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CAN IN SHAKESPEARE AND MARLOWE

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to present the main meanings and the use of the modal verb *can* in the plays of two Early Modern English playwrights, William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. In particular, the study aims at presenting a comparative analysis and provides descriptive as well as quantitative data. The research is based on the analysis of the corpus consisting of the plays written by Shakespeare and Marlowe between 1593-1599. The choice of the works is not random but includes the plays which bear the strongest resemblance in terms of theme, structure, and most importantly, the language of both authors.

Keywords: modal verb *can*, Shakespeare, Marlowe

1. Introduction

The aim of the study is to shed some light on the use and function of the modal verb *can* in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe, the Early Modern English playwrights whose literary genius continues to puzzle the reader after four hundred years. The strong resemblance of the language, the structure and the leading themes in their plays is astonishing, to the degree which renders a question of mutual influence, a kind of master-apprentice relationship, and even authorship. The language incorporated in the works of the two writers constitutes an interesting study area and leaves plenty of space for a comparative analysis. Modality, as a linguistic phenomenon, offers great potential for research. The use and the meanings of modal verbs are dependent on the context, style and the degree of formality of the language. The analysis takes into account a number of factors, such as modality, context, and participants. The modal verb *can* constitutes a particularly interesting object of analysis due to great instability and evolutionary changes which occurred during the Early Modern English period.

2. Categorisation of *can* in previous studies

Modality has been the subject of keen interest and research of many scholars. During the past years a considerable amount of literature has been published on modal studies (e.g. Facchinetti 1993; Warner 1990, 2003; Verstraete 2001; Palmer 1990, 2001; Papafragou 2000; Portner 2009).

Ehrman (1966) provides a monosemantic analysis of modal auxiliaries in Present Day American English, and she expands her study to the comparison of modals in the works of William Shakespeare and John Dryden. Her primary interest is in finding the most general modal meanings, applicable to the majority of occurrences. Ehrman (1966: 10) posits the existence of a basic meaning from which subsidiary meanings, *overtones*, are derived. The overtones do not delete the basic meaning but add a new element which enforces a different interpretation of the modal meaning. As for the modal *can*, Ehrman (1966: 12) defines its basic meaning as "no obstruction to the action of the lexical verb of which *can* is an auxiliary". This basic meaning of *can* becomes a foundation from which the following overtones are derived: internal (knowledge or ability of the subject), permission, semi-imperative, and occurrential. Additionally, Ehrman (1966: 13-16) discusses the modal in terms of hypothesis, conditionality, and negation.

Coates (1983: 10) questions the usefulness of such an approach claiming that "neither models which assume discrete categories nor those which assume indeterminacy are wholly satisfactory for an analysis of modal meaning." In addition, Coates (1983: 13-17) draws the attention of the reader to the problem of indeterminacy of modal meanings and differentiates between its three types: gradience, ambiguity and merger. Coates (1983: 85) adopts a Root-Epistemic distinction but, at the same time, she admits that this differentiation is not applicable to the modal *can*. She thus considers the modal verb *can* within three categories: permission, ability, and root possibility and adopts a 'fuzzy set theory' to illustrate their interrelations. The extended discussion on the gradience of the modal meanings of *can* is provided by Leech and Coates (1980: 82-84), who claim that "*can* is essentially a monosemous modal: there are no clear divisions between permission, possibility, and ability."

Kakietek (1972) attempts to provide a systematic description of modal verbs in the language of William Shakespeare and focuses exclusively on the semantic features of the verbs. In order to identify a set of components of the modal *can*, Kakietek (1972: 54) employs a componential analysis and relies heavily on the study of declarative sentences with only minor references to negations and interrogatives. This approach leads Kakietek (1972: 54) to the conclusion that *can* is used as a realisation of the set of the following features: intentional, potential, non-external, non-conditional, and non-past. This set of

components is shared also by the modal *may*, which, according to Kakietek (1972: 54), is employed by Shakespeare interchangeably with *can*.

Palmer (1965: 115-116) offers a classification of the verb *can* based on the four criteria: reference to the future, collocation with adverbials, the function of the form *could*, and the substitution of *may* for *can*. On the basis of these criteria Palmer (1965: 116) distinguishes six uses of the verb, which are the following: ability (to do something), characteristic (patterns of behaviour), permission (to act), possibility, willingness (to ask a favour or make an offer), and sensation (with verbs of sensation). This brief categorisation of the verb is further developed and elaborated on in Palmer's (1990, 2001) later works, where he adopts a polysemantic approach and discusses the classification of modal categories within epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality. One dimension of this classification is regarding the modals in terms of possibility, which constitutes one of the meanings of the modal verb *can*, and necessity. Palmer (2001: 22) distinguishes between propositional and event modality. Propositional modality includes epistemic and evidential modality which "are concerned with the speaker's attitude to the truth-value of factual status of the proposition" (Palmer 2001: 24). Epistemic modality is further divided into speculative, deductive, and assumptive, whereas within evidential modality Palmer (2001: 22) differentiates between reported and sensory. Deontic and dynamic modality are termed by Palmer (2001: 70) as event modality, as they "refer to events that are not actualized, events that have not taken place but are merely potential". Within deontic modality Palmer (2001: 22) lists permissive, obligative and commissive, while dynamic modality includes abilitive and volitive. In Palmer (1990, 2001) the classification of the modal verb *can* may be categorised in terms of deontic possibility as indicating permission or, in extremely intensive cases, moving close to a command. Dynamic possibility designated by *can* involves subject-oriented (ability and power), neutral, rational and existential modality.

