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**EXPRESSING EPISTEMIC POSSIBILITY  
IN MODERN BRITISH AND AMERICAN FICTION  
AND NON-FICTION**

**(modal verbs *may, might, can, could* )**

**DIPLOMA THESIS**

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this diploma thesis, titled "Expressing Epistemic Possibility in modern British and American fiction and non-fiction (modal verbs *may*, *might*, *can*, *could*)" and the research to which it refers, are the result of my own work and that all used sources are quoted in the enclosed bibliography.

## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis analyses ways of expressing Epistemic Possibility in modern English: modal verbs *may*, *might*, *can* and *could*. The expression of Epistemic Possibility is examined separately in four registers: British and American fiction and non-fiction. In Part One, an extensive theoretical background is provided. Part Two is based on a corpus of examples representing contemporary British and American fiction and non-fiction. Devices of expressing Epistemic Possibility are analysed according to their occurrence in positive statements, questions and negative statements. Special attention has been paid to Syntactic Co-occurrence Patterns associated with Epistemic Possibility. Results are summarized in conclusion and statistical data and tables are provided in Part Four. Nevertheless, this thesis is focused only on written English.

## **Anotace**

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá způsoby vyjádření jistotní možnosti v současném anglickém jazyce (modálními slovesy *may*, *might*, *can* a *could*). Vyjádření jistotní možnosti je zkoumáno odděleně ve čtyřech registrech - v britské a americké beletrii a odborné literatuře. První část nabízí rozsáhlý teoretický základ. Druhá část je založena na korpusu příkladů reprezentujících současnou britskou a americkou beletrii a odbornou literaturu. Prostředky vyjadřující jistotní možnost jsou analyzovány na základě jejich výskytu v kladných větách, otázkách a záporných větách. Pozornost je zaměřena na syntaktické vzorce spojované s jistotní možností. Výsledky jsou shrnuty v závěru práce a statistické údaje a tabulky jsou ve čtvrté části práce.

Tato práce je soustředěna pouze na psaný jazyk.

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## Introduction

This study deals with ways of expressing Epistemic Possibility - the modal verbs **may**, **might**, **can** and **could** and differences in their usage.

The first part of the study provides an extensive theoretical background. The general notion of modality is based on A Comprehensive Grammar of the English language by Randolph Quirk et al., Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny by L. Dušková and four studies. The first of the studies, The Semantics of the Modal Auxiliaries by Jennifer Coates describes differences between Epistemic and Root Possibility and provides a detailed description of Syntactic Co-occurrence Patterns. The second study, Modality and the English Modals by F.R. Palmer provides a semantic concept of modality and a detailed study of Epistemic modality, including the devices of expressing Epistemic Possibility and semantic differences in their usage. The third and fourth study, Meaning and the English Verb and Towards a Semantic Description of English by Geoffrey N. Leech, provide a comprehensive account of the semantics of modal auxiliaries.

The second part of the study provides examples of **may**, **might**, **can** and **could** taken out of twelve books representing contemporary British and American fiction and non-fiction. All four registers are represented by a corpus of the same extent and thus they are mutually comparable. The aim of this study is to comment on different ways of expressing Epistemic Possibility and to find out if there are different tendencies in these four registers. The comparison is given at the end of the chapter. Statistical data commenting on the proportion and percentage of ways of expressing Epistemic Possibility are summarized in tables in the last part of the study.

Special attention has been paid to Syntactic Co-occurrence Patterns associated with expressing Epistemic Possibility. Their description and proportion are provided at the end of each chapter and the statistical data are given again in tables in the last part.

# 1 PART ONE

## 1.1 Introduction to modality

The term modality has been used in different senses. In the most general meaning, modality is defined as "the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true" (Quirk, p. 219).

The meaning of modal verbs may be divided into two types:

- (a) 'Permission', 'obligation', and 'volition', which include "some kind of intrinsic human control over events"(Quirk, p. 219), and
- (b) 'Possibility', 'necessity', and 'prediction', which do not primarily involve "human control of events, but do typically involve human judgment of what is or is not likely to happen" (Quirk, p. 219).

