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THE EPISTEMIC USE OF THE ENGLISH MODAL VERBS *MAY* AND *MIGHT* AND THE BULGARIAN *МОЖЕ ДА CONSTRUCTION*. A CASE STUDY BASED ON *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY* BY OSCAR WILDE AND *ANGELS AND DEMONS* BY DAN BROWN.

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The object of study in the paper is the epistemic use of the English modal verbs *may* and *might,* and the Bulgarian *може да (mozhe da)* construction. For the needs of the analysis I have adopted the cognitive framework of Günter Radden and Rene Dirven on the one hand, and on the other I have discussed the modal verbs' semantic meaning as expression units of epistemic possibility. The latter analysis is based on the findings of F. R. Palmer. The analysis is further extended to establishing patterns of similarity and variation of usage via a corpus of examples excerpted from the novels *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Angels and Demons* and their translations into Bulgarian.

Key words: epistemic possibility, mental spaces, conceptualizer, epistemic assessment

The focus in the paper is on a comparative analysis of the English modal verbs *may* and *might* and the Bulgarian *може да (mozhe da)* construction, which function as expression units of epistemic possibility in both languages. The examples illustrating the usage of *може да (mozhe da)* construction are excerpted from the novel „Случаят Джем“. The subject matter is treated from cognitive-pragmatic perspective and the study is based on the theoretical frameworks and findings of Günter Radden and Rene Dirven, and F.R.Palmer. The aim of the analysis is to establish patterns of similarity of usage of the English epistemic markers and the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction. The research is based on the corpus of examples excerpted from fiction: „The Picture of Dorian Gray“ by Oscar Wilde –an English classic novel, and „Angels and Demons“ by Dan Brown– a contemporary American bestseller, and their translations into Bulgarian. The scope of the study is limited just to the aims stated above with no intention of analyzing the literary merits or style

differences of each novel, although the differences between British and American English can't be entirely left aside. I will just quote Oscar Wilde who in „The Canterville Ghost" claimed „We have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language." The corpus serves as a background to discuss a research hypothesis –namely, that the variation of the epistemic markers in the Bulgarian translations does not only depend on the competences and preferences of the translators for a particular epistemic marker but also on the characteristics and the positions *may* and *might* respectively hold in the semantic area of epistemic possibility. I will attempt to prove that the latter can be considered a factor actually accounting for the predominant use of *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction for *may* and the predominant use of other epistemic markers for *might* in the Bulgarian translations. I should specifically point out that an analysis of those other markers of epistemic possibility in English or in Bulgarian is also not an object of my study. Perhaps, a research on just 2 novels is rather limited to raise a hypothesis on, but it can turn out to be the beginning of a more comprehensive study if the hypothesis happens to be proved.

1. Theoretical Background

Epistemic possibility is an essential aspect of epistemic modality. According to Günter Radden and Rene Dirven „Epistemic modality is concerned with the speaker's assessment of the potentiality of a state of affairs" (Radden, Dirven 2007: 234). They determine the characteristics of epistemic modality on the grounds of the type, the scope, and the time of the situation involved. They point out that it „typically applies to states [...]; that „the speaker assesses a proposition […]"; that it „applies to situations that hold at the present moment or in future", and that „we assess past situations in retrospect" (Radden, Dirven 2007: 238). Palmer shares their views defining epistemic modality as „the modality of propositions rather than of actions, states, events, etc" (Palmer 1979: 41). He also states that the „term 'epistemic' should apply […], but to any modal system that indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he says" (Palmer 1986: 51). Radden, Dirven and Palmer distinguish the modal verbs *may* and *might* as markers of epistemic possibility, which together with epistemic necessity, are aspects of epistemic modality. Palmer goes further stating that *might* „merely indicates a little less certainty about the possibility" (Palmer 1979: 48).