A different classification of modal categories, based on the place of accomodation of the enabling conditions (agent or speaker), is proposed by Bybee et al. (1994: 176-181). This diachronic research differentiates between agent-oriented, speaker-oriented, epistemic, and subordinating modality. According to Bybee et al. (1994: 177) agent-oriented modality "reports the existence of internal and external conditions on an agent with respect to the completion of the action expressed in the main predicate". This type of modality includes obligation, necessity, ability, desire, intention, willingness, and root possibility. In the case of the speaker-oriented modality, as explained in Bybee et al. (1994: 179), it is the speaker who imposes conditions on the addressee. The full set of speaker-oriented modality consists of imperative, prohibitive, optative, hortative, admonitive, and permissive. The set of three terms, possibility,

probability, and inferred certainty, constitutes the third type of modality, epistemic, which in the view supported by Bybee et al. (1994: 179) "applies to assertions and indicates the extent to which the speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition". An interesting semantic development of abilitive *can* is given by Bybee (1988, as quoted in Bybee et al. 1994: 192), showing how the modal goes through the stages of semantic generalisation and gradually loses its semantic components:

> *Can* predicates that
> (1st stage) mental enabling conditions exist in the agent
> (2nd stage) enabling conditions exist in the agent
> (3rd stage) enabling conditions exist

for the completion of the main predicate situation.

Kytö (1987) appreciates the polysemic approach towards the analysis of the modal verbs. For the sake of her variation-based study, she has collected a corpus of American English texts covering the period from the 17th to the early 18th century. The rough classification which she adopts includes the division of modals (*can*, *may*, *could* and *might*) into cases denoting 'possibility' and 'necessity'. Kytö (1987: 150) further categorises the modals of possibility into epistemic, non-epistemic, and indeterminate, whereas the modals of necessity are all epistemic. Each representative is additionally classified as 'past' and 'non-past'. In Kytö's (1987: 150) classification *can* occupies the position of possibility non-epistemic non-past modal, together with *may*, *could* and *might*, and, its negative form *cannot* is the only representative of necessity epistemic non-past modality.

3. Historical development of *can*

The PDE modal verb *can* is the successor of the OE preterite-present verb *cunnan*, whose forms include: *cann* (1 sing.), *canst* (2 sing.), *cann* (3 sing.), *cunnon* (plural), *cunne* (subj. sing.), *cūþe* (past) (Hogg 2002: 65). OED indicates the Old Teutonic senses of *cunnan*, namely 'to know', 'to know how', 'be mentally or intellectually able'. Visser (1978: 1734) also mentions mental capabilities conveyed by the verb, and Traugott (1972: 171) points out that *cunn-* was used to translate Latin *scīre* meaning 'have the intellectual power to'. Lightfoot (1979: 100) argues for a semantic distinction between *cunnan*, denoting mental abilities, and *magan* (PDE *may*), meaning 'to have the physical capability to', which sometimes used to be contrasted in the same sentence. The evolution of the verb *can* involves the gradual transition of its sense from mental to general physical capacity.

According to Traugott (1972: 171), this process was due to ME *koun* (OE *cunn-*) being used with nonhuman subjects. Since knowledge is considered to be exclusively a quality of humans, the partial loss of the reference to knowledge (Denison 1993: 303) and the introduction of the sense 'be able to' seem natural and logical consequences. The extension of the sense of ability onto the human subject is another step in the evolution of the verb (Traugott 1972: 171). By the ME period, 'ability' had become a prevailing meaning of *can*. Visser (1978: 1735) defines the reference of the verb as "natural or acquired capacity or ability" and lists its plausible meanings at this stage: "'to be able to', 'to have the power, ability, capacity, fitness or expertness to', 'to be in a position to', 'to be endowed with a talent for (-ing)', 'to be a good hand at' [...], 'to have virtue of (-ing), 'to be efficacious in (-ing), etc." (Visser 1978: 1735).

As Blake (2002: 128) explains, the confusion of *can* and *may* is under way by Elizabethan period, although some attempts are made to assign physical ability to *can* and mental or moral possibility to *may*. It has been observed that both verbs are "employed by Shakespeare interchangeably" (Kakietek 1972: 54). During the Early Modern English period the rivalry between *can* and *may* indicating ability is finally resolved with the former one winning and overtaking almost completely the sense 'be able to' (Traugott 1972: 172). Additionally, some instances of the original meaning of *can* ('to have knowledge or skill'), although infrequent, are traced back by Abbott (1966: 218) in Shakespearian language. Two new meanings of EME *can* emerge, i.e. possibility ("external circumstances allow me to do") and permission ("human authority, rules and regulations allow me to do") (Coates 1983: 93), the latter of which, according to Traugott (1972: 172), is finally established in the nineteenth century. In PDE *can* signifies "inherent or permanent ability or possibility" (Twaddell 1963: 13). The semantic development of *can* intertwines with the evolution of *may*, and involves a few-centuries' long transition from the expression of intellectual ability to possibility and permission.

4. Material

In order to obtain a reliable sample of texts a significant corpus has been collected comprising the total number of 282,305 words. The corpus consists of the plays written by Shakespeare and Marlowe between 1593-1599. The choice of the plays has been based not only on the time of their genesis and the number of words, but also on the genres they represent. The material under analysis can be approached as two separate corpora comprising the plays of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. For the contrastive reasons, the corpus of Shakespeare can be further divided into two subgroups comprising tragedies as well as history plays.

The plays of Christopher Marlowe:
1. *Dido, Queen of Carthage*
2. *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great*
3. *The Second part of Tamburlaine the Great*
4. *The Jew of Malta*
5. *Doctor Faustus*
6. *Edward the Second*
7. *The Massacre at Paris*

The tragedies of William Shakespeare:
1. *Titus Andronicus*
2. *Romeo and Juliet*
3. *Julius Caesar*

The history plays of William Shakespeare:
1. *The First Part of King Henry VI*
2. *The Second Part of King Henry VI*
3. *The Third Part of King Henry VI*
4. *The Tragedy of King Richard II*

5. Frequency distribution

The total relative frequency (RF) distribution of the modal *can* in the plays of William Shakespeare is 22.55. As Figure 1 shows, the verb is not regularly distributed across the plays, with the highest frequency in the history play *The Second Part of King Henry VI* (29.23 RF), and the lowest in the tragedy *Julius Caesar* (13.47 RF). The range is thus pretty high and equals 15.76 RF.

