MODALITY AS PORTRAYED IN FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL TEXTBOOKS: A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH
To Kisu, although this may well have killed us
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# Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>AmE</td>
<td>American English</td>
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<td>BrE</td>
<td>British English</td>
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<td>BNC</td>
<td>British National Corpus</td>
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<td>CC2</td>
<td>Culture Café Course 2</td>
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<td>CC7</td>
<td>Culture Café Course 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEFR</td>
<td>Common European Framework of Reference for Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>FLE</td>
<td>Foreign Language Teaching</td>
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<td>IT4</td>
<td>In Touch Course 4</td>
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<td>IT7</td>
<td>In Touch Course 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSWE</td>
<td>Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus</td>
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<td>NCCUSS</td>
<td>National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools</td>
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1 Introduction

It has been well said by many a prominent scholar that modality in many ways constitutes one of the key areas of English linguistics in general and semantics in particular that contributes to the overall complexity of the language. This, as Römer (2004: 185) suggests, is perhaps especially true of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. English, ubiquitous in the Finnish culture, is regarded by some as an ‘easy’ language to learn and one which requires little to no effort on the part of the learner, the assumption in many cases being that English is somehow magically absorbed from the surroundings. Upon entering the upper secondary school, however, many learners are confronted with a new degree of complexity which may leave them bewildered.

The inspiration for this study originated partly from personal experiences as an EFL teacher of both upper secondary school students and adult learners. Whenever the discussion turned to the so-called modal auxiliary verbs or modal auxiliaries, there was a feeling of uneasiness that pervaded the classroom. This was due, no doubt, to the teacher’s own lack of proper understanding of the subject matter. A closer look at the way in which EFL grammar books deal with modality was not helpful: there was a strong feeling that much of the intricacies involved were being hidden or that the authors themselves had not fully mastered the field. I then turned my attention to scholarly studies on modality and the modal auxiliaries: these demonstrated quickly enough that modality is a complex field of study and one that is, moreover, hotly debated.

More than in the way in which grammar books treat modality, which I felt was already somewhat crooked, I became interested in how EFL textbooks implicitly portray modality through their texts. After all, a textbook, no matter what any teacher
might say, in the majority of cases still serves as a practical guideline directing the teacher’s work. Theoretically, a textbook is supposed to reflect the way in which English is actually used as accurately as possible, and the demands for authentic and varied teaching materials in the classroom are now well-established. Ostensibly, all contemporary EFL textbooks conform to these demands. Most contain a great number of texts that make reference to real-life materials produced in an English-speaking country. Despite authentic sources, however, the textbook authors have clearly had to make decisions and choose certain excerpts over others and even possibly tone down some of the nuances found in the text in the interest of general accessibility. I wanted to see how this process had affected, if at all, the picture that was being conveyed through their work.

I found out, however, that although studies on foreign language teaching (FLT) textbooks are an everyday occurrence especially at the department of Applied Sciences, little or no attention has been paid to modality. Fairly early on, then, I stumbled across the work of Römer (see e.g. Römer 2004 and Klages & Römer 2002) and Mindt (see e.g. 1996) who have done extensive research on EFL textbooks in Germany specifically from the standpoint of modality. Their example provided the final inspirational push towards the present study.

This study aims, on the one hand, to look at some of the recent developments and breakthroughs in the field, and, on the other, to compare these findings to the reality that is being offered by contemporary Finnish EFL textbooks at upper secondary school level. I have further delimited my field of research to only one aspect of modality, i.e. the modal system of English which has as its main component the modal auxiliary verbs. Of these, I will only consider the so-called core or central modal auxiliary verbs (or simply core modals), which I will formally define in Chapter 6.
In the present study, I ask the following questions:

1) How well does the English modal auxiliary verb usage taught at Finnish upper secondary school correspond to actual usage?

2) How accurately are the different semantic uses of the core modal auxiliaries portrayed in EFL textbooks?

3) How can we achieve a greater degree of authenticity as called for by the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools in the way modal auxiliaries are portrayed?

My initial hypothesis is that Finnish EFL textbooks, although modern by many standards, offer a simplified picture of the English modal auxiliaries in an attempt to tone down the complexity of the English language at a level where it is no longer necessary. Consequently, I expect there to be discrepancies in the way in which English modality and the English core modal auxiliaries are portrayed in EFL textbooks when compared to how they are actually used according to recent research.

The methods which I will make use of are, broadly speaking, those associated with a branch of linguistics known as corpus linguistics. For the present study, I have taken a representative sampling of Finnish EFL textbooks and essentially made a mini-corpus of the texts found in them. In the empirical part of the study, I will do searches on all the core modal auxiliaries, which will, in the first phase, yield a numerical frequency count for each verb. The sentences identified in this process will then be analysed semantically in order to see how they are used, i.e. what meanings are more prominent or less prominent than others. Finally, these results will be critically evaluated and compared to results from recent research.

Throughout this study, it has been my policy to use examples from my own mini-corpus for illustrative purposes wherever possible. These can be identified by an
abbreviation that refers to the book from which the example derives. In the interest of clarity, however, I have sometimes taken advantage of examples produced by other scholars and in some very rare cases I have made up short sentences on my own. These will be clearly indicated.

This study is in 11 chapters. In Section 1.2, I will briefly review some of the previous research on English modality that bears particular relevance to mine. Chapters 2-4 provide the theoretical framework on which the present study is based: Chapter 2 is concerned with methodology, Chapter 3 discusses modality within the context of the Finnish education system and Chapter 4 introduces a key concept in the analysis of modality, i.e. semantic indeterminacy. In Chapters 5-7, I will then turn to the discussion of modality proper: Chapter 5 defines modality in a broad sense, Chapter 6 situates the so-called core modal auxiliaries within the concept of modality in relation to other verbs and auxiliaries as well as other modal expressions. Chapter 7 provides a detailed analysis of the meanings of all core modals as well as the frequencies attributed to the modals in general and their different meanings in particular. Chapters 8-11, then, constitute the empirical part. In Chapter 8, I will discuss the material used in this study and the manner in which it was carried out. In Chapter 9, I will present the numerical results as they emerged from the data. Chapter 10 is essentially a closer analysis of the results, forming the qualitative counterpart to the quantitative results discussed in Chapter 9. Finally, Chapter 11 will be devoted to conclusions and will be followed by a list of primary and secondary sources.

1.1 Previous research

English modality is under constant scholarly scrutiny. Research is being done and new theories and results are being produced in frequent intervals. The advent and further development of corpus linguistics has played a key role in enhancing our understanding
of the phenomenon (McEnery & Wilson 2001: 20-25). Among other things, it has enabled the storage of larger databases and quick and reliable analyses (Biber, Conrad & Reppen 1998: 4). In this section, I will briefly review some of the most important studies on modality in general and the English core modal auxiliaries in particular.

Much has been written on modality as a concept. The present study draws mainly from the works of Palmer (2003, 2001 and 1990) and, to a lesser extent, Saeed (2009). The former has written extensively not only on the modality of English but of other languages as well. Palmer (2001) is a thorough account of how modality works in many languages of the world: it compares typologically the differences and similarities between languages, trying to find a common ground. Saeed (2009), on the other hand, is a straightforward account of the linguistic field of semantics with a useful and lucid chapter on sentence semantics and its subcategory modality.

Likewise, there are numerous books written on the English verb that often put particular emphasis on the auxiliaries. For this study, I have consulted mainly those of Leech (2004), Palmer (1990 & 1988), Biber et al. (1999) and Mindt (1995). Leech (2004) is a well-written account with as little confusing terminology as possible. It is also useful in that it pays particular attention to semantics and the different meanings of the core modals. Palmer (1990) is a similar account but can be a daunting book for someone who is just starting to get acquainted with the field. Mindt (1995) is interesting in that it focuses only on the modal auxiliaries and its approach is entirely corpus-based.

As for Biber et al. (1999), it is not an underestimation to say that it has served as a general reference book throughout the whole study. Its scope is unmatched and its relevance to almost any study within the field of English linguistics cannot be disputed. It is corpus-based with 6000 authentic examples from the 40 million-word Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus (LSWE) and takes into account both spoken and
written registers as well as the differences between American and British English. To a large extent, the way the modals are analysed in this study draws from the chapter on the modal auxiliaries in Biber et al. (1999).

Finally, we turn to recent studies on the core modals. Especially pertinent to the present study have been the works of Leech et al. (2009), Römer (2004) and Coates (1983). Of these, Leech et al. (2009) discuss the modals from the viewpoint of change. Their focus is on grammatical change in the written standard American and British English in the late 20th century, more specifically the period of thirty years between the early 1960s and the early 1990s. Their book, impressive in scope, is mainly based on four well-known corpora: the Brown corpus (American English, 1961), the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (British English, 1961), the Freiburg-Brown corpus (American English, 1992) and the Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (British English, 1991), collectively known as the ‘Brown family’. Their study demonstrates that the core modals, although still extensively used, have dropped in frequency especially in relation to the so-called semi-modals, which will be discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3). Moreover, with respect to some low-to-middle-frequency modals such as may and must, they have been able to show an appreciable tendency towards monosemy (Leech et al. 2009: 83-89), i.e. that with some (if not all) modals, one meaning is becoming markedly more frequent than the other(s).

Römer (2004), on the other hand, focuses on the spoken part of the British National Corpus (BNC), which is a 10-million-word corpus of spoken British English. According to Römer (2004: 186), the reason for choosing spoken material was the fact that “modal auxiliaries occur more frequently in spoken than in written English”. In her study, she analysed sentences from the spoken part of the BNC and compared them with an analysis on how the core modals were used in a German EFL textbook series. In a
sense, her object of inquiry closely mirrors that of the present study and has thus provided considerable inspiration. In her analysis, she was able to find notable discrepancies in the way the core modals are portrayed in German EFL textbooks.

Finally, Coates (1983) is an impressive study focusing specifically on the semantics of the modal auxiliaries. It relies on the one-million-word Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (British English, 1961) with the addition of spoken material from the corpus of the Survey of English Usage. Her study, although somewhat dated, has been crucial in demonstrating how the core modals are best understood in terms of semantic indeterminacy and fuzziness, which will be the topic of Chapter 4.

2 Corpus linguistics
The present study, although admittedly having little to do with the kind of hard-core corpus linguistics of which examples were seen in the Section 1.1, can, however, be regarded as corpus-based in its approach. In order to situate this study within the general field of linguistics, then, it is necessary for me to briefly discuss corpus linguistics as well as the so-called corpus-based approaches to doing research. This overview will be brief and to the point: for a more detailed discussion, Kennedy (1998), Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998) and McEnery and Wilson (2001) have written lucidly on the subject.

Simply put, corpus linguistics is an embodiment of the idea that the way language is actually used tells us more than its underlying structure. The debate is an old one that dates back to the 17th century. It was during that period that the rationalist views to doing research began to be questioned by people such as John Locke, David Hume and Francis Bacon. These people were called empiricists, and they believed that the only way of gaining real knowledge is through sense experience. Whereas rationalists
believed in the superiority of reason, empiricists held the view that we do not know anything until experience informs us (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 4, 480).

Within linguistics, this rationalism/empiricism dichotomy manifests itself in the attitude that the scholar adopts towards the proper way of eliciting linguistic knowledge. In the words of Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998: 1), he/she can either study *structure*, e.g. the structural units or word classes of a language, or he/she can emphasise *actual language use* from which he/she then makes inductive conclusions. The former approach, *structuralism*, was until recently the dominant way in which linguists conducted research, largely due to the influence of Noam Chomsky (see e.g. Chomsky 1957). The latter approach, on the other hand, is often referred to by the term *descriptivism* or *descriptive linguistics*, the aim of which is to, as objectively as possible, analyse and describe how language is actually used by a particular language community. McEnery and Wilson (2001) clarify the distinction further by stating that the rationalist approach to linguistics “is based upon introspection rather than external data analysis” (198), whereas the empiricist/descriptivist approach “is based on the analysis of external data (such as texts or corpora)” (ibid).

Descriptivism is, on the other hand, often contrasted with *prescriptivism*, which is an approach sometimes equated with structuralism. Briefly, linguistic prescription refers to the codification and enforcement of rules that govern how a language *ought to* be used in contrast to the way it is actually used. Prescriptivism is the notion that to every aspect of language, be it pronunciation, grammar or spelling, there is a normative rule, a way of doing things correctly and incorrectly. It is, then, in the best interest of the speaker/writer to follow the rules, since a failure to do so results in ‘bad’, ‘broken’ or ‘simple’ language that should be shunned upon.
In the war that has been raging for several centuries, then, corpus linguists situate themselves on the empiricist/descriptivist side of the trench. They rely on (usually) huge bodies of texts that represent actual language use known as *corpora*, from which they draw their conclusions and construct their theories. They consider rationalist/structural approaches unable to determine, for example, the typical patterns or the most frequently used vocabulary in a given language for the simple reason that “in many cases, humans tend to notice unusual occurrences more than typical occurrences, and therefore conclusions based on intuition can be unreliable” (Biber, Conrad & Reppen 1998: 3).

Corpus linguistics did not really emerge as a noteworthy methodology before the 1980s simply because, before the advent of computers of practical proportions, adequately sized corpora were unwieldy. This is no longer the case. Computers can nowadays do searches in a several million word corpus in a matter of seconds. As a result, corpus linguistics has enjoyed a terrific boom in popularity during the past few decades, and there is no indication of its going out of fashion anytime soon. Indeed, it is largely thanks to the technological advances in computing that have made corpus linguistics such a widely accepted methodology in recent years. (McEnery & Wilson 2001: 17.)

This, essentially, is the methodological framework of the present study. The material from which my data derive is a compilation of texts from which I make inductive conclusions as to the way modality is portrayed in Finnish upper secondary school textbooks. In a sense, this compilation can be called a corpus. Corpus is Latin for ‘body’, and if we define the term broadly, any body of texts or indeed even an individual text can be said to form a corpus (McEnery & Wilson 2001: 29). I am doubtful, however, whether corpus linguists would applaud my choice of terms.
McEnery and Wilson (2001) emphasise the fact that for a body of texts to be considered a real corpus, it has to conform to the following principles:

(a) Sampling and representativeness: A corpus should be “maximally representative of the variety under examination” so that it “provides us with as accurate a picture as possible of the tendencies of that variety, including their proportions” (30).

(b) Finite size: “The term corpus also tends to imply a body of text of a finite size, for example 1,000,000 words” (30).

(c) Machine-readable form: Although this is not always the case, a corpus is usually in machine-readable form (31). Indeed, it is largely thanks to the technological advances in computing that corpus linguistics has become such a widely accepted methodology in recent years (17).

(d) Standard reference: There is often a “tacit understanding” that corpora should be considered the standard reference for a given language variety. This is usually achieved through its wide availability (32).

In this strict sense, then, I do not feel that I can with good conscience call the body of text under examination a corpus. Although it is in machine-readable form and most definitely finite, I do not think it is “carefully sampled to be maximally representative” (McEnery & Wilson 2001: 103). This is not to say that care has not been taken to ensure that the texts that are the object of study are as representative as possible: indeed, it may be argued that in the context of EFL textbooks they are perfectly so. Returning to the list, however, there can be doubt as to the status of standard reference, which this particular body of texts most certainly does not attain. Consequently, it is perhaps more accurate to apply the term collection of texts rather than corpus to my material, which is

I maintain, however, that my approach to doing research can be termed corpus-based. According to Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998: 4), the characteristics of corpus-based research are

(e) that it is empirical, analysing the actual patterns of use in natural texts,

(f) that it utilises a collection of natural texts,

(g) that it makes extensive use of computers for analysis and

(h) that it depends on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques.

As Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998: 4) note, the main advantage of a corpus-based approach is “a scope and reliability of analysis not otherwise possible”. An essential step in corpus linguistics is to go beyond a simple quantitative analysis, such as raw frequencies of particular verb forms, and provide a more detailed qualitative analysis that functions as the perfect counterpart to numerical data. The present study has, then, all of the characteristics of a corpus-based study, as will become clear later on. The material (see Chapter 8) consists of textbooks that are actually used in Finnish upper secondary schools nationwide. In my analysis, I shall make use of both quantitative data (see Chapter 9), the results of a largely computer-driven data collection process (see Section 8.2), which I will then examine quantitatively (see Chapters 10).

3 Educational framework
The purpose of this chapter is to set the educational framework on which the present study is based. Its aims are twofold. Firstly, I will situate modality and the English modals within the Finnish school system by examining the various documents and guidelines that govern it. This will begin with an overview of the Common European
Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), which serves as the basis for all FLT curricula in the European Union member states.

3.1 CEFR and the Communicative Approach

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001, henceforth CEFR) is a guideline put together by the Council of Europe with the aim of providing a common reference book for language learning, teaching and assessment to all member states of the European Union. The general idea behind the CEFR (2001) is a belief that a common core would facilitate the comparison of language courses, syllabuses and proficiency levels (Huhta 2005: 109). It was never meant as a practical guide, but it serves instead as a starting point for national curricula and teaching and assessment practices.

The approach that the CEFR (2001) adopts towards FLT is called the Communicative Approach (Richards & Rodgers 2001). According to Richards (2001: 3), it has been the most prominent approach in language teaching ever since the 1970s. Generally speaking, it stresses the idea that language is a tool for expressing a specific (functional) meaning. It focuses on “communication as the organizing principle for teaching” (Richards 2001: 36) rather than on “mastery of the grammatical system of the language” (ibid). Mitchell and Myles (2004) refer to it as the functional or pragmatic approach, in which, rather than starting off from the formal linguistic system (i.e. structure, cf. Chapter 2) as was previously the case in FLT, teachers should be “concerned with the ways in which second language learners set about making meaning, and achieving their personal communicative goals” (131).