Another important issue to mention is the notion of subjectivity manifested by the epistemic modals. Palmer argues that „epistemic modals

are normally subjective, i.e. that the epistemic judgment rests with the speaker“ (Palmer 1979: 42). Radden and Dirven also discuss the issue of subjectification arguing that when a modal verb is used as an epistemic expression „the construal of the epistemic assessment is maximally subjective“ and that it is „excessively or largely the speaker’s“ (Radden, Dirven 2007: 241). Having thus established the common background of both approaches as regards categorization, I shall now turn my attention to the cognitive mental space model, developed by Radden and Dirven. According to them „modals have the function of grounding a situation in potential reality with the speaker as the fixed reference point“ (Radden, Dirven 2007: 242). In this way modals function as space-builders of the mental space of possibility which unfolds in the discourse. The conceptualizer – the speaker may be present (on stage) explicitly or implicitly in the area of potential reality, depicted by the circle, or may be off-stage. Whatever the situation is he or she is the source of the epistemic judgment.

(1) *I am afraid I* ***may frighten*** *the company, frighten or enthrall them.* (O. Wilde)

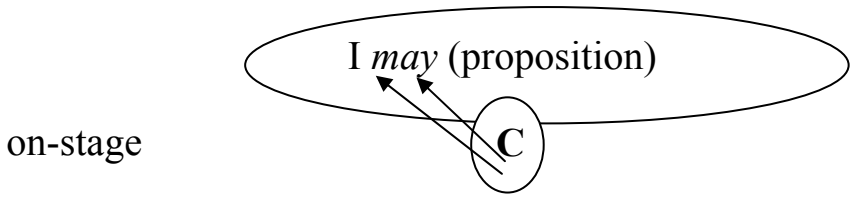

Figure1. A spatial model based on Radden and Dirven

The conceptualizer is in the immediate reality and serves as the reference point. The modal verb *may* grounds the situation in the area of potential reality. The conceptualizer is also on-stage, as he or she is also present in the area of the potential reality. There are 2 arrows in the model: one – identifying the conceptualizer as the source of the modal assessment, and the other – indicating his or her identity in the area of potential reality. The epistemic assessment expressed by the modal verb *may* indicates a strong degree of possibility. That conclusion is based not only on Palmer’s scaling the degrees of possibility expressed by *may* and *might* respectively, but also on the prototype theory. „In contrast with the classical model, the experiential prototype hypothesis of categorization claims that categories are not homogeneous, but have a prototype, good and bad members, and

have fuzzy boundaries. Category members do not all share the same discrete attributes, but may be linked by family resemblances“ (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: 38). I believe *may* is the prototype of the semantic category of possibility, denoted by the modal verbs, and thus is central and bears the most prominent features of the category. I will go back to that argument again in the next section in which I will discuss the corpus.

The Bulgarian *може да (mozhe da)* construction is closest in meaning and usage to the English paradigm of modal verbs denoting possibility, which consists of the modals *may*, *can*, *could* and *might*. The *може да* (*mozhe da*) construction in Bulgarian is considered to be „a semi-modal complex verb phrase that is used to express suppositional modality“ (Pashov 1994: 166). It indicates lesser degree of certainty than the one denoted by the lexical conclusive modifiers *трябва да* (*triabva da*) and *ще да (shte da*), which are regarded „peripheral to the grammeme Conclusive Mood in the functional-semantic category of Subjective modality“ (Kutsarov 1989: 104). Thus the *може да* (*mozhe da*) construction, though being a peripheral epistemic marker, is actually the only true equivalent in form and function to the English modals denoting possibility. To test whether it matches the characteristics of *may* and *might* as markers of epistemic possibility, I have analyzed a corpus of examples excerpted from Bulgarian fiction – „Случаят Джем“ (The Case of Djem) by Vera Mutafchieva. In 11 sentences out of 52 the *може да* (*mozhe da)* expresses ability, denoted by the English modal verb *can* or the constructions *be able to* and *manage to*. Actually, just like the English modals, the Bulgarian *може да (mozhe da)* construction is poly-semantic – i.e. „it denotes both ability and possibility“ (Pashov 1994: 166). Only 3 are positive sentences; the majority are negative-i.e. the meaning is *not being able to, or incapable of*, as illustrated in example (4).

(2) *Ако още разбираше, би разбрал: човек* ***може да даде*** *на човека много, страшно много, неимоверно и непосилно много*. (Ako oshte razbirashe, bi razbral: chovek **mozhe da dade** na choveka mnogo, strashno mnogo, neimoverno i neposilno mnogo.) (If one were able to understand, he would: a person **is able to give / can give** another one much, very much, excessively and unbearably much.)