Table 1. Distribution of *can* in the plays of William Shakespeare

Title	Words in total	Can	Can – RF
King Henry VI; P. I	22,679	42	18.51
King Henry VI; P. II	26,677	78	29.23
King Henry VI; P. III	25,833	66	25.54
King Richard II	23,807	49	20.58
Titus Andronicus	21,658	46	21.23
Romeo and Juliet	25,740	68	26.41
Julius Caesar	20,780	28	13.47
Total	167,174	377	22.55

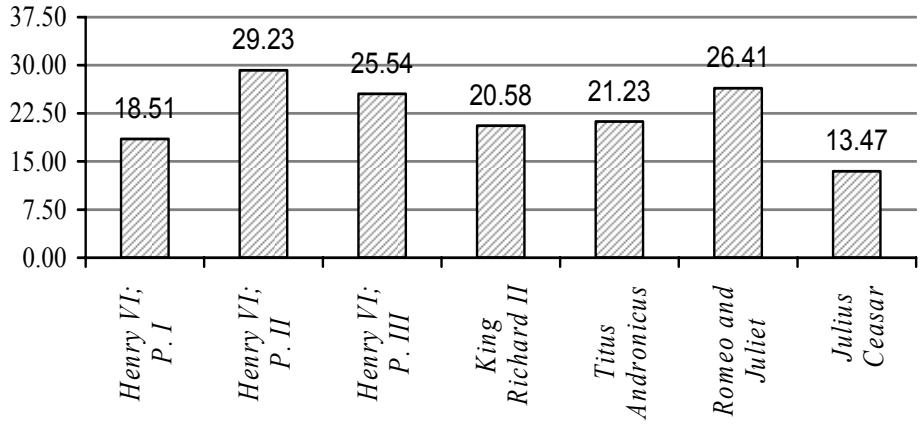

Figure 1. Distribution of can in the plays of William Shakespeare

Table 2. Distribution of *can* in the plays of Christopher Marlowe

Title	Words in total	Can	Can - RF
Dido, Queen of Carthage	14,642	30	20.48
Tamburlaine the Great 1	18,676	27	14.45
Tamburlaine the Great 2	19,116	28	14.64
The Jew of Malta	20,447	55	26.89
Doctor Faustus	12,815	36	28.09
Edward the Second	18,249	41	22.46
The Massacre at Paris	11,186	20	17.87
Total	115,131	237	20.58

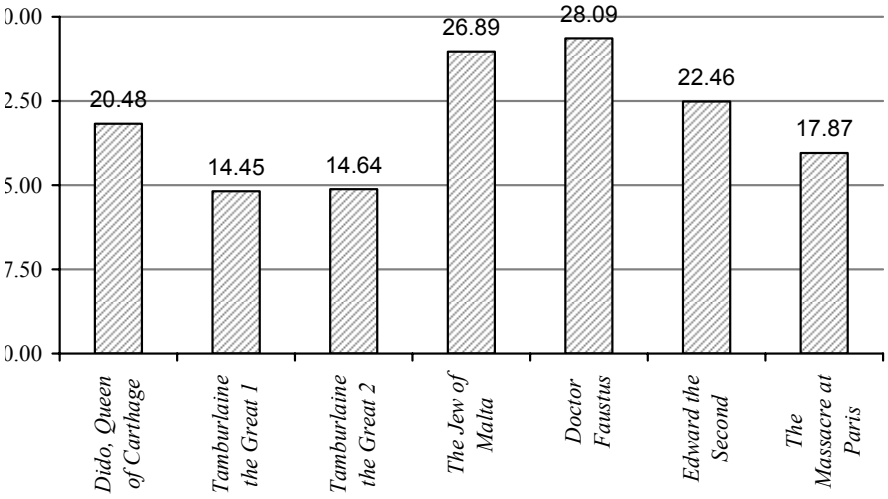

Figure 2. Distribution of *can* in the plays of Christopher Marlowe

As can be observed in Figure 2, a similarly fluctuating distribution of *can* has been attested in the plays of Christopher Marlowe. The total relative frequency is 20.58 with a range 13.64. The highest number of occurrences have been found in *Doctor Faustus* (28.09 RF), whereas the lowest in *Tamburlaine the Great 1* (14.45 RF).

It is apparent from Figure 3 that the overall frequency distribution of the modal verb *can* is higher in Shakespeare (22.55 RF) than in Marlowe (20.58 RF). However, as far as the number of occurrences in each play is concerned, both playwrights show a high degree of diversity, which is manifested in the great value of the range (15.76 RF in Shakespeare and 13.64 RF in Marlowe).

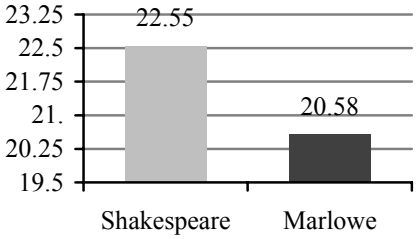

Figure 3. Distribution of *can* in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

6. Dynamic possibility

Dynamic modality expressed by the modal *can* is necessarily and exclusively related to possibility. Palmer (1990: 83) introduces two subkinds of this type of modality, namely 'subject-oriented' and 'neutral', in some cases also called 'circumstantial'. *Can* indicating this type of modality is more frequent in the historical plays (23.23 RF) than in the tragedies (18.92 RF) of Shakespeare. Several subtypes of dynamic possibility have been attested in Shakespearian plays, namely subject-oriented *can* with reference to both ability and power, rational, neutral, circumstantial and existential (though ambiguous).

As far as Marlowe's plays are concerned, they seem to cover a similar range of modal subkinds as in Shakespeare, however, no clear instances of circumstantial or existential possibility have been encountered.

Dynamic possibility is very frequent in both Shakespeare (21.47 RF) and Marlowe (19.97 RF). All in all, dynamic possibility expressed by *can* is not only more frequent in Shakespeare, but also constitutes a greater variety of modal subkinds than in Marlowe.

