Possible worlds: Verbo-nominal patterns with chance

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1. Introduction

- Focus on *chance(s)*: “semiotic noun” (Halliday 1985), “shell noun” (Schmid 2000)

OEDonline on *chance* (< Old French; attested from ME onwards)

- “The falling out or happening of events; the way in which things fall out; **fortune**; case.”
- “An **opportunity** that comes in any one's way. Often const. of.”
- “A **possibility** or **probability** of anything happening: as distinct from a certainty: often in plural, with a number expressed.”
- In “phrases”: “To stand a (fair, good) chance”; “Is there any chance of....?”; “To be in with a chance”
1. Introduction

• Chance(s) in *verbo-nominal patterns* in which it takes a complement (clause) (constructional templates)
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Complement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXIST</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>complement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAVE</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>complement</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>complement</td>
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  **There** *BE DET ADJ chance(s) of/to/(that)*
  
  *You have got the midterm election coming up here. My sense is that there’s a very good chance the Republicans are going to take back the Senate* (WBO)

  **Have** *DET ADJ chance(s) of/to/(that)*
  
  *Terry claims that he is being fitted up by a corrupt policeman and thinks he has no chance of proving his innocence in court* (WBO)

  **DET chances are (that)**
  
  *if you’re really interested in the course then chances are you’ll go out and buy the books* (WBO)

1. Introduction

We aim to show that verbo-nominal patterns with chance(s) exceed the functional reach of modal auxiliaries, as they exhibit 3 types of uses:

1) They are functionally equivalent to modal aux: \( \rightarrow \) possible worlds
   - Grammatical uses expressing different types of modality (dynamic, deontic and epistemic)
     
     *Since he was quite unable to run he had no chance of outstripping his pursuer, so he resigned himself to imminent recapture.* (WBO UKwrit)

2) They exceed the functional reach of modal aux:
   - Lexical uses
     
     *Many also devote inside pages to the policies and characters of the three contenders, and assess their chances of winning* (WBO UKspok)
   - Third category: ‘caused modality’
     
     *While executing their children’s killers would not bring back their loved ones, it would at least act as a catharsis, giving all concerned a better chance to move on with their lives* (WBO UKwrit)
Outline for today

1. Introduction
2. Data and methods
3. Grammatical uses
   3.1 Dynamic modality
   3.2 Deontic modality
   3.3 Epistemic modality
4. Beyond modal auxiliaries: lexical uses
5. Beyond Modal auxiliaries: ‘caused modality’
6. Conclusions
2. Data and methods

- Queries run on **WordBanks Online** subcorpora (57 million word synchronic corpus)
- British English subcorpora:
  - **Spoken**: Brspok
  - **Written**: Brbooks, Brmags, Brnews, Brephem, Times, Sunnow
- Queries targeted the lemma *chance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>query</th>
<th>Absolute frequency [subcorpora]</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>chance</em> in Query box</td>
<td>59,467 [6 written UK subcorpora]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>chance</em> in Query box</td>
<td>5,060 [brspok]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Analysis of 250 random examples with complements for written and spoken each (500 hits)
  - Syntactic variables: complement type, subject complement, number of N, determiner, modifier, voice, polarity
  - Semantic variables: overall meaning
3. Grammatical uses

3.1 Dynamic modality

• traditionally: ability or capacity of subject participant (von Wright 1951b)

  - abilities/possibilities, or needs/necessities
  - inherent in participants of actions, or in situations
  - no attitudinal assessment (i.e., no speaker attitude)

(1) *It is essential* to keep emptying the bladder if you are to flush out the germs. (CB)
(2) *Will I ever be able to* have a baby? (WB)
(3) *Karen had to* swerve to avoid something on the road. (WB)
3. Grammatical uses

3.1 Dynamic modality

4) He [i.e. Sadam Hussein] has caused a superpower [i.e., the USA] to hesitate to use force against him. And he now has a chance to present himself as the only Arab leader who can compel the world to take the Palestine problem seriously. (brspok)
   [participant-imposed possibility: he can now present himself as ...]