According to Richards (2001), the Communicative Approach to language teaching was a response to changes in the field of linguistics as it “moved away from a focus on grammar as the core component of language abilities to a consideration of how
language is used by speakers in different contexts of communication” (36). Inherent in this viewpoint on language, then, is the idea that the way language is actually used is more important than what people think it should be used, an idea, as we have seen, that forms the basis of the descriptivism/prescriptivism dichotomy in linguistics (see Chapter 2).

The Communicative Approach to FLT manifests itself in the CEFR (2001) in a number of ways. In its very core lies the notion of different competences that the learners of a foreign language must draw upon “in order to carry out the tasks and activities required to deal with the communicative situations in which they are involved” (CEFR 2001: 101). Learner competences are developed, then, through participation in such communicative events, and it is precisely this that effective language teaching should aim to do.

According to the CEFR (2001: 101), there are two kinds of competences that all language learners must develop in order to successfully acquire a foreign language: general competences and communicative competences. The present study only deals with the communicative competences and thus assumes that the general competences (i.e. knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge, ability to learn etc.), while fully recognising that all human competences have a contribution to make to the learning process, do not have a significant role to play as far as modality is concerned.

The so-called communicative language competences are divided into three categories: linguistic competences, sociolinguistic competences and pragmatic competences. Of these, it is the development of linguistic competences that the proper use of modal verbs is generally thought to entail. Indeed, there is no denying the fact that in order to express modality in English, one has to know the actual verbs involved (lexical competence), understand how they behave as opposed to ‘normal’ lexical verbs
(grammatical competence), know what they mean (semantic competence) and how they are pronounced in different (phonological) contexts (phonological competence) (CEFR 2001: 108-117). It is these four facets of linguistic competence that traditional education has mainly provided access to.

However, it is a particularly problematic feature of the English modal verbs that their use often involves elements of other competences as well. As Leech points out (2004: 72):

We can talk about [the modal auxiliaries] in terms of such logical [semantic] notions as ‘permission’ and ‘necessity’ but, this done, we still have to consider ways in which these notions become remoulded by the social and psychological influences of everyday communication between human beings: factors such as motivation, condescension, politeness, tact and irony.

Within the framework of communicative competences, then, it is important that the learner discern not only the linguistic competences involved but also the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic dimensions.

Sociolinguistic competence (CEFR 2001: 118-122) is linked to modality mainly through the concept of politeness. As English no longer has such formal indicators of politeness or respect as many other European languages (e.g. French and other Romance languages), a speaker of English is often compelled to resort to modal verbs in order to cushion or soften his/her utterance. In this sense, then, modality plays a significant part in ‘face-saving acts’ as introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987) in their seminal study.

Pragmatic competence (CEFR 2001: 122-128) is also a factor in English modality. The most trivial is the question *Can you open the window*, which, if one were to give the sentence a purely semantic analysis, could be seen as an inquiry as to the ability of
the recipient to open the window. A pragmatic analysis, however, would reveal that the question is in fact a request for the recipient to open it.

The present study, while acknowledging that the effective use of modal verbs must incorporate elements of all the competences described above, is for practical purposes mainly concerned with aspects of linguistic competence, with a particular focus on semantics. That being said, no study on English modality and the modal verbs can be considered adequate without some mention of the intricate ways in which all three competences manifest themselves when they are used.

3.2 Syllabuses
The CEFR (2001) has, in turn, given rise to the national curricula currently in use all over Europe. In Finland, the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (2003, henceforth NCCUSS), put together by the Finnish National Board of Education and the Ministry of Education, serves as a general guideline for all upper secondary school education. This document, moreover, is the point of reference for all authors of EFL textbooks, although it is an interesting aside that these authors are not, at least in Finland, legally obligated to implement the rules and regulations of the NCCUSS (2003) in their textbooks, whereas the schools obviously are. In the present section, I shall first take up the issue of the National Core Curriculum and then proceed to discuss the way in which it is translated into the syllabuses of an EFL textbook.

Before moving on, a terminological digression is in order. The terms syllabus and curriculum are not interchangeable, but instead refer to subtly different aspects of the same phenomenon. In the words of Richards (2001: 2), “a syllabus is a specification of the content of the course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested”. Curriculum, on the other hand, is a much broader concept. For Rodgers (1989: 26), “[c]urriculum is all those activities in which children engage under the auspices of the
school”, which includes “not only what pupils learn, but how they learn it, how teachers help them learn, using what supporting materials, styles and methods of assessment, and in what kind of facilities”. The NCCUSS (2003) is, then, essentially the sum of all the syllabuses of different subjects.

3.2.1 The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools

The national curriculum for both comprehensive and upper secondary schools is prepared and renewed by a group of experts in intervals of 5-10 years. The current policy is that the curriculum merely guides the work taking place at schools nationwide. Although a legally binding document, it is not meant to provide detailed information on subject matters or teaching methods. Instead, each school is free and even obligated to formulate their own curriculum and make it public. In a sense, the national curriculum only sets boundaries; the actual practices are then decided at local level.

Over the years, the national curriculum has seen many different forms and embodied many different views on education and language teaching as a whole. As Richards (2001: 2-3) points out, “much of the impetus for changes in approaches to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods”, and the approach currently in vogue is the Communicative Approach. As we have already seen (see Section 3.1), it pervades much of the contents of the CEFR (2001) and, in turn, the NCCUSS (2003) as well.

With regard to FLT, then, the NCCUSS (2003) aims to set up a framework according to which all FLT should provide students with “knowledge and know-how pertaining to the language in question and to the way it is used” (100). FLT is, moreover, regarded as an opportunity “to develop one’s knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the culture of the linguistic community” (ibid). Thus, it is the view adopted by the NCCUSS (2003) that proper FLT incorporates not only skills and
knowledge about the language, but also cultural elements pertaining to it. Effective foreign language use is seen as the result of the acquisition of different competences that, in turn, are based on the competence paradigm of CEFR (2001) described in Section 3.1.

For the purposes of the present study, however, it is important to understand that the NCCUSS (2003) does not offer structural or grammatical syllabuses in the way Richards (2001) intends it. A structural syllabus would be based on “a careful selection and gradation of grammatical items” (Mindt 1996: 294) and would indicate, among other things, where and when the modal verbs should be discussed. In actual fact, the NCCUSS (2003) does not discuss the English language separately at all, but rather gives general guidelines to the teaching of all foreign languages. English receives special treatment only insofar as the so-called Common Reference Levels (CEFR 2001: 21-42) are concerned: the generally higher degree of proficiency of Finnish speakers in the English language as opposed to other foreign languages is reflected in the levels of proficiency that learners are supposed to attain at the end of upper secondary school (NCCUSS 2003: 100).

Likewise, the curriculum makes no mention of modality or modal verbs. Although it dictates the subject matter and the general focus points of each course (NCCUSS 2003: 101-106), it does not include information on when different grammar points should be discussed or even what these grammar points should be. It is left to the discretion of textbook authors to decide on these particularities, which is the reason why various upper secondary school textbook series have included the modal verbs within the contents of different courses (see e.g. Davies et al. 2002 and Benmergui et al. 2003).
3.2.2 Textbook syllabuses

As Heinonen points out (2005: 36), textbooks are an important part of teaching. Regardless of what official documents say, textbooks are in many cases the teacher’s principal guide when he/she is making lesson plans. In contrast to the syllabuses proposed by the NCCUSS (2003), the textbook syllabuses are much more detailed and structured. On the whole, the main objective in English language teaching textbooks appears to be the accumulation of communicative competence in everyday situations, as can well be expected. The penchant for the communicative framework is also evident in the syllabuses of both textbook series under scrutiny in the present study (i.e. Culture Café\(^1\) and In Touch\(^2\)). The subject matters for each course naturally follow those stated in the NCCUSS (2003), but in addition to these, the textbook syllabuses contain explicit mentions of specific grammar points and structures that will be discussed during the course.

It may well be argued, then, that in contrast to the NCCUSS (2003), the textbook syllabuses are structural/grammatical in nature. Interestingly, despite the lack of general guidelines from any official direction, these syllabuses are, at least for the two textbook series in question, more or less identical. This raises intriguing questions. As Mindt (1996) points out in his study on German textbooks, the textbook syllabuses, although apparently the results of a general consensus, are never openly discussed. He notes that

\[\text{even though there are no commonly accepted criteria for the selection and gradation of grammatical items in a syllabus, it is either tradition or a tacit agreement by the authors of textbooks or the authors’ anticipations about the grading expected by foreign-language teachers that makes these syllabuses very often strikingly similar to each other.}\]

(294)

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\(^1\) Available online at <http://www.otava.fi/oppimateriaalit/oppimateriaali_sarjat/culturecafe/fi_FI/cc_ops/_files/12223183070056578/default/Culture%20Caf%C3%A9%20ops%202005.pdf> 5 January 2010

\(^2\) Available online at <http://static.wsoyoppimateriaalit.fi/pdf/oppi/ops_in_touch.pdf> 5 January 2010
Further research is needed on how the authors of textbooks incorporate the CEFR and the National Core Curriculum into their syllabuses, as they themselves never openly state it. As it is, we can only presume that they are familiar with the ideas presented in this chapter and, most importantly, that they subscribe to the notion of ‘describing language as it is’ inherent in both the Communicative Approach and descriptive linguistics from which the former derives.

4 Issues of categorisation

The present study is concerned with the semantic analysis of a group of verbs known as the modal verbs. This analysis is accomplished by establishing a set of semantic categories to which the occurrences in the data are said to belong, a process familiarly known as categorisation. These categories may, at first glance, seem definite and rock-solid, but it is important to understand that they are not. It is therefore instructive at this point to provide a theoretical basis for the notion of categories and the kind of indeterminacy that is invariably attached to them.

This chapter is in three sections. In Section 4.1, I will discuss categories and semantic indeterminacy in linguistics. In Section 4.2, I will go on to discuss semantic indeterminacy with regard to modality and the English modals. The chapter will then end in a discussion on the different kinds of indeterminacy that are most pertinent in the analysis of the English modals.

4.1 Categories and indeterminacy

As Löbner puts it (2002: 173, italics by the author), “[c]ategorizing something that we perceive (or imagine, or remember) means to perceive it as something of a kind”. For instance, “[t]he category DOG consists of all those things we would categorize as dogs” (ibid). An entity can also belong to more than one category: a man called John belongs
to the category of HUMAN as well as to the category of MAN. The entities that belong to a category are called members of that category.

The so-called traditional view of categories is shaped by the model of “necessary and sufficient conditions” (Saeed 2009: 35-37) that goes back to Aristotle and his two famous works *Metaphysics* and *Categories* (Aarts 2007: 11). The traditional view holds that, in order to gain membership in a particular category, a set of necessary conditions must be fulfilled. In the words of Löbner (2002, italics by the author):

For example, if we assume that the category WOMAN is defined by the three conditions of being human, female and adult, each one is necessary. If someone is not human or not female or not adult, he or she is not a woman. On the other hand, the condition of being human and female and adult, is sufficient for membership in the category WOMAN. It does not matter what other conditions someone or something may fulfil. Being a woman or not depends on these three conditions. (174)

In the traditional or, as it is sometimes called, the Aristotelian model, categories are rigid and inflexible. Category membership is a yes-or-no question: an entity can either belong entirely to a given category or not belong to it in any way: there is no middle ground. This is also known as the all-or-none principle, “which holds that something must be either inside or outside a category ... it cannot be something in between” (Aarts 2007: 11). As a direct consequence of this, “categories have clear boundaries, and within their boundaries all members enjoy the same status as full members” (Löbner 2002: 175).

This traditional view has been very dominant in many sciences. Within linguistics, however, the recent paradigm shift from prescriptivism to descriptivism (see Chapter 2) has led to it being contested from many quarters. Among the first to do so were two
influential linguists Brent Berlin and Paul Kay (1969). While studying colours and the basic colour terms a culture has, they found that a basic colour category is in fact defined by a focal colour, i.e. a particular hue of this colour. Consequently, they claimed that “a colour belongs to a category if it is sufficiently similar to the focal hue, i.e. the best example” (Löbner 2002: 175). They went on to claim that “category boundaries ... are not reliable, even for repeated trials with the same informant” (Berlin & Kay 1969: 15).

Elsewhere, Bolinger (1975) noted that nouns, instead of being discrete and distinct from one another, quite often overlap, so that some nouns, for example, can be more ‘nouny’ than others (Bolinger 1975: 244-245) or that there are pairs of nouns that can be synonymous but to a higher or lesser degree (Bolinger 1975: 211). In short, linguists were discovering the fact that category membership is not in fact a yes-or-no question: there were degrees of membership.

These were the beginnings of the so-called prototype theory, first introduced by Eleanor Rosch (see e.g. Rosch 1973), in which some members of a particular category were called prototypes if they were somehow ‘better’ members of it. For example, the category BIRD could have central or typical members and peripheral members, i.e. members that were birds but that were not as likely to be perceived as birds. Saeed (2009: 37) provides the example of sparrow being a more typical member of the category BIRD than penguin. Further research into prototype theory, most notably by William Labov (1973) and his famous study on “the conditions for the denotative use of cup, bowl, glass and other container terms” (221), suggested that come categories have ‘fuzzy’ boundaries: when presented with different kinds of containers, his informants were liable to label something as a cup depending on whether there was coffee in it or not.
The emergence of prototype theory and fuzziness are again closely linked to the paradigm shift in linguistics that moved the focus away from structure and rigidly defined categories towards real-life language, in which examples would always turn up that would not quite fit into any of the established categories (see Chapter 2). In short, what these ruminations brought forth was the indeterminacy inherent in all categorisation.

4.2 Semantic indeterminacy and the modals
As Aarts points out (2007: 10), no description of any language can do without categories. They are needed to make sense of the world around us and of the language that we use to describe it. What linguists came face-to-face with, then, were problems of determination and delimitation: what exactly entitles an entity to have membership in a particular category? If, as the prototype theory has it, there are degrees of membership, how does one know where one category starts and another one ends? Or, as the famous Eubulides’ Paradox of the Sorites3 puts it, how many grains does one need to make a heap? Where does one draw the line? The term semantic indeterminacy is used in linguistics to describe the notion of boundary vagueness and the overall difficulty one is often faced with when trying to categorise linguistic items. In the words of Aarts (2007):

Aristotle held that the categories which we use to class the phenomena in the world around us are hard and inviolable, but others have long recognized that they may not be as clearly delimited as Aristotle made them out to be, and that we have to recognize boundary fluidity between taxonomic constructs. (1)

With the rise of descriptive linguistics (see Chapter 2), the feeling that indeterminacy is found everywhere in language has grown stronger and stronger, to the point where,

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3 “Does one grain make a heap? Obviously not. Do two grains make a heap? No. Do one hundred grains make a heap? Yes. Where should one draw the line?” (cited in Aarts 2007: 1)
arguably, indeterminacy is seen in places where it may seem awkward and counter-intuitive (for further discussion on the topic, see e.g. Aarts 2007, Bouchard 2004, Wierzbicka 2004). Aarts (2007: 2) mentions a rift between what he calls “radical categorizationalists” and “eclectic linguists for whom anything goes” and situates himself, rather aptly, somewhere in between.

In a sense, the way linguists have understood and analysed the English modals reflects this dichotomy. Much of the traditional research (see e.g. Leech 1971, Palmer 1965) on the modals has started off from the premise that each modal has a number of different meanings that are distinct and to which all cases must fit into. Others (see e.g. Ehrman 1966, Joos 1964) have decided to do away with categories altogether and posit a single ‘basic meaning’ for all modals to which all others are somehow related. As Leech and Coates (1980: 79) argue, studies on the English modals have in the past had to answer the following three questions:

(a) Are linguistic items monosemous or polysemous?

(b) Are meanings strictly categorical or non-categorical?

(c) Can factors of speaker- and hearer-involvement be integrated into the logical representation of meaning, or should they be given an extrinsic pragmatic explanation?

We have already noted in our discussion on the CEFR (2001) that the present study will largely ignore question (c), i.e. the pragmatic dimension of the modals (see Section 3.1). I am compelled, however, to take up a position on the first two questions.

A polysemous approach to modality assumes not only that the modals, as the term suggests, have many meanings, but also that these meanings are discrete and neat categories. Another way of labelling it is to say that it is the categorical view. A monosemous approach, on the other hand, opts for the ‘basic meaning’ theory. This can
be termed the **non-categorical view**. As Leech and Coates suggest (1980: 79), “it is a measure of the intricacy of our subject that the answers to these questions, with respect to the English modals, seem to be ‘sometimes yes, and sometimes no’”.

In this chapter, we have already seen that the polysemous/categorical view is inadequate. It would be equally wrong, however, to say that there is a single ‘basic meaning’ that serves as a common denominator for all others. In the words of Palmer (1990: 15):

[T]here is no *a priori* reason why there should be a single meaning; it is more likely that there is a conglomerate of vaguely related meanings, each linked in some way to at least one of the others in the set, but not necessarily sharing any common feature with, or directly linked to, all of them.

This, essentially, is the approach adopted by the present study. On the one hand, we cannot abandon categories altogether, because that would suggest that “the English modal system tends to more anarchy than any other area of the English language” (Perkins 1983: 269). On the other, while attempting to put real language data inside neat categories, one is inevitably faced with unclear, indeterminate cases that cannot be assigned to any particular category, or conversely, that seem to belong to more than one category. In the words of Palmer (1979: 172-173):

It has been increasingly apparent in recent years that there are many areas of syntax and semantics where no clear, discrete categorization is possible. This does not invalidate any attempt to categorize; it simply means that the model must recognize that there are often continua with extremes that are clearly distinct, but with considerable indeterminacy in the middle.