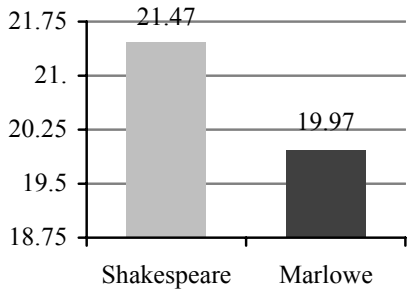

Figure 4. Distribution of *can* indicating dynamic possibility in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

6.1. Subject-oriented *can*

Subject-oriented *can* indicates the possibility of a subject to perform a certain action. This possibility involves not only the skills and abilities of the subject, but also the knowledge and the mental capacities which enable them to act. Palmer (1990: 85) proposes the division of subject-oriented *can* into ability and power, depending on the animacy of the subject.

6.1.1. Ability

Ability is assigned exclusively to animate entities such as people or animals. It may designate either the natural or acquired skills, or simply the physical capacity to perform. In Shakespeare's plays, ability expressed by *can* displays the relative frequency 1.61, with the distribution higher in tragedies (1.76 RF) than historical plays (1.51 RF). *The Second Part of King Henry VI* (2.99 RF) displays the highest amount of *can* indicating this meaning and the least prolific in this sense is *Julius Caesar* (0.48 RF).

In Marlowe, the frequency of this meaning of *can* is 3.47 RF. The range within this corpus, however, is pretty high with the relative value of 12.37, which is caused by the fact that this meaning of the verb manifests an unusually high distribution in one of the plays: *Doctor Faustus* (13.26 RF). The high frequency of abilitive *can* in the text is self-explanatory, given that it is a tragedy dealing with supernatural and paranormal issues. The main character of the play, Faustus, desires the devilish skills and is obsessed with the possession of demonic power, hence the frequent reference in the text to the abilities of the subject.

The outstandingly high frequency of *can* indicating ability in Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* may be responsible for the general tendency of dynamic possibility being more common in Marlowe (3.47 RF) than in Shakespeare (1.61 RF).

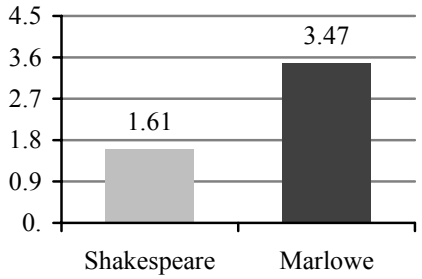

Figure 5. Distribution of *can* indicating ability in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

Some examples of abilitive *can* include:

(1) I *can* do al these things easily with it: first, I *can*
make thee druncke with ipocrase at any taberne in Europe
for nothing thats one of my coniuring workes. (C. M., *Doctor Faustus*, 8)

(2) Any man that *can* write may answer a letter. (W. Sh., *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.)

The most frequent animate subjects in Shakespeare and Marlowe are human. However, some instances of animal subjects have been recorded including horses, which are occasionally assigned human skills such as reading. Such cases of clear personification, as in (3), where an abstract subject shows purely human skills, have also been detected and classified as animate subjects.

(3) I am Enuy begotten of a Chimney-sweeper, and an Oyster wife,
I *cannot* reade, and therefore wish al books were burnt (C. M., *Doctor Faustus*, 5)

6.1.2. Power

The term *power* is introduced by Palmer (1990: 85) in order to make a distinction between the skills assigned to animate and inanimate entities. This is due to the fact that lifeless matter possesses no control over events, neither can perform nor pursue the course of action. On the other hand, such motionless substance may manifest certain characteristics which in some way may affect the vicinity and enhance the neighbouring community to act. In this sense, the exclusive use of the term *power* to designate the 'abilities' of inanimate entities seems justified.

The analysis has shown that this meaning of *can* in the plays of William Shakespeare is more frequent in the historical plays (1.21 RF) than the tragedies (0.73 RF). What is more, the highest number of occurrences (1.76 RF) of this meaning of *can* has been found in *Henry the Sixth, Part I* and *King Richard II*, whereas no representatives have been encountered in *Julius Caesar*.

In Marlowe, the number of occurrences of *can* constitutes the relative frequency of 1.30. The distribution of the verb across the plays is uneven, with the range 2.61 RF. No representatives of this type of modality have been detected in *The Massacre at Paris*, whilst the highest frequency (2.61 RF) has been found in *Tamburlaine the Great 2*.

As Figure 6 shows, the modal *can* in this meaning is only slightly more frequent in Marlowe (1.30) than in Shakespeare (1.01).

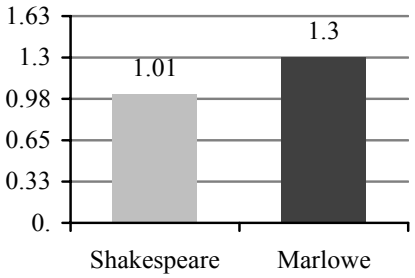

Figure 6. Distribution of *can* indicating power of inanimate subject in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

Some examples of *can* denoting power include:

(4) Damsel of France, I think I have you fast:
Unchain your spirits now with spelling charms
And try if they *can* gain your liberty. (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part One*, 5.3.)

(5) Nothing Faustus, but to delight thy minde withall,
And to shewe thee what Magicke *can* performe. (C. M., *Doctor Faustus*, 5)

(6) Sweet Bajazeth, I will prolong thy life,
As long as any blood or sparke of breath
Can quench or coole the torments of my griefe. (C. M., *Tamburlaine the Great 1*, 5.1.)

6.2. Rational possibility

Rational possibility indicates the events which are unacceptable in the opinion of the speaker. Most often this kind of modality is designated by the modal *can* in a negative form. Palmer (1990: 105) points out that *can* in this function is typically found with a subject either in the first person, the impersonal *you* or something with which the speaker indentifies himself.

