

# Different Shades Of Pragmatic Meaning Of Agreement Formed By Modal Words

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**Abstract:** *The present article is devoted to investigation of modal words which can render different shades of pragmatic meaning. The author points and proves that this meaning depends also on surrounding elements in the context where modal words are used. Theoretical part of the article is approved by numerous examples taken from the original literary texts.*

**Keywords:** *modal word, pragmatic meaning, shade of meaning, agreement, addressee, speaker, speech act, sentence structure, to render, to express.*

## INTRODUCTION

The investigation of modal words which express different shades of pragmatic meaning is actual and necessary in modern linguistics. We know that language is used either in oral (speech act) or written (literary and other types of texts) speech. Modal words don't have one fixed meaning that is registered in dictionaries. Together with surrounding language units in the context where modal words are used, they can render various shades of pragmatic meaning. They are investigated in the present manuscript and are proved by examples – contexts from original literary texts. The meaning of belief or sureness can be expressed by a number of modal words and phrases such as: I know, It is known, I'm sure, I'm certain, I'm positive, I'm convinced, I have no doubt, I don't doubt, It is evident, It is obvious, It is natural.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Speech structures which contain modal words and expressions with the approving meaning give chance to a listener to get ready information and not to ponder over its real existence [A. Hubler, 1983, p. 148].

By these modal words and phrases the degree of doubt is decreased due our meaning. They demonstrate that something really has happened and one must not doubt [Z. Korotkih, L. Shiukaeva, 1987, p. 100].

The meaning of belief can be rendered by following modal words: surely, certainly, of course, sure, undoubtedly, no doubt, for sure, for certain, to be sure, without doubt, etc.

They can express two kinds of belief: 1) subjective belief and 2) objective belief. Most of them have the structure of shortened predication: I'm sure --- Surely, I'm certain --- Certainly; I have no doubt --- Undoubtedly. So, the main sense of the modal word "certainly" expresses 1) not to produce doubt and 2) to believe in given information. Greenbaum thinks that the modal word "certainly" can express the meaning of sureness only in the moment of speech [S. Greenbaum, 1989, p. 141].

The main semantic elements of the modal word "surely" are belief and sureness in the given statement.

The absence of doubt can be transferred by the modal words "undoubtedly", "no doubt" which show that there is no need to doubt. It should be mentioned that the modal word "certainly" is accepted as the strongest in meaning in comparison with other above mentioned modal words. It causes subjective belief.

As for objective belief, it can be expressed by such modal words as “really”, “actually”, “indeed”. Though they also produce the meaning of belief, they are weaker in meaning than the modal word “certainly”:

– You can’t even ride a horse.

– Who can’t? Surely I can. Certainly I can [Salinger, Catcher, p.166];

«Then your mother didn’t have any romantic attachment for Fleetwood whatever?» «Of course not, certainly not» [Gardner, p. 55].

At the beginning of the sentence there is the modal word “surely” and after it the modal words “of course”, “undoubtedly” are used which together strengthen the meaning of the whole sentence. They form the pragmatic meaning of belief.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the following sentence the modal word “surely” can produce contrastive meaning:

Why don’t you drive up with me on Thursday night, stay for the weekend? Surely you can take Friday off [Bradford, p.540];

– A matter of some 2500 dollars

– Which the bank has not paid of course [Gardner, p.34];

– Are you tired? She asked placing her hand on my shoulder.

– A little ma’am.

– And hungry too, no doubt [Bronte, p.45];

This modal word can point at the natural procedure of the process of action:

I hadn’t spoken to Hale or written him in years. Hale certainly wasn’t expecting me [Shaw, Nightwork, p. 51];

Surely don’t have to remind you that the other shareholders begged candy to take over [Bradford, p.272];

Besides, the modal words can express that somebody is right:

– I’m in bad shape. I’m in lousy shape.

– You certainly are [Salinger, Catcher, p.131];

– I’m not interested in other women, he exclaimed ...

– Oh yes, of course, you have a girlfriend now [Bradford, p.533];

Modal words are often used in order to demonstrate agreement to someone’s proposal:

– Trust your son, trust his judgment.

– I certainly do [Bradford, p.117];

– Don’t you go to bed yet, Paul; you may have work to do.

– Of course, I’ll have work to do, Drake said [Gardner, p.128];

Modal words have also the pragmatic function of approving of someone’s case:

– Still planning to get rich, Mc Gregor?

– I certainly am [Sheldon, M. of the G., p.279];

– Is that why you want to be in the show? To meet someone and get married.

– Sure, because then I’d be somebody [Susann, p.32];

In negative sentences such modal words can oppose the statement or reject the information uttered by the speaker:

– Happiness. That’s one of our weakness.

– You certainly won’t find it there [Murdoch, The B. and B., p.75] (though you think he will);  
Jerome undoubtedly posted her on everything the police know, to date [Gardner, p.125] (though you think he didn’t);

Together with the particle “not”, modal words express the meaning of disagreement:

– Because the lieutenant happens to be your son-in-law?

– Certainly not. The colonel said angrily [Sheldon, Windnill, p.279];

– Where do you live?

– I don’t know.

- Sure you know. You must know [Salinger, p.35];
- I told you it wasn't a party.
- Of course it wasn't a party [Maugham, 1, p.254].