For the purposes of the present study, then, it is necessary to define the nature of this indeterminacy, which I will briefly do in the following section.
4.3 Kinds of indeterminacy
With regard to the English modals, Coates (1983: 14-17) distinguishes three types of
semantic indeterminacy: gradience, ambiguity and merger. Of these three notions, I
will only discuss the first two, as merger is best understood as a subcategory of
ambiguity (Leech & Coates 1980: 81) and is not particularly relevant to the present
study.

Leech and Coates (1980) illustrate the semantic gradience of modality in their
analysis of can. They argue convincingly that two meanings of can, i.e. ‘possibility’ and
‘permission’, are, instead of the hard-and-fast categories that they are sometimes
purported to be, in fact two ends of a spectrum and best understood in terms of “scales
of similarity and difference” (Leech 2004: 73). To illustrate the point, Leech and Coates
(1980: 82-83) provide the following paradigm for the interpretation of the sentence You
can’t do that:

(4.1) You can’t do that - I forbid it.
(4.2) You can’t do that - it’s against the rules.
(4.3) You can’t do that - it would be breaking the law.
(4.4) You can’t do that - everyone would think you were mad. (i.e. a breach of
conventions of acceptable behaviour)
(4.5) You can’t do that - it wouldn’t be reasonable.
(4.6) You can’t do that - it wouldn’t be right.
(4.7) You can’t do that - it’s contrary to the law of gravity.
These examples show how, at the ‘permission’ end of the spectrum (4.1), You can’t do
that is analysed in terms of human constraint, and a paraphrase with allow or permit
would be acceptable. At the ‘possibility’ end (4.7), the same sentence denotes a kind of
neutral possibility, and a paraphrase with possible is an obvious choice. By contrast,
sentences (4.2) – (4.6) display varying degrees of ‘permission’ and ‘possibility’. It is
impossible to say where ‘permission’ ends and ‘possibility’ starts, and consequently, there is no way of drawing the line between them in a scientific, non-arbitrary fashion. We can say, then, that these two meanings of *can* “are related through a gradient of RESTRICTION” (Leech & Coates 1980: 82), in which the other end of the gradient is restricted only by natural laws and the other by human constraint.

This is what is meant by semantic gradience. Leech and Coates (1980: 83-84) go on to show that there is also a gradient between the ‘possibility’ and ‘ability’ senses of *can*, which, essentially, makes *can* a monosemous modal in that all of its meanings are somehow related to ‘possibility’ and “there are no clear divisions between permission, possibility, and ability” (Leech & Coates 1980: 84). This would suggest that *can* is an especially difficult modal to analyse, which is indeed the case. For illustrative purposes, let us consider the full range of meanings that *can* can have:

(4.8) In other parts of Brazil, especially in the north, we hear that you **can** get sick from the water. (CC7)

(4.9) With enough preparation, I **can** take anything! (CC2)

(4.10) “And you **can** quote me on that.” (IT4)

Sentence (4.8), then, is clearly an indication of ‘possibility’. Although theoretically an ‘ability’ reading is possible, it is unlikely that anyone would have acquired the ability to get sick from water. This, however, is a perfectly valid reading for sentence (4.9). Sentence (4.10) is an example of the encroachment of *can* into the territory traditionally occupied by *may*. It is a permission granted by the speaker: in such contexts, *can* and *may* are largely interchangeable (see Section 7.2). Sometimes, however, the analysis is less straightforward. Indeed, there are plenty of examples where the semantic gradience between the different meanings of *can* makes analysis either difficult and or downright impossible. Consider the following sentences:
(4.11) “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens **can** change the world.” (CC7)

(4.12) And people who believe blindly in their religious leaders **can** be manipulated into committing the most extreme acts. (IT4)

In sentences (4.11) and (4.12), it is unclear whether can expresses the internal ability of someone or some people to *change* or *manipulate*, or whether it is a simple indication of possibility (in which case a potential paraphrase for sentence (4.11) is ‘It may be possible for committed citizens to change the world; then again, it may not’).

Not all modals have gradients, however, and “few modals … are monosemous like can” (Leech & Coates 1980: 85). For example, *may* can be considered polysemous in that it has two meanings (‘possibility’ and ‘permission’) that are clearly distinct from one another. Without simplifying the matter too much, then, we can regard the two semantic categories of may as ‘non-fuzzy’. This is not to say, however, that a semantic analysis of may will not produce unclear cases. This brings us to the notion of **ambiguity**.

A useful starting point for the consideration of ambiguity is that of Coates (1983: 15) who notes that “an intermediate example is said to be ambiguous when it is not possible to decide which of the two meanings is intended”. Consider the following sentences that contain the modal *may*:

(4.13) Shots and pills **may** be required to prevent catching certain diseases.

(CC2)

(4.14) “**May** I interest you in parts of my body?” (IT4)

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4 It is a coincidence that the two meanings of *may* are the same as for *can*, between which, as we have already seen, there is a gradient. At this stage, it will suffice to say that the ‘possibility’ indicated by *may* is distinct from that of *can* and that we should, to be perfectly accurate, talk of ‘factual possibility’ for *may* and ‘theoretical possibility’ for *can*. This matter will be more thoroughly discussed in Section 7.2.1.
There is no difficulty in analysing these sentences semantically. In sentence (4.13), *may* indicates ‘possibility’ (‘It is possible that shots and pills are required...’) whereas in sentence (4.14), it indicates ‘permission’ (‘Will you give me permission to interest you...’). Consider, however, the following sentence:

(4.15) You *may* try to find out who these persons are. (CC2)

In sentence (3), then, it is difficult to say whether *may* indicates ‘possibility’ or ‘permission’. In other words, it impossible to determine, at least without a proper context, whether a proper paraphrase for the sentence would be ‘I give you permission to try to find out...’ or ‘It is possible that you will try to find out...’ This is what is meant by ambiguity.

Generally speaking, *may* is nevertheless one of the least ambiguous modals and seldom poses many problems. The same cannot be said for many others. Consequently, it has been my policy throughout the present study not to engage in any kind of guesswork while analysing the data. For this reason, I have set up a separate category labelled ‘ambiguous’ under which I have listed all cases which, either for reasons of semantic gradience or general ambiguity, are unclear in any way. In doing so, I will follow the example set by many other scholars (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999).

5 Defining modality

In this chapter, I will first define modality in broad terms. I will attempt to anchor modality as a category within a given language as well as the study of modality within the field of linguistics. At this stage, it is my aim to keep the discussion as general as possible, although the examples I use come from English and French.
5.1 What is modality?
As a notion, modality belongs to the linguistic field of semantics. It has, then, to do with meaning, but not in the traditional sense in which semantics is sometimes understood to mean word meaning and would consider notions such as synonymy, antonymy, polysemy and the like. Instead, modality is an aspect of meaning that belongs “to the level of the sentence” (Saeed 2009: 118), i.e. modality is something that affects the meaning of the sentence as a whole. Indeed, linguists often use the term sentence semantics (see e.g. Saeed 2009, Lyons 1977) to refer to a subcategory of semantics that considers just such aspects of meaning.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to examine sentence semantics in much detail. In order to clarify the concept of modality more fully, however, I will consider another better-known category of sentence semantics (or rather a manifestation of such a category), namely tense.

Tense is by no means a semantic category. It is, however, a grammatical category used to indicate the semantic category of time (Quirk et al. 1985: 175). Unless one is conversing with a group of physicists, time is an easy concept to grasp: actions can happen in the past, in the present, or in the future. Tense is often equated with time, but in fact it is the function of tense to anchor an action in time. Consider the following sentences:

(5.1) John writes a letter.

(5.2) John wrote a letter.

The difference between sentences (5.1) and (5.2) is that the first happens in the present and the second in the past: we make this distinction clear by using the grammatical category of tense to situate the event in time. We say that tense is a grammatical category because it is marked within the verb phrase in certain systematic ways (Saeed
It is not the same, then, to talk of past tense and past time. The former is a means of acquiring the latter.

It is precisely in these terms, then, that modality should be considered as well. It is a grammatical category on a par with others such as tense, aspect and number. Like tense and aspect, it is something that contributes to the meaning of a sentence. But whereas we have no difficulty in determining the relevant concept governing the choice between write/wrote, which is time, or girl/girls, which is number (Palmer 1990: 1-2), the same cannot be said for modality. All that we can say is that modality “does not refer directly to any characteristic of the event, but simply to the status of the proposition” (Palmer 2001: 1).

Elsewhere, Palmer (1986: 16) introduces the notion of subjectivity as a common denominator for modality. According to him, modality “is ... concerned with subjective characteristics of an utterance” and it is “defined as the grammaticalization of speakers’ (subjective) attitudes and opinions”. Although this seems like a reasonable starting point, it does not get us much closer to understanding what modality really is in the same way that time helps us to understand tense.

A more helpful approach might be to understand modality as a kind of “binary distinction between ‘non-modal’ and ‘modal’ ... and to associate this distinction with the notional contrast of ‘factual’ and ‘non-factual’, or ‘real’ and ‘unreal’” (Palmer 2001: 1). To take Palmer’s idea a bit further, we can think of modality as a switch that is either ‘on’ or ‘off’. Consider the following sentences:

(5.3) Mary is at home.

(5.4) Mary may be at home.

(5.5) Mary must be at home.

“Grammaticalization refers to that part of the study of language change that is concerned with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions.” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 1)
If we follow the switch analogy, we can say that in sentence (5.3) the switch is ‘off’ whereas in the other two it is ‘on’, i.e. that sentence (5.3) is ‘non-modal’ and the other two are ‘modal’. All that remains, then, is to define the circumstances that make the switch turn ‘on’. Paradoxically, the best way of accomplishing this is perhaps to explain why the switch in sentence (1) stays ‘off’. Consider the following ‘non-modal’ or ‘factual’ sentences (Saeed 2009: 135):

(5.6) Niamh has gone to the airport.

(5.7) Niamh hasn’t gone to the airport.

Both are simple declarative sentences, the latter semantically being the complete denial of the former. In both cases, “we assume a certain commitment on behalf of the speaker to its truth” (Saeed 2009: 135), i.e. we think that the speaker believes that this is indeed the case. The speaker might well be wrong or he/she might be lying, but that does not change the initial assumption: in both cases, we assume that the speaker is 100% certain of what he/she is saying. In plain terms, modality is a system by which the speaker introduces varying degrees of uncertainty into his/her message. This system takes on various forms. In English, it can, for instance, embed either sentence (5.6) or (5.7) under a higher clause and put it together with a modal adjective. Consider these sentences:

(5.8) It is not possible that Niamh has gone to the airport.

(5.9) It is probable that Niamh has gone to the airport.

In both sentences, the certainty is now less than 100%.

In reality, as we will see later on (see Chapter 7), modality as defined in this chapter is only one particular kind of modality and that there are, at the very least, two others. Nonetheless, it is a useful short-hand way of approaching a difficult concept.
5.2 What triggers modality?
Despite its problematic nature, modality is, as far as anybody can tell, absolutely ubiquitous. Lyons (1995: 327) makes the claim that modality is actually “more widespread than tense throughout the languages of the world”. Palmer, too, points out (1986: 7) that with all likelihood “there are very few languages that do not have some kind of grammatical system of modality”. This is not to say, however, that there are no differences between languages. They are, roughly speaking, twofold.

Firstly, different languages choose to ‘modalise’ different parts of the semantic system (Palmer 1986: 7). For instance, there is a (modal) grammatical category in many European languages for ‘report’ or ‘hearsay’, which, if we review our definition of modality (see Section 5.1), falls quite nicely within the idea of subjectivity. A French-speaking person, then, would use the verbal form known as the conditional in a sentence such as *Un homme aurait tué son ami hier soir*, a translation for which might be ‘A man is said to have killed his friend last night’. We can see from this example that English, in contrast to French, does not map this part of the semantic field grammatically, although it is perfectly possible to get the same meaning across in other ways.

Secondly and more pertinently to the present study, languages employ different grammatical devices to establish modality (Palmer 1986: 7). We have already seen that one way in which English does this is by embedding a sentence into a higher clause containing a modal adjective. However, this is not, strictly speaking, a grammatical device, since it merely involves taking two sentences and putting them together and thus belongs more to the realm of syntax. There are two ways in which languages deal grammatically with modality: they can either tie it into the morphology of the verb, making it an issue of verbal inflection, or they can make use of separate lexical items, usually verbs. Sometimes languages do both (Palmer 2001: 4-5). Consider the following
sentence in French (5.10) and its English translation (5.11). In both cases, the modal element of the sentence is in bold:

(5.10) Il faut que tu partes maintenant.

(5.11) You must leave now.

We can see here, then, that modality in French is, at least to a certain degree, part of the verbal inflection system of the language. In other words, the verb takes on a special form to indicate modality. We can see, moreover, that in English the same meaning is conveyed by means of a separate verbal item, which, for obvious reasons, is called a modal verb. It is this group of modal verbs, or rather a subcategory of this group called the modal auxiliary verbs, that is the focal point of the present study.

Apart from grammatical devices, the most common ways of expressing modality are “verbal, adverbial, adjectival and nominal expressions, together with particles, clitics and, in speech, prosodic features like intonation and stress” (Gotti & Dossena 2001: 10-11). Although interesting aspects of the overall system of modality, they will not be discussed in the present study.

5.3 Modality, mood and modal system

So far, we have identified the term modality as belonging to the linguistic field of semantics. We have also discussed the grammatical devices with which modality is realised in a sentence. For a thorough understanding of the concept, it is now necessary to introduce some potentially confusing terminology as well as draw some boundaries between them.

In the previous section, we saw that modality in French is, to a certain degree, part of the verbal morphology of the language. In the case of French, the verbal form in question is called the subjunctive. It is only for this kind of grammatical marking that the familiar term mood is reserved. In the words of Jespersen (1924: 313), we can speak
of mood “only if the attitude of the speaker [i.e. modality] is shown in the form of the
verb”. Mood is best exemplified in traditional grammars by the distinction between
indicative, subjunctive and imperative (Lyons 1995: 327). Modality, then, is the name
of the grammatical category; mood is one of its subcategories. Although scholars’
understanding of this distinction seems to vary somewhat (for a discussion on the topic,
see Palmer 1986), it is undoubtedly a useful one.

In the previous section, we saw also that English uses a separate modal verb in
place of verbal inflection for the same effect. If we stay true to the definition discussed
above, this cannot properly be called mood, since no verbal morphology is involved.
For this kind of marking of modality, the term modal system is employed (Palmer
2001: 4-7). The principal difference between mood and modal systems is that “within
modal systems different kinds of modality are distinguished within a single system of
commuting terms” (Palmer 2001: 6). For example, the English modal verbs are used to
make varying kinds of truth judgments about the factual status of a proposition as in the
following sentences (examples from Palmer 2001: 6):

(5.12) Kate may be at home now.

(5.13) Kate must be at home now.

(5.14) Kate will be at home now.

These kinds of varying degrees of certainty are only possible within modal systems, and
it is on these kinds of ‘shades of gray’ or differences in meaning that the present study,
along with the verbs themselves, focuses.

Not much remains to be said about mood and modal systems, except the surprising
claim (Palmer 2003: 3) that, apparently, languages tend to “have either mood or modal
systems, but not both”. In the case of French, this is not true: besides mood, French has
a host of modal verbs that are used similarly to English. It is worth noting, however, that
the subjunctive in French seems to be on the decline, and its usage span is clearly not what it used to be (Palmer 2003: 4-5). With regard to English, then, there are many traditional scholars who feel that English has remnants of what can be called subjunctive or quasi-subjunctive (see e.g. Leech 2004, Biber et al. 1999) in the highlighted verbal forms as in Long live the queen and If I were you. As Palmer (2003: 4) points out, however, these forms are not, although obviously verbal, distinct or reserved to this kind of usage solely, but they are instead frequently employed elsewhere. For this reason, it can be argued that English does not have mood in its repertoire, nor will the present study include any further discussion on it or the so-called ‘quasi-subjunctive’ uses of modal verbs.

6 Core modal auxiliaries
Having thus defined the general concept of modality and its subcategories, we now turn to the most frequently used grammatical device in English to indicate modality, i.e. the modal auxiliary verbs. This chapter is in three parts. I will begin by introducing criteria for distinguishing the modal auxiliary verbs from a) other lexical verbs and b) other auxiliary verbs. It is important to understand that these criteria are, at this stage, purely formal and serve only to differentiate them syntactically as a group: a more detailed (semantic) analysis of each individual modal will be deferred to Chapter 7. This section is followed by a separate section on some key terminological issues related to the modals. I will then end the chapter with a discussion on a group called semi-modals that, although not the focus of the present study, are sufficiently important as to warrant a few comments on their exclusion.

6.1 Formal defining criteria
No one can count the number of verbs in the English language, and I am confident that no one will invent a classification system for them that everyone would agree on. This,
however, is not true of a small group of verbs known as the auxiliary verbs. In the words of Palmer (1988: 14), it is a “striking and, perhaps, fortunate characteristic of English” that the auxiliary verbs are so clearly marked by what Huddleston (1976: 333) has called the ‘NICE’ properties. ‘NICE’ is an acronym which comes from the initial letters of four properties that all English auxiliaries share. The example sentences are from Palmer (1988: 14-21):

(a) N for Negation - auxiliaries take *n’t to form the negative (e.g. *He can’t come).
(b) I for Inversion - auxiliaries can come before the subject in certain types of sentence, such as questions (e.g. *Must he come?).
(c) C for ‘Code’ - auxiliaries may occur ‘stranded’ in cases where a main verb has been omitted to avoid repetition (e.g. *He will come and so will she)
(d) E for Emphasis - auxiliaries can be used for emphatic assertion with the accent upon the auxiliary (e.g. *He may come or *I cán do it)

By applying the ‘NICE’ properties, we end up with a list of auxiliaries: be, have, do, will, would, can, could, shall, should, may, might, must, ought to and, to a lesser extent, dare and need. There is one point to be made, namely that of may. May conforms to all the ‘NICE’ properties with the exception of (a). It would be grammatically incorrect, then, to say *He mayn’t come; *He may not come would, of course, be acceptable. As may in every other respects behaves like an auxiliary and moreover has the characteristics of modal auxiliaries that will be discussed next, there is no reason to exclude it (Palmer 1988: 18).