5) with er the monkeys [...] they'd got chances to swing to the trees and that sort of thing (brspok)
   [participant-imposed possibility: they could swing to the trees]

6) It's such a fab feeling having a make-over with everyone fussing over you. I love everything about this outfit but what makes it more special is that I'd never get the chance to wear something like this back home on a night out. (sunnow)
   [participant-imposed impossibility: I would never be able to wear ...]
3. Grammatical uses

3.2 Deontic modality

• traditionally: permission and obligation  
  (von Wright 1951a, 1951b; Lyons 1977: 823–841)

• more recently (Nuyts et al. 2010; Van Linden 2012): distinction between
  - obligation, permission, advice (directive meaning) (1)
  - desirability (attitudinal meaning) (2)-(3)

(1) *Mistress Philippa and Geoffrey had best stay together.* (BNC)
(2) *We must not under-estimate the phenomenal and accelerating pace at which the world is changing.* (WB)
(3) *we feel it is more appropriate to give the task of pulling the threads together to one person.* (CB)
3. Grammatical uses

3.2 Deontic modality

4) But Shearer did not rule out the possibility of making the pairing work. He added: "Myself and Patrick should be able to form a good partnership -- if we get the chance to play together." (sunnow) [permission: if we are allowed to play together (by the coach)]

5) What about erm do you think while you were at school there was anything that you were n't allowed to do because you were a girl? -- Mm. <tc text="pause"/> E as well we had the chance to play football (brspok) [permission: we were allowed to play football at school]

6) It would have given access to the institutions' expertise who would have been able to advise President Gorbachov on his programme to convert the Soviet Union from a centrally planned economy to a market orientated one. But there would have been no chance of loans from the institutions -- they are restricted to full members. (brspok) [absence of permission: The Sovjet Union would not be allowed to get loans from the World Bank]
3. Grammatical uses

3.3 Epistemic modality

- speaker’s (or someone else’s) assessment of an SoA in terms of likelihood (to what extent the SoA applies in the world or not)

(1) We most probably drank more two years ago than we have this season. (WB)
(2) There’s no doubt, Peter Mandelson is a disaster. (WB)
(3) “I was a consummate fool,” Wolfe said. “I made every possible mistake, but Milos appeared from somewhere with a rifle and a pistol. He must have killed three of them.” Five, he said, when he told me the story later. (CB, ukbooks)
3. Grammatical uses

3.3 Epistemic modality

4) Q. How does it seem this particular issue may be resolved? GREEN: There is a good chance that someone in Parliament may yet call for a vote of no confidence in Mr Sacher. (brspok) [epistemic probability: someone may well yet call for a vote]

5) I mean fair enough if you're really interested in the course then chances are you'll go out and buy the books (brspok) [epistemic probability: it is likely you go out and buy the books]

6) With between 13 and 14 per cent of the vote they [the Communists] are the second biggest political group nationwide. They know they stand no chance of being included in the future coalition government. That will most likely be a matter between the Civic Forum and the Christian Democrats. (brspok) [epistemic impossibility: they know they won't be included]
### 3. Grammatical uses

- **interim summary** -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>dynamic</th>
<th>deontic</th>
<th>epistemic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal source</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary(-)/scalar (+)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+ (gradual scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(possibility vs. necessity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>abilities/possibilities, or needs/necessities inherent in participants of actions, or in situations</td>
<td>traditionally: permission and obligation; more recently: (moral) desirability of events</td>
<td>Likelihood of a propositional content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Grammatical uses

• Conceptual framework of **FORCE DYNAMICS** (Talmy 1988, 2000) applied to modal auxiliaries: entities interact with respect to forces and barriers

**ROOT** meanings:

• **e.g. cannot**: a typically sentient subject (the Agonist) is inclined towards the action expressed by the infinitive, but some opposing factor (force) blocks the realisation of the event

• **e.g. pouvoir** in its ability sense: “The force stored in the locus of potency [=subject participant] allows the latter to overcome the resistance (or force) coming form the activity profiled in the landmark, and therefore perform an occurrence of that process” (Achard 1998: 143).

**EPISTEMIC** meanings: sociophysical forces and barriers are metaphorically mapped onto premises in the world of reasoning

• **e.g. must** is taken as indicating an epistemic force applied by some body of premises (the only thing that can apply epistemic force), which compels the speaker (or people in general) to reach the conclusion embodied in the sentence. (Sweetser 1990: 64)
4. Beyond modal auxiliaries: lexical uses

• Core modals in English have lost their original lexical use
e.g. *Can* < *cunnon* ‘to know’ *I can a noble tale* (c1386 Chaucer OEDonline)

