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"The Role of Auxiliary Verbs in Forming Questions and Negatives"

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Dedication

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ"

أهدي هذه الحروف الى جنود الله المجهولين في الأرض المعروفين في السماء الذين لا يدافعون عن أنفسهم بل يدافعون عن الأمة والوطن وقضايا الحق ولا ينتظرون مديحا.
إلى أرواح أولئك الذين لولا تضحياتهم ما كنت لأكتب حرفا واحدا، إلى أصحاب الأرواح الطاهرة التي ضحت بنفسها لأعلاء كلمه الله.

إلى من ضحوا بالحياه فوهبوا الحياه

إلى من خسرتهم الدنيا وفازت بهم الآخرة

إلى من أناروا بدمائهم دروب الحياه

((إلى شهدائنا الأبرار))

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

Auxiliary verbs, often termed "helping verbs," are fundamental components of English grammar, serving as the structural backbone for constructing questions, negatives, and complex verbal phrases. Unlike main verbs, which convey primary actions or states (e.g., run, exist), auxiliary verbs operate in tandem with main verbs to express grammatical nuances such as tense, aspect, modality, and voice. For instance, in the sentence *She has finished her work*, the auxiliary verb *has* signals the completion of an action (perfect aspect), while in *They are singing*, *are* indicates an ongoing activity (progressive aspect). These verbs primarily be, have, do, and modal auxiliaries like can, will, and must enable speakers to manipulate sentence structure for clarity, emphasis, and syntactic flexibility (Radford, 2004: 67).

The ability to form coherent questions and negatives hinges on auxiliary verbs. Without them, English would lack the grammatical machinery to invert subjects and verbs for questions (e.g., *Is she coming?*) or to negate statements effectively (e.g., *He does not agree*). Auxiliaries also facilitate contractions (e.g., *isn't, won't*), which streamline communication in informal contexts. However, their usage is governed by rules that often challenge learners, such as avoiding double negatives (*I don't need nothing*) or applying do-support in the absence of other auxiliaries (*Do you understand?*) (Leech, 2004: 89).

This research explores the pivotal role of auxiliary verbs in shaping English syntax, with a focus on their application in question formation, negation, and contracted speech. By dissecting their functions, types, and common errors, this study aims to demystify their usage and highlight their indispensability in achieving grammatical precision. Understanding auxiliary verbs is not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for mastering the structural elegance of the English language (Quirk et al., 1985: 120).

1.1 Definition of Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs, sometimes called “helping verbs,” are small but powerful words that work alongside main verbs to create different tenses, moods, or voices in sentences. Unlike main verbs, which describe the primary action (e.g., “run,” “eat”), auxiliary verbs add grammatical details. For example, in the sentence “She is running,” the word “is” doesn’t describe the action itself it tells us the action is happening now (Quirk et al., 1985: 120).

Auxiliary verbs have a unique role: they cannot stand alone in a sentence. If someone asks, “Are you coming?” you can’t just answer, “Am.” You need a main verb: “I am coming.” This teamwork between auxiliaries and main verbs is what makes English grammar flexible. For instance, “do” in “Do you like pizza?” helps turn a statement into a question without changing the main verb (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 92).

To spot an auxiliary verb, look for words that invert with the subject in questions (“Is she coming?”) or pair with “not” in negatives (“She is not coming”). Without auxiliaries, English questions and negatives would sound incomplete, like “She coming?” or “She not coming” (Quirk et al., 1985: 130).

1.2 Types of Auxiliary Verbs (Be, Have, Do, Modals)

There are two main categories of auxiliary verbs: primary auxiliaries (be, have, do) and modal auxiliaries (can, will, must). Primary auxiliaries help express time (e.g., “has eaten”) or passive voice (“was written”), while modals add meanings like possibility (“might rain”) or permission (“may I go”). This distinction is key to understanding how sentences are built (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 135).

Auxiliary verbs can be used in two different ways, either as auxiliary verbs or ordinary verbs. He further justifies his claim by providing the following sentences. (Eastwood, 1994 , 104).

Auxiliary verbs :

We are waiting for a bus.

I have thought about it.

Does tina need any help?

Ordinary verbs:

We are eat at the bus stop.

I have a suggestion.

Tina Does all the work.