The ‘NICE’ properties set auxiliaries apart quite nicely, but the present study is only concerned with the so-called modal auxiliaries, that is to say auxiliaries used to trigger modality (see Chapter 6). Be, have and do are called, to use Palmer’s terms
(1988: 25-26), **primary auxiliaries**, and they have no part to play in this, unless they co-occur with modal auxiliaries (e.g. *He may have come*). Thus, further criteria for distinguishing the modal auxiliaries from other auxiliaries are needed, and these are provided by Biber et al. (1999: 483). In addition to the ‘NICE’ properties, modal auxiliaries

(e)  do not get the third person -s (i.e. *He can do it* instead of *He cans do it*)

(f)  precede in negations the negative particle *not* and do not require *do* support in questions (i.e. *He may not do it* instead of *He doesn’t may do it*)

(g)  precede the subject in yes/no questions (i.e. *Can he do it?*)

(h)  are succeeded by a verb without the *to* particle (i.e. *He would do it* instead of *He would to do it*)

(i)  cannot co-occur in Standard (British or American) English (*He may will come* etc.)

The list of auxiliaries is now down to nine verbs: *will, would, can, could, shall, should, may, might* and *must*. Besides primary auxiliaries, some omissions have been made that need to be explained. *Ought to*, although clearly modal in nature, is not on the list for two reasons. Firstly, it has the *to* particle and thus does not conform to rule (h) in Biber et al.’s (1999) list, and secondly, its overall frequency compared to the other modals is so low that it should be considered separately (Biber et al. 1999: 487). For these reasons, I have chosen to exclude *ought to* from the present study.

Another slightly problematic issue is that of *dare* and *need*. There is no doubt that in some cases they can be used as auxiliaries, nor is there any question of their modal nature. They conform (in some contexts) to the rules by Biber et al. (1999) as well as to most, though not all, of the ‘NICE’ properties (Palmer 1990: 4). I will, however, follow
Palmer (1988) and Biber et al. (1999) and regard them as full verbs rather than modal auxiliaries, as in all cases where they could be treated as auxiliaries, a ‘normal’ or ‘full verb’ interpretation would also be possible (e.g. *He does not dare to come* instead of *He dare not come*). Indeed, this is how they are usually treated in present-day English (Biber et al. 1999: 483-486). For this reason, *dare* and *need* are likewise excluded from the present study.

### 6.2 Some terminological considerations

As we have already seen, the terminology related to modality is often confusing and even downright contradictory. It is instructive at this point, then, to review some of the terms that we have already seen and introduce some others. Although this may feel somewhat repetitious, it is important to have a clear overall picture in one’s head before moving on to the analysis of each individual modal.

So far, we have distinguished auxiliary verbs from lexical verbs using the ‘NICE’ properties. We then proceeded to make a distinction between primary and secondary auxiliaries, and we noted also that another term for secondary auxiliaries is modal auxiliaries, as their (primary) function is to trigger modality in a sentence. One important point needs to be made. Although modal auxiliaries are, as we have seen, clearly distinguishable based on purely formal criteria, there is a great number of other verbs and fixed idiomatic phrases in English, such as *had better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to* and *be going to*, that are equally modal in nature but that, to a lesser extent, can be regarded as auxiliaries. From the standpoint of modality, then, we can say that English has a wide array of modal verbs, some of which are auxiliaries and others that are less so. A useful way of distinguishing between the two is to say that the former are core or central modals, as they are often called (by e.g. Facchinetti et al. 2003: vi). The latter have in various contexts been called semi-modals, quasi-modals or even
**periphrastic modals** (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999, Palmer 1990). Although they are not the focus of the present study, it is difficult to avoid discussing them in a study pertaining to English modality, and Section 6.3 will be devoted to them.

Finally, as regards the core modals identified in the present chapter, it is a long-lasting tradition in grammars of English (see e.g. Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003, Kallela et al. 1998) to call the modals ‘anomalous’ or ‘defective’ in that “they have no morphological contrast of person and number, and have no non-finite forms” (Leech et al. 2009: 80). Yet, many of them still arrange the core modals (with the exception of *must*) into pairs that are frequently called ‘Present Tense’ modals and ‘Past Tense’ modals in the following manner (Biber et al. 1999: 484-485):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Present Tense’ modals</th>
<th>‘Past Tense’ modals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>can</em></td>
<td><em>could</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>may</em></td>
<td><em>might</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>shall</em></td>
<td><em>should</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>will</em></td>
<td><em>would</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tense, as we have seen in Chapter 5, is a grammatical category used to situate an action in time. The argument behind these denominations, then, is that the so-called ‘Past Tense’ modals are the past time equivalents of the corresponding ‘Present Tense’ modals. Indeed, there is much to be said in favour of it. There are, for instance, plenty of examples in the data for the present study where the distinction is ostensibly time-related. Consider the following sentences with the modals *can* and *could*:

(6.1) With enough preparation I **can** take anything. (CC2)

(6.2) She was at her first race before she **could** crawl. (CC2)

In sentence (6.2), then, there can be doubt that *could* is the past tense of *can*: it refers to someone’s ability in the past. This kind of analysis makes sense from a historical point
of view as well (Leech et al. 2009). It would be just as easy, however, to come up with examples where could does not have past time reference, such as the following sentences:

(6.3) “You do know you could find yourself charged with being a dominant species while under the influence of impulse-driven consumerism, don’t you?” (IT7)

(6.4) So what I’m saying is, it could be worse, and to every cloud a silver lining, wouldn’t you agree, gentlemen? (CC7)

As Leech et al. (2009: 80) point out, “the present-past tense distinction, if it is considered to exist for modals, is highly irregular and problematic”. Moreover, there is no past tense form for must6. In actual fact, then, the so-called ‘Present Tense’ modals “might more properly be called ‘Non-past’, as they refer to future as well as to present time” (Leech 2004: 73), and on the other hand, the ‘Past Tense’ modals have “a number of other meaning distinctions ... with the main functions relating to speaker stance rather than the marking of time distinctions” (Biber et al. 1999: 485). It is for these reasons, then, that core modals are better regarded as unmarked for tense.

However, all ‘Past Tense’ modals have something in common and the distinction in itself is a useful one. Thus, although I have already used the terms primary and secondary with regard to auxiliaries, I will follow Leech’s example (2004: 73) and call “modals like can PRIMARY and modals like could SECONDARY rather than Present and Past”. This distinction will become pertinent in Chapter 7.

6.3 The so-called semi-modals

The interest in semi-modals has been steadily increasing in recent years. This is mainly because current research has revealed them to be a real force to be reckoned with and no

6 “[M]ust, historically the past tense of the obsolete verb form mote, is sometimes used in past-tense-like contexts, notably in (free) indirect style”. (Leech et al. 2009: 80)
longer the ‘second-rate’ modals restricted to spoken registers that they once were (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Collins 2009, Millar 2009, Biber 2004, Biber et al. 1999). Thus, although I have carefully delimited the object of my study to consider only those lexical items which, by formal criteria, can be regarded as core or central modals, this is slightly artificial, since formal criteria tell us nothing about actual usage patterns. Indeed, if we were to compile the list of verbs under scrutiny by order of frequency, it would look rather different.

We have noted already that English has a number of fixed expressions that, although not conforming to the same formal criteria that core modals do, are to varying degrees more like auxiliaries than main verbs. Quirk et al. (1985) propose a gradient (cf. Chapter 4) in which core modals form the auxiliary end of the scale and main verbs with a modal meaning the other:

**Table 1.** The auxiliary verb - main verb gradient (Quirk et al. 1985: 137).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) CENTRAL MODALS</td>
<td><em>can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) MARGINAL MODALS</td>
<td><em>dare, need, ought to, used to</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) MODAL IDIOMS</td>
<td><em>had better, would rather/sooner, be to, have got to, etc.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) SEMI-AUXILIARIES</td>
<td><em>have to, be about to, be able to, be bound to, be going to, be obliged to, be supposed to, be willing to, etc.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) CATENATIVES</td>
<td><em>appear to, happen to, seem to, get + -ed participle, keep + -ing participle, etc.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) MAIN VERB +</td>
<td><em>hope + to-infinitive, begin + -ing participle, etc.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terms that Quirk et al. (1985) propose in Table 1, although illustrative as far as terms go, have not established themselves in any wider context, and it is roughly the categories of **marginal modals**, **modal idioms** and **semi-auxiliaries** that the term semi-
modal tries to cover. Thus, it is not a very precise term, and many others have been proposed (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999). Whatever term is used, however, it “refers to a loose constellation of verb constructions which, according to many commentators ..., have been moving along the path of grammaticalization in recent centuries” (Leech et al. 2009: 91). A well-known example in the realm of English modality, then, are the familiar verbal constructions be going to and have to, in which the verbs be and have have, over the centuries, began to act more and more like auxiliaries (see e.g. Cacouloos & Walker 2009, Lee 2006, Krug 2000).

It is a popular belief that the use of core modals has been declining rapidly in recent years and, conversely, that the use of semi-modals has been spreading in English. The idea seems to be that these two groups are in competition with one another, and it is the latter that is gaining the upper hand (Leech et al. 2009: 78-79). There are arguments both for and against this assertion, and I will only briefly consider them here. For a thorough treatment of the topic, Leech et al. (2009: 91-143) provide a lucid discussion.

For the purposes of the present study, there can be no denying the fact the inclusion of semi-modals would provide a fuller and more detailed picture of the way modality is portrayed in Finnish upper secondary schools. Semi-modals have clearly become more frequent in recent years, although admittedly the change has occurred rather unevenly with, most notably, huge differences in registers: many studies (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber 2004, Biber et al. 1999) have shown discrepancies between written and spoken corpora, with semi-modals being considerably more frequent in spoken corpora. Another interesting point is that these studies show a substantially more dramatic increase in the use of semi-modals in American English as opposed to British English. This, if we accept the popular belief that American speech is “the most influential source of innovation in the language”
Leech et al. (2009: 79), is an interesting find that may be indicative of what is to come in the future.

There is, however, at least one compelling counter-argument to the notion that the rise of semi-modals has come about at the expense of core modals. Although recent research has found a considerable drop in frequency with regard to the core modals and a roughly similar increase in the use of semi-modals, core modals are still very much more frequent generally speaking than semi-modals. To give an indication of frequency, Leech et al. (2009) list core modals as being over five times more frequent than semi-modals. Consequently, they claim with some confidence that “there can be no argument ... that the semi-modals wholly account for the decline [of core modals]” (Leech et al. 2009: 78). The exclusion of semi-modals from the present study can thus be considered arguable on more than just formal (syntactic) grounds.

One final point needs to be made. There is one group of modals where the exclusion of semi-modals is perhaps more unfortunate than elsewhere, namely the so-called ‘obligation/necessity’ modals which, for the purposes of the present study, are must (see Section 7.2.5) and should (see Section 7.3.5). Leech et al. (2009: 83-89) report a drop in the use of both modals, particularly affecting must which is on the verge of becoming a second-rate modal especially in American English. By contrast, there has been a significant increase in the use of have to, (have) got to and need to that, so it would seem, have usurped many of the roles that must formerly had (Leech et al. 2009: 98-105), to the extent that a full picture of ‘obligation/necessity’ modals of English would perhaps require their inclusion. This, however, will be left for future studies on the subject.
7 Semantic distribution of core modals

In this chapter, I will consider each modal identified in Chapter 6 individually. My aims are twofold. Firstly, each modal will be analysed in terms of its semantic distribution, i.e. the different meanings that it can have. Secondly, I will present frequencies of use for both the modal in general and its different meanings. The discussion of each modal follows the same structure: I will start off with some comments on its semantic distribution. In the section that follows, I will first provide an overall indication of frequency and some general notes on its present-day usage in different registers. If available, I will also comment on the changes this particular modal has undergone in recent years. I will then go on provide an indication of frequency for all its meanings.

This chapter is in four parts. It will begin with a preliminary discussion on the semantic categories of the modals that will provide some key terminology. I will then go on to discuss the primary modals individually, followed by a section on the secondary modals. The final section is intended as a summary.

7.1 Some preliminaries

It is easy to see that all core modals can be used in (at least) two distinct ways. The example sentences provided here are from Palmer (1990: 5) and concern the modals *may* and *must*.

(7.1) John *may* be there now.
(7.2) John *must* be there now.
(7.3) John *may* come in now.
(7.4) John *must* come in now.

In sentences (7.1) and (7.2), it is clear that something is being said about the probability of whether John is there or not. The difference between them is that in sentence (7.1), the probability is slightly lower. Sentences (7.3) and (7.4), on the other hand, convey a
completely different meaning for *may* and *must*: In sentence (7.3), we are dealing with a permission, a useful paraphrase of which might be ‘I hereby give John permission to come in’. In sentence (7.4), we are dealing with an obligation imposed on John.

Of these two uses, the first has traditionally been called **epistemic**. Epistemic modality is, then, “essentially making a judgment about the truth of the proposition” (Palmer 1990: 6). Elsewhere, Palmer (1990: 50) states that “we use epistemic modality to make judgments about the possibility, etc., that something is or is not the case”. It is this kind of modality that is the most distinct from all others and usually the one that is used as an illustrative example of modality when trying to define it (see Chapter 5). Moreover, as a result of its relatively clear boundaries, not much semantic indeterminacy is said to exist within epistemic modality (Leech & Coates 1980: 85, cf. Chapter 4). Epistemic modality conveys the ideas of ‘(factual) possibility’, ‘necessity’ and ‘prediction’, and the core modals associated with it are *may, might, will, would, shall, should* and *must*.

The second meaning of the two is called **deontic**. According to Palmer (1990: 6), deontic modality is “concerned with influencing actions, states or events”, with the event in question being controlled “by circumstances external to the subject of the sentence” (Palmer 2003: 7). Gotti and Dossena (2001: 11-12) elaborate the idea further by stating that “what is at issue with [deontic modality] is not whether a proposition is true [i.e. epistemic modality], but whether something is going to be done”. The ideas conveyed by deontic modality are principally those of ‘permission’, ‘obligation’ and ‘advice’, and the core modals involved are *may, might, can, could, must* and *should*.

There is, however, potentially a third kind of modality. The two types already introduced seem clear enough, but they do not leave much room for many legitimate uses of the core modals. If we consider a simple sentence such as *John can swim*, the
modal *can* is not used to make a judgment about the truthfulness of the sentence (epistemic), nor is it in any way (unless the context deems otherwise) a permission or an obligation (deontic). Instead, it is concerned with the **internal ability** of the speaker to swim, which is difficult to fit into either of the two categories mentioned. It is reasonable, then, to introduce a third kind of modality, **dynamic modality**.

Dynamic modality is defined by Palmer (2003: 7) as an event or action in which “the control is internal to the subject” such as in “the subject’s ability to run fast with *can*” or “the speaker’s willingness to help with *will*”. In other words, “dynamic modality is subject-oriented in the sense that it is concerned with the ability or volition of the subject of the sentence, rather than the opinions (epistemic) or attitudes (deontic) of the speaker” (Palmer 1990: 36). Gotti and Dossena (2001: 12) reserve the term dynamic modality to cases where they claim that a kind of ‘neutrality’ is involved. At any rate, dynamic modality conveys the semantic notions of ‘ability’ and ‘volition’, and the core modals involved are *will, would, can* and *could*.

Scholars disagree strongly on the semantic categories of the core modals. The terminology they use sometimes feels obscure and contrived, and it is usually quite different from the terminology that other scholars use. There are some who think that dynamic modality does not exist (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999) and others who think that it does exist but that it is not modality at all, since modality is concerned with **subjectivity**, not **neutrality** (for a discussion on this topic, see Palmer 1986). As the terminology provided here is, nevertheless, extensively used, it cannot be completely discarded in a study on modality, although I will mainly refer to the semantic categories with their lay terms (i.e. ‘possibility’, ‘necessity’ or ‘prediction’ instead of epistemic modality).
7.2 Primary modals

This section focuses on the primary modals, i.e. *can*, *may*, *must*, *will* and *shall*. The discussion will be brief and to the point. It is useful at this stage to bear in mind the notion of indeterminacy (see Chapter 4), as it will slice through the whole chapter. A second general point to be made is that the meanings of each modal presented below are not on an equal footing with one another. In fact, as will become clear in the sections on frequencies, some meanings are very much more common than others, with *must* being the exception that confirms the rule (Leech 2004: 73). Indeed, as Leech et al. (2009: 71-90) point out, this recent trend towards monosemy has only gained strength in recent years.

7.2.1 *Can* – meanings

*Can* has already been discussed in the section on semantic indeterminacy (see Section 4.3). To review, there are two meanings that are especially prominent with *can*: ‘possibility’ and ‘ability’ (Mindt 1995: 73). Another less common sense is that of ‘permission’ (Leech 2004: 75). Sentences (7.5), (7.6) and (7.7) are examples of ‘possibility’ *can*, ‘ability’ *can* and ‘permission’ *can* respectively.

(7.5) Tea has been a popular drink in Great Britain for hundreds of years, but it is important to note that the word itself *can* refer to something more than just the beverage. (CC2)

(7.6) [N]ow the river flows through taps at hand’s reach and we *can* wash next to where we sleep, we *can* eat where we have cooked, and we *can* surround the whole with a protective wall and keep it clean and warm. (IT7)

(7.7) If your group accepts your explanation, you *can* keep going. (CC2)

It is tempting to analyse the first of these meanings as epistemic, since it is apparently concerned with making “judgments about the possibility that something is or is not the
case” in the way Palmer defined it (see Section 7.1). This would be wrong, however, as there is a clear distinction between the (unarguably epistemic) ‘possibility’ may (see Section 7.2.3) on the one hand and ‘possibility’ can on the other. The most succinct account of this argument is that of Leech (2004: 82), who notes that may represents ‘factual possibility’ and can ‘theoretical possibility’. By way of illustration, he offers the following sentences and their paraphrases:

(7.8) FACTUAL: The road may be blocked = ‘It is possible that the road is blocked’ = ‘Perhaps the road is blocked’ = ‘The road might be blocked’.