(3) *Тъй като брат му следва рано или късно да умре, тъй като неговият живот между неверниците е за него адско страдание, то Ваше светейшество* ***може да го отърве*** *от тия многолетни мъки и му позволи да премине в един по-добър, по-справедлив свят.* (Tui kato brat mu sledva rano ili kusno da umre, tui kato negovijat zhivot mezhdu nevernitsite e za nego adsko stradanie, to Vashe sveteishestvo **mozhe da go oturve** ot tija mnogoletni muki i mu pozvoli da premine v edin po-dobur, po-spravedliv svjat.) (As his brother is to die sooner or later, as his life among the infidels is a real torture to

him, Your Holiness **can spare / is able to spare** him all those years of suffering and let him pass into a better and fairer world.)

(4) *Той* ***не може да пие****, без да залее целите си гърди*. (Toi **ne mozhe da pie**, bez da zalee tselite si gurdi.) (He **can't drink / is not able** to drink without spilling stuff all over his breast.)

13 sentences in which the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction expresses possibility are negative i.e. the meaning is *–it is not possible that….* as illustrated in example (5); 2 of the sentences are interrogative. Epistemic impossibility is predominantly expressed in English by the modal verb *can*, which is also used in interrogative constructions as there are grammatical constraints on the use of *may* in questions. In 3 of the sentences the meaning is *it is possible that it is not the case,* which is the basic use of *may* and *might* in negative sentences as illustrated in example (6).

(5) ***Не може да бъде*** *владетел –усещах как гласът ми се издига до вик – човек, роден от прости смъртни*. (Ne **mozhe da bude** vladetel-useshtah kak glasut mi se izdiga do vik- chovek, roden ot prosti smurtni.) (He **can't be a ruler-** I felt my voice rise to a cry – a man born of poor mortals.)

(6) *Знаете,* ***може да не удържиш*** *обещание към живите, но всеки спазва клетвата си пред мъртвец*. (Znaete **mozhe da ne udurzhish** obeshtanie kum zhivite, no vseki spazva kletvata si pred murtvec.) (You know one **may not keep** his word to those living, but everyone keeps his oath to those dead.)

The rest of the sentences – 23 in total – are positive and illustrate the use of the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction as a marker of epistemic possibility. Just like the English modals *may* and *might*, the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction grounds the situation in the area of potential reality, which means that it is subjective and that the speaker judges an epistemic distance assigning a particular degree of likelihood on the state of affairs or events. Therefore the *може да* (*mozhe da)* can function as a space builder and thus freely fits Radden and Dirven's cognitive mental space model.

(7) *Дали не го подценихме?* ***Може да е*** *истина, че зад Джем стои войската*. (Dali ne go podtsenihme? **Mozhe da e istina**, che zad Djem stoi voiskata.) (Could we have underestimated him? It **may be true** that the army supports Djem.)

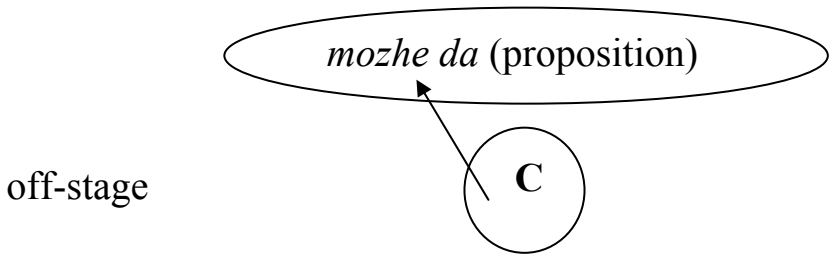

Figure 2. A spatial modal based on Radden and Dirven

The conceptualizer is off-stage and is not present in potential reality. From his standpoint in the immediate reality, he makes an epistemic judgement as regards the possibility of a situation being so. The example illustrates an epistemic assessment of a potential state of affairs in the proposition. In this respect I should mention that 13 of the examples are of this kind and the other 10 illustrate an epistemic assessment of a potential event, a fact that corresponds with Radden and Dirven's findings that epistemic modality is mostly identifiable as referring to states.

Having established the similarities in the semantics and function between the English modal verbs *may* and *might* and the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction as markers of epistemic possibility, I shall now turn my attention to the corpus survey.

