Non-epistemic possibility in tourism research article sections

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study of modal verbs with dynamic meaning for the expression of possibility in the tourism research article in the introduction and conclusion sections of the article. The main aim of this paper is then to analyse these dynamic modal verbs in a corpus of scientific journals in the discipline of tourism. It is understood in this study that dynamic modal verbs contribute to defining the speaker's point of view. In this sense, this analysis will determine which section has the highest frequency of dynamic modal forms. Furthermore, the functions that these modal verbs fulfil in the sections under study will be highlighted, according to the context in which these forms are found.

Keywords: *modality; dynamic modality; research article; tourism; mitigation*

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism research article has not received the attention it deserves (Lin & Evans, 2012), despite being a discipline with great impact on the economies of many countries (Benkraiem et al., 2020, p. 25). Other textual genres related to the tourism register have been studied, as can be seen in the work of Yui Ling Ip (2008), Sulaiman (2014) and Carretero and Zamorano-Mansilla (2015) on promotional texts such as the brochure, Llorens Simón (2022) on digital texts, Lin and Evans (2012), Dolnicar and Chapple (2015), Aluthman (2018) on academic writing texts; and Ahmed (2015), Sabila and Kurniawan (2020), Álvarez-Gil and Domínguez-Morales (2018), Álvarez-Gil and Domínguez-Morales (2021) in the abstract genre of these scientific texts.

As noted in Álvarez-Gil (2022), tourism research provides organisations, whether public or private, with fundamental information for the implementation of their activity, which implies the formulation of recommendations based on empirical research. Despite the works that have been mentioned on the language of tourism, the rhetorical structure of the research article has so far only been carried out in Álvarez-Gil (2022). In this work, a formal analysis of the genre is included in a structure of stages, following the terminology of systemic-functional linguistics, as outlined in Martin (1984). In this work, Álvarez Gil also describes the recurrent lexico-grammatical structures in each of the sections of the scientific article and the lexical and syntactic variables that are registered in the genre. In addition, the author is interested in a series of grammatical structures that appear in the sections and indicates aspects such as the significant variation that exists in each of them. These structures are intended to show the authors' point of view, among other things. Several mechanisms are studied, being of special interest for this paper the use of modal verbs.

In this article, I intend to contribute to this characterisation of the scientific article with a study of the variation existing in the expression of dynamic possibility in the sections of the scientific article called "introduction" and "conclusion". Thus, the main aim of

this paper is to analyse the dynamic modal periphrases in a corpus of these sections in the discipline of tourism. The texts in this compilation are taken from scientific journals in this discipline. All of the publications have a relevant impact index in the field. It is understood in this study that dynamic modal periphrases contribute to defining the speaker's point of view, as pointed out in Palmer (2001) and Biber et al. (1999). In this sense, I will try to determine in this analysis which section has the highest frequency of dynamic modal verbs. In addition, the functions that these modal verbs fulfil in the sections under study will be highlighted.

To this end, corpus linguistics tools are used to manage the texts and their consultation, as well as to select specific examples that illustrate the functions that these forms show in the corpus. As context is fundamental to the identification of modal meanings, it is necessary to carry out a first-hand analysis of each example identified. The role of context in determining the meaning of a given modal verb has been discussed previously (Alonso-Almeida, 2015a). The same modal verb can indicate different meanings, so that, without assessing the context, an adequate categorisation of these verb forms would not be possible, since this procedure without prior automatic labelling would not yield results, as the software by itself cannot discriminate semantic and pragmatic issues in dynamic forms.

This article is structured in five sections, plus the references at the end of the paper. After the introduction, the concept of modality used in the analysis of dynamic forms is described. In section three, the methodological issues for the analysis of data in the introduction and conclusion of scientific articles are explained. Likewise, the tourism research article is described and characterised as a textual genre from a systemic-functional perspective in a succinct manner. In the next section, the modal verbs with dynamic value in the introductions and conclusions of the tourism research article are analysed. Here, not only the modal forms and meanings in the texts studied are described, but also the modal functions fulfilled by these modal forms are included. The

conclusions derived from this study are given in the last section.