The distribution of rational *can* is significantly higher in histories (2.42 RF) than tragedies (1.61 RF) of William Shakespeare, with the relative frequency fluctuating from 0.00 in *Julius Caesar* to 3.87 in *The Third Part of King Henry VI*.

The total relative frequency of rational *can* in Marlowe is equal to 4.86. The lowest distribution is manifested in *Doctor Faustus* (3.12 RF), whereas the highest in *Edward the Second* (8.21 RF).

All in all, the analysis of the corpora has showed that *can* indicating rational possibility is more than twice more common in Marlowe (4.86 RF) than in Shakespeare (2.09 RF).

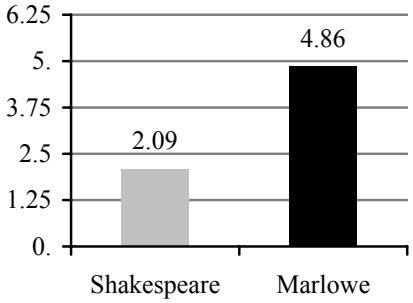

Figure 7. Distribution of *can* indicating rational possibility in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

Some instances of *can* expressing rational possibility in the corpus include:

(7) Feeling so the loss,
Cannot choose but ever weep the friend. (W. Sh., *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5.)

(8) Alas, this is a child, a silly dwarf!
It *cannot* be this weak and writhled shrimp
Should strike such terror to his enemies. (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part One*, 2.3.)

(9) What if I sinke his ships? O heele frowne:
Better he frowne, then I should dye for griefe:
I *cannot* see him frowne, it may not be: (C. M., *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 4.4.)

6.3. Neutral possibility

Neutral possibility designates the existence of possibility for an event to happen. Palmer (1990: 83-84) offers a paraphrase of the modal meaning as 'It is possible for...'. The possibility is not conditioned by the individual abilities or features of the speaker, but by some external factors and circumstances. When these factors are clearly defined in the utterance, the modality may be termed according to Palmer (1990: 84) as circumstantial possibility (see 5.3.1.).

In Shakespeare, neutral *can* is more common in histories (18.08 RF) than in tragedies (14.66 RF). As for Marlowe's plays, the total relative frequency of neutral *can* is 10.50. As Figure 8 shows, neutral possibility is more frequent in Shakespeare (16.68 RF) than in Marlowe (10.50 RF).

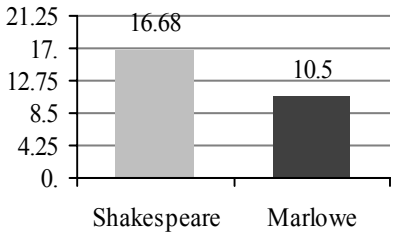

Figure 8. Distribution of *can* indicating neutral possibility in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

Some representatives of neutral *can* in Shakespeare and Marlowe include:

(10) Woman, do what thou *canst* to save our honours;
Drive them from Orleans and be immortalized. (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part One*, 1.2.)

(11) O monstrous treachery! *can* this be so,
That in alliance, amity and oaths,
There should be found such false dissembling guile? (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part One*, 4.1.)

(12) But Faustus offence *can* nere be pardoned,
The Serpent that tempted Eue may be sau'd,
But not Faustus (C. M., *Doctor Faustus*, 14)

(13) Not all the world *can* take thee from mine armes,
Aeneas may commaund as many Moores,
As in the Sea are little water drops (C. M., *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 4.4.)

6.3.1. Circumstantial possibility

Circumstantial possibility is a subtype of neutral possibility indicating clearly defined circumstances which condition the occurrence of an event or phenomenon. This kind of modality is easily defined when occurring in conditional clauses, otherwise it can be confusing and difficult to decide with absolute certainty whether a given instance of *can* may be termed as circumstantial. This research classifies only the unambiguous cases as circumstantial. In Shakespeare the relative frequency distribution of this type of possibility is 0.23 with no more than four representatives. Only one example (0.37 RF) has been found in *The Second Part of King Henry VI* and the tragedy most replete with this meaning of *can* is *Julius Caesar* (3 cases, 1.44 RF). No explicit cases have been found in Marlowe. Some examples of neutral *can* in Shakespeare's plays include:

(14) Nay, I beseech you, sir, be not out with me: yet,
if you be out, sir, I *can* mend you. (W. Sh. *Julius Caesar*, 1.1.)
(15) If I know this, know all the world besides,
That part of tyranny that I do bear
I *can* shake off at pleasure. (W. Sh. *Julius Caesar*, 1.3.)

6.4. Existential modality

As Palmer (1990: 107-108) points out, existential modality is connected to quantification and it frequently involves the quantifier *some* or the adverb of frequency *sometimes*. The meaning of *can* may thus be paraphrased as 'It is possible for some…' or 'It is sometimes possible that…'. Some ambiguity may be observed between the existential modality and the subject-oriented *can* when the verb is in the negative form. No instances of this type of modality have been detected in Marlowe and only one case (0.05 RF) in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

The only representative of this type found in the corpora is not totally free of ambiguity. The example (16) may be understood in terms of existential modality as 'no (…) strong links of iron are ever retentive to the strength of spirit' or as a case of subject-oriented modality denoting power of inanimate entities 'no (…) strong links of iron have the power to retain the strength of spirit'.

(16) Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,
Can be retentive to the strength of spirit; (W. Sh. *Julius Caesar*, 1.3.)

7. Deontic modality

Palmer (1990: 69) differentiates between deontic and dynamic modality on the basis of the fact that deontic modality is performative or 'discourse-oriented' whereas dynamic is not. By using a deontic *can* the speaker may give permission (permissive *can*), forbid to act (forbidding *can(not)*) or ask for something (*can* in polite requests).

The distribution of this type of modality in Shakespeare constitutes the total relative frequency of 0.35, with occurrences higher in tragedies (0.58 RF) than in histories (0.20 RF).

The analysis of Marlowe's plays reveals the total distribution of deontic *can* equal to 0.60 RF. Only two tragedies, both parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* exhibit no representatives, whereas the most prolific is *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1.36 RF).