Primary Auxiliaries:

Adejare and adejare discuss the primary auxiliaries with paying attention to their dual functions, they explain that the auxiliaries Be and Have,have both finite and non_finite forms, but the third member, the auxiliary Do , has only finite forms. these collectively generate a host of finite and non_finite forms.The auxiliary Be generates five finite forms and three non-finite forms. In turn, the auxiliary Have generates three finite forms and none finite forms . Finally, the auxiliary Do generates only three finite forms. (Adejare, 1996:195)

The table below shows the finite and non_finite forms.

Aux		Be	Have	Do
Finite forms		am, is, are, was, were	has, Have, had	do, Does, did
Non-finite forms		be, been, being	have, having	

Ex: I am a student (Lexical verb).

Ex: I am studying English. (Auxiliaries)

1. Be: Used for continuous tenses (“is running”) and passive voice (“was written”). For example, “They are studying” shows an ongoing action.
2. Have: Forms perfect tenses to show completed actions (“has eaten”). In “She has finished her homework,” “has” tells us the action is done.
3. Do: Creates emphasis (“I do like it!”) and helps form questions/negatives (“Do you know?” / “I don’t care”) (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 140).

The verb Do is special it can act as both a main verb (“I do yoga”) and an auxiliary. In questions, it “supports” the main verb: “Do you like tea?” Here, “do” has no meaning of its own but helps structure the sentence. Without it, the question would sound incorrect: “Like you tea?” (Quirk et al., 1985: 132).

Modal Auxiliaries:

These include words like can, could, will, would, may, might, shall, should, must, ...etc . Modals add shades of meaning:

Unlike primary auxiliaries, modals don't change form (e.g., no "mays" or "musts") and are always followed by a base verb ("can go," not "can goes") (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 108).

Modals also express hypothetical situations. For example, "If I were rich, I would travel" uses "were" (a form of "be") and "would" to imagine something unreal. This flexibility makes auxiliaries essential for clear communication (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 155).

We can use modal verbs to tell or allow people to do things; or we can use them to say how certain or uncertain we are.

- Necessity: must, have (got) to, needn't and mustn't

Ex: I must go to the bank.

- Obligation and advice: should, ought to etc •

Ex: You should answer the letter.

- Permission: can, could, may, might and be allowed to Ex: We can leave our luggage at the hotel.

- Certainty: will, must and can't

Ex: Mandy will be in London now.

- Probability: should and ought to.

Ex: The rain should stop soon.

- Possibility: may, might, can and could .

Ex: The keys may be in my coat pocket.

- Ability: can, could and be able to .

Ex: Most people can swim.

- Unreal situations: would .

Ex: Six weeks' holiday would be nice.

- Habits: will, would and used to.

Ex: People will leave litter everywhere.

- The verb 'dare'

Ex: I daren't go up on the roof. (Eastwood, 1994: 113)

1.3 Importance of Auxiliary Verbs in Grammar

Syntactically and semantically auxiliary verbs (primary or modals)are of great importance, they function as an operator, which is a "single word " performs an operational function in relating a positive declarative structure to another major structure in the language. (Quirk et al, 1985 : 80)

Auxiliary verbs are the backbone of English sentence structure. Without them, we couldn't ask clear questions ("Are you coming?" vs. "You coming?") or make accurate negatives ("I don't know" vs. "I not know"). They help us express time (past, present, future), possibility ("might rain"), and obligation ("must go"), making our ideas precise (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 45).

They also allow us to avoid repetition. In the sentence "She loves pizza, and so do I," "do" replaces the main verb "love." Similarly, in "He hasn't finished his work, but I have," "have" stands in for "finished." This makes conversations smoother and less repetitive (Quirk et al., 1985: 150).

For non-native speakers, mastering auxiliaries is challenging but critical. Errors like "She not like coffee" (missing "does") or "Can you swimming?" (wrong verb form) are common. Understanding auxiliaries helps learners avoid these mistakes and sound more natural (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 160).

Auxiliary verb are essential in English Grammar for several reasons.

1_ Forming tenses : Auxiliary verbs are used to create different tenses, for instance, "have" is used in the present perfect tense.

Ex: I have finished my homework. (Biber et al, 1999: 562) .

2_ Passive voice : They are used to form the passive voice, which focus from the subject to the action or object.

Ex : The song was sung by the choir. (Swan, 2005) .