(7.9) THEORETICAL: The road can be blocked = ‘It is possible for the road to be blocked’ = ‘It is possible to block the road’.

Although the contexts in which these two modals appear are identical, we can see from these two sentences that the situations they depict are subtly different. Sentence (7.9) “describes a theoretically conceivable happening” (Leech 2004: 82), whereas sentence (7.8) “feels more immediate, because the actual likelihood of an event’s taking place is being considered” (ibid). Palmer (1990: 83) employs the term ‘neutral possibility’ for the ‘possibility’ meaning of can, and although it is perhaps unwise to mix neutrality with modality, it gives an idea of the kind of possibility can elicits. For this reason, the ‘possibility’ can cannot be considered epistemic in the same way that may can. Instead, I will follow Palmer’s example (1990: 83-85) and regard the ‘possibility’ can as dynamic.

Sentence (7.6) is an example of can in the ‘ability’ sense, which can be paraphrased as ‘be capable of’ or ‘know how to’. It depicts the ability of the subject of the sentence to do something (Palmer 1990: 85). As has been already noted (see Section 7.1), it is the quintessential candidate for the dynamic category: indeed, it is one of the reasons why the whole category exists.
We have, then, essentially two different senses for *can* that are dynamic. This is not wholly surprising when we consider the gradients proposed for *can* in Chapter 4, and I shall not reiterate the argument here. However, Leech (2004: 75) provides an interesting explanation for the ambiguities between ‘possibility’ *can* and ‘ability’ *can* by pointing out that these two meanings “are especially close because ‘ability’ implies ‘possibility’ – that is, if someone has the ability to do X, then X is possible”. Biber et al. (1999: 491-493) essentially say the same thing when they paraphrase the ‘ability’ *can* as ‘It is possible for me/you/him/us/them to...’ and regard it as a subcategory of the more general (dynamic) ‘possibility’ sense. They seem hesitant about this classification, however, and choose to keep the ‘ability’ sense separate in their analysis. This policy will be adopted in the present study as well.

All that remains, then, is to discuss the third meaning of *can* which falls under the deontic category. Sentence (7.7) is an example of the encroachment of *can* into the territory traditionally occupied by *may* (see Section 7.2.3). It is clearly a permission granted by the speaker: in such contexts, *can* and *may* are largely interchangeable, although there are register differences (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999: 483-497). Leech (2004: 75) notes that there is still a well-known prescriptive rule that considers *may* to be the appropriate or more ‘correct’ modal of ‘permission’, but as we shall see, this rule hardly represents actual present-day usage.

### 7.2.2 *Can* – frequencies

In terms of overall frequency, *can* is one of the high-frequency modals. Most scholars (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999, Mindt 1995) place *can* in the top three along with *will* and *would*, although their ordering relative to each other may vary according to register. Römer (2004: 187), who conducted her research on spoken British English, makes the arresting point that these three are the most frequent modals
by a considerably wide margin, with *can* in her study being over two times as frequent as the next most frequent modal *could*. Although the numbers are less compelling in other studies, this serves as a useful starting point for further analysis.

From a diachronic standpoint, the status of *can* has remained remarkably stable while many other modals have suffered a significant decline in usage. This applies to both written and spoken registers, and in the latter there has even been a small increase (Leech et al. 2009: 71-78).

In most discussions (see e.g. Leech 2004, Mindt 1995, Palmer 1990), the different meanings of *can* are arranged in order of frequency in the following manner: ‘possibility’ (very common), ‘ability’ (common) and ‘permission’ (less common). Biber et al. (1999: 491), although agreeing with them for the most part, report almost identical distributions for ‘possibility’ and ‘ability’ for both written and spoken registers. The ‘permission’ *can*, finally, although clearly less frequent than the other two meanings, is nevertheless a viable option especially in conversation. Despite the prescriptive rule that prefers *may* as the modal of permission, “*can* is much more widely used as an auxiliary of permission than *may*” (Leech 2004: 75).

### 7.2.3 *May* – meanings

According to Mindt (1995: 103), two meanings make up the majority of cases of *may*: ‘possibility’ and ‘permission’. The present study will disregard the so-called ‘quasi-subjunctive’ or ‘formulaic’ uses of *may* (e.g. *May God grant you happiness*), as these are becoming extremely rare in present-day English (cf. Leech 2004: 77-78, Leech et al. 2009: 83-89) and moreover, such uses were not found in the data. Sentences (7.10) and (7.11) are examples of ‘possibility’ *may* and ‘permission’ *may* respectively.

(7.10) *You may* be surprised by the amount of time people actually spend watching television. (CC2)
In terms of semantic analysis, *may* rarely poses serious problems, as we have already seen (see Chapter 4). The first meaning is clearly epistemic and can be paraphrased as ‘It is possible that...’. Although both *may* and *can* can sometimes be used in this context, we have already noted that there is a contrast between the (epistemic) ‘possibility’ *may* and the (dynamic) ‘possibility’ *can*, and they should not be treated as synonyms. As for the second meaning, exemplified by sentence (7.11), it is just as clear as the first one with the speaker either giving permission or, as in this case, asking for permission. This kind of modality is labelled deontic (see Section 7.1).

### 7.2.4 May – frequencies

As a general trend, the use of *may* in present-day English seems to be declining sharply. Leech et al. (2009: 72-77) note a significant drop in frequency in recent years. This drop is all the more steeper firstly in American English as opposed to British English and secondly in spoken as opposed to written registers. Römer (2004: 186-187), who conducted her research on spoken British English, lists *may* as one of the low-frequency modals, surpassing only *shall* and *ought to* in the number of occurrences. Biber et al. (1999: 491-492) essentially make the same point but note that there appears to be a significant discrepancy between registers: although *may* is admittedly rare in conversation, it is still quite common in academic prose, especially in its (epistemic) ‘possibility’ sense.

According to Leech (2004: 76), “the only meaning of *may* which is still flourishing is the first sense of ‘possibility’”. This is corroborated by many other scholars as well (see e.g. Römer 2004, Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999). Indeed, according to Leech et al. (2009: 84), there is evidence that the ‘possibility’ *may* is actually becoming more frequent in British English, and, if nothing else, it is clear that...
“the epistemic meaning is surviving more robustly than other meanings”. In short, *may* appears to be changing into a predominantly epistemic modal, and there is a strong tendency towards monosemy.

All agree, finally, that the ‘permission’ sense of *may* is much less frequent and “increasingly restricted to formal contexts where writers (or speakers) are on their best linguistic behaviour” (Leech 2004: 76-77). The more frequent ‘permission’ modal in present-day English is *can* (see Section 7.2.2). To a certain extent, however, *may* survives in writing in such formulaic expressions as *If I may...* (Leech 2003: 234).

### 7.2.5 *Must* — meanings

As a general note, there is considerable disagreement as to the titles of the semantic categories associated with *must*, but as the differences are mainly terminological, they need not concern us here. All agree, however, that *must* can have an epistemic and a deontic reading: these can be termed ‘(logical) necessity’ and ‘obligation’ respectively. Sentences (7.12) and (7.13) are examples of epistemic and deontic *must*.

(7.12) No dairy products? That’s udderly (sic) ridiculous! Yeah, they **must** be nuts. (IT4)

(7.13) What about your promise? I want to go. You **must** show me the way. (CC2)

In sentence (7.12), then, *must* is used to indicate “knowledge arrived at by inference or reasoning” (Leech 2004: 79). A useful paraphrase might be ‘The only possible conclusion is that...’ or ‘It is necessarily the case that...’ (Palmer 1990: 50). Sentence (7.13), on the other hand, is an example of an obligation imposed by the speaker over the person mentioned. It is one of the most typical uses of the deontic category (see Section 7.1).
Theoretically, it would be possible to distinguish between the more ‘typical’ kind of deontic *must* exemplified by sentence (7.13) and a more ‘impersonal’ or ‘neutral’ *must* for which Leech (2004: 79) employs the term ‘requirement’. In ‘requirement’, the obligation does not come from within, but instead from external sources. Palmer (1990: 113-114) sets this use of *must* apart and discusses it under the heading of dynamic modality. Sentences (7.14) and (7.15) are potential candidates for this category:

(7.14) Special precautions **must** be taken with food and water. (CC2)

(7.15) People’s needs **must** be taken into consideration. (CC7)

While recognising that sentences (7.14) and (7.15) differ from sentence (7.13) in terms of their semantics, I have chosen to disregard this distinction. My reasons are twofold. Firstly, it is often difficult to distinguish between ‘obligation’ and ‘requirement’. If we think of them in terms of semantic indeterminacy (see Chapter 4), we can say that “[r]oot necessity is a gradient phenomenon with no clear borderline between its intermediate stages” (Smith 2003: 242). It is a continuum with personal authority at one end and “general regulations, instructions [and] moral imperatives at the other” (Leech 2004: 79). A second more compelling reason for discounting this distinction is that it is not pertinent to the purposes of this study. Indeed, it would be more properly dealt with in a study focusing specifically on the so-called ‘obligation/necessity’ modals (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999: 493-495) in which a finer line between the members of this category (which includes both core modals and semi-modals) needs to be established. For these reasons, I will categorise all non-epistemic uses of *must* under (deontic) ‘obligation’.

### 7.2.6 Must – frequencies

Along with *may*, *must* is one of the nine core modals which is currently suffering a decline in frequency. In many respects, the decline has been even sharper than with *may* (Leech 2003: 228). It is still considered a middle-frequency modal (Leech 2004), but the
differences across registers are worth noting in that *must* is considerably less frequent in spoken than in written registers (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999). This is particularly true of American English (Leech 2004: 78).

Unlike *may*, for which the decline in frequency is mostly felt in only one of its meanings (i.e. deontic ‘permission’), in the case of *must* both epistemic and deontic meanings have suffered. An appreciable tendency towards monosemy cannot, then, be discerned (Leech et al. 2009: 87). It is worth noting, however, that the use of ‘obligation’ *must* is nowadays avoided especially in spoken registers, probably because of its forcefulness (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999: 495). Leech et al. (2009) make the interesting claim that this may be due to the “‘democratization’ trend in society” (88), which makes *must* sound too authoritarian.

### 7.2.7 Will – meanings

Along with a host of school grammar book authors (see e.g. Kallela et al. 1998, Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003), some traditional scholars still argue for the treatment of *will* merely as a marker of future tense. This simplistic view is not supported here for a number of reasons. A well-rounded account of these with regard to both *will* and *shall* is that of Palmer (1990: 160-163), and I will only briefly summarise them here. He notes, firstly, that *will* and *shall* “are formally modal verbs; they belong to the modal system not to the (morphologically marked) tense system of present and past” (Palmer 1990: 160). Secondly, other core modals too can have future time reference, and thus it is not a trait restricted exclusively to *will* or *shall*. Finally, although *time* is clearly an issue with *will* and *shall*, they seldom (if ever) refer to a ‘pure’ future, and indeed it is doubtful whether the whole concept of ‘futurity’ can be separated from modality.

According to Leech (2004: 56), a convincing argument for putting together the future and modal uses of *will* is that “we cannot be as certain of future happenings as we
are of events in the past and present, and even the most confident prediction about the future must reflect something of the speaker’s uncertainty and so be tinged with modality”. Thus, although the use of will in many cases is closer to a ‘pure’ or ‘neutral’ future than anything else in English, Leech argues that it is never on an equal footing with the past and present tenses and should not, therefore, be called ‘future tense’. It is, then, the term ‘prediction’ that conveniently covers both the idea of ‘futurity’ and the personal judgment that is inherent in it.

There are many conflicting accounts of the semantic distribution of will. The present study will opt for a simple two-way approach in which all meanings of will can be understood in terms of either (epistemic) ‘prediction’ or (dynamic) ‘volition’, with paraphrases such as ‘I confidently predict that...’ and ‘I am willing to...’. Sentences (7.16) and (7.17) are examples of epistemic and dynamic will respectively.

(7.16) That means that by the age of 65 most people will have spent about 8 years of their lives in front of the tube. (CC2)

(7.17) Meanwhile he will not help me to understand how it was he came to be sleeping on the streets, which means that I am unable to show him the side of me that I wanted him to see. (IT4)

There are several points to be made. The first has to do with the overarching quality of the ‘prediction’ category which is applied to uses of will that can, it must be said, appear at first glance very different from one another. Of particular pertinence to the present study is the so-called ‘habitual’ will (Palmer 1990: 136-137) that denotes activity that is said to be typical of the subject of the sentence. Consider the following sentence:

(7.18) Beneath the trees where nobody sees, they’ll hide and seek as long as they please. (CC2)
Palmer in his treatment of *will* (1990: 133-142) regards ‘habitual’ *will* as a subcategory of (dynamic) ‘volition’ *will* and notes that it is used to indicate the way in which objects or people “characteristically [want to] behave” (Palmer 1990: 136). This view, although plausible, seems somewhat counter-intuitive and is thus not supported here. Instead, I will opt for the treatment of ‘habitual’ *will* as a subcategory of (epistemic) ‘prediction’ *will*. This is because ‘habitual’ *will* can be seen as an extension to the general ‘prediction’ meaning in which the speaker makes a (confident) prediction about the typical behaviour of someone or something. The term ‘predictability’ has been proposed for this particular use of *will* (see e.g. Leech 2004, Coates 1983). The crucial difference between the general ‘prediction’ *will* and the ‘predictability’ *will* is that in the latter “the speaker makes a claim about the present” (Coates 1983: 177, italics by the author) and thus no ‘futurity’ is involved.

As regards ‘volition’ *will*, then, there are strictly speaking several kinds of ‘volitional’ uses of *will* which can be discerned from one another in terms of their ‘strength’ (Leech 2004: 85-88). Proposed labels for these are ‘insistence’ (‘strong volition’), ‘intention’ (‘intermediate volition’) and ‘willingness’ (‘weak volition’) (Leech 2004: 87-88). However, as all of these are for all practical purposes concerned with the same semantic category of ‘volition’, I will again apply the notion of semantic indeterminacy (see Chapter 4) and regard them as variants of a single meaning.

The final point involves the overlapping of meanings which, in the case of *will*, is of particular importance. Despite a rather simplified picture of the different uses of *will*, even such a bipolar approach is unable to prevent confusion in the analysis, with sentences that can be analysed either way and some that clearly have elements of both. Consider the following sentences:

(7.19) “I think I’ll just have a green salad,” he muttered. (IT4)
(7.20) And if my memory serves me right, Tessa will go for her favourite Chicken Korma, won’t you Tessa? (IT4)

It may be argued in both cases that at least some element of ‘volition’ is involved. In sentence (7.19), it is, I think, particularly evident; sentence (7.20), on the other hand, seems to me a borderline case, a plausible reading of which might in effect incorporate both epistemic and dynamic elements. If not exactly a gradient, there is clearly a “complex interrelationship” (Coates 1983: 169) between the different meanings of will, and a great deal of ambiguity will naturally ensue. An illustrating example of this is Biber et al.’s (1999: 496) analysis of will, in which over half of all the occurrences of will were considered ambiguous.

7.2.8 Will – frequencies
There is no doubt that will, along with would and can, belongs to the high-frequency modals (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Leech 2004, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999) with relatively small register differences and no discernable difference when comparing American English and British English (Biber et al. 1999: 488). A diachronic analysis shows a small and insignificant drop in the use of will in recent years, and thus the decline witnessed in the use of many other modals does not seem to apply to will to the same extent (Leech et al. 2009: 71-76). The use of will, generally speaking, is strong and thriving.

Just as the semantic categories associated with will are disputed, so are, rather logically, the frequencies attributed to them. Biber et al. (1999), proponents of the two-way distinction between ‘prediction’ and ‘volition’, list the two meanings as almost equally frequent, with ‘prediction’ gaining the advantage with only a very small margin. By contrast, as was already mentioned, both categories are massively overwhelmed by the ‘ambiguous’ category in their analysis, which is a fitting testament to the blurry
distinction between ‘volition’ and ‘prediction’ discussed in the previous section. Most other scholars (Römer 2004, Leech 2004, Mindt 1995) regard ‘prediction’ as the vastly more frequent meaning of the two, with numbers as high as 81% for ‘prediction’ and 16% for ‘volition’ (Mindt 1995: 56).

7.2.9 Shall – meanings and frequencies
This section is an exception. In it, I will deal with both the semantics and the frequencies of shall. The reason why I have chosen not to devote much space to the analysis of shall is twofold. Firstly, nearly all accounts indicate that its use, never that frequent to begin with, has waned considerably in recent years (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Leech 2004, Biber et al. 1999). Leech (2004) notes that “shall occurs nowadays only in a few rather restricted linguistic contexts” (88) and in virtually all of these “shall could be replaced by a different modal or other modal construction” (ibid). Among the few supporters of shall are Römer (2004: 189), who found that “shall is used very frequently in questions” and Mindt (1995: 177), who puts shall on top of the list of modals in interrogative contexts. Nevertheless, the data for the present study produced only one instance of shall, and it is therefore difficult to say anything conclusive about the way it is portrayed, other than to note its virtual absence. Secondly, the meanings of shall closely parallel those of will, and indeed when stylistic differences are put aside, they can in some contexts be considered interchangeable.