As Figure 9 indicates, this type of modality is slightly more common in the plays of Christopher Marlowe (0.60 RF) than in William Shakespeare (0.35 RF).

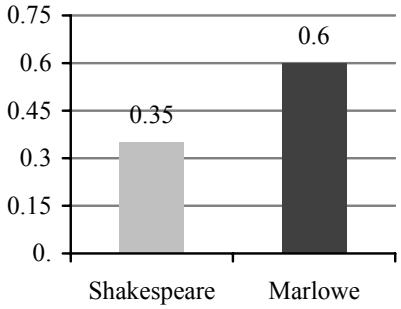

Figure 9. Distribution of *can* indicating deontic modality in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

7.1. Directive

By the use of directive modality the speaker either gives instructions to the interlocutor, lays obligation on the addressee (e.g. obligative *must*) or grants permission to act (e.g. permissive *may*, giving place to *can* in an informal language).

Directive modality is more common in Shakespeare's plays where the three subtypes, forbidding, permissive and polite requests, have been attested. On the other hand, only two instances have been found in Marlowe, both denoting forbidding *can*.

7.1.1. Forbidding

Can in a negative form is sometimes used to reject the request of the interlocutor or to forbid them to act. This meaning of *can* is very unusual, yet more frequent in tragedies (0.14 RF) than in histories (0.10 RF) of Shakespeare, constituting the total value of 0.11 RF. Only two representatives have been encountered altogether, in *The Third Part of King Henry VI* (0.38 RF) and *Romeo and Juliet* (0.38 RF).

Similarly, in Marlowe's plays only two instances of this type of modal meaning have been found with the total relative frequency 0.17. The tragedies displaying the cases include *The Jew of Malta* (0.48 RF) and *Doctor Faustus* (0.78 RF).

All in all, forbidding is a very scarce meaning of *can*, as only a handful of instances have been found in the corpora.

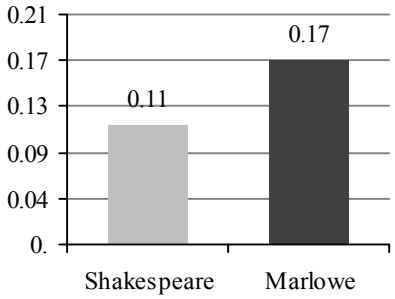

Figure 10. Distribution of *can* indicating forbidding in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

Can indicating forbidding or a refusal to undertake the action is represented in the examples (17) and (18). The meaning conveyed by *can* may be paraphrased as "I refuse to grant the permission to act". In both cases *can* is negated. The speakers respond to the requests of the interlocutors and the forbidding meaning of the verb becomes the most plausible interpretation in this context.

(17) RICHARD
I'll prove the contrary, if you'll hear me speak.
YORK
Thou *canst not*, son; it is impossible. (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part Three*, 1.2.)

(18) FRIAR LAURENCE
Let me dispute with thee of thy estate.
ROMEO
Thou *canst not* speak of that thou dost not feel; (W. Sh., *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.3.)

7.1.2. Permissive

Permissive *can* is a very infrequent type of deontic modality. No more than one representative (0.37 RF) has been found in Shakespeare's history play *The Second Part of King Henry VI* and no instances in Marlowe.

In the example (19) the most credible interpretation of *can* is 'I am allowed to' or 'I am permitted to'. Although the subject is the first person singular, it would not be reasonable to assume that the speaker grants permission to themselves, but, most probably, the speaker is granted the permission by someone else.

(19) My shame will not be shifted with my sheet:
No, it will hang upon my richest robes
And show itself, attire me how I *can*.
Go, lead the way; I long to see my prison. (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part Two*, 2.4.)

7.1.3. Polite request

Can denoting a polite request is scarcely found in the contexts when the speaker expects the addressee to act, but either is not in the position to lay an obligation or does not want to manifest their power.

In Shakespeare's plays the total distribution is equal to 0.17 RF, with one representative found in each of the tragedies: *Titus Andronicus* (0.46 RF), *Romeo and Juliet* (0.38 RF), and *Julius Caesar* (0.48 RF). No cases have been encountered in the history plays.

A slightly higher frequency of *can* denoting polite requests has been detected in the tragedies of Christopher Marlowe (0.43 RF), with the highest distribution in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1.36 RF).

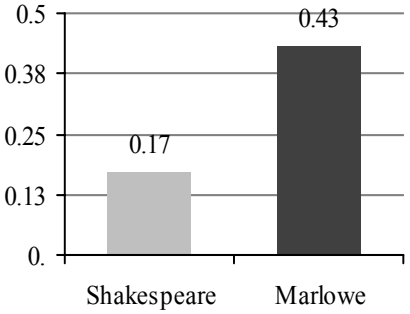

Figure 11. Distribution of *can* indicating polite request in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

In Shakespeare's plays, two out of three instances of *can* co-occur with the communication verb *tell*, whereas in Marlowe *can* collocates with *tell* in three out of five. Some examples of *can* in polite requests include:

(20) Gentlemen, *can* any of you tell me where I
may find the young Romeo? (W. Sh., *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.)
(21) Proud and ambitious tribune, *canst* thou tell? (W. Sh., *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.)

(22) *Canst* thou hold up thy heavy eyes awhile,
And touch thy instrument a strain or two? (W. Sh. *Julius Caesar*, 4.3.)
(23) Well Barabas *canst* helpe me to a Diamond? (C. M., *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.)

8. Co-occurrence of *can* with other verbs

8.1. Communicative verbs

Can has been found to co-occur frequently with communicative verbs such as *tell*, *speak*, etc. The most common verb co-occurring with *can* in Shakespeare's plays is *tell* with the relative frequency 0.95. The other numerous verbs are *speak* (0.65 RF) and *say* (0.35 RF). *Answer* and *deliver* constitute only 0.17 RF, and *call* 0.11 RF. *Utter* and *ask* are the least common, both equal to 0.05 RF.