2. Corpus Survey

As I have stated in the introduction, the aim of study in the paper is two-fold. On the one hand I have decided to discuss the epistemic use of the English modal verbs *may* and *might* and the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction as markers of epistemic possibility, and on the other to present a research based on the corpus excerpted from „The Picture of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde and „Angels and Demons" by Dan Brown and their translations in Bulgarian in an attempt to raise a research hypothesis that can justify the linguistic variation of the epistemic markers other than the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction in the Bulgarian texts. I assume that the choice of epistemic markers is largely based on the characteristics and the positions the English *may* and *might* hold in the semantic area of possibility and not only on the competences and preferences of the translators. Of course, I have taken into account the fact that the closest Bulgarian marker in function and usage to both the English *may* and *might*, which vary mostly in the degree of epistemic possibility denoted, is the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction – a single marker, so it may not prove to be the case. Yet, considering *may* as a more prominent member than *might*, I expect that there would be a higher frequency of usage of the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction for it. I shall now continue outlining the other markers of epistemic possibility, which is an aspect of Subjective modality, in Bulgarian. Besides the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, there are a number of other peripheral markers: „modal lexical modifiers – mostly adverbs and particles" (Kutsarov 1989: 112), and „the core is occupied by the grammemes Conditional Mood and Conclusive Mood as subjective modal grammemes" (Kutsarov 1989: 104). To fulfill my task – to prove the predominant use of the *може да* (*mozhe*

da) construction for *may* and other epistemic markers for *might*, I have analyzed all the instances of epistemic possibility, expressed by *may* and *might* in both novels and have discussed the usage of each of the Bulgarian markers, outlined above.

2.1. The Epistemic Use of *May* in „The Picture of Dorian Gray"

A great number of linguists among whom Coates, Leech, Quirk, and Palmer state that *may* indicates the highest degree of possibility compared to *can*, *could*, and *might*. Leech for example argues that *may* indicates factual possibility, and therefore should be considered the most categorical member in the paradigm, whereas Palmer simply categorizes *might* as denoting less degree of certainty about the possibility it expresses. I have taken that categorization for granted, but have tried to find proof in the prototype theory supporting my claims not only by the source examples but also by the epistemic markers used in the respective Bulgarian translations. As I have stated above I consider *may* the most prominent member of the semantic category of possibility, denoted by the modal verbs in English, thus manifesting the strongest degree of likelihood. The closest Bulgarian epistemic marker to the semantics and the grammatical usage of the modal verb *may* is the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction. Therefore I have expected that the corpus survey will prove a higher frequency of usage of the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction for *may* in the Bulgarian translation.

There are 16 instances with the epistemic *may* with present and future -time reference in the novel. 6 of these are translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, 4 of which related to states.

(8) *People say sometimes that beauty is only superficial. That* ***may be*** *so, but at least it is not so superficial as thought is.*

Хората понякога казват, че Красотата е повърхностна. ***Може и да е*** *така. Но все пак е по-малко повърхностна от Мисълта*. (Horata poniakoga kazvat, che krasotata e povurhnosnta. **Mozhe i da e taka**. No cse pak e po-malko povurhnostna otkolkoto misulta.)

The other 10 are translated by other epistemic markers. 4 are translated by modal adverbs, but I should mention that one of these makes use of the modal adverb *сигурно (sigurno)* which indicates a high degree of certainty and parallels the English *surely.* Though using a different marker than the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, the translator has obviously experienced the high degree of possibility, expressed by *may* in the source text.

(9) *Still, your wonderful girl* ***may thrill*** *me.*

И все пак твоето прекрасно момиче ***сигурно*** *ще ме извади от вцепенението.*(I vse pak tvoeto prekrasno momiche **sigurno** shte me izvadi ot vcepenenieto.)

The other 3 sentences are translated by modal adverbs indicating possibility and can be considered cases of linguistic variation of markers on the one hand, and on the other we can expect even wider usage of modal adverbs as the paradigm in Bulgarian is very rich compared to the single *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction.