II. MODALITY

The concept of modality has been differently approached in the scientific literature giving way to several definitions. Some of these are as follows:

> **Palmer (2001, p. 1)**: Modality is concerned with the status of the proposition that describes the event.

> **Saeed (2016, p. 134)**: Modality is a cover term for devices which allow speakers to express varying degrees of commitment to, or belief in, a proposition.

> **Rocci (2017, p. 3)**: Modality is the semantic category associated with the basic human cognitive ability of thinking that things might be otherwise, that is thinking of alternatives: situations other than what is the case. Modality refers generally to the linguistic means that allow "one to say things about, or on the basis of, situations which need not be real" (Portner, 2009, p. 1, my emphasis).

> **Alonso-Almeida and Álvarez-Gil (2020, pp. 62–63)**: Modality is the term used in linguistics to refer to the expression of a speaker's evaluation of an event in terms of such notions as probability, possibility, obligation, permission and necessity, among other more fine-grained attitudes towards the propositional content framed by the modal particle.

These definitions show the different perspectives that linguists have on this concept. It is therefore a phenomenon that can represent different realities, but all definitions agree that modality qualifies the meaning of a linguistic event. One of the most interesting aspects is what is modalised. On the one hand, Palmer (2001) and Saeed (2016) talk about propositions while Rocci (2017) refers to situations, and Alonso-Almeida and Álvarez-Gil (2020) call them events. On the other hand, Narrog (2005, 2012) prefers to use the term

state of affairs. It is relevant, then, to point out here the technical meaning of the concepts proposition and state of affairs, as the term situation is more obvious. Proposition refers to the true or false expression of meaning in the field of logic-semantics, while the term state of affair refers to a fact, which can be a result or consequence of some human action. In this paper, since modality is studied in modal verbs, it seems appropriate to use the term proposition, as they respond to the same philosophical nature of language.

There is no doubt that modality has an evaluative function with which the propositional content is qualified. The speaker can specify obligation, possibility, necessity by referring to this propositional content. This evaluative aspect of modality would form part of what are called stance studies, as Alonso-Almeida (2015b, p. 2) explains:

> Stance indeed refers to different phenomena in language, and so it is generally the umbrella term for notions, such as epistemic stance (Finegan 1989), commitment (Caffi 1999; Caffi 2007; Del Lungo Camiciotti 2008), mitigation (Martín-Martín 2008; Alonso-Almeida 2015a), reinforcement or strengthening (Brown 2011), intensification (González 2015), authority, involvement and hedging (Hyland 2005a; Hyland 1998), assessment (Goodwin 2006), modality and evidentiality (Chafe 1986; Chu et al. 2011; Fairclough 2004; Marín Arrese 2009; Carrió-Pastor 2012; Pic & Furmaniak 2012; Goodwin 2006), affect (Martin 2000; Martin & White 2005), and vagueness in language (Cutting 2007).

There are several ways in which modal forms can be classified. However, Lyons' (1977) semantic classification into epistemic modality and deontic modality seems to be one of the most widely accepted and is maintained by Palmer (1986, p. 19). The same split classification is found in Biber et al. (1999, p. 485), but the categories are called intrinsic modality and extrinsic modality.

Palmer (2001) gives another classification that distinguishes between propositional modality and event modality. The former includes epistemic modality, and evidentiality,

which refers to the source or mode of information (Pic & Furmaniak, 2012). The latter phenomenon has been frequently studied in these last decades (cf. Chafe 1986; Willett, 1988; Leavitt et al., 1991; Lazard, 2001; Plungian, 2001; Viechnicki, 2002; Boye & Harder, 2009; Mushin, 2013; Haßler, 2011; Alonso-Almeida, 2015a; Alonso-Almeida, 2015c; Greco, 2018) and analysed as a mechanism indicating the speaker's point of view with respect to the information offered. The event modality expresses an attitude with respect to the information provided and is divided into deontic modality and dynamic modality which are related to meanings of obligation and ability, respectively, among others. It is precisely dynamic modality that interests me in this study.

