

## EVALUATIVE LINGUISTIC RESOURCES: PRESENTING NEW INSIGHTS IN THE FIELD OF MANAGEMENT

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### Abstract

Having in mind all the more intensified exchange in the world of business at global level, as well as in international working settings, it is beyond dispute that foreign language proficiency is necessary in today's world of economy and management. At the same time, in order to present new insights in the field of management, an expert or a researcher has also to have evaluative linguistic resources at his/her disposal. The paper investigates most frequent modal means appearing in the articles dealing with the issues of management. The corpus-based approach is positioned within the appraisal theory, basically corresponding to the concept of evaluation defined by Hunston and Thompson (2000: 5) as "a broad cover term for the expression of the writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about entities or propositions that he or she is talking about". The corpus consists of 5 recent articles in economic, i.e. business domain, *Management articles of the year*, available at [www.cmilibrary.managers.org.uk](http://www.cmilibrary.managers.org.uk). It has been processed in order to identify evaluative linguistic resources at writer's or speaker's disposal when he/she wants to express his/her opinions and attitudes, to suppose and anticipate, get into socially and culturally acceptable interaction with the addressee, as well as to influence the addressee's subsequent conduct. The basic finding refers to the most frequent evaluative means identified in the corpus being the modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, will, would, should*), as well as verbs *need, seem, argue, claim, appear, believe, think, tend to, suggest*, the phrases *be likely/unlikely, be supposed to, be bound to*, as well as modal adverbs *perhaps, presumably, probably, possibly...* The paper also offers an outline of poly-functional potential of the identified English modal means used at pragmatic level either deontically or epistemically.

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## Introduction

Today's world of management and business is characterised by intercultural environments, the growing trend of mobility within and between corporations, as well as by all the more intensified exchange at global level. As a consequence, business communication exchange events, either spoken or written, involve native and non-native speakers of English. Thus, it is beyond dispute that foreign language proficiency, especially English language mastery, is necessary in the contemporary world of economy and management. At the same time, in order to present new insights in the field of management, an expert, a lecturer or a researcher has also to have evaluative linguistic resources at his/her disposal. In other words, it is not sufficient to have linguistic competence, but it is also necessary to have command over evaluative devices, supported by intercultural linguistic competence. Linguists have recently become increasingly more interested in the linguistic devices used to convey personal feelings, attitudes, and assessments of likelihood (e.g. Hunston & Thomson 2000; Martin & White 2005). Of these, modal verbs are the most common device (Biber et al. 1999: 979). There is evidence in linguistic literature that modal verbs are often problematic for non-native speakers in terms of both perception and active use. Therefore, a targeted analysis of evaluative linguistic means, before all modal verbs in management writings can provide useful insights for both experts, i.e. lecturers, researchers and audiences, i.e. readers who find themselves in cross-cultural contexts of presenting new insights in the field of management.

## Outline of the appraisal theory

Appraisal theory and its resources basically correspond to the concept of evaluation defined by Hunston & Thompson (2000:5) as "a broad cover term for the expression of the writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about entities or propositions that he is or she is talking about". In other words, it deals with what has traditionally been dealt with under the heading of 'modality'. More specifically, appraisal theory approach is informed by the notions of dialogism and heteroglossia under which all verbal communication, whether written or spoken, is 'dialogic' in that to speak or write is always to reveal the influence of, refer to, or

to take up in some way, what has been said/written before, and simultaneously to anticipate the responses of actual, potential or imagined readers/listeners (Martin & White 2005: 93).

Even though its focus is on 'epistemic modality' and 'evidentiality', concentrating on interpersonal meaning in written discourse, appraisal theory also recognizes the meanings traditionally classified under deontic modality. At the same time, regardless of the approach to modality and modal verbs as its exponents, the fact remains that in different contexts English modal verbs can express a wide range of meanings falling into different types of modality (according to polysemous view: epistemic – the modality of knowledge and belief; deontic – the modality of permission and obligation; dynamic – the modality of volition and ability). Furthermore, semantics exercises a powerful influence on the grammatical behaviour of the English modal verbs. Furthermore, there are cases in which different domains of modality merge completely, allowing flexibility of pragmatic reading and hindering accurate interpretation.