(10) *I don't know if he will be able to come, Harry. He* ***may have to go*** *to Monte Carlo with his father.*

– Не знам дали ще успее да дойде, Хари. ***Може би ще трябва да отиде*** *с баща си в Монте Карло.* (Ne znam dali shte uspee da doide, Harry. **Mozhe bi shte triabva da otide** s bashta si v Monte Karlo.)

2 sentences are translated by *за да (za da)* construction in Bulgarian, which is even stronger than the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, as it is used for factual reality situations rather than for potential reality situations. The epistemic possibility can be experienced in the sentence through the presence of the negative construction that follows the *за да (za da)* construction in example (11) as it constructs conditioned possibility.

(11) *You had better go home and put that pistol away, or you* ***may get into trouble****," said Dorian, turning on his heel and going slowly down the street.*

– Най-добре си върви и скрий някъде този револвер, ***за да не си навлечеш беля*** *– каза Дориан Грей, обърна се и бавно тръгна по улицата.* (Nai-dobre si vurvi I skrii njakude tozi revolver, **za da ne si navlechesh belia**-kaza Dorian Grey, oburna se i bavno trugna po ulicata.)

2 sentences are translated by *и да (i da)* construction, which opens a mental space of possibility and thus functions as the modal verb *may* in English.

(12) *Besides, every experience is of value, and whatever one* ***may say*** *against marriage, it is certainly an experience.*

Освен това всеки опит е от полза, а каквото ***и да се говори*** *против брака, той все пак представлява един опит.* (Osven tova vseki opit e ot polza, a kakvoto **i da se govori** protiv braka, toi vse pak predstavljava edin opit)

Only 2 sentences lack an epistemic marker of possibility locating the situation in the area of factual reality.

(13) *We praise the banker that we* ***may overdraw*** *our account, and find good qualities in the highwayman in the hope that he may spare our pockets.*

Хвалим банкера, защото ***разчитаме да увеличи*** *кредита ни и сме готови да открием достойнства дори у разбойника, с надежда-*

та той да пощади джобовете ни. (Hvalim bankera, zashtoto **razchitame da uvelichi** kredita ni i sme gotovi da otkriem dostoinstva dori u razboinika, s nadezhdata toi da poshtadi djobovete ni.)

There are 2 instances of a present epistemic judgment upon a past situation in the novel. Both are translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, which is a true equivalent to the English *may.*

(14) *However, whatever was my motive –and it* ***may have been pride****, for I used to be very proud – I certainly struggled to the door.*

Във всеки случай, каквото и да ме е карало да постъпя така – ***може да е била и гордостта****, тъй като винаги съм бил много горд, – аз започнах да си пробивам път към вратата*. (Vuv vseki sluchai, kakvoto i da me e karalo da postupia taka – **mozhe da e bila i gordostta**, tui kato vinagi sum bil mnogo gord, -az zapochnah da si probivam put kum vratata.)

To sum up, there are 18 instances in „The Picture of Dorian Gray" that express epistemic possibility through the modal verb *may*, which locates the situation in the area of potential reality. 8 are translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, which is the closest to the English *may* in the semantics and grammatical usage; 8 are translated by other epistemic markers corresponding to the semantics and function of *may* and 2 lack an epistemic marker of possibility and locate the situation in the area of factual reality. The statistics prove that in almost 50 per cent of the instances, the translator has experienced not only the strong degree of possibility denoted by *may* but also its status as the prototype and has made use of the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction whereas in the other instances the markers vary.

2.2. The Epistemic Use of *May* in „Angels and Demons"

There are 21 examples with *may*, expressing epistemic possibility with present and future-time reference in the novel. 12 of these (positive and negative) are translated into Bulgarian by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction thus mirroring the semantics and the grammatical usage of the English *may*, grounding the situation in the area of potential reality.

(15) *Target* ***may know*** *you visually, so you will be pas-visible.*

Обектът ***може да ви познава****, затова трябва да сте незабележими*. (Obektut **mozhe da vi poznava**, zatova trjabva da ste nezabelizhimi.)

(16) *At this time, MSNBC would like to issue our viewers a discretionary warning. The images we are about to show are exceptionally vivid and* ***may not be suitable*** *for all audiences."*

– Уважаеми зрители, Ем Ес Ен Би Си ви предупреждава, че кадрите, които ще видите, са изключително натуралистични и ***може да не са подходящи*** *за всякаква публика*. (Uvazhaemi zriteli, MSNBC

vi preduprezhdava, che kadrite, koito shte vidite, sa izkljuchitelno naturalistichni **i mozhe da ne sa podhodjashti** za vsjakakava publika.)