Dynamic modality is a complex term, as it is often overlapped with epistemic modality, as both types of modality are related to reasoning based on possibilities, yet of a different nature. According to Alonso-Almeida (2015d), dynamic modality appears frequently in texts of a technical-scientific nature, and he indicates that this type of modality "is used even when the context implies assurance" (Alonso-Almeida, 2015d, p. 404). He notes that this certainty and confidence in the realisation of the event described in the proposition is achieved by considering the capabilities of a particular object or person, so that rather than a modulating effect, it would indicate factuality. This is seen in the following example where the use of will illustrates how the authors are aware of what their work can contribute to the food industry and which they identify as a fact and which they therefore mark by *will*.

> The article **will** be of value to practitioners, researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders involved in the food industry (Taylor et al., 2015).

There is a tendency to mix up dynamic modality and epistemic modality because of the difficulty of determining what kind of possibility is referred to in each example. The context is essential here, since it is possible to determine whether it is a possible fact due to a quality or, on the other hand, due to the speaker's own supposition. In the first case,

reference would be made to the dynamic modality, and in the second to the epistemic modality (cf. Carrió-Pastor, 2012).

The English language has nine central modal verbs (Biber et al. 1999, p. 483), which are *can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would* and *must*. These authors establish a relationship between modals in pairs according to a grammatical value based on the expression of time: can and could, may and might, shall and should, will and would (1999, p. 485). However, despite this use of late medieval origin, the past forms of these verbs have different pragmatic functions, including the mitigation of propositional content as a politeness strategy, since they avoid imposing the speaker's criterion, as occurs with might in *The low hotel occupancy this year might be a consequence of the unexpected rise in the number of B&B in the islands*. In this example, the whole proposition is attenuated using the modal verb which indicates a probability that what is expressed in the propositional content will be fulfilled. This means that might do not represent past tense. In addition to the central modal verbs, there are other forms which are called peripheral or marginal, although they are often referred to as semi-modals These peripheral forms are need (to), ought to, dare (to), and used to. As can be seen, one of the aspects that stands out in the semi-modals with respect to the core modals is the possibility that the former can be followed by to plus infinitive, while the latter can be followed by an infinitive verb without to (cf. Denison, 1993). Similar to the semi-modals is a third group of idiomatic expressions with modal meanings (Biber et al., 1999, p. 484): *have to, had better, be supposed to...*

III. METHODOLOGY

The analysis of modal verbs in this paper is based on the variants found through the computer analysis of a corpus of introductions and conclusions in tourism research articles, as explained in the introduction. These sections have been taken from the tourism articles to compile the corpus in plain text files for use with the tools of the CasualConc suite (Imao, 2020). The word count of the introductions sub-corpus is 100,363 words,

while the conclusions form a total of 83,156 words. To facilitate the comparison of the results obtained by this procedure, the data have been normalised to 10,000 words.

The identification of the introduction and conclusion sections in the selected documents has been carried out following Álvarez-Gil (2022). Due to their position at the beginning of the articles, it was not complicated to identify the introductions in the texts. Something similar has occurred with the conclusions, although this section may appear in combination with the discussion section. When this happened, the relevant checks were made to ensure that the contents included in the corpus corresponded exclusively to the conclusion.

As explained above, the data collection has been achieved by using the string *can/ could/ may/ might/ might/ must/ will/ would/ shall/ should/ should* in CasualConc, which returned the concordance lines that include these forms in the introductions and in the conclusions. As mentioned above, context is crucial to identify the modal meanings and pragmatic functions played by the verbs in each of the sections of the scientific article analysed in this study. In this respect, von Fintel (2006, pp. 22-23) argues that "modal expressions have in of themselves a rather skeletal meaning and it is only in combination with the background context that they take on a particular shade of meaning (such as epistemic or deontic)", even though these "are not entirely subject to the whims of context but impose their own preferences as to what kind of modal meaning they would like to express". Following these ideas, the analyses report on the frequency of occurrence of modal forms in the introductions and conclusions of the scientific article in tourism. These occurrences of modal verbs are presented first as a whole and then for each form that has been identified.