It is observed that modal words are able to demonstrate direct refuse of the speaker's invitation: «I don't want to alarm you, and this is only a suggestion, but perhaps, we ought to make the children wards of court.

- «Oh, John, surely, that's far too drastic a step» [Bradford, p.758];
- Don't bother to come.
- Of course I'll come [Murdoch, The B. and B., p.211].

Modal words are also used to express exact positive or negative mark towards something:

I had to sit there and listen to that crap. It certainly was a dirty trick [Salinger, Catcher, p.11]; It's not yellow. That's a great relief, surely [Rudkin, p.100]; That, of course, is a horse of another colour [Maugham, 1, p.186]; Most people would have termed her a splendid women of her age; and so she was, no doubt, physically speaking [Bronte, p.174].

If connected with the conjunction "but", modal words can enhance the meaning of one from two opposed propositions. If a modal word is used in the first part of the sentence, it provides natural process of the action:

- It is pretty free, of course, but it's very harsh too [Osborne, p.59];
- She sure was nice to me after you told her I was your friend ...
- But it doesn't change things [Susann, p.117].

If a modal operator is used in the second part of the sentence, which contains two opposing propositions, the modal word can strengthen the meaning of the second part towards the first one:

I had to be careful not to bump into anything to make a racket. I certainly know I was home though [Salinger, Catcher, p.158]; He was unconscious. He died just after Dr. Thomas had gone of. But of course I felt I had to squat there – couldn't just push off and leave him [Christie, Evans, p.12].

Sometimes, especially in literary texts we can meet cases of usage of two modal words in one sentence:

- Except that your tongue is hanging out to see him.
- It certainly is not, but of course I would like to see him [Cunningham, p.39].

In this case the modal word "certainly" expresses disagreement to the addressee's opinion, the use of the modal word "of course" in the second part of the sentence approves the addressee's case.

It's interesting that modal words can render ironical meaning of utterance:

- Four times she asked me that. She was certainly witty [Salinger, Catcher, p.75].
- At Haven Manor, when we release a person, they are ready to take their place in society.
- Sure – in the old-age home [Susann, p.419].

The usage of the modal word "surely" aims at convincing the speaker's opinion to be under the influence the addressee's point of view. This kind of structure has the pragmatic meaning of concealed question:

In the process we reveal our personnel. Surely, you're aware of this [Ludlum, p.604].

In such case the intention to make somebody do something is emerged in implicit way:

- ... Can't you kick a few ideas around for us? Said Lacon, equally plaintively. Surely you can go down the line a little [le Carre, p.191].

In such cases, as we see, the modal word "surely" doesn't express the meaning of the adequacy of rightness of the case, on the contrary, it elicits doubt, causes question.

The modal word "of course" points at exactness of the action and confirming it [E. Belyaeva, 1985, p. 162]. It is usually used together with the modal word "surely" and fulfills the function of approving of what is said by the addressee:

–You know Tonio Corelli, of course, Jess, he said.

– By sight [Shaw, Byz., p.129].

When the modal word “of course” is used in conditional sentences, it doesn’t express urgency of the condition but provides the meaning of cause or occasion:

It’ll be nice for me if you’d stay on at Pennistone Royal, Paula. If Jim is agreeable and would like to live here, of course [Bradford, p.676];

I don’t see where it’s so wrong to be loyal to the team. If the team’s winning, of course [Shaw, Nightwork, p.87].

We think that in the first example the use of the modal word “of course” is complicated. The meaning of reason can be expressed by special syntactical structures:

«When the car was found, her suitcase wasn’t in it». Fleetwood’s face showed dismay. «The hell it wasn’t. Of course, I couldn’t see her too clearly [Gardner, p.139]; «That generally is the law», Mason said. «There are, of course certain exceptions [Gardner, p.17].

As we observe, modal words can produce different pragmatic meanings which depends on surrounding elements and language units in the context. When the speaker’s information is accepted as real, it is expressed in the following pragmatic meaning of the modal words “for sure”, “for certain”:

– to make believe the addressee in the reality of proposition:

Marion, there’s food out there, for sure [Donleavy, p.140];

– to confirm the addressee’s presupposition:

Will you be the sole person authorized to have access to the safety-deposit box?

– That’s for sure, brother [Shaw, Nightwork, p.38];

– Would I see one of those in Mayfair, Mac? Would I?

– For certain [Donleavy, p.298].

– to demonstrate separately the agreement with the addressee’s opinion:

It’s been showery weather.

– For sure [Donleavy, p.174];

– to confirm the pointed before mark to any object or phenomenon:

Potato weather, for sure [Wilder, p.31];

– to enhance one of the opposed propositions:

You may have been joking, but he, for sure, wasn’t [Shaw, Nightwork, p.89].

These modal words can have the shape of expression:

To be sure, I am distantly related to the Rochesters by the mother’s side [Bronte, p.103];

He’d seen enough of death, that was for sure [le Carre, p.253]; It’s a certainly, Grandy’s ring us as soon as she’d had time to think up a few penetrating questions, which are bound to catch us off guard [Bradford, p.387].

## CONCLUSION

The analysis has shown that modal words can express different shades of pragmatic meaning. They can express that the addressee’s proposition is right and real. They also can produce the meaning of belief and agreement. If used with negative particle they express total disagreement to the statement. Moreover, they are able to cause a question and give chance to the speaker to express his / her opinion towards the uttered invitation or statement.

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