In Marlowe's plays, the most frequent communicative verb collocating with *can* is also *tell* (0.52 RF) and *speak* (0.34 RF). The third place is occupied by *witness* (0.26 RF). The remaining verbs include *answer*, *request*, *call*, *talk*, *ask*.

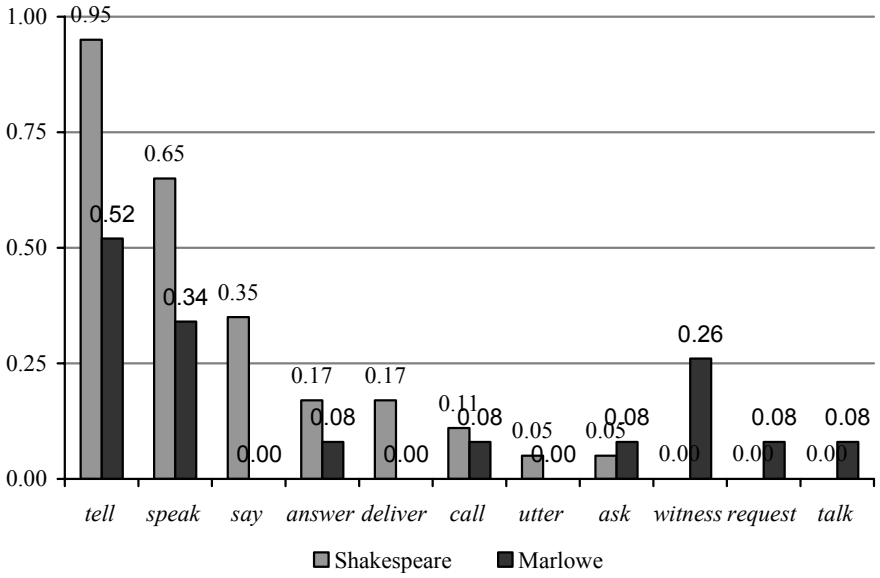

Figure 12. Distribution of communicative verbs co-occurring with *can* in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

(24) Believe me, lords, my tender years *can tell*
Civil dissension is a viperous worm
That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth. (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part One*, 3.1.)

(25) They say we are a scatter'd Nation:
I *cannot tell*, but we have scambled up
More wealth by farre then those that brag of faith. (C. M., *The Jew of Malta*, 1.1.)
(26) O Ned, sweet Ned! speak to thy mother, boy!
Canst thou not *speak*? O traitors! murderers! (W. Sh., *Henry the Sixth, Part Three*, 5.5.)
(27) why sir, what would you?
you *cannot speake* with him. (C. M., *Doctor Faustus*, 14)
(28) Peace! let us hear what Antony *can say*. (W. Sh. *Julius Caesar*, 3.2.)
(29) Heavens *can witnesse*, I love none but you.(C. M. *Edward the Second*, 2.4.)

8.2. Verbs of sensation

Another group of verbs collocating with *can* are verbs of sensation. In Shakespeare, only two have been found, namely *see* (0.41 RF) and *hear* (0.05 RF), constituting the total relative frequency 0.47.

As far as Marlowe's plays are considered, three sensation verbs have been encountered, *hear* (0.26 RF), *see* (0.17 RF) and *look* (0.08 RF) with the total relative frequency 0.52.

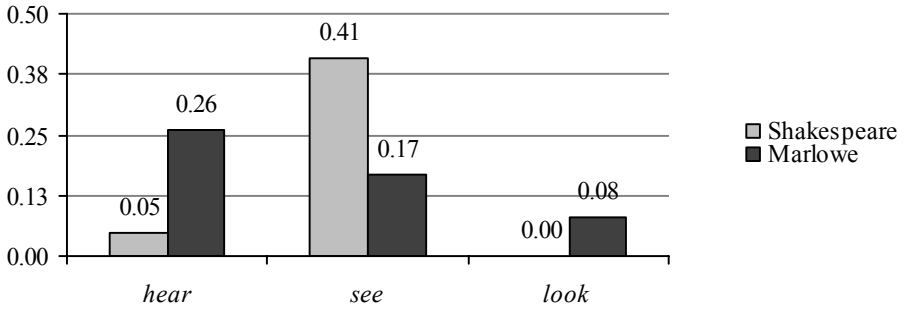

Figure 13. Distribution of verbs of sensation co-occurring with can in the tragedies of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

(30) Tell me, good Brutus, *can* you *see* your face? (W. Sh. *Julius Caesar*, 1.2.)
(31) For I *can see* no fruits in all their faith,
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride? (C. M., *The Jew of Malta*, 1.1.)
(32) Wel souldiers, Mahomet remaines in hell,
He *cannot heare* the voice of Tamburlain, (C. M., *Tamburlaine the Great 2*, 5.1.)

(33) O heavens, *can* you *hear* a good man groan,
And not relent, or not compassion him? (W. Sh., *Titus Andronicus*, 4.1.)
(34) If that your majestie *can looke* so lowe,
As my despised worts, that shun all praise,
With this my hand I give to you my heart,
And vow by all the Gods of Hospitalitie (…) (C. M., *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 4.1.)

9. Analysis

The analysis of *can* in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe has revealed that dynamic possibility is the most common type of modality denoted by this modal verb in both corpora. The difference in the distribution of dynamic *can* in the plays of both writers is rather slight (21.47 RF in Shakespeare and 19.97 RF in Marlowe) and thus may be regarded as minor and coincidental. On the other hand, a much more significant discrepancy can be observed between the distribution of dynamic *can* in the historical plays (23.23 RF) and the tragedies (18.92 RF) of William Shakespeare. This tendency raises questions about the function of *can* within a given genre and the relation between various modal meanings of the verb and the style of the language.