The introductions and conclusions on which this paper is based are drawn from a set of 160 research articles found in journals published between 2015 and 2018 with a score of more than 9 points on the ICDS (Secondary Composite Index Broadcasting) visibility

index. Such an index indicates that a journal with nine ICDS points or more is bound to appear as listed in several international databases. The relevance of this criterion for the selection of journal articles in our corpus is that it ensures, firstly, that the journal enjoys prestigious recognition and, secondly, that the journal has a wide distribution in the scientific community for which its contents are intended.

In this paper we have selected the journals Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Vacation Marketing, Tourism Economics and Tourist Studies from which to retrieve the texts, as they meet this visibility criterion. The corpus of introductions and conclusions results in the distribution shown in table 1:

Table 1. *Corpus*

Year	Number of articles	Journals	Section	Word count
2015	15	Journal of Travel Research Journal of Vacation Marketing Tourism Economics Tourist Studies	Introduction	100,363
2016	58			
2017	37		Conclusion	83,156
2018	50			

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following table shows the results for the use of the modal verbs *can, could, may, must, may, might, will, would, shall* and *should* with the actual number of occurrences (NR) and the relative frequency (RF) per 10,000 words.

Table 2. *RF of modal verbs in introductions and conclusions.*

Modal verbs	INTRODUCTION		CONCLUSION	
	RF	NR	RF	NR
can	24.51	246	34.39	286
could	3.69	37	19.36	161
may	10.06	101	31.87	265
might	2.29	23	4.93	41
must	1.00	10	3.37	28
will	11.36	114	15.75	131
would	5.88	59	12.87	107
shall	0.40	4	0.24	2
should	3.59	36	18.52	154
Total	62.77	630	141.30	1175

Of these forms, those with a dynamic modal meaning are distributed in the introductions and conclusions, revealing a higher frequency in the conclusions, as follows:
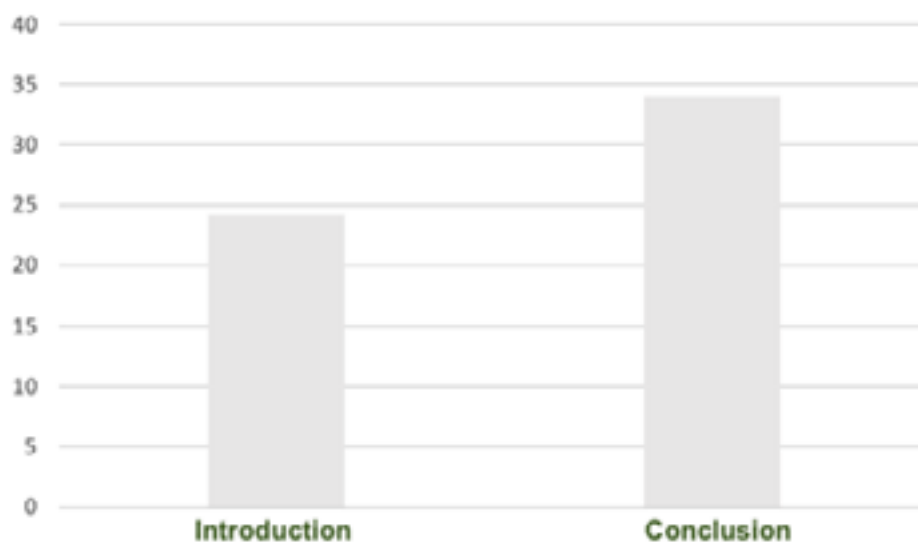

