the italicized modal auxiliaries have been added in brackets in the text.
- c. The implication of *be going to* is that the “easy but tame life” seems a likely outcome of the present evidence.

5. Findings from the Corpus of Contemporary American English at <http://corpus.buy.edu>:

- a. As per June 2018, the numbers are as follows (they may increase as the corpus is being expanded):

<i>will</i>	293793
<i>would</i>	232441
<i>may</i>	89283
<i>should</i>	73212
<i>might</i>	49396
<i>shall</i>	1470

- b. The first ten hits for *should*, in the sample studied, were the following (there may be other acceptable translations as well)

the change should be delayed until 2022 → endringen bør utsettes til 2022
and the county should have a mechanism to stop the increase → og fylkeskommunen
burde ha en mekanisme for å stanse økningen.

the county should focus on creating jobs → fylkeskommunen burde fokusere på å
skape arbeidsplasser.

Park should be removed from the presidency → Park burde fjernes fra presidentjobben.
to decide if Park should be removed or reinstated → å bestemme om Park bør/
burde fjernes eller gjeninnsettes.

...any brand should be proud to dress the first lady of the United States. → ethvert
merke burde være stolt av å lage klær til USAs førstedame.

and prosecutors should investigate. → og påtalemyndigheten bør/må undersøke.

Dang has said he built the house exactly where the city said he should... → Dang har
sagt at han bygde huset akkurat der kommunen sa han skulle gjøre det.

We shouldn't be proud of the city just for following a law... → Vi trenger ikke være
stolt av byen bare fordi den følger en lov...

The Hall of Fame should be for celebrating great baseball players, not necessarily
great men... → Hall of Fame bør være for å feire de beste baseballspillerne, ikke
nødvendigvis de beste menneskene...

- c. Of the first ten occurrences of *must* in the newspaper sample studied, nine convey root modality. The only one that is clearly epistemic has the perfect aspect: *How weird must it have been for Plumlee to hear those late-game Nurkic chants?*
All the first ten occurrences of *ought to* have root modality.
- d. Some of the instances of *was going to* are preceded by for instance *I thought*, which reveals that the speaker is uncertain, as in *I really thought I was going to change the world*. Here the word *really* also indicates some degree of subjectivity. We infer that the world was not changed.
- e. *Will see* occurs 1497 times in the newspaper section of the COCA corpus (June 2018). The first five do not seem to imply any planning; they are neutral predictions of future events. *Will be seeing* occurs only 25 times. The first five are predictions of future activities, not involving any planning, but indicating that the activities are fairly certain to happen and will have some duration.