Appraisal theory divides evaluative linguistic resources into three main categories: adopting subjective positions through *attitude*, managing and negotiating intersubjective positions through *engagement*, and intensifying or downgrading a given value as *graduation*. These three main appraisal systems are further sub-categorised in increasing levels of delicacy. Attitude has 3 sub-systems: affect (emotional response), judgement (evaluation of human behaviour) and appreciation (evaluation of entities).

## Research

The research investigates most frequent modal devices appearing in the articles dealing with the issues of management. It should be noted that the study could on the one hand be considered quantitative, since it deals with the frequency of occurrences of evaluative language devices, while, on the other, it also provides qualitative analyses of the examined linguistic means, offering an outline of poly-functional potential of the identified English modal means used at pragmatic level either deontically (within attitude, i.e. judgement) or epistemically (within engagement).

### 1. Corpus description and methodology

The corpus-based approach is adopted and positioned within the above outlined appraisal theory. A small-size corpus has been compiled for the purpose of the re-

search, consisting of 5 recent articles in business domain, i.e. *Management articles of the year*, available at [www.cmilibrary.managers.org.uk](http://www.cmilibrary.managers.org.uk). The articles included in the corpus are as follows: *The 'need to get more for less': a new model of 'engaging leadership' and evidence of its effect on team productivity, and staff morale and wellbeing at work*, written by Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe – EL; *A new role emerges in downsizing: Special envoys*, Ian Ashman – SE; *Dynamic knowledge creation*, T. H. Powell – DKC; *Against the Tyranny of PowerPoint: Technology-in-Use and Technology Abuse*, Yiannis Gabriel – TPP; *Closing the Needs to Offer Gap: CRM Intervention in Retail SMEs*, co-authored by K. Hutchinson, A. Reid & L. Donnell. The corpus has been processed in order to identify evaluative linguistic resources at writer's or speaker's disposal when he/she wants to express his/her opinions and attitudes, to suppose and anticipate, get into socially and culturally acceptable interaction with the addressee, as well as to influence the addressee's subsequent conduct. It is worth noting that the articles are written by native speakers of English language.

## 2. Analysis

Semantic and pragmatic analysis of a small-size corpus consisting of about 30,000 words has been carried out showing that the ratio of the modal verbs within it is about 1%, i.e. 300 modal verbs have been identified. Table 1 below reports the number of occurrences of these modals in the corpus:

Table 1 Modal auxiliaries in the corpus

Modal	Example	Occurrences
<i>Can</i>	Downsizing activities <i>can often become</i> a preoccupation for those charged with managing events...	99
<i>May</i>	So while these concepts of knowledge <i>may be effective</i> in the present, as they are static, they are unlikely to prove as effective when confronting a dynamic market.	43
<i>Would</i>	Without the exploration of new possibilities, the organization <i>would find itself trapped</i> in suboptimal states and <i>would eventually become</i> maladapted to changing environmental conditions.	40
<i>Will</i>	But organizations that devote all their resources to the exploration of new possibilities <i>will face</i> too high a degree of risk, and even in the case of successful discoveries they <i>will often fail</i> to exploit the knowledge they acquire and will systematically perform worse than fast followers and imitators.	34
<i>Could</i>	If only HP knew what HP knows, we <i>could be</i> three times more productive!	26
<i>Need to</i>	To successfully compete in these markets, it is argued that firms need to continually create new sources of competitive advantage - but how?	24

<i>Must</i>	Dynamic strategy can be described as: while competing in its current position, a company also <i>must search</i> continuously for new strategic positions.	14
<i>Should</i>	Envoys <i>should not feel</i> forced into the role.	12
<i>Have to</i>	The dynamic between HR professionals and line managers in downsizing events is an interesting one as they often <i>have to work</i> side by side as envoys.	8