Figure 1. *RF of dynamic modal verbs in introductions and conclusions.*

The dynamic modal verbs used in the introductions of the texts are *can, could, may, will* and *would*, with the distribution shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Relative frequencies of occurences of dynamic modal meanings per section in tourism articles.*

	can	*could*	*may*	*will*	*would*
Introduction	23.32	0.00	0.10	0.70	0.10
Conclusion	33.67	0.24	0.12	0.00	0.00

It can be seen from this table that the proportion of dynamic modals is indeed very significant. In both introductions and conclusions, the most frequent modal form is can. In examples (1) to (4), below, instances of this modality are given in context, where can implies features that are specific and refer to the object referred to in each instance:

(1) Thus, based on the IP addresses of consumers, a hotel company can advertise a given price in a particular country but not make that price available to users from other countries (Introduction; Song et al., 2018).

(2) Some notable examples include Cooper et al. (1998), Goeldner and Ritchie (2003), and Hudson (1999), each questioning how a model can predict travel behavior as tourists travel with different motivations on different occasions (Introduction; Litvin & Smith, 2016).

(3) Representational performances can offer a venue to reimagine how the myth is presented, and ask important questions that should be asked of all national myths (Conclusion; Zhang & Ryan, 2018).

(4) This paper has provided an importance index and identified the 30 most important web-sites within the West Australian tourism industry. This can assist key policy makers and managing bodies of the destination to have a better understanding of important hubs, where they are located in the network, and how their structural powers can be used for the better management of the network. Moreover, it can help hubs to better understand their position, and

more strategically plan their networking on the Internet (Conclusion; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017).

The qualities of the objects *this* ('an importance index'), *company, examples, performances* and *structural powers* which appear as subjects of the modal verb can in each case allow us to understand that the actions are carried out thanks to these qualities themselves. Sometimes, some epistemic nuances can be understood in the use of *can*, as a certain degree of probability can also be inferred that the proposition preceded by can will be realised. This depends on the individual speaker and what contextual premises are considered in the interpretation of the modal form. A clear example could be the last case of *can* in (4), as *can* may be judged to indicate the probability that an importance index will be helpful, rather than that it will be able to help. In the second interpretation, it refers to a dynamic value that enables the described action.

This same meaning of dynamic possibility to carry out an action is found in the use of modal verbs, as exemplified in examples (5) and (6) with *will* and *may*, respectively. The future sense in (5) is certainly unavoidable, since the statement resembles the formulation of a promise in the sense described in Searle (1969). In this sense, the will to carry out the action seems to indicate that the necessary conditions for this will be fulfilled. In (6), the form *may* indicates the logical outcome resulting from what has been said earlier in the text and, therefore, its use indicates the subject's ability to carry out the action.

(5) The successful incorporation of AR into the tourism model will contribute to understanding the rapidly evolving technologies travelers will face in the future (Introduction; Chung et al., 2018).

(6) To continue with this line of research, we suggest to study whether the presence of foreign direct investment in the hotel industry gives rise to an increase in the competitiveness of the destination of the investment, due to knowledge

transfer. Accordingly, efficiency may explain the reverse direction of causality (Conclusion; Mendieta-Peñalver et al., 2018).

Variation in the use of dynamic modality in introductions and conclusions is presented in terms of the calculation of LL in Table 4.

Table 4. *Log-likelihood and log ratio values to measure the effect of variation in the presence of epistemic modal verbs. An asterisk indicates a higher presence in the conclusions.*

	*can**	*could**	*may**	*will*	*would*
Log-likelihood	17.31	3.17	0.02	8.45	1.21
Log ratio	-0.53	-2.27	-0.27	inf.	inf.

Dynamic modality seems to be more frequent in the conclusions of tourism research articles, as shown in Table 4. The data obtained from the LL calculation indicate that the forms *can, could* and *may* are more likely in conclusions, possibly because they allow the presentation of ideas without directly imposing the authors' judgement.