Shall can be analysed in the same way as will (see Section 7.2.7), i.e. in terms of ‘prediction’ and ‘volition’. In the ‘prediction’ sense of shall, it is considered “an alternative to will with first person subjects in more formal styles of speaking and (especially) writing” (Leech 2004: 58). Sentence (7.21) is an example of ‘prediction’ shall.
Nevertheless, he took the precaution of packing his photo album in waterproof cloth - “it being the only record of my work I shall be able to take, should we be compelled to take to the floe.” (CC7)

There were no examples of ‘volition’ shall in the data.

7.3 Secondary modals
It has already been noted (see Section 6.2) that secondary modals are called secondary because of their status (historically speaking) as the past tense forms of the corresponding present tense verbs. Although this can no longer be considered their primary use, it is nevertheless a useful way of avoiding needless repetition that would inevitably ensue, if we were to analyse the secondary modals semantically as a group of wholly distinct verb forms. For this reason, the present section will be considerably shorter than the previous one, and I will refer to the semantic analysis of the corresponding primary modal wherever applicable. I will begin with some general remarks that involve all the secondary modals as a group and then go on to consider each secondary modal individually.

7.3.1 Some general remarks
All secondary modals can be seen as the past tense forms of the corresponding primary modals. This means, in plain terms, that all secondary modals can be used to indicate the same meanings as the corresponding primary modal but in past time. *Could*, then, is the past tense of *can* and has all the meanings attached to *can* and discussed in Section 7.2.1, with the exception that they are used to refer to past time. This is true of all secondary modals, although due to historical developments, the link is less clearly felt with *may/might* and is more or less non-existent with *shall/should* (Leech 2004: 97-98).

The secondary modals have, however, evolved past their simple tense-related uses, and it is nowadays generally felt that they are primarily employed within the present
timeframe (Bybee 1995). This extension of meaning is believed to have arisen through the idea of **hypotheticality**, which means that “the happening described is assumed to take place not in the real world, but in an imaginary world” (Leech 2004: 120). A helpful indicator of a hypothetical sentence is either an explicit (*It would be laughable if Septimus was in love*) or an implicit (*Would you like some peas? ['…if I offered you some]*) conditional clause within it.

According to Leech (2004: 122), the grammatical markers of hypothetical meaning are:

(a) *would* + infinitive (e.g. *I’d love to live abroad.*)

(b) past tense (e.g. *He talks as if he was/were my rich uncle.*)

(c) the past tense construction *was / were to* + infinitive (e.g. *Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to say something.*)

For the purposes of this paper, hypothetical meanings need concern us only to the extent to which core modals play a part in them. We can see from Leech’s list that in English, *would* is the ‘pure’ marker of hypothetical meaning. There is a problem of a syntactic nature, however, which involves the fact that modals (see Section 6.1), cannot co-occur. It is for this reason, it is thought, that hypothetical meanings are indicated in core modals by the past tense form alone. The end result is that “all the secondary modals *would, could, might* and *should* can express … hypothetical meanings corresponding to the same meanings of the primary modals *will, can, may* and *shall*” (Leech 2004: 126) with the addition that *would*, “besides expressing *will*’s meanings of prediction and volition in the hypothetical mood, can also express pure hypothetical meaning in main clauses” (ibid).

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7 Leech (2004: 120) provides the following examples of hypothetical meaning: “Someone who says *I wish I WAS clever*, implies ‘…but I am not clever’ and someone who says *Just suppose I HADN’T APPLIED for the job*, suggests that ‘…but I have applied for the job’.” He goes on to say that it is the “negative truth-commitment” of hypothetical meaning that is its defining factor.
It is beyond the scope of the present study to examine hypothetical meanings in much detail, other than to say that, due to the associations of secondary modals with both past time and hypotheticality, they tend to display a huge variety of meanings, which may seem perplexing even to a native speaker. To illustrate the point, I will provide Leech’s (2004: 132) paradigm with examples of seven different meanings of *could*:

(d) Past time equivalent of *can* (= ‘possibility’)

- Nothing *could* be done to stop the water flooding into the house.

(e) Past time equivalent of *can* (= ‘ability’)

- Like every self-respecting young Victorian lady, Charlotte *could* paint and play the piano; but she *couldn’t* peel a potato to save her life.

(f) Past time equivalent of *can* (= ‘permission’)

- After the 1920 Act, women *could* vote, but they still *couldn’t* become Members of Parliament.

(g) Hypothetical equivalent of *can* (= ‘possibility’)

- The house is one of the most beautiful that *could* be imagined.

(h) Hypothetical equivalent of *can* (= ‘ability’)

- Do you know anyone who *could* repair this clock for me?

(i) Hypothetical equivalent of *can* (= ‘permission’)

- I’d be grateful if I *could* borrow your electric drill.

(j) Tentative equivalent of *may* (= ‘factual possibility’) (see Section 7.2.1)

- The weather has been terrible up there in the mountains. You *could* find climbing very difficult.

There is one more crucial point to be made. For the purposes of the present study, the distinction between what can be termed ‘past time ability’ and ‘hypothetical ability’ is
not considered relevant. That is to say, although ‘past time ability’ and ‘hypothetical ability’ are distinct in meaning, both convey the idea of ‘ability’ in the same way that can does, albeit with a slight twist. It is for this reason, then, that I have chosen to do without these nuances and categorise both ‘past time ability’ and ‘hypothetical ability’ under general ‘ability’. This policy is maintained for all other meanings of could and of other secondary modals as well.

7.3.2 Could

Could is regarded as one of the middle-frequency modals, giving way only to the three high-frequency modals (i.e. will, would and can) in most accounts (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999, Mindt 1995). Leech et al. (2009) put could in the top four and make the arresting claim that, according to their research, will, would, can and could account for 71.9% of all modal usage (73). It is safe to say, then, that could is doing well, with increasing frequencies of use.

Could can be analysed in the same was as can (see Section 7.2.1), i.e. in terms of ‘(theoretical) possibility’, ‘ability’ and ‘permission’, with the addition that these meanings are either ‘past time’ or ‘hypothetical’ (see Section 7.3.1). Sentences (7.22), (7.23) and (7.24) are examples of ‘possibility’ could, ‘ability’ could and ‘permission’ could respectively.

(7.22) The park could be twice as large as Hardangervidda in Norway, currently the biggest national park in Europe. (CC7)

(7.23) She was at her first race before she could crawl. (CC2)

(7.24) I could never play with my friends or basically do anything that the other neighborhood kids my age did on Saturdays. (IT4)

There is no need to provide paraphrases for these meanings, as this was already done for can. The categories, moreover, are the same as with can: dynamic for ‘possibility’ and
‘ability’ and deontic for ‘permission’. As both Leech (2004: 127) and Palmer (1990: 185-187) point out, however, could is potentially also used to mark epistemic, i.e. ‘factual possibility’ in the same way that may and might are, and in fact, sentence (7.22) is a candidate for this category. This is a very fine-grained distinction that, for the purposes of the present study, is not considered pertinent. All occurrences of ‘possibility’ could will, then, be categorised under general ‘possibility’.

Of the three uses of could, it is the ‘permission’ sense that is clearly the most marginal (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999, Mindt 1995). The other two are sometimes considered equally frequent (Leech et al. 2009) or, as is more often the case, the ‘possibility’ sense gains the upper hand (Biber et al. 1999, Mindt 1995). This applies especially to the spoken registers (Biber et al. 1999).

7.3.3 Might
Might is a slightly special case in that it is not as flexible as other secondary modals and, most notably, is not used as the past tense of may to quite the same extent as, for example, could is. As a general trend, might is used mainly as a (hypothetical) ‘possibility’ modal in present-day English (Biber et al. 1999: 492), and the past time uses of might are rare or even non-existent.

Might is usually listed among the middle-to-low frequency modals (Leech et al. 2009, Leech 2004, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999). Its use, although not that frequent to begin with, has nevertheless remained remarkably consistent, and it is nowadays considered more frequent than its primary modal counterpart may (Leech et al. 2009: 71-76). In spoken registers, it is almost twice as frequent as both may and must (Leech et al. 2009: 77). The two different meanings (‘permission’ and ‘possibility’), however, are not on an equal footing with one another.
Leech notes (2004) that the ‘past time permission’ *might* “is now rare and old-fashioned, chiefly BrE” (94) and that the ‘hypothetical permission’ *might* also “rarely occur[s]” (126) but that it is a possible alternative in very polite requests. This may just as well be so, since there were no occurrences of ‘permission’ *might* in the data. Other scholars have reported similar trends (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999, Römer 2004, Mindt 1995).

Instead, it is the ‘possibility’ sense of *might* that is thriving, although Leech (2004) notes that the ‘past time possibility’ is a “virtually unused” (98) meaning of *might*. We are left, then, with the hypothetical present time meaning of *might* to account for nearly all of its present-day uses. Sentences (7.25) and (7.26) are examples of ‘possibility’ *might*:

(7.25) While this figure *might* seem encouraging, it’s somewhat lower than the rest of Europe. (CC7)

(7.26) Amid a water shortage, a plague of flying ants, and frightening rumours that the beer supply *might* actually run dry, Britain has once again proved that it is just as ill-equipped for an August heat wave as it is for any other kind of extreme weather. (IT7)

Sentences (7.25) and (7.26) are examples of ‘factual possibility’ (see Section 7.2.1), which one might expect given that *might* is the past tense of *may*. Thus, as was the case with *may*, ‘possibility’ *might* is epistemic in meaning.

### 7.3.4 Would

*Would*, historically the past tense of *will*, has moved well beyond its past time limitations. It is semantically one of the most complex modals because of its evolution in many different directions. It is nowadays considered one of the most common modals in present-day English (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999, Mindt
1995), with many studies putting it at the top of the list. It is especially common in
spoken registers, where its frequency has had a significant boost in recent years, while
many other modals are on the decline (Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004).

As with will, I have opted here for a simplistic two-way approach to the semantic
distribution of would. It can be understood, then, in terms of epistemic ‘prediction’ and
dynamic ‘volition’, with the addition that these meanings are either ‘past time’ or
‘hypothetical’ (see Section 7.3.1). Sentences (7.27) and (7.28) are examples of
‘prediction’ would and ‘volition’ would respectively.

(7.27) She was convinced there was a place out there somewhere where she could
be completely happy. She would find it.

(7.28) Would you consider converting to a different religion in order to be able
to marry the person you love?

Sentence (7.27), then, is clearly the past time equivalent of ‘prediction’ will. In the
words of Leech (2004: 111), it “shows the backshift of future will to a ‘reported past
future’ would”. Sentence (7.28), on the other hand, is the hypothetical form of ‘volition’
will, which, according to Coates (1983: 211), is characterised by an animate subject and
a paraphrase with ‘willing to’ (i.e. Would you be willing to…). As becomes clear from
these two examples alone, ‘volition’ would is not an easy one to spot, and the distinction
between the two, as was the case with will, is extremely blurred. Moreover, we
discussed in Section 7.2.7 the so-called ‘habitual’ or ‘predictability’ will, for which
would serves as the past tense form. As with will, this use will be categorised under
‘prediction’.

There is, however, an additional complication in that would, as we have already
seen, is used as a general or ‘pure’ hypothetical marker denoting “unreal conditions
when the corresponding real condition would have simple present tense” (Coates 1983:
In a sense, this is the same problem that we encountered with regard to *will*, which many purport to be the general marker of future tense (see Section 7.2.7). This argument was countered with the introduction of the semantic category of ‘prediction’, but this solution seems less appropriate with *would*. From a semantic viewpoint, then, *would* as the general marker of hypothetical meaning is a slightly problematic issue, and linguists have been unsure what to make of it. In the present study, I will follow Coates’s (1983: 213) example who notes that

> although it is true to say that WOULD is not just the hypothetical marker of WILL (=‘Prediction’), in the vast majority of cases … this is WOULD’s function. I therefore propose to call this usage of WOULD ‘Epistemic’; this will also serve to distinguish this usage from [hypothetical ‘volition’ *will*].

The so-called ‘pure’ hypothetical *would* will, then, be categorised under ‘prediction’. This apparently is the policy adopted by Biber et al. (1999) as well, although they make no explicit mention of it.

In terms of frequencies, most studies (see e.g. Römer 2004, Coates 1983) report much higher frequencies for ‘prediction’ *would* than for ‘volition’ *would*. Biber et al. (1999) are an exception: for written registers, they report roughly similar frequencies for both meanings. Interestingly, they have not resorted to the ‘ambiguous’ category at all for *would*, which is surprising considering the fuzziness of its different meanings.

### 7.3.5 Should

Along with *might, should*, too, has nowadays little connection with its so-called present time counterpart *shall*. Leech et al. (2009: 80) note that “there is virtually no case nowadays for arguing that *should* is the past tense of *shall*”. Instead, it is best understood as a weaker equivalent of *must* “except that [*should*] expresses not confidence, but rather lack of full confidence, in the fulfilment of the happening
described by the main verb” (Leech 2004: 100). Consider the following sentences with
*must* and *should* in their ‘obligation’ sense:

(7.29) “What about your promise? I want to go. You **must** show me the way.”

(CC2)

(7.30) You **should** never bribe a horse to get a response. (CC2)

We can see from these examples, then, that “the tone of *must* tolerates little argument”
(Leech 2004: 100-101), whereas the use of *should* weakens the ‘obligation’ to
something like ‘desirability’ or ‘advice’. Likewise, *should* is used as a weaker
equivalent of ‘logical necessity’ *must* to indicate “that the speaker has doubts about the
soundness of his/her conclusion” (Leech 2004: 101). Sentence (7.31) and (7.32) are
examples of *must* and *should* in their ‘logical necessity’ sense.

(7.31) Talking to you two is like talking to a pair of overgrown schoolboys. **Must**
be all that protein we eat. (IT4)

(7.32) According to the map, there **should** be a bridge here but it has collapsed.

(CC2)

It goes without saying that, as with *must*, ‘weak obligation’ or ‘advice’ is considered
deontic and ‘logical necessity’ epistemic.

*Should* is considered one of the middle-frequency modals by most scholars (see
e.g. Leech 2004, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999) with higher frequencies in
conversation than in written registers (Biber et al. 1999: 488). Although *should* is still
faring relatively well, it is nevertheless showing a slight decrease in use (Leech et al.
2009). Leech et al. (2009: 86) note that *should* “mirrors ... the trend towards monosemy
found in the analysis of *may*, except that here deontic rather than epistemic meaning is
in the ascendant”. It is the ‘weak obligation/advice’ sense of *should*, then, that has
gained the advantage: this is corroborated by other studies as well (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999).

7.4 Summary
We have seen, during the course of this chapter, that “an understanding of indeterminacy is crucial to an understanding of modality” (Coates 1983: 11): there is no other way of accounting for the semantic intricacies of the core modals of English. We have seen, moreover, that although the modals are sometimes difficult to analyse, they are so to varying degrees. For example, we saw with may and might that their meanings are relatively clear with only minor sources of ambiguity; with will and would, on the other hand, the situation is rather more difficult, and much depends on the scholarly insight of the researcher. This, though largely unavoidable, is a useful caveat to bear in mind as we now proceed to the empirical part of the present study.

There is one final point to be made. In the empirical part, I shall analyse the core modals in three separate groups containing modals with similar meanings as proposed by Biber et al. (1999). These three groups are the ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals (can, could, may and might), the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals (must and should) and the ‘volition/prediction’ modals (will, would and shall).

8 Material and methods
This chapter is devoted to describing the material and methods used in the present study. It is in two sections. In Section 8.1, I will present the material from which my data derive. In Section 8.2, I will describe in detail the way in which the data was collected and processed.

8.1 Material
The material for this study comes from two EFL textbook series for Finnish upper secondary schools, In Touch and Culture Café. Both series were completed between the
years 2002-2005 and published by the two biggest book publishing companies in Finland, WSOY (In Touch) and Otava (Culture Café). While neither of the companies was willing to divulge information concerning sales, they are indubitably among the most used EFL textbook series in Finland for the simple reason that none of the smaller companies have published textbooks for upper secondary schools. The only contenders, then, are two other series, Profiles and Open Road, by the same companies, but as most the course books in these series have been published either very recently or not at all, it is doubtful whether they are in full circulation yet.

Both textbook series contain eight books altogether, one for each upper secondary school course as mandated by the NCCUSS (2003). Although it would no doubt be instructive to analyse all eight books in both series, I have instead handpicked only the ones that explicitly mention modal verbs in their table of contents. I am assuming, then, that an overt emphasis on modal auxiliaries will manifest itself in the texts, and that the authors have made extra effort to bring their presentation of the core modals of English up to modern standards. This requirement, albeit somewhat implicitly, is evident both in the NCCUSS (2003) (see Section 3.3) and the CEFR on which it is based (see Section 3.1).

In Finland, as we have already noted, the curriculum changes every 5-10 years. The curriculum currently in use was approved for upper secondary schools in 2003, which is always a signal for publishers to come up with new teaching materials that incorporate the changes effected in the curriculum. Unsurprisingly, then, both textbook series put an emphasis on communicative skills and knowledge about the target culture while deliberately refraining from using words that might put off students, such as grammar.
Four textbooks in the two series mentioned modality: *Culture Café Course 2* (Benmergui et al. 2003), *Culture Café Course 7* (Benmergui et al. 2003), *In Touch Course 4* (Davies et al. 2002) and *In Touch Course 7* (Davies et al. 2004). The title of each book corresponds to the course on which it is intended to be used. It should be noted that the courses in question are different, which is to be expected given that the NCCUSS (2003) does not stipulate at which stage the modals should be discussed or even, indeed, that they should be included in the syllabus at all (see Chapter 3). Courses 2 and 4 are compulsory; course 7, on the other hand, is optional (NCCUSS 2003: 103-105). I will now proceed to discuss the subject matter and general aims of each course.