These two kinds may be termed INTRINSIC and EXTRINSIC modality. Each of the modals may be used both intrinsically and extrinsically. For example, *may* conveys the meaning of possibility (extrinsic) and the meaning of permission (intrinsic).

Modals may have overlapping meanings and in some environments they can be more or less interchangeable. For example, *can* and *may* overlap to a small extent in the areas of possibility and permission (mostly in formal or written English) but generally they are not in free variation.

### 1.1.1 Introduction to *can/could*

Can/could has the meaning of 'possibility', 'permission' and 'ability'. We can observe the meaning of 'possibility' in the following examples.

- 1) *Even expert drivers can make mistakes.* (Quirk et al., p.221)
- 2) *Her performance was the best that could be hoped for.* (Quirk et al., p.221)
- 3) *If it's raining tomorrow, the sports can take place indoors.* (Quirk et al., p.221)

In this meaning, *can* may be generally paraphrased by *it is possible* followed by an infinitive clause. The first example may be paraphrased:

*It is possible for even expert drivers to make mistakes.* (Quirk et al., p.222)

In some uses, *can* indicates a future possibility. For example, [3] may be paraphrased:

*It will be possible. . .*

*Can/could* [=possibility] is frequently used in a "quasi-imperative manner, to suggest a course of action to the addressee" (Quirk et al., p.222). We can use *could* or add a conditional clause as *if you like* to make the instruction more polite:

*You can sit here until I get back (if you like).* (Quirk et al., p.222)

*Your children could help me move these chairs.* (Quirk et al., p.222)

The speaker can convert the suggestion into a polite request by turning the statement into a question:

*Can/could you (please) check these figures?*

The 'ability' meaning of *can/could* may be paraphrased by *be capable of* or *know how to*. Nevertheless, sometimes we can convey the same meaning by the '*be possible*' construction:

*I could swim all the way across the lake.*

We can paraphrase this example by following constructions:

*It was/would be possible for me to swim all the way across the lake.*

In this example the 'ability' meaning of *can/could* may be considered as a special use of the 'possibility' meaning. The possibility of an action is expressed due to some capability or skill on the part of subject referent.

The negative form *cannot* or *can't* takes auxiliary negation:

*She can't be serious.* (Quirk et al., p. 796)

This example can be paraphrased by 'It's not possible that she is serious'.

The past tense negative forms *could* or *couldn't* have the same pattern of conveying negation as their present tense equivalents: auxiliary negation:

*She couldn't be serious.* (Quirk et al., p.796)

('It is not possible..., is it?')

*Can* or *could* (more commonly in AmE) is often used in questions, where it replaces *may*.

*Can/Could they have missed the bus?* (Quirk et al., p.815)

### 1.1.2 Introduction to *may/might*

*May/might* conveys the meaning of 'possibility' and 'permission'.

The most common meaning of *may* [possibility] differs from the possibility meaning of *can*. We can paraphrase *may* by using *it is possible* followed by a *that-clause*, rather than an infinitive clause:

- 1) *We may never succeed.* [It is possible that we'll never succeed](Quirk et al., p.223)
- 2) *You may be right.* [It is possible that you are right](Quirk et al., p.223)
- 3) *There might be some complaints.* (Quirk et al., p.223)

We can also paraphrase *may* by *It may be that*. . ., or by the adverbs *possibly* or *perhaps*.

Example [2] is equivalent to:

*It may be that you are right.*

*Perhaps/possibly you are right.*

This is the use of *may* in the sense of EPISTEMIC POSSIBILITY, where "it denotes the possibility of a given proposition's being or becoming true" (Quirk et al., 223). *May* in this use is normally stressed and has fall-rise nuclear tone.

*Might* is a somewhat more tentative device of expressing epistemic possibility and thus we can use *might* to replace *may* in this environment.