Table above shows that the modal verb *can* significantly outnumbers the rest of the modals. Most often it is used in its neutral sense of dynamic modality, simply pointing to existence of particular possibility. The modals following it according to its frequency (*may, would, will* and *could*) mainly express the epistemic modal meanings, while those less frequent modals (*need to, must, should* and *have to*) predominantly belong to deontic domain of modality. Even though the verb *need to* is actually not a modal verb in its narrower formal sense, it is included in the analysis due to its semantic features. Quantitative analysis of other evaluative means has not been undertaken, but their appearance and senses will also be briefly discussed in the text that follows.

## 2. 1. Engagement

The domain of engagement within the appraisal theory refers to the resources for positioning the speaker's/author's voice with respect to the various propositions and proposals conveyed by a text; it also encompasses the meanings by which speakers either acknowledge or ignore the diversity of view-points put at risk by their utterances and negotiate an interpersonal space for their own positions within that diversity. In other words, when using the evaluative language means belonging to the domain of engagement, a speaker/writer can perform a whole range of interactive and interpersonal language functions: he can distance himself from the truth of the proposition, he can express doubt or certainty, as well as attribution and proclamation; furthermore, he can predict, anticipate or express expectation or counter-expectation.

Identified devices falling within the domain of engagement are as follows: epistemic modals: *may, might, could, will, would*, but also the verbs *seem, argue, claim, appear, believe, think, tend to, suggest*, the phrases *be likely/unlikely, be supposed to, be bound to*, as well as modal adverbs *perhaps, presumably, probably, possibly...*

In order to express epistemic distance, i.e. what is generally or currently possible or to be expected in the future, but not necessary, the writers of the examined articles most frequently use the modal verbs *may* (example 1) and *might* (example 2):

1.	This means that the knowledge created for one context <i>may not be relevant</i> to any other context, and even if it is relevant, it <i>may not be possible</i> to articulate this knowledge to easily share it. (DKC 8)
2.	Criticism of an emphasis on the 'inspirational-charismatic' aspects of leadership grew in the 1990s alongside awareness of the 'dark side of charisma', which <i>might include</i> arrogance, narcissistic and manipulative behaviours, and be associated with an inability to build and support a team. (EL)

Furthermore, the modal verbs *can* and *may* are used interchangeably to merely denote a whole range of possibilities:

3.	Sometimes, the image <i>may reinforce</i> the sound or vice versa. At other times, image and sound <i>can work</i> against each other and <i>may produce</i> entirely novel effects. (TPP 265)
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In collocation with perfective infinitive, the modal verb *may* conveys the meaning of possibility in the past:

4.	Where an old-fashioned lecture <i>may have employed</i> a drawing on a blackboard (...) PowerPoint offers a colour diagram; where a traditional lecture <i>may have used</i> an anecdote or a joke to support an argument, a PowerPoint lecturer <i>may use</i> a photograph or a cartoon to liven things up. (TPP 267)
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As it has already been stated and illustrated above (example 3), the modal verb *can* is predominantly used dynamically, i.e. merely referring to all kinds of possibilities. The same is true for the modal verb *could*. Apart from this usage, the modal verb *could* is often used in collocation with passive infinitive to refer to possible standpoints a phenomenon could be considered from: *could be viewed*, *could be seen*, *could be described*, *could be said*, *a correct description could be*...