As for the function of these modal values, one is as a negative politeness strategy, as seen in the following example:

(7) If we assume that online chatting with friends is not entirely unlike people sharing their travel experiences around a kitchen table, we could argue that SNSs just give us easy access to how it is done in practice (Conclusion; Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016).

In the case of could argue in (7), the authors mitigate the propositional content by means of the manifestation of the context expressed by the modal verb could, which indicates that the circumstances are present that enable the authors to be 'in a position' to argue about what is expressed in the clause introduced by that. The difference with the rest of the examples is that the use of could does not seem to indicate doubt or absence of

certainty, as noted in Alonso-Almeida (2021).

From a pragmatic perspective, the use of dynamic modal verbs in conclusions may have an intensifying effect on communication, since this modal meaning refers to a true fact based on the assumption that a person, an event or an object has the intrinsic capacity or the external conditions are present for them to perform the action described in the proposition. Hence, the information is offered as a conclusion. However, even so, these modal verbs may mitigate the eloquent force of the propositional content (see Depraetere, 2017, p. 16), as the facts expressed are based on potentially possible events and/or abilities. Examples include the following:

(8) Destination image in relation to tourism can be defined as a continuous mental process by which one holds a set of impressions, emotional thoughts, beliefs, and prejudices regarding a destination due to information obtained from different channels (Crompton, 1979; Liou, 2010; Milman, 2011; Reynolds, 1965) (Introduction; Kim & Chen, 2016).

(9) In particular, we highlight works that can help us to use a (critical) mobility lens to sharpen our understanding of the forces shaping the development of these policies as well as the implications thereof (Introduction; Torabian & Mair, 2017).

(10) Such research directions can facilitate the development of important research streams, e.g. segmentation, latent class/profile analyses), which together can provide the theoretical insight that is necessary to explicate the differential adoption patterns of various population groups (Conclusion; Morosan, 2018).

(11) Photos and visual processing may, after all, be more basic to human existence than the processing of verbal information, and photos may therefore evoke deeper elements of consciousness than words (Harper, 2002) (Conclusion;

Andersson et al., 2016).

In example (8), the form can is used to introduce a definition, so it does not express doubt at all. On the contrary, it refers to a real and true possibility representing the concept destination image in relation to tourism. Actually, in this context, the use of this modal form might not be necessary, as is the case in the rest of the examples, since they refer to a fact whose possibility lies in the internal characteristics of the subjects or to the conditions which, in fact, exist. The presence of these modal verbs, as indicated above, is maintained in order to contextualise the information by avoiding the explicit imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987) of the perspective and thus prevents future criticism in the scientific literature. In the case of the other forms of can in examples (9) and (10), they also refer to the real possibility based on the ability of the objects or events mentioned, works in (9), such research directions in (10) and research directions and research streams also in (10), to perform the actions described in each of the propositions preceded by the modal form. In the case of the example in (11), the form may on the two occasions in which it appears expresses the possibility of the written actions being carried out based on the qualities of the subjects responsible for these actions.

V. CONCLUSION

This article shows partial research carried out on a corpus of tourism articles to identify modal verb forms and the functions they fulfil in introductions and conclusions; in this case those forms with dynamic meaning. A quantitative conclusion is that dynamic modality appears more frequently in conclusions. The modal verbs that appear with this value are *can, could, may, will* and *would*. As far as functions are concerned, we have detected an intention to express mitigation and linguistic politeness by means of dynamic modal verbs, which are intended to avoid imposition.

Another function clearly linked to these modal verbs found in introductions and conclusions is the expression of factuality. Information is thus expressed on the basis

of the capacities and potential of the subjects. These characteristics appeal to the possibility that the events described are realised without the imposition of the authors' point of view.

This work represents a first approach to the study of dynamic modality in a corpus of scientific articles in English. In this case, a description of the forms and functions of dynamic modal verbs in introductions and conclusions has been carried out, so it would be necessary to cover the analysis of these mechanisms in all sections of the research article in order to examine possible variation. It would also be important to analyse interdisciplinary variation in the use of modal verbs.

VI. REFERENCES

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