We can use *may/might* in the same possibility sense as *can/could*. This use is termed as ROOT POSSIBILITY and it occurs less frequently, mostly in formal English. It can be illustrated by the following example:

*During the autumn, many rare birds may be observed on the rocky northern coasts of the island.* (Quirk et al., p.223)

*May* in this example, as a more formal device, substitutes for *can*. We could paraphrase the whole sentence by *It is possible to observe...*

*May* in the sense of epistemic possibility is commonly replaced by *can* in interrogatives and negation.

*May not* takes main verb negation and thus it differs from the auxiliary negation used with *cannot*:

*She may not be serious.* (Quirk et al., p.796)

('It's possible that she's not serious)

The past form *might not* or *mightn't* follows the same pattern:

*They might not be telling lies.* (Quirk et al., p.796)

('It is possible that they are not...')

### 1.13 The past tense forms of the modals: *could, might*

There are some uses of past time modals which differ from the corresponding nonpast modals.

#### 'Past time' in indirect speech

In indirect speech constructions, we normally use the past tense modals *could, might* as past tense equivalents of *can, may*:

*It may rain later.* [=possibility](Quirk et al., p.231)

~ *We were afraid that it might rain later.*

*What can he do?* [=possibility](Quirk et al., p.231)

~ *Nobody knew what could be done.*

#### 'Past time' in other constructions

Outside indirect speech contexts, *could* also normally acts as a 'past time' equivalent of *can*:

*In those days, a transatlantic voyage could be dangerous.* [=possibility](Quirk et al., p.231)

Generally, we can't say that *might* works as 'past time' equivalent of *may*.

#### Hypothetical meaning

The past tense modals can be used to express hypothetical meaning.

1) *If United can win this game, they may become league champions.* (Quirk et al., p.232)

2) *If United could win this game, they might become league champions.* (Quirk et al., p.232)

Sentence [2] expresses the speaker's expectation that United will not win the game and thus they will not become league champions. Unlike [1], it expresses an unreal condition. We have to use *could* with the perfective aspect to achieve past hypothetical meaning:

3) *If United could have won that game, they might have become league champions.* (Quirk et al., p.232)

Sentence [3] implies that United did not win the game. Concerning the epistemic modality of *might*, it is the meaning of the following predication that is interpreted hypothetically (rather than the meaning of the modal itself):

*They might have become champions.* (Quirk et al., p.233)

[= It is possible that they would have become champions.]

*We could have borrowed the money.* (Quirk et al., p.233)

[= It would have been possible for us to borrow the money,  
it usually implies '. . . but we didn't']

#### **1.1.4 Tentativeness or politeness: *could*, *might***

There are special uses of *could* and *might* which convey a certain degree of tentativeness or politeness.

##### **Tentative possibility**

1) in expressing a tentative opinion:

*There could be something wrong with the light switch.* (Quirk et al., p.233)

*Ofcourse, I might be wrong.* (Quirk et al., p. 233)

In these examples, *can* and *might* both express the epistemic possibility associated with *may* and thus *could* is exceptionally used as the past equivalent of *may* instead of *can*.

2) in polite directives and requests:

*Could you (please) open the door?* (Quirk et al., p.233)

*You could answer these letters for me.* (Quirk et al., p.233)

There is a tendency to neutralize the difference between *may* and *might* in the sense of hypothetical or tentative possibility. As a result of this, some speakers don't much distinguish between sentences:

*You may be wrong.* (Quirk et al., p.234)

*You might be wrong.* (Quirk et al., p.234)

This neutralization leads to using *may* in contexts, where normally only *might* would be considered appropriate:

*?An earlier launch of the boat may [=might] have averted the tragedy.* (Quirk et al., p.234)

This example indicates the continuing tendency to diminish the differences in the real and unreal senses of modals.