Another interesting sense detected in the corpus denoted by the above stated modal verbs is a warning, which is a meaning balancing between epistemic and deontic modality. In other words, pointing to negative aspects or consequences, the modal verbs *can*, *could*, *may* and *might* are actually often used as a warning:

5.	... PowerPoint in the classroom <i>can</i> reduce students' critical awareness... it <i>can</i> substantially limit a lecturer's ability to deviate from a preconceived lecture plan... (TPP 258)
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It is not a rare case that *may/might* and *can/could* are used as hedges in the expressions like, e.g. *if I may/might say so, we can say that*, or:

6.	The irony, <i>if we can call it that</i> , is that despite the heightened emotional burden, the envoys always felt it right and proper that they should take responsibility for delivering the news of downsizing to their subordinates and colleagues because they knew them best and wanted to provide support.
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Even though Palmer holds that *might* is more tentative than *may* (Palmer 1990: 10), i.e. implying lower degree of confidence or commitment, the data from the present corpus have not shown any difference between the two, or even the modal verb *could*, so that the finding is in favour of Coates view, who sees them as equivalent, both expressing the speaker's lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition (Coates 1983: 133). In each of these cases it is available to the reader to interpret the modalising locutions as a sign by the writer that their knowledge of the matters under consideration is to some degree limited and therefore not sufficient to allow for a categorical formulation of the proposition.

There are two more modal verbs frequently used to express prediction with a higher level of certainty: *will* and *would*. When the modal verb *will* is in question, a process of reasoning is involved as the writer draws the inference from the premise (example 7), while in the case of the modal verb *would* the prediction is always potential (i.e. it will come true if particular requirements are met) (example 8):

7.	Success <i>will</i> ultimately <i>depend on</i> the capacity of the business to analyse customer data collected and use it to make informed business decisions: (CNOG 7)
8.	This <i>would result</i> in a relationship as depicted in figure 4 (DKC 12)

Like *might*, the modal verb *would* in collocation with perfect infinitive refers to prediction about the past, implying that the writer is convinced that the proposition was true:

9.	On this final point, it is worth remembering that many downsizing survivors <i>will have spent</i> some time at risk so have had direct contact with envoys. (SE 32)
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Another way which is at writer's disposal when he/she wants to distance him/herself from the truth of the proposition is to attribute the statement to another source. According to appraisal theory, this is dialogistic expansion through the externalised proposition – attribution. Namely, under the heading of 'attribution', the authors deal with those formulations which disassociate the proposition from the text's internal authorial voice by attributing it to some external source. (Martin



& White 2005: 111). The examined articles are permeated by such evaluative language means, i.e. expressions: *it is argued, it is claimed, in the light of the findings, it is evident in the literature, numerous survey studies had revealed, it has been found, this is consistent with other studies, according to certain author, as cited by...*

Apart from the discussed modals verbs, the corpus analysis has shown that the writers are also searching for other stylistic alternatives, by far the most common of which are the phrases *is likely/unlikely* and *it seems*.

## 2.2. Judgement

Entertaining dialogic alternatives, deontic modality is classified under the category of entertain locutions within appraisal theory. So, on the one hand, Martin and White classify deontic meanings of permission and obligation within the system of engagement, i.e. the category of entertain locutions (Martin and White 2005: 111); on the other, they note that modulations of obligation can be related to as lexicalized judgements (Martin and White 2005: 55). Prototypically imposing a course of action on the addressee, deontically used modals also make dialogic space for alternative possibilities. In other words, using a deontic modal the speaker often allows the addressee not to take the proposed course of action, acknowledging the speaker's role as a participant in a dialogic exchange.

Table 1 shows that the most frequent verbs conveying the meaning of obligation is *need to*, followed by *must*, *should* and *have to*. According to its illocutionary force, the modal verb *must* is the most powerful, imposing undisputable obligation on the addressee and implying a subjective opinion supported by moral and ethical reasoning. Expressing the existence of objective necessity, the semi-modal *have to* expresses lower degree of deontic modality. Even though *will/would* and *can/could* are often used in formulaic expressions in interpersonal communication to influence the actions of the addressee, such examples have not been found in the corpus. The modal verb *should* is one of the most frequent modal verbs in the English language expressing, among others, both subjective and objective deontic meanings of medium strength. On the other hand, even though it expresses similar deontic meaning, the modal verb *ought to* does not appear in the corpus, since it is relatively rare (Quirk et al. 1996: 227) and is reaching the end of its useful life (Leech 2003: 236).