3_ Expressing mood and aspect : auxiliary verbs convey modality (possibility, necessity)and aspect (completed or ongoing Actions .

Ex: She might go to the concert. (Biber et al, 1999: 562)

Ex: I am working on the project. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) .

4_ Clarifying meaning : They help Clarify the meaning of main verbs, especially in complex sentences.

Ex: He has been waiting for an hour. (Swan, 2005) .

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Yes/No Questions

Yes/No questions are questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” They are formed by moving an auxiliary verb to the front of the sentence. For example, “You like coffee” becomes “Do you like coffee?” Here, the auxiliary verb “do” helps create the question structure. Without it, the question would sound incorrect, like “Like you coffee?” (Aarts, 2011: 78).

Auxiliary verbs like be, have, or do are essential for forming these questions. If the original sentence already has an auxiliary verb (e.g., “She is reading”), you invert it to the front: “Is she reading?” If there’s no auxiliary, you add “do” (or “does”/“did”) to create the question. For example, “They play soccer” becomes “Do they play soccer?” This process is called do-support (Biber et al., 1999: 210).

Not all verbs need “do” in questions. Modal verbs (e.g., can, will) form questions without “do”: “Can you swim?” instead of “Do you can swim?” This rule helps avoid common mistakes. Beginners often forget to use “do” with main verbs, leading to errors like “Like you pizza?” instead of “Do you like pizza?” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 302).

Yes/No questions are useful for quick conversations. They also show how auxiliary verbs act as “grammatical glue,” holding sentences together. Without them, questions would sound incomplete or confusing. For example, “She going to the party?” is missing the auxiliary “is,” making it unclear. The correct version is “Is she going to the party?” (Eastwood, 2002: 145).

2.2 WH-Questions

WH-questions are questions that start with words like what, where, when, why, who, or how. These words ask for specific information. For example, “What are you eating?” or “Where did they go?” Auxiliary verbs are crucial here because they help structure the question (Biber et al., 1999: 215).

To form a WH-question, follow two steps:

- 1-Start with the WH-word (e.g., “What”).
- 2-Add the auxiliary verb and subject.

For example, “You are eating what?” becomes “What are you eating?” The auxiliary “are” moves after the WH-word. If there’s no auxiliary, use “do”: “They ate pizza” → “What did they eat?” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 308).

WH-questions can be tricky because they change depending on whether the

WH-word refers to the subject or object. For example:

- Subject question: “Who called you?” (The answer is the subject: “John called me.”)
No auxiliary is needed here.
- Object question: “Who did you call?” (The answer is the object: “I called John.”)
Here, “did” is required (Eastwood, 2002: 150).

Modal verbs work similarly in

WH-questions. For example, “Where should I go?” or “What can she do?” The auxiliary “should” or “can” stays after the

WH-word. Beginners sometimes forget this order, saying “Where I should go?” instead of “Where should I go?” (Aarts, 2011: 85).

2.3 Inversion in Questions

Inversion is a key rule in English questions. It means swapping the positions of the subject and auxiliary verb. For example, “She is happy” becomes “Is she happy?” This inversion signals that a question is being asked (Eastwood, 2002: 156).

Inversion happens in almost all questions. If there’s no auxiliary verb in the original sentence, use “do”:

- Statement: “They like music.”
- Question: “Do they like music?”

Here, “do” is added to create inversion. Without it, the question would be incorrect (“Like they music?”) (Carter &

McCarthy, 2006: 312).

This inversion occurs in a number of environments, namely, matrix questions, conditionals, blessings and curses, comparatives, exclamatives, negative imperatives, and in environments where certain elements have been fronted (so /as /nor, negative phrases, phrases with only and certain others). (Abels, Klaus, 2012: 43, 229-254).

However, inversion does NOT occur in two cases:

1. Subject questions: When the WH-word is the subject, keep the normal order.
“Who called you?” (Not “Who did call you?”)
2. Embedded questions: Questions inside statements.
 - “I wonder where she is.” (Not “I wonder where is she.”)
 - (Biber et al., 1999: 224).

Inversion also applies to negative questions. For example,

“Is she not coming?” or “Didn’t you finish?”

These questions often express surprise or confusion.

Beginners might struggle with contractions like “Isn’t she coming?” but with practice, inversion becomes natural (Aarts, 2011: 90).