According to the NCCUSS (2003), the topic of course 2 in the FLE syllabus is ‘Communication and leisure’. On this course, students will practise oral communication in different ways and they will reinforce and expand their command of structures. Themes and situations are related to leisure time and interests and services used in connection with these. The cross-curricular themes to be emphasised in treatment of the course topics are ‘safety and well-being’ and ‘communication and media competence’. Students will practise their writing skills by means of communicative assignments. Their command of oral communication strategies will be enhanced and attention will be paid to confidence of expression. (104)

The guidelines of the NCCUSS (2003) are faithfully reproduced in the syllabus of *Culture Café Course 2* (Benmergui et al. 2003). It is a course heavily based on the enhancement of communication strategies and their fluency. In addition, the contents page of the book includes a separate ‘suggested grammar’ box that lists the acquisition of the English auxiliaries as one of the goals of the course. It should be noted that these auxiliaries do not include *will, would* or *shall*, which within the context of EFL
textbooks are usually understood in terms of future tense, and, moreover, that they do include *have, be, do, dare* and *need*. Towards the end of the book, then, there is a separate section with exercises focusing only on auxiliaries.

The topic of course 4 in the EFL syllabus is ‘Society and the surrounding world’. The NCCUSS (2003: 104) states that the course will place emphasis on speaking and reading comprehension at a relatively demanding level. The course is based on texts related to societies in Finland and the target countries. The cross-curricular theme entitled ‘active citizenship and entrepreneurship’ offers perspectives to deal with the course topics. Students will practise various strategies for reading comprehension. Students will practise their written expression by writing texts suitable for different purposes.

The stipulations of the NCCUSS (2003) are again copied more or less *verbatim* into the textbook syllabus of *In Touch Course 4* (Davies et al. 2002). In addition to these, the book lists as one of its aims the acquisition of the so-called ‘defective auxiliaries’. This is again translated into a separate section with examples and exercises on how the modals should be used. These include *have to, ought to* and *need; will, would* and *shall* are again excluded.

It is an interesting and perhaps significant fact that the authors of *Culture Café* and *In Touch* appear to have adopted a dissimilar attitude towards the English modality. The former discuss it first and foremost within the framework of communication, whereas the latter have decided to include the modals within a course focusing primarily on literary texts and more formal settings. This contrast is clearly felt in the actual texts as well. Both *Culture Café Course 2* (Benmergui et al. 2003) and *In Touch Course 4* (Davies et al. 2002) show a clear preference for authentic materials, i.e. texts that
derive, with occasional alterations, from original English-speaking sources, but while
the former makes much more use of magazines and Internet sites (e.g. Diablo Magazine
and Racerchicks.com), the latter, on the other hand, contains more excerpts from literary
texts and novels, such as The Restaurant at the End of the Universe (Adams 1987) and
Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus (Gray 1993). Presumably, then, the authors
of In Touch Course 4 (Davies et al. 2002) feel that the literary register is better suited
for modelling the use of the English modals.

Lastly, both textbook series include the modals in their optional course number 7.
According to the NCCUSS (2003), the topic of this course is ‘Nature and sustainable
development’. It should “provide students with capabilities to understand and use
language relating to nature, the natural sciences and the theme of sustainable
development” (NCCUSS 2003: 105). As this course is also, on a more general level,
aimed at revision, both Culture Café Course 7 (Benmergui et al. 2003) and In Touch
Course 7 (Davies et al. 2004) have decided to include the modals within the larger
framework of verb revision. In Culture Café Course 7 (Benmergui et al. 2003), this
translates into little more than two pages of exercises on the auxiliaries; as for In Touch
Course 7 (Davies et al. 2004), the book merely reiterates the ideas presented in In Touch
Course 4 (Davies et al. 2002) and adds some new exercises.

As a final point, both textbook series mention a separate grammar book that in the
authors’ opinion should serve as the general reference book in all grammar-related
issues during the three years that Finnish students usually attend upper secondary
school. These books are called Grammar Rules! (Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003) for Culture
Café and Datelines: Grammar Plus (Kallela et al. 1998) for In Touch. While not
included in the corpus for the present study, they will be consulted in cases where it
would provide additional information on how the authors view modality.
8.2 Data collection and processing
For this particular study, I scanned all the texts found in the four chosen textbooks, including the actual key texts as well as all shorter texts that formed a stand-alone entity. Excluded, then, were exercises and texts that were otherwise considered too fragmented and thus inauthentic; the exercises will, however, be included in a closer analysis and discussion of the results whenever a more extensive treatment is needed in Chapter 10. This process yielded a small corpus or a compilation of texts of 53,648 words. All the texts were then proofread and inserted into a concordancing software called AntConc.

AntConc\(^8\) is a simple freeware program intended for corpus analysis that allows one to perform many of the things that a commercial concordancing program would. Among other things, it can do KWIC\(^9\) searches, analyse collocates, word frequencies and keywords. Using the AntConc software, I then proceeded to do KWIC searches on the core modals in the scanned texts. Table 2 is a typical example of the first 25 lines of a KWIC concordance list.

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\(^8\) AntConc software by Laurence Anthony \(<http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/>\>

\(^9\) KWIC is an acronym for Key Word In Context and it is the most common format for concordance lines.
Having performed a KWIC search on all the core modals in the texts, I had a total of nine separate concordance lists, which constituted the raw data for the present study.

After data collection, I then went on to process it in two phases. The first one was straightforward: the lists provided me with the number of occurrences for each modal, which could then be contrasted to the total number of occurrences. The results of this phase are presented in Table 3 (see Section 9.1).

Having thus produced a crude numerical indication of frequency, I then proceeded to analyse the core modals semantically. As could be expected, this proved a laborious process. Some modals were relatively straightforward and posed no real problems, whereas others had a markedly more elusive quality to them. This is hardly surprising given the semantic indeterminacy inherent in them (see Chapter 4).

Whenever I was unable to assign a particular modal in a particular sentence to a semantic category, or when the inferences I made from the context drew in several directions, I classified the sentence under ‘ambiguous’. This ‘ambiguous’ category
varies greatly in size from one modal to the next. This is firstly because the number of actual occurrences varies: there were, for example, 31 cases of might, whereas will and can, the two most frequent core modals, occurred in 169 sentences. Secondly, as we have already discussed (see Chapters 4 and 7), some modal verbs are easier to analyse than others: For may, which can be interpreted either as a (deontic) permission or an (epistemic) indication of likelihood, there is usually no real danger of confusion. The same, as we have seen, is not true of modals like can and will. It was my policy to resort to the ‘ambiguous’ category in all cases where the semantic analysis would have had to rely more on guesswork than rigid scholarly reflection.

This said, the ‘ambiguous’ category did not with any of the modals concerned grow out of proportions. Indeed, when compared to recent studies on the English modals (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999), the numbers were relatively low. This is not surprising, considering that the texts chosen by the textbook authors were entirely from the written medium and, presumably, chosen for their relative simplicity and clarity.

Having completed the analysis, I then went on to produce the results in graphical form. Table 4 (Section 9.2), Table 5 (Section 9.3) and Table 6 (Section 9.4) show the results of this final phase.

9 Results
In this chapter, I will present the results of the present study as they emerged from the data collected and processed in the manner discussed in Chapter 8. This chapter is in four parts. I will first discuss the overall frequency of the core modals found in the data. I will then discuss each semantic group (i.e. the ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals, the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals and the ‘volition/prediction’ modals) separately in terms of the different meanings they had. In a sense, the present chapter provides the
quantitative basis for the more thorough qualitative discussion which is deferred to Chapter 10.

9.1 Overall frequencies
Table 3 illustrates the overall frequency of the nine core modals in the data. There were altogether 740 instances of core modals. The two most frequent were will and can with 169 hits each (22.8%). Would was not far behind with 162 hits (21.9%). After would, there is a considerable gap in frequency before could, which is only half as frequent as any of the three most frequent modals with 87 hits (11.8%). Could is followed by should with 52 hits (7.0%), after which come the three least frequent modals may, must and might with 37 (5.0%), 33 (4.5%) and 31 (4.2%) hits respectively. There was only one occurrence (0.1%) of shall in the data.

Table 3. Overall frequency of the core modals.

9.2 The ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals
Table 4 shows the distribution of different semantic categories within the ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals. There were altogether 169 occurrences of can in the data, of which 101 (59.8%) were analysed as (dynamic) ‘ability’, 35 (20.7%) as
(dynamic) ‘possibility’ and 8 (4.7%) as (deontic) ‘permission’. 25 cases (14.8%) were considered ambiguous. *Could* had 87 hits, of which 45 (51.7%) were analysed as (dynamic) ‘ability’, 36 (41.4%) as (dynamic) ‘possibility’ and 3 (3.4%) as (deontic) ‘permission’. In 3 cases (3.4%), *could* was considered ambiguous.

*May* and *might* had very similar distributions. There were 37 cases of *may*, of which 31 (83.8%) were analysed as (epistemic) ‘possibility’ and 3 (8.1%) as (deontic) ‘permission’. There were 3 (8.1%) ambiguous cases. *Might* had 31 hits, of which 29 (93.5%) were analysed in terms of (deontic) ‘possibility’. There were no instances of (deontic) ‘permission’ *might* and 2 (6.5%) ambiguous cases.

**Table 4.** Semantic distribution of the ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals.

![Bar chart showing the distribution of modals](chart.png)

Table 4 shows quite clearly that, as regards *may* and *might*, the (epistemic) ‘possibility’ meanings are emphasised in both cases. The following sentences are examples of epistemic *may* and *might*.

(9.1) Bradford *may* enjoy tremendous multicultural diversity but it is also deeply divided along ethnic lines. (IT4)
(9.2) You **may** also find yourself in trouble for standing up and joining in with chanting “likely to cause alarm or distress”. (CC2)

(9.3) But when the film’s real-life heroine is played by Julia Roberts ... you **might** just be persuaded to see it. (IT7)

On the other hand, the results show that the (deontic) ‘permission’ meaning is very infrequent with these two modals. In the case of *may*, there were only three cases in which a deontic reading seemed probable and which, interestingly, were all found in an excerpt from a literary text by a British author (Adams 1987). There were no instances of deontic *might* in the data.

(9.4) “**May** I interest you in parts of my body?” (IT4)

(9.5) “**May** I urge you to consider my liver?” asked the animal. (IT4)

(9.6) “A very wise choice, sir, if I *may* say so.” (IT4)

As for *can* and *could*, then, we see a tendency for ‘ability’ to be regarded as primary and ‘possibility’ as secondary. This is especially true of *can*, for which the ‘ability’ meaning is the most frequent by a considerable margin. The same applies to *could*, although the numbers are less overwhelming. Sentences (9.7) and (9.8) are examples of *can* and *could* with (dynamic) ‘ability’ meanings; Sentences (9.9) and (9.10) are examples of *can* and *could* with (dynamic) ‘possibility’ meanings:

(9.7) In the literature **can** be found legions of examples of animals that **could** escape but did not, or did and returned. (IT7)

(9.8) He **could** make audiences laugh. (CC7)

(9.9) The word ‘bank’ obviously **can’t** mean a place you go to get money from, but it makes sense to think of it as something that is next to water, ground to stand on. (CC2)
(9.10) Industrial development and the demands of modern life could have disastrous consequences for the environment. (IT7)

Finally, the results show that the ‘permission’ sense of can and could is relatively infrequent, as was the case with may and might.

(9.11) “You can touch me if you like.” (CC2)

(9.12) “I could never play with my friends or basically do anything that the other neighborhood kids my age did on Saturdays.” (IT4)

9.3 The ‘obligation/necessity’ modals
Table 5 shows the distribution of different semantic categories within the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals. There were altogether 33 instances of must, of which 24 (72.7%) were analysed as (deontic) ‘obligation’ and 9 (27.3%) as (epistemic) ‘necessity’. Should, the more frequent of the two, had altogether 52 hits, of which 47 (90.4%) were analysed as (deontic) ‘obligation/advice’ and only 5 (9.6%) as (epistemic) ‘necessity’.

Table 5. Semantic distribution of the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modals</th>
<th>(deontic) ‘obligation / advice’</th>
<th>(epistemic) ‘necessity’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>must</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observing Table 5, we find that in both cases the (deontic) ‘obligation’ meaning is considerably more frequent than (epistemic) ‘necessity’. In the case of should, this
tendency is especially prominent: only one in ten occurrences expresses ‘necessity’. Sentences (9.13) and (9.14) are examples of deontic *must* and *should*; sentences (9.15) and (9.16) are examples of epistemic *must* and *should*.

(9.13) The context, the environment, and relationships between people carry many signals and people must be able to read them. (CC2)

(9.14) “Using a whip at trotting races should be banned.” (CC2)

(9.15) He must have been well aware of the dangers, even adapted to them up to a point. (IT7)

(9.16) According to the map, there should be a bridge here but it has collapsed. (CC2)

9.4 The ‘volition/prediction’ modals

We turn finally to the results regarding the ‘volition/prediction’ modals *will* and *would*. As a reminder, I have categorised the so-called ‘habitual’ *will* and *would* under ‘prediction’ in accordance with Leech (2004) and Coates (1983) (see Section 7.2.7). Likewise, the so-called ‘pure’ hypothetical *would* is categorised under ‘prediction’ (see Section 7.3.4).

Table 6 shows the distribution of different semantic categories within the ‘volition/prediction’ modals. There were altogether 169 cases of *will*, of which 143 (84.6%) were analysed as (epistemic) ‘prediction’ and 12 (7.1%) as (dynamic) ‘volition’. In addition, there were 13 (7.7%) ambiguous cases. As for *would*, there were altogether 162 cases, of which 131 (80.9%) were analysed as (epistemic) ‘prediction’ and 19 (11.7%) as (dynamic) ‘volition’. There were 12 (7.4%) ambiguous cases.
Table 6. Semantic distribution of the ‘volition/prediction’ modals.

Table 6 shows quite clearly that both will and would are predominantly used to mark ‘prediction’ instead of ‘volition’. Shall appearing in the results with only one hit, nothing conclusive can be said about its semantic distribution. Sentences (9.17) and (9.18) are examples of ‘prediction’ will and would; sentences (9.19) and (9.20) are examples of ‘volition’ will and would. Sentence (9.21) is the only example of shall in the data.

(9.17) While Roberts’ fans won’t be disappointed by her Oscar-winning performance as the feisty Erin Brockovich, neither will anyone who has a passing interest in environmental matters … (IT7)

(9.18) What about your two cats? You promised you’d look after them when you persuaded your parents to let you have them in the first place, remember? (CC2)

(9.19) “Not in this life. And you ought to give it up, too. Besides, I have half the mind of reporting you to the police. Get lost, will you.” (CC2)

(9.20) So what I’m saying is, it could be worse, and to every cloud a silver lining, wouldn’t you agree, gentlemen?
(9.21) Nevertheless, he took the precaution of packing his photo album in
waterproof cloth - “it being the only record of my work I shall be able to
take, should we be compelled to take to the floe.” (CC7)

10 Discussion
This chapter has three aims. I will first provide a critical appraisal of the study and an
evaluation of the methods used in Section 10.1. In Section 10.2, then, I will critically
analyse the results obtained from this study. This section serves as the qualitative
deliberation on the quantitative results presented in Chapter 9. The chapter will then
conclude in a separate section (Section 10.3) on some of the more general suggestions
that the results and their analysis invite one to make.

10.1 Critical appraisal of the study
Before moving on to a discussion on the results as presented in Chapter 9, it is
necessary to evaluate the manner in which the study was conducted as well as its
reliability\(^\text{10}\) and validity\(^\text{11}\). All in all, the study was carried out and proceeded
according to plan. In hindsight, the exclusion of exercises from my mini-corpus was,
despite the unnatural and inauthentic feel that they had, somewhat unfortunate, although
I do not feel that this would have changed the outcome to any great extent. If anything,
it would have emphasised the patterns that already emerged and that will be discussed
in the following section (Section 10.2).

As for the semantic analyses that followed the raw frequency counts in Section
9.1, it is here that the general linguistic competence of the researcher comes into play.

\(^{10}\) Reliability is defined by Dörnyei (2007: 50) as an indication of “the extent to which our measurement
instruments and procedures produce consistent results in a given population in different circumstances”.

\(^{11}\) Validity, according to Dörnyei (2007: 49-50), can be broken down into measurement validity and
research validity. The requirements of measurement validity can be said to be fulfilled if the test
“measures what it is supposed to measure” (Dörnyei 2007: 51). As for research validity, which I will
mainly focus on, it is divided into internal validity (the results of the study must be the outcome of the
variables in the study and not affected by other factors) and external validity (the extent to which the
results can be generalised) (Dörnyei 2007: 52).
Subjective assessments, it must be said, cannot be completely eradicated: as meticulously as one tries to categorise different modals into different groups, real-life examples can never be completely unambiguous. This, I think, is the single biggest threat to the overall reliability as well as to the external validity of the present study. I take comfort in the fact that even seasoned veterans of the trade, such as Geoffrey Leech and Frank Palmer, admit the complications that this kind of analysis invariably entails.

This being said, I feel that the compilation of texts from which my data derive is by no means on a similar level of complexity with regard to studies based on corpora that represents actual present-day English, whether it be spoken or written. Textbook texts, although to all appearances excerpts from authentic sources, have nevertheless been carefully selected and toned down in the interest of accessibility. This has made my work easier and, to a certain extent, more reliable. A measure of this reliability is, I think, the relatively small ‘ambiguous’ categories in contrast to similar studies in the field (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999).

Nor does the simplicity of the examples in the data in any way detract from the overall validity of the study. The object of my study has not been real-life English as it is spoken in an English-speaking country but rather the way this compares to how EFL textbooks portray it. As such, I feel that my study has been representative and thus a good indication of how the English modals are portrayed in EFL textbooks more generally. The requirements of external validity and generalisability are, I think, perfectly met.