Modal adverbs denoting possibility are used in 7 of the examples with *may* in the source text. The Bulgarian *може би* (mozhe bi) –the equivalent of the English *maybe* – is used in 5 of these. Modal adverbs in both languages are invariably classified as epistemic units, so these are cases of linguistic variation locating the situation into the area of potential reality just like the modal verb *may*.

(17) *Tonight I* ***may die*** *at the hands of religion, he thought.*

Тази нощ ***може би ще умра*** *от ръцете на религията – помисли си той*. (Tazi nosht **mozhe bi shte umra** ot rutsete na religijata– pomisli si toi.)

There is one example illustrating a conditioned possibility, which is translated in Bulgarian by the future tense form, which denotes projected reality, hence it indicates a high degree of possibility on the border of factual reality.

(18) *If the canister is in one of your central buildings or underground, the effect outside these walls* ***may be minimal***.

Ако контейнерът се намира в някоя от централните ви сгради или под земята, въздействието му извън вашите стени ***ще е минимално***.*(*Ako konteinerut se namira v njakoja ot centralnite vi sgradi ili pod zemjata, vuzdeistvieto mu izvun vashite steni, **shte e minimalno**.)

And there is one example with a noun construction also expressing conditioned possibility.

(19) *If my ranks have been infiltrated, my men* ***may be known*** *by sight.*

Ако противникът се е внедрил сред хората ми, ***има вероятност да ги познават***. (Ako protivnikut se e vnedril sred horata mi, **ima verjatnost da gi posnavat**.)

There are 5 examples in the novel in which *may* is used to make an epistemic judgement about a past situation; 4 of these are translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction.

(20) *They* ***may have seen i****t and not noticed*.

– ***Може да са го видели***, *но да не са го забелязали*.(**Mozhe da sa go videli**, no da ne sa go zabeljazali.)

The fifth one (21) lacks an epistemic marker of possibility in the subordinate clause, but both in the English and the Bulgarian main clauses we can identify another space- builder of epistemic possibility – the mental state predicate – *think (струва ми се)*. I should say that according to Radden and Dirven a cognition verb implies a kind of objective interpretation in comparison to the more subjective one of a modal verb. This, together with the omission of the epistemic marker in the subordinate

clause, builds up an epistemic possibility even stronger than that denoted in the source text thus bordering on factual reality.

(21) *I think the camerlegno's address* ***may have worked****.*

– Струва ми се, че обръщението на шамбелана ***има ефект****.* (–Struva mi se, che obrushtenieto na shambelana **ima** efekt.)

To sum up, there are 26 examples with *may* denoting possibility in the novel. There is a slight predominance of the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, which is used in 17 examples as a true equivalent of *may* both in semantics and function – statistics that correspond to the research hypothesis.

2.3. The Epistemic Use of *Might* in „The Picture of Dorian Gray"

Being a marker of epistemic possibility *might* just like *may* grounds the situation into the area of potential reality, so it can be considered a space-builder of a mental space of possibility thus fitting into Radden and Dirven's cognitive mental space model. The difference is not in the way the conceptualizer experiences the situation, but in the degree of possibility denoted by *might*. The latter aspect is in the focus of my research on the corpus.

(22) *You* ***might see*** *nothing in him.*

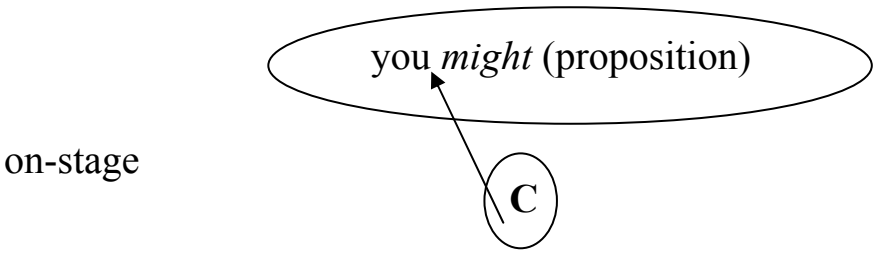

Figure 3. A spatial model based on Radden and Dirven

The conceptualizer is in the immediate reality as a reference point. He or she is also present implicitly on-stage making an epistemic judgement of a potential situation; there- fore the model doesn't require a second arrow indicating his or her identity in the area of potential reality. Using *might* the conceptualizer expresses a certain doubt about the state of affairs being so, hence categorizes the situation as quite unlikely.