### **1.1.5 The modals with the perfective and progressive aspects**

The perfective and progressive aspects are freely used with 'possibility' meanings:

*He may/might have missed the train.* (Quirk et al., p.235)

*She can 't/couldn 't be swimming all day.* (Quirk et al., p.235)

We can also combine both progressive and perfective constructions:

*She couldn 't have been swimming all day.* (Quirk et al., p.235)

## 1.2 Dušková's conception of Epistemic Possibility

Dušková distinguishes between *can* expressing ability and permission (root modality) and possibility (epistemic modality). *Can* expresses possibility when the agent and content of the action is not compatible with the meaning of ability. Future is then conveyed by the usage of present forms.

The usage of *can* expressing possibility is close to the 'possibility' *may*. The difference in the usage is that while *can* conveys **theoretical possibility**, *may* expresses **real chance**. Nevertheless, in some examples these differences are slight and thus both modals are mutually interchangeable.

*May* is characteristic for a formal style. The difference between *the weather can change* and *the weather may change* is that by *can* we express a general statement about weather but using *may* we comment on a single occasion. *Can* and *may* are in a free variation namely in a formal style and in sentences with general agent, e.g. *we can sum up that...* / *we may sum up that...* (Dušková, p. 187)

The overlap in meaning of *may* and *can* is observed only in positive statements. The possibility negative form *cannot* expresses a different degree of possibility than *may not*. While *cannot* functions as the opposite to possibility *must*, *may not* operates as the negative form of *may*, e.g. *he may not know it* conveys the opposite to *he may know it*. (Dušková, p. 187)

Furthermore, there is no overlap in the usage of *can* and *may* in questions because *may* in its possibility meaning is not used in questions. Considering the affirmative sentence *they can (could, might) be still waiting/they may be still waiting*, the question is expressed only using *can (could/might)*, namely *can (could/might) they still be waiting?* (Dušková, p. 187)

The past form of possibility *can* is expressed by the combination of *can(not)* and the perfect infinitive of the verb, e.g. *he can't have forgotten*. This form is also used as the opposite to *may* in affirmative sentences, e.g. *that remark may have offended her- can that remark have offended her?* (Dušková, p. 187)

According to Dušková, *could* has the same meaning as *can*. The form *could* plus perfect infinitive is not restricted only to negative sentences and questions but also occurs in positive affirmative sentences, e.g. *the door wasn't locked, anybody could have got in*

(Dušková, p. 189). It expresses an action, which could happen in the past but its realization is left open. In negative sentences, it expresses an action which didn't happen, e.g. *nobody could have foreseen this complication*. (Dušková, p. 189)

In contrary to *can plus present infinitive*, which expresses only epistemic modality, *could plus present infinitive* expresses both epistemic and root modality. Its meaning is figured out from the context. The epistemic modality *could* can be replaced by *can*, e.g.

*We looked everywhere.- You couldn't have done.*(Dušková, p. 190)

This example can be paraphrased by *can you can't have done*.

If the type of modality isn't indicated by the context, the meaning of *could plus perfect infinitive* is ambiguous. Thus the following example

*He couldn't have done it alone.* (Dušková, p. 190)

can be interpreted both in root (ability) and epistemic (possibility) modality sense.

*May* expresses both possibility (epistemic modality) and permission (root modality). There is a certain overlap in the semantic structures of *may* and *can*. Considering *may* in its possibility meaning, there is no specific form of expressing future. Past is conveyed by the usage of perfect infinitive.

The negative possibility is expressed by *may not*, which can be translated into Czech as the adverb *možná*. Thus the following example

*I may not be able to come* (Dušková, p. 191)

can be translated as *Možná, že nebudu moci přijít*.

*May* expressing possibility is used only in positive statements. In questions, *can*(*could*, *might*) is used, e.g.:

*It may be true - Can (could/might) it be true?* (Dušková, p. 191)

A possible event in the past is expressed by *may plus perfect infinitive*, e.g.:

*The language of man or his ancestors may once have had a far larger element of the instinctive in it.* (Dušková, p. 191)

*It may have been a coincidence.* (Dušková, p. 191)

*Might* has the same meanings as *may*, it expresses both possibility and permission. In comparison with *may*, its usage is more tentative.