10.2 Discussion of results
In this section, I will analyse the results obtained from the present study. Its structure follows that of Chapter 9. I will start off with the overall frequencies and then go on to discuss the results of each semantic category of modals separately.
10.2.1 Overall frequencies
All in all, the results (see Section 9.1) indicate that the frequency and ordering of the core modals in the data correspond reasonably well to the values presented in recent studies on the subject (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999, Mindt 1995). Although one should admittedly be careful when making comparisons between corpora that have such a huge discrepancy in numbers (Biber et al.’s LSWE corpus, for instance, contains 40 million words), it is gratifying to note the remarkably similar proportions. The only notable exception is *can*, which is somewhat overrepresented in the data: although most studies put it in the top three, it is usually well below *will* and *would* in terms of frequency (Leech et al. 2009: 72, Biber et al. 1999: 486). It is interesting to note, however, that *can* is usually more frequent in studies that focus on the spoken registers (Leech et al. 2009: 77, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999: 489), which might lead one to believe that the authors of both *Culture Café* and *In Touch*, in accordance with the ideas behind the Communicative Approach (see Chapter 3), have favoured language closer to conversation and speech. This would explain, moreover, the slightly more frequent *should* and the relatively infrequent *may*, for which the same tendency has been found, although the numbers here are too small to be meaningful.

Another interesting point is the virtual non-existence of the modal *shall* in the data. As we have already noted (see Section 7.2.9), most recent studies consider it “relatively rare” (Biber et al. 1999: 486) or even showing signs of “diminishing functionality, and perhaps obsolescence” (Leech et al. 2009: 80), but others argue (see e.g. Römer 2004, Mindt 1995) that *shall* in certain contexts is still widely used. Although the rarity of *shall* in present-day English cannot, I think, be disputed, it is still interesting to note that despite all the prophecies predicting its speedy demise, it is still very far from being completely dead. On the basis of this particular study, however,
Finnish upper secondary school students do not at present encounter *shall* in almost any contexts. Likewise, the exercise sections of the textbooks contain no exercises on *shall*.

### 10.2.2 The ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals

On the whole, the results of the semantic analysis into the ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals (see Section 9.2) present an interesting if not altogether disturbing picture of the way these modals are portrayed in Finnish EFL upper secondary school textbooks.

As for *may* and *might*, the general trend is clear: (epistemic) ‘possibility’ meanings are emphasised in both cases, while the (deontic) ‘permission’ meaning is downplayed considerably. Although the bias towards possibility meanings is notable for *may* and *might*, this is in keeping with recent research (see Sections 7.2.4 and 7.3.3), which suggests that the use of *may* and *might* in present-day English is more and more restricted to ‘possibility’ meanings and that the ‘permission’ meaning is for the most part confined to the formal register (Leech 2004: 76-77, Biber et al. 1999: 491-493). In this respect, then, the portrayal of *may* and *might* in the data can be said to be accurate.

It is an interesting aside, however, that both grammar books that accompany the textbooks (i.e. Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003 and Kallela et al. 1998) begin their treatment of *may* with the ‘permission’ meaning and regard ‘possibility’ as secondary.

This, however, is not the case with *can* and *could*. *Can* especially shows a massive bias towards (dynamic) ‘ability’ meanings, which are three times as frequent as ‘possibility’ meanings, while for instance Biber et al. (1999: 491) list them as equally frequent both in spoken and written registers. In none of the studies investigated for the present study was there any indication of a tendency for *can* to primarily mark ‘ability’ instead of ‘possibility’. The same bias is evident in the portrayal of *could* as well, although the numbers are, as was already noted, not as daunting.
A tentative explanation for this bias is, I suspect, the traditional treatment of *can* in Finnish grammars of English as something that can be paraphrased as ‘be able to’. This is evident from elementary level EFL textbooks such as *Wow! 3 Study Book* (Westlake, Aura & Turpeinen 2002) and *All Stars 3 Reader* (Benmergui et al. 2008) onwards. While this is perhaps a sensible viewpoint at elementary level where students are better equipped to handle sentences with concrete meanings such as *I can swim* instead of *It can happen*, it makes no sense to continue this practice up to upper secondary school level where the students are more prepared and indeed expected to encounter the general complexity of the English language. A quick glance at the two grammar books that serve as an accompaniment to *Culture Café* and *In Touch* (Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003 and Kallela et al. 1998 respectively) is revealing in that both consider *can* and *could* first in terms of their ability (dynamic) meanings while reluctantly admitting that it can have other meanings as well.

As for the ‘permission’ meaning of *can*, then, the general predilection of the authors for preferring meanings in the ‘ability’ end of the gradient means that the ‘permission’ meaning has taken a hit as well. Admittedly, most studies consider it much rarer than the other two meanings (see Section 7.2.2), but eight occurrences for *can* and only three for *could* do not, I think, give a full picture of what can at present be regarded as linguistic reality. What is interesting to note, moreover, is the general scarcity of the ‘permission’ meaning in the data when considering all of the four ‘permission’ modals together. Is ‘permission’ not a meaning that needs to be conveyed in an EFL textbook? If we think of EFL textbooks being geared towards the Communicative Approach and the idea that communicative competence is primary (see Chapter 3), one would think that the act of giving permission and asking for permission are vital to successful communication in an English-speaking country.
For a more extensive treatment of the matter, it is instructive at this point to consider the wider context in which *can* and *could* appear in the material by bringing into the analysis the exercises that were intentionally excluded from the corpus (see Section 8.1). It is again a salient point that the exercise section that is included in *Culture Café Course 2* (Benmergui et al. 2003), for example, starts off with two exercises in which the student has to replace sentences with *can* with its, as Benmergui et al. (2003) have it, ‘suppletive’ form *be able to*. *In Touch Course 4* (Davies et al. 2002) and *In Touch Course 7* (Davies et al. 2004) are less exclusive in that they contain plenty of exercises with ‘possibility’ *can*. In none of exercise sections in any of the books is there any mention of or exercises on the ‘permission’ *can*; all books, however, begin their treatment of *may* with exercises on the ‘permission’ meaning.

### 10.2.3 The ‘obligation/necessity’ modals

The results presented in Section 9.3 show that there is again noticeable discrepancies especially in the case of *must* when compared to recent studies (see e.g. Leech et al. 2009, Biber et al. 1999). We have noted already (see Sections 7.2.5 and 7.2.6) that, as a general trend, *must* is on the decline and has taken a hit in both of its meanings. Insofar as it is still used, the ‘necessity’ meaning is emphasised at the expense of ‘obligation’, a tendency which is especially true of the spoken registers (Biber et al. 1999: 494). By contrast, the data show a trend that is the exact reverse: the obligation meaning is over two times as frequent as the possibility meaning, providing an altogether crooked picture of the way *must* is used in present-day English.

Although the discrepancy is considerable, it is slightly unfair to criticise the authors simply on the basis of their treatment of *must*. Out of all three groups of modals, it is the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals that have undergone the most significant changes in recent years. As was noted earlier (see Section 6.3), the rise of the semi-modals has
had an enormous impact on their frequency. No treatment of the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals should be considered adequate, then, without the inclusion of (at least) have to and need to to complete the overall picture. This view is corroborated by a speculative KWIC search in the corpus, which yields a raw frequency of 40 hits for have to (surpassing must with 7 hits) and 13 hits for need to. A more thorough investigation on the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals would, I think, be an interesting topic for further research.

On the basis of the present study, however, we can say that although the overall frequency of must in the data corresponds fairly well to reality, a semantic analysis shows a considerable bias towards deontic meanings. Bearing in mind that a complete analysis should include the ‘obligation/necessity’ semi-modals, I am inclined to think that the main reason for this is at least partially the same bias that was evident in the case of can (see Section 10.2.2). A traditional stance adopted by Finnish grammars of English has been to regard must not only (inaccurately) as the most important ‘obligation/necessity’ modal but also as primarily something that can be paraphrased as ‘be obliged to’ or ‘be forced to’. Both Grammar Rules! (Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003: 76-77) and Datelines: Grammar Plus (Kallela et al. 1998: 34-35) are again revealing in that they consider must as the standard form for expressing the idea of ‘being forced to’, and in cases where must is a grammatically impossible choice due to its inherent ‘defectiveness’, a ‘suppletive’ verb have to is to be used. This same ordering of meanings is evident in the exercise sections of Culture Café Course 2 (Benmergui et al. 2003) and Course 7 (Benmergui et al. 2003) as well as In Touch Course 4 (Davies et al. 2002) and In Touch Course 7 (Davies et al. 2004). Only in passing or as a secondary meaning do any of the books mention the epistemic use of must, which, after all, is the most frequent and widespread way of using must in present-day English (see e.g. Leech
et al. 2009, Römer 2004, Biber et al. 1999). This is clearly not justifiable from a contemporary standpoint. Admittedly, a more fair treatment of must is provided in the two grammar books (Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003 and Kallela et al. 1998), which contain plenty of examples of the ‘necessity’ must.

All that is left, then, is to examine should, for which there is little to say. As we have seen, should in the data is much more common marking (deontic) ‘obligation/advice’ than it is marking (epistemic) ‘necessity’. Although this can, to a certain degree, be considered accurate (see Section 7.3.5), only 5 hits (9.6%) for ‘necessity’ in contrast to 47 (90.4%) for ‘obligation/advice’ in the data can hardly be considered a fair portrayal of the different uses of should. A closer analysis of the exercise sections provides no comfort: there are no examples of ‘necessity’ should in any of the exercise sentences.

10.2.4 The ‘volition/prediction’ modals
Yet again, though perhaps unsurprisingly at this stage, we find a rather one-sided picture being portrayed by the EFL textbooks as regards the ‘volition/prediction’ modals. As Table 6 shows, the ‘prediction’ sense is emphasised considerably. This makes sense to a certain degree, as ‘prediction’ appears to be their most common use in present-day English by a wide margin (see Section 7.2.8). The numbers are, however, so overwhelming as to be considered disproportionate.

Although understandable, what this bias towards the ‘prediction’ sense clearly demonstrates, is the more general treatment of will and would as primarily either the ‘future tense’ marker (see Section 7.2.7) or the ‘hypothetical meaning’ marker (see Section 7.3.4) respectively. There are, relatively speaking, precious few examples of either being used in any other sense in the data, although admittedly a more fine-grained analysis would be needed before anything conclusive can be said about the matter. It is
an incontestable fact, however, that neither the books under scrutiny for the present study nor the grammar books Grammar Rules! (Silk, Mäki & Kjisik 2003) and Datelines: Grammar Plus (Kallela et al. 1998) that accompany them consider will or would in terms of modality. Both regard will as a separate ‘future tense’ auxiliary together with others such as be going to; would, on the other hand, is treated as an auxiliary used to form the so-called ‘conditional’ verb form. There is no overt mention of, for example, the ‘volition’ uses of either modal, although both grammar books discuss the so-called ‘habitual’ will and its past tense would (see Section 7.2.7). Taking this into account, it is hardly surprising that the way in which will and would are portrayed in the actual texts is so lopsided.

As a general observation, I feel that the analysis of the ‘volition/prediction’ modals would benefit from a more detailed treatment that would differentiate between the finer nuances within the ‘prediction’ category, e.g. ‘habitual’ or ‘predictability’ for will and ‘past future’ and ‘hypothetical meaning’ for would (see Sections 7.2.7 and 7.3.4). This would lead to a more thorough understanding of this particular group of modals; on the downside, this would require more or less native-like competence on the part of the researcher, as these nuances are often very subtle. This kind of analysis is not impossible, however, as for example Coates (1983) skilfully shows.

10.3 Suggestions
If we assume that the way in which the core modals are portrayed in the textbooks analysed for the present study is an accurate description of the way in which they are portrayed more generally in an EFL setting, there are several points to be made. Firstly, if the main objective of EFL teaching is for learners to be able to communicate effectively and accurately, it is paramount that they be exposed to the full array of meanings that the core modals can have. A few examples here and there will not do:
learners especially at upper secondary school level are capable of coming to terms with a higher degree of complexity that the EFL textbooks, on the basis of the present study, clearly do not provide. This is not simply a matter pertaining to can and must, the portrayal of which, as we have seen, is particularly deformed; it is my opinion that the teaching of all core modals would greatly benefit from a fuller treatment in EFL upper secondary school textbooks, even if it means emphasising meanings that are relatively infrequent in some present-day English registers. In particular, I would advocate more examples of ‘permission’ meanings within the ‘permission/possibility/ability’ modals and of ‘necessity’ meanings within the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals. Moreover, I would introduce more elements of ‘volition’ into the analysis of will and would.

Likewise, nothing is gained by excluding some uses or entire modals altogether. The relative rarity of shall in present-day English, for instance, is not sufficient grounds for completely excluding it and thus robbing learners of vital learning opportunities. Even if learners were exposed to disproportionate frequencies of, for example, the different senses of shall or the ‘permission’ might, there is, I think, no danger that they would learn to overuse these meanings, especially if the teacher is there to explain things more thoroughly. Both need to be included in texts studied in an EFL classroom.

As a final point, we have seen in the analysis of the ‘volition/prediction’ modals that they are treated predominantly as simple grammatical markers of either ‘future tense’ (as in the case of will and, to a lesser extent, shall) or ‘hypothetical meaning’ (as in the case of would). Indeed, they are formally not considered modal verbs at all in most EFL grammar books: the idea seems to be that they are semantically vacuous strings of letters that are used to trigger a particular tense or mood. Although recent research suggests that this may well be the direction in which this group of modals is heading, they are still far from being ‘empty’ grammatical markers, and the element of
‘volition’, especially in the case of will, is often quite strong. Consequently, will and would need to included within the modals and, as they are also the two most frequent modals, they should be taught at an early stage in the syllabus.

11 Conclusions
Finally, we turn to conclusions. This chapter is in two parts. The first part provides a summary of the results presented in Chapter 9 and discussed in Chapter 10. The second part considers implications for future research.

11.1 Summary of results
The main purpose of the present study has been to examine the ways in which English modality is portrayed in Finnish EFL textbooks at upper secondary school level. I have further delimited my field of study to include only the so-called core or central modals will, would, can, could, shall, should, may, might and must. I began with the hypothesis that there are notable discrepancies in the way that the core modals are portrayed in EFL textbooks when compared with recent research on how they are actually used in present-day English.

As hypothesised, the discrepancies are there. EFL upper secondary school textbooks seem to offer a relatively one-sided picture of the way the core modals are used. In many all cases, the treatment was heavily biased towards one of the meanings the core modal could have. This, with respect to some modals, is not an irredeemable deficiency. Recent research suggests that the evolution of the core modals has gone in the direction that one meaning is favoured over the other, and this tendency towards monosemy is a well-established fact in the case of may and might, for example. The results of the present study seem to indicate, however, that the authors of EFL textbooks are taking this tendency too far. We have seen this unusually well in the portrayal of can and must, for which the favouring of one meaning (i.e. ‘ability’ in the case of can and
‘obligation’ in the case of *must* is less justifiable or even, to use a more prescriptive term, wrong. Moreover, we have seen that this one-sided approach is perhaps less due to an overgeneralisation of a recent trend in the evolution of the core modals than it is a simple ‘carrying over’ of elements deriving from traditional grammars of English (such as the treatment of *can* as primarily something meaning ‘be able to’) that have been the established practice of EFL teaching for decades.

In conclusion, the portrayal of the core modals in EFL textbooks, although reasonably accurate, could be improved. I have tried to provide some suggestions on how this might be achieved. Generally speaking, the teaching of English modality would greatly benefit from a more all-inclusive approach: firstly, the core modals should be taught as a group that would include, contrary to what the current norm appears to be, *will, would* and *shall*, and secondly, learners should be exposed more thoroughly to all the meanings the core modals can have.

### 11.2 Implications for future research

McEnery and Wilson (2001: 120) provide a particularly felicitous remark when they say that “…non-empirically based teaching materials can be positively misleading and … corpus studies should be used to inform the production of materials, so that the more common choices of usage are given more attention than those which are less common”.

Further research is clearly needed on English modality in the Finnish context. Although studies on textbooks are far from being a rarity in Finland, modality is seldom their object of study. This is not the case in other European countries, such as Germany. Furthermore, the corpus-based approach is, I think, well-suited for this kind of research, as it brings out the discrepancies quite nicely.

An obvious expansion to the present study would be to include all eight books of both textbook series, which would then provide a more complete picture. However, this
would not be sensible in light of the fact that two new textbook series will shortly be published in full (*Profiles* by WSOY and *Open Road* by Otava). More useful, then, would be to study how modality is portrayed in these more recent textbooks.

An even more promising object of future studies would be to include at least some of the semi-modals that were intentionally excluded. We have seen with respect to the ‘obligation/necessity’ modals *must* and *should* in particular that semi-modals would be a welcome addition. At least *have to* and *need to* should be included, and I would even advocate the inclusion of *ought to* to complete the list. Outside the ‘obligation/necessity’ group, the list could be supplemented with more semi-modals from the top of the frequency list, such as *be going to*, *be able to*, *want to* and *be to*: these are all showing high frequencies especially in spoken registers (Leech et al. 2009: 97). Moreover, it would be interesting to see more detailed analyses on the ‘volition/prediction’ modals *will*, *would* and *shall*. The two-way approach for which I opted makes for simple analysis, but I feel that some of the nuances are lost that might well be the object of further research.

Finally, it is my belief that the whole EFL language teaching community would greatly benefit from more studies of this kind. We have seen during the course of this study that English modality is an intriguing and yet strangely elusive concept which poses many distinctive problems in an EFL setting. Teachers and textbook authors alike should be made well aware of the intricacies involved in it. I would argue, moreover, that the latter play a vital part in the way in which English is taught, as textbooks often dictate the approaches and perspectives that the teacher adopts in the classroom. For this reason, it is particularly important that the English core modals and the meanings they convey are portrayed correctly.
Primary sources


Secondary sources