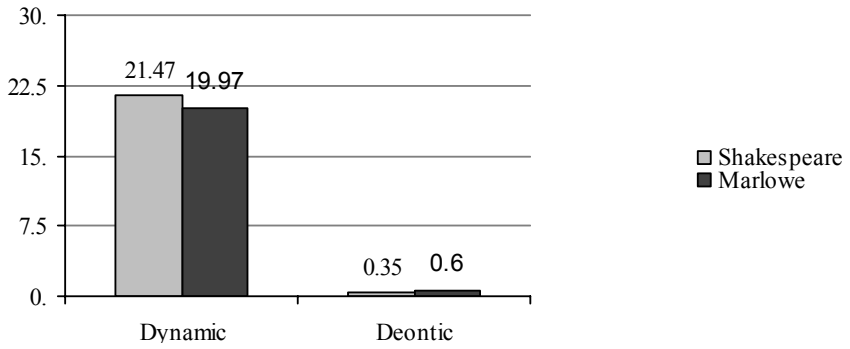

Figure 14. Distribution of dynamic and deontic possibility denoted by *can* in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

The most common subtype of the dynamic modality in the plays of both writers is neutral possibility. The difference, however, between the two corpora is significant, with the frequency much higher in Shakespeare (16.68 RF) than in Marlowe (10.50 RF). This disproportion may be partially explained by the individual characteristics of each play such as the settings, the social position of the characters, the topics of their dialogues, the environment within which they

operate, and the general aura the plays invoke. A good example of such close correlation between the frequency of a modal meaning and the main theme of a play is Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. As has already been mentioned, the peculiar ambience of the tragedy and the obsession of the character with the desire to possess supernatural abilities, magic power and knowledge, may serve as a reason for outstandingly high distribution of abilitive *can* in this play. The text abounds with the descriptions of paranormal skills which are in the possession of devilish beings and which lure mortal *Faustus* into their demonic realm. The higher (in comparison to Shakespearian plays) distribution of other modal meanings of *can* (ability, power and rational possibility) in the plays of Christopher Marlowe makes up for the lower frequency of neutral *can* in this corpora.

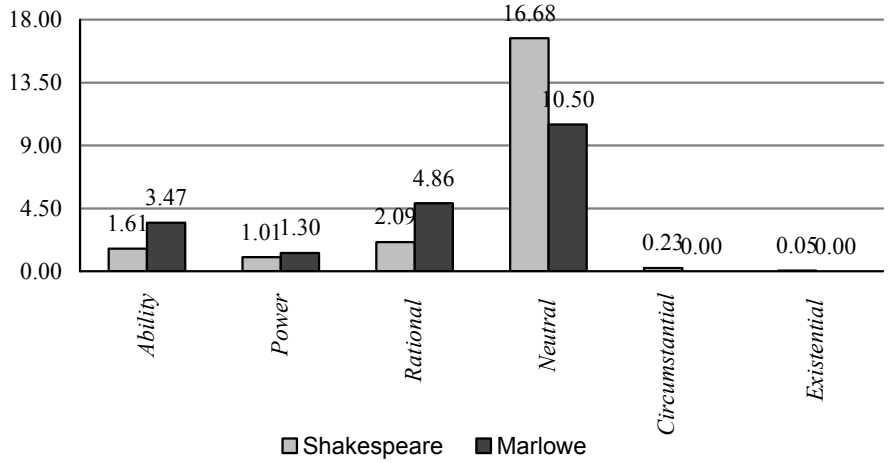

Figure 15. Distribution of *can* denoting different subkinds of dynamic modality in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

Figure 16 indicates that a disparity is also noticeable within deontic meanings designated by *can*. Polite requests, for instance, are more common in Marlowe's plays (0.43 RF) than in Shakespeare's (0.17 RF), and the play in which the highest relative frequency (1.36 RF) of *can* in this context has been found is *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. The primary plot of the play, unhappy and, almost obsessive love of Dido for Aeneas, awakens some kind of kindness and tenderness of the dialogues. The charm of love, thus, lends its beauty to the language of the lovers, as in the following example:

(34) Wilt thou kisse Dido? O thy lips have sworne
To stay with Dido: *canst* thou take her hand? (C. M., *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 5.1.)

This explanation, however, becomes only partially plausible in the light of the fact that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* does not exhibit the same tendency, although the leading theme of unhappy love prevails in both tragedies. On the other hand, the relative frequency of *can* indicating a polite request in both corpora is minor, limited to merely a few cases, in comparison to other meanings, such as neutral possibility. The data thus regarding this meaning of *can* may seem insufficient to arrive at any explanatory conclusion.

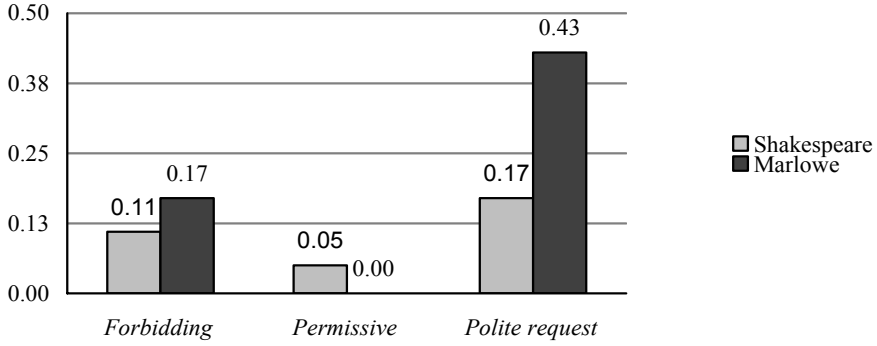

Figure 16. Distribution of deontic can denoting different types of speech acts in the plays of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

10. Conclusions

The meanings of the modal verb *can* bear great resemblance in both corpora. The discrepancies seem minor and coincidental, and occur usually with a very limited frequency distribution. The absence of certain meanings of *can* in one corpora is usually reflected by their very scarce presence in another one. On the other hand, the most common meanings of the modal are similarly frequent in the works of both playwrights. The majority of differences may be explained by the characteristics of the plays, however, a further comparative study of other modal verbs in Shakespeare and Marlowe is necessary in order to account for all the discrepancies in both corpora.

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