• Verbo-nominal patterns with *chance(s)* can still be used lexically:
  1) *Many also devote inside pages to the policies and characters of the three contenders, and assess their chances of winning* (WBOspok)
  2) *Let us say that team A is playing team B on a neutral ground and that team A has a 70 per cent chance of victory and team B has 30 per cent.* (WBOwrit)
  3) *From Cairo, Jeffery Phillips reports: producers in Cairo and the ending of the hostile media campaigns. However, the chances of this plan getting beyond the discussion stage seemed dashed today when the official Baghdad press launched a strong personal attack upon the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah.* (WBOspok)
  4) *The gold medalists from the Delhi Games now stand no chance of a medal this time round.* (WBOspok)
5. Beyond modal auxiliaries: ‘caused modality’

• Verbo-nominal patterns with *chance(s)* can express ‘caused modality’ in augmented event structures (adding a (positive/negative) causative operator to the basic modal meaning)

• Cf. “greater modal system” (Talmy 1988: 81): includes modal auxiliaries, e.g. (2)
• as well as (lexical) *causative* verbs (e.g. *make, let, have, help*), e.g. (1):
  • syntactically similar to the core modals: take a bare infinitival complement
  • semantically similar: have force-dynamic reference
  • different in verb argument structure: code the Antagonist as subject, while modals code the Agonist as subject

(1) *I made him push the car to the garage.*
(2) *He must push the car to the garage.*
5. Beyond modal auxiliaries: ‘caused modality’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modal type</th>
<th>Basic pattern</th>
<th>Augmented pattern</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemic</strong></td>
<td>It has declared that it'll take account of legitimate Soviet security worries. And there's every chance the NATO summit will unveil a revised military strategy for the Alliance (WBO)</td>
<td>chairman John Yorkston has admitted Richard Gough's plan to draft in Archie Knox as his right-hand man has boosted his chances of being Pars gaffer. (WBO) (increase likelihood: make more likely)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>But erm then if you use er flux correction at the surface erm &lt;M01/&gt; Mm. &lt;M02/&gt; chances are you'll still have a thermohaline circulation and things like that (WBO)</td>
<td>Just seven days earlier, the White Feather had blown the chance of a draw for his relegation-racked side at Newcastle by having a penalty brilliantly saved by Shay Given. (WBO) (decrease likelihood: make less likely)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dynamic</strong></td>
<td>Since he was quite unable to run he had no chance of outstripping his pursuer, so he resigned himself to imminent recapture. (WBO)</td>
<td>but fears a dispute over a transfer fee might scupper any chance he has of making the move permanent. (WBO) (preclude: make impossible)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>they'd got chances to swing to the trees and that sort of thing (WBO, brspok)</td>
<td>While executing their children's killers would not bring back their loved ones, it would at least act as a catharsis, giving all concerned a better chance to move on with their lives (WBO) (enable: make possible)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deontic</strong></td>
<td>However, the paper says, in an historic move, the Soviet Union will be given the chance to join the International Monetary Fund (WBO)</td>
<td>Vinogradov 's difficult task was to restore the Kirov 's morale by providing new choreography alongside the 'classics' and by giving impatient young dancers a chance to prove themselves. (WBO) (allow)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It is BBC policy that all parties to a contentious matter have a fair chance to make their points within the confines of programme format (WBO)</td>
<td>The North Korean premier said he would give the South one more chance to sit round the negotiating table. (WBO, brspok). (allow once more)</td>
</tr>
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6. Conclusions

• Verbo-nominal patterns with *chance(s)* ‘enrich’ the “greater modal system”
  • Onomasiologically: new patterns that are functionally equivalent to basic modal auxiliaries
  • ‘Functionally’: display ‘caused modal’ meanings
  • Show layering (Hopper 1991) of lexical, grammatical and ‘caused’ modal uses

• Support for Talmy’s “greater modal system”: VNP evidence conceptual connection between basic modal and caused modal meanings that is at the basis of this greater system

• Importance of negation, voice, animacy of subject, modifiers, determiners in these patterns
  • Not lack of decategorialization (Hopper 1991) affecting their modal grammatical status (cf. Keizer 2016 on *(the) fact is (that)*)
  • ADJ N // ADV Mod AUX  *Have a good chance/ May well be*


References


Saad, Khalida, Wouter Parmentier, Lieselotte Brems, Kristin Davidse & An Van linden. The development of modal no way-constructions compared with that of no question- constructions. BAAHE (Belgian Association of Anglicists in Higher Education) 4 conference on Facing Present, Past and Future, Brussel (HUB), 1-3 December 2011.


References