Considering possibility usage of *may*, the realization of the action is more likely, e.g.:

*This may be a special escape mechanism, although it might also be the result of the normal escape reaction performed near the surface.* (Dušková, p. 192)

Possibility *might* occurs also in questions and is not restricted to positive statements only,

e.g.:

*Might it be true?* (Dušková, p. 192)

*May plus perfect infinitive* expresses a possible event in the past, e.g.:

*What might have seemed fantastic ten years ago may not be unfeasible today.* (Dušková, p. 192)

*Might plus perfect infinitive* expresses an action less likely to happen than *may plus perfect infinitive*, e.g.:

*I don't know what time it was, it may have been eleven o'clock but it might have been later.* (Dušková, p. 192)

The context can imply an action which was possible but didn't happen, e.g.:

*Look out! You might have been run over.* (Dušková, p. 193)

### 1.3 Palmer's conception of Epistemic modality

According to F.R. Palmer, "the function of epistemic modals is to make judgments about the possibility, etc, that something is or is not the **case**"(Palmer, p.41). They are normally subjective and thus it is the speaker who makes the epistemic judgment. Epistemic modality is "the modality of propositions rather than of actions, states, events" (Palmer, p.41). Palmer states that epistemic possibility is expressed by *may* and can be paraphrased by 'possible that'. *May* is used to refer to both present and future actions, e.g.:

*They're all very sort of Kentish and they may be in Sussex actually.* (Palmer, p. 42)

*You may not like the idea of it, but let me explain.* (Palmer, p. 42)

*May* also refers to actions in progress, both present and future.

*Who may not have a very strong claim or who may be facing bitterness among their members.* (Palmer, p. 42)

*So we may be seeing some changes in British industry from these students.* (Palmer, p. 42)

It can also refer to habitual activity:

*He may go to London every day.* (Palmer, p. 42)

*He may go to London every day when he gets his new job.* (Palmer, p. 42)

*May* is also used to refer to a single future action:

*I may go up at the end of August.* (Palmer, p. 43)

*On the other hand he may say 'My dear fellow, of course we understand this problem and we would arrange it this way'.* (Palmer, p. 43)

There is also noted the 'concessive' use of *may*.

*Whatever John may say...* (Palmer, p. 43)

*However difficult it may be...* (Palmer, p. 43)

*Might* is used in the same way as *may*, "it merely indicates a little less certainty about the possibility." (Palmer, p. 48) and it works as the tentative or unreal form of *may*. Its usage is illustrated by the following examples:

*...and then you might be back again on that Monday.* (Palmer, p. 48)

*So he might go and live with his parents for a while.* (Palmer, p. 48)

*You think someone might be watching us.* (Palmer, p. 48)

*Look, now you might be going in August.* (Palmer, p. 48)

### 1.3.1 Past

Palmer argues that the epistemic modal verbs are not normally used in past tense forms to refer to past judgments because the judgments are made in the act of speaking and the modality is generally in the present only. The past forms *{might, could}* are normally tentative and have present time reference.

Nevertheless, the proposition can be in the past because judgments about past events can be made. This is accomplished by the use of *have* before the main verb:

*You may have guessed that it's a dress of pure silk.* (Palmer, p. 50)

*He might have been there while you were there.* (Palmer, p. 50)

Although, there are some examples where the modality itself is in the past:

*For all I knew he might have done it.* (Palmer, p. 51)

This example can be paraphrased by 'It was possible that he did it'. This interpretation can be indicated by the expression *For all I knew* because reported speech can be implied here ('I thought that') and it requires the sequence of tenses rule.

### 1.3.2 Unreality

The unreality of epistemic modals does not relate to the modals, but to the proposition:

*I think I might have walked out too, from all accounts.* (Palmer, p. 142)

*This might not have mattered much had the November declaration been seen as having put sterling wholly out of danger.* (Palmer, p. 142)

*