Exactly that lesser degree of possibility manifested by *might* accounts for its frequent use in clauses denoting conditioned present possibility.

(23) *There are many things that we would throw away if we were not afraid that others* ***might pick*** *them up.*

Ние бихме изхвърлили много неща, ако не се страхувахме, че някой друг ***би могъл да ги прибере***. (Nie bihme izhvurlili mnogo neshta, ako ne se strahuvahme, che njakoi drug **bi mogul da gi pribere**.)

The most frequently used marker in the Bulgarian translation is a complex verb phrase with the verb *мога (moga)*, which denotes possibility and the construction is very close in pattern to the Bulgarian grammeme Conditional mood. That marker is used in 8 out of 11 examples.

The rest of the examples are translated by modal adverbs.

(24) *Dorian, if I told you, you* ***might like*** *me less than you do, and you would certainly laugh at me.*

– Дориан, ако ти кажа, ***сигурно*** *няма да ме обичаш, както досега, и ще ми се присмееш*. (– Dorian, ako ti kaja, **sigurno** niama da me obichash kakto dosega, i shte mi se prismeesh.)

It should be noted that when *might* refers to a past situation often the meaning is one of regret and reproach, which is successfully rendered by the translator through a construction denoting obligation.

(25) *I think you* ***might have telegraphed*** *for me when you heard of it first.*

Мисля, че ***трябваше да ми телеграфираш****, когато си узнал за случилото се.* (Mislja, che **trjabvashe da mi telegrafirash**, kogato si uznal za sluchiloto se.)

There are 39 examples with *might* in the novel. 7 examples are translated by modal adverbs, 5 by *за да (za da)* modal construction, 5 by *да (da)* modal construction, 8 by a complex verb phrase with the modal verb *мога (moga),*1 by the grammeme Conclusive mood, 2 lack a form denoting epistemic possibility and locate the situation rather in the area of factual reality than a potential reality, 2 by a noun construction, 2 interrogative sentences translated by the modal form expressing possibility in Bulgarian *дали (dali)*, and just 4 by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction.

To sum up, the research has proven that the semantics and function of *might* on the one hand, and its categorization as peripheral to *may* as regards the degree of possibility involved, accounts for the greater variety of linguistic markers of possibility, used in the Bulgarian translation and the few instances of the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, in which the degree of possibility is experienced as higher.

(26) *Days would elapse before he could come back. Perhaps he* ***might refuse*** *to come.*

Могат да изминат дни до завръщането му. А ***може и да откаже*** *да дойде*.(Mogat da izminat dni do zavrushtaneto mu. A **mozhe i da otkazhe** da doide.)

2.4. The Epistemic Use of *Might* in „Angels and Demons“

There are 29 examples with *might* in the novel. All of the examples illustrate the use of might as a marker of epistemic possibility. As there is not an example with *migh*t used in a clause denoting unreal conditioned possibility, I can't provide comments on the use of the corresponding Bulgarian markers. In 12 of the sentences with present-time reference *might* is translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction. It is not quite unexpected because the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction is a single marker in Bulgarian that parallels both *may* and *might*, though *might* indicates lesser degree of possibility than *may.*

(27) *As his excitement mounted, Langdon feared at any moment he* ***might awake*** *back in Cambridge with a pile of test papers to grade.*

Вълнението му се усилваше и Лангдън се боеше, че всеки момент ***може да се събуди*** *в Кеймбридж с купчина тестове, които трябва да провери*. (Vulnenieto mu se usilvashe i Langdon se boeshe, che vseki moment **mozhe da se subudi** v Cambridge s kupchina testove, koito trabva da proveri.)

There are 3 examples in which *might* is translated by a modal adverb.

(28) *I have a breaking story your network* ***might be*** *interested in*.