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Forming Negatives with “Not”

To form negative sentences in English, we place the word “not” after an auxiliary verb. For example, “She is happy” becomes “She is not happy.” The auxiliary verb (e.g., is, have, do) acts like a bridge between the subject and “not,” making the sentence grammatically correct (Biber et al., 1999: 159).

The position of “not” changes slightly depending on the auxiliary:

- With be, have, or modals: “She is not here,” “They have not eaten,” “You must not go.”
- With do: “He does not like spinach.”

If there’s no auxiliary, we add “do” to carry “not”: “They do not dance” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 335).

In some languages, like Spanish, you can say “No viene” (“She not comes”) without an auxiliary. But in English, skipping the auxiliary creates errors: “She not coming” is incorrect. Instead, we say “She is not coming,” using “is” to hold the negative structure (Eastwood, 2002: 165).

Beginners often forget “do-support” in negatives. For example, “She not likes coffee” should be “She does not like coffee.” Remember: “Do” helps form negatives when no other auxiliary is present (Aarts, 2011: 112).

3.2 Contracted Forms

In English, writers and speakers commonly employ contractions with the intention of saving time and increasing communications efficiency. (Odlin, T, 1978: 451-458).

Contractions shorten phrases by combining an auxiliary verb and “not” into one word. For example, “is not” becomes “isn't,” and “do not” becomes “don't.” These forms are common in casual speech and writing: “He isnt ready” or “They don't care” (Bibber et al., 1999: 163).

Contractions follow consistent patterns:

- Be: isn't, aren't, wasn't.
- Have: haven't, hasn't.
- Do: don't, doesn't, didn't.
- Modals: cant, wont, shouldn't.

Note that “will not” becomes “wont,” which is irregular (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 340).

Contractions can sometimes cause confusion. For example, “cant” sounds like “cant,” but they mean different things. Similarly, “hes not” and “he isnt” are both correct, but the contraction changes placement: “Hes not coming” vs. “He isnt coming” (Eastwood, 2002: 170).

While contractions make speech sound natural, avoid them in formal writing (e.g., academic essays). For example, use “do not” instead of “don't” in formal contexts. However, in dialogue or informal texts, contractions keep the tone friendly

(Aarts, 2011: 115).

3.3 Double Negatives and Common Errors

A double negative uses two negative words in one sentence, like “I don’t need no help.” In Standard English, this is incorrect because the two negatives cancel each other out, creating confusion: “I don’t need no help” technically means “I need help” (Biber et al., 1999: 167).

However, double negatives are accepted in some dialects, like African American Vernacular English (AAVE), where “He aint got none” means “He doesn’t have any.” Despite this, learners should avoid them in formal writing to follow Standard English rules (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 345).

Common errors include:

- Using “not” with main verbs without an auxiliary: “She not likes cats” → “She does not like cats.”
- Misplacing “not”: “I not have seen him” → “I have not seen him.”
- Using double negatives unintentionally: “I don’t want nothing” → “I don’t want anything” (Eastwood, 2002: 175).

To fix these errors, remember: One negative per clause. For example, “I don’t know anyone” (not “I don’t know no one”). Practicing with simple sentences like “They aren’t here” or “We can’t go” helps build accuracy (Aarts, 2011: 118).

CONCLUSION

Auxiliary verbs play a foundational role in English grammar, acting as essential tools for constructing questions, negatives, and nuanced meanings. By enabling subjectauxiliary inversion, they allow speakers to transform statements into questions, such as changing "She is coming" to "Is she coming?" Similarly, they provide the structure needed to form negatives, as seen in "She is not coming" or "They do not agree," where "not" relies on the auxiliary verb to convey negation clearly. Contractions like "isn't" or "don't" further simplify communication in informal contexts, making speech and writing more efficient. However, the rules governing auxiliaries such as avoiding double negatives or using "do-support" when no other auxiliary is present can pose challenges for learners, particularly those whose native languages handle questions and negatives differently. Despite these complexities, mastering auxiliary verbs is critical for achieving grammatical accuracy and fluency. They not only ensure clarity in everyday interactions but also underpin the flexibility and precision of English syntax, allowing speakers to express time, possibility, obligation, and more with subtlety and depth. In essence, auxiliary verbs are the invisible scaffolding that holds sentences together, making them indispensable for effective communication in both spoken and written English.

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