In regard to its intensity of deontic meaning, the verb *need to* is between *must* and *ought to*, usually containing a distinctive feature of circumstances being such



that impose a necessity, i.e. obligation. When the analysed corpus is in question, it most frequently expresses the meaning of strong recommendation:

10.	Support from the HR function may be valuable, but, <u>crucially</u> , support <i>needs to</i> come from senior managers and peers... (SE 35)
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Having in mind that, compared to other modal verbs, it denotes the strongest deontic meaning and is often likened to the force of an imperative, it is rather surprising that the occurrences of the modal verb *must* outnumber those of *have to* and *should* in the corpus.

11.	... a company also <i>must search</i> continuously for new strategic positions... then it <i>must attempt</i> to manage both simultaneously... As the old position matures and declines, the company <i>must slowly make</i> a transition to the new. (DKC 3)
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The semi-modal *have to* expresses a meaning similar to *must* with a significant difference – the obligation imposed by it is due to objective circumstances. Furthermore, what has also been found according to the examples containing the semi-modal is that when it is used the obligation is usually assessed as unpleasant for the one/those it refers to:

12.	Every organization that has restructured or downsized has within it “envoys”, people who <i>have to break the news</i> of redundancy or redeployment to their colleagues. (SE 32)
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Used deontically, the modal verb *should* conveys the meaning of strong recommendation:

13.	Interestingly, all of the HR envoys said their professional training had provided them with very little insight into the emotional aspect of downsizing suggesting that professional developmental program <i>should pay more attention</i> to the less palatable psychological demands of organizational renewal (SE 35)
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Furthermore, in interrogative form, i.e. questions, it usually expresses unwillingness of the speaker, i.e. writer to obey the obligation. In a sense, it usually denotes a protest:

14.	Why <i>should</i> I change my ways, purely in response to pressures from students and administrators?’TPP
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Even though they are not so frequent the modal verbs *will* (example 15) and *can* (example 16) are also used to express the meaning of strong recommendation:

15.	<u>Ideally</u> , that <i>will mean</i> involvement at the strategic, policy and implementation levels. (SE 35)
16.	Causal relationships <i>can only be determined</i> through a longitudinal investigation... (EL)

Usually being an implicit component of a text, a direct interaction with a reader can be introduced by the use of modal verbs. Namely, knowing how tricky and delicate it might be for a writer/researcher to offer a definite list of features, the author wants to point it out to the reader that he/she is aware of that fact using the modal verb *may* to introduce a hedge:

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 17. | The skills include (if I <i>may be permitted</i> proposing a list): (TPP 267) |
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### Concluding Remarks

The small-scale corpus analysis has identified a whole range of evaluative language means in the texts dealing with economy and management. Overall, modal verbs turned out to be major devices to express writer's stance. Even though each modal in English can convey multiple meanings falling under different types of modality, there seems to be a trend towards monosemy; in other words, modal verbs *may*, *might*, *could*, *will* and *would* are mostly used to express epistemic meanings, while *need to*, *should*, *must* and *have to* usually express deontic meanings. The finding is in accordance with other studies (Leech 2003: 234). Furthermore, when epistemic modality is in question, the writers of investigated articles can hardly be said to be indicating different degrees of commitment to the truth of their statements by their choice of the modal; namely, the choice of a modal does not always follow the epistemic gradient. As for the deontic meanings of the examined modal verbs, the fact that the modal verb *must* outnumbers other deontically used modal verbs is rather surprising, especially having in mind that in regard to its frequency, deontic sense of *must* has significantly declined between 1960s and 1990s, i.e. it has suffered most of all (Leech 2003: 234).

Meanwhile, it would seem worthwhile to carry forward this investigation in economy register extending the size of the corpus and encompassing other means and layers of evaluative language.

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