– Имам сензационна новина, която ***може би*** *представлява интерес за вашата мрежа*. (Imam senzacionna novina, kojato **mozhe bi** predstavljava interes za vashata mrezha.)

In 5 of the examples might is translated by Future tense in Bulgarian, which is an epistemic marker of certainty, therefore the situation is experienced as quite likely.

(29) *The researchers had hoped the X-ray* ***might reveal*** *some small hint of foul play-a broken bone perhaps.*

Изследователите се бяха надявали, че рентгенът ще открие *свидетелства за насилствена смърт, например счупена кост.* (Izsledovatelite se bjaha nadjavali, che rentgenut **shte otkrie** svidetelstva za nasilstvena smurt, naprimer schupena kost.)

There are 2 examples with a modal *да (da)* construction, a question with the modal form *дали (dali)*, one instance without an epistemic marker, and 3 examples with the *можеше да* (*mozheshe da)* construction, which parallels the complex verb phrase with *мога да* (moga da), denoting conditioned possibility.

(30) *Olivetti closed his eyes slowly and reopened them, as if refocusing on Vittoria* ***migh****t* ***change*** *what he just heard.*

Оливети бавно затвори очи и пак ги отвори, сякаш така ***можеше да промени*** *онова, което бе чул*. (Oliveti bavno zarvori ochi i pak gi otvori, sjakash taka **mozheshe da promeni** onova, koeto be chul.)

To sum up, the corpus survey on the use of *might* in the novel „Angels and Demons“ has shown that there is a slight tendency for *might* to be experienced just like *may* as regards the degrees of possibility expressed in instances with present-time reference and conditioned present-time reference possibility and therefore it is often translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction. Yet, the statics prove that out of 29 examples with *might* , only 12 are translated by the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, so we can conclude that there is obvious predominance of other epistemic markers for it.

3. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, I have decided on a two-fold task in this paper: on the one hand to do a comparative analysis of the English modal verbs *may* and *might* and the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, and on the other, to raise a research hypothesis, based on a corpus survey on two English novels: „The Picture of Dorian Gray“ and „Angels and Demons“ and their translations in Bulgarian in order to justify the choice of epistemic markers on the grounds of their characteristics and the positions they hold in the area of epistemic possibility in the paradigm of the English modals rather than only on the grounds of the competences and preferences of the translators.

Having completed the analysis, I have come to the conclusion that obviously the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction is the closest Bulgarian epistemic marker in semantics and function to the English modal verbs *may* and *might.* I have expected that the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction will be used predominantly by the translators for *may* as I consider it the most prominent member of the semantic category of epistemic possibility indicating higher degree of possibility than *might.* I have also supposed that *might* would be translated predominantly by other epistemic markers, particularly in the cases of conditioned possibility, which actually proved to be the case. The statistics prove that in the case of *may* out of 44 examples altogether, 25 are translated by *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, so there is a relatively higher frequency of usage of the latter compared to the other epistemic markers. In the case of *might* out of 68 examples, only 16 are translated by *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction, so there is a definite predominance of the other epistemic markers indicating possibility. Yet, the corpus survey on the usage of *might* in „Angels and Demons“ seems to raise another issue for consideration – a possible overlap in the degrees of possibility denoted by *may* and *might* in recent years – particularly in present-time reference linguistic situations.

That fact can account for the greater number of instances with the *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction in the Bulgarian translation. Still, in both novels when *might* definitely indicates lesser degree of possibility, it is experienced as such by the translators and they have used a number of other epistemic markers such as modal adverbs, the modal *за да (za da)* and *да (da)* constructions to render the targeted degree of possibility. Few of the examples, mostly with *may* lack an epistemic marker of possibility and locate the situation into the area of factual reality rather than the potential reality.

To sum up, I think that though quite small, the corpus survey has proven my hypothesis – the linguistic variation of the epistemic markers in the Bulgarian translations does not simply depend on the competences and preferences of the translators but can also be explained by the prototype theory according to which I consider *may* as a more prominent member than *might* and therefore most likely to be translated by the Bulgarian *може да* (*mozhe da)* construction. As stated in the introduction, I believe that this research can turn out to be the beginning of a more comprehensive study in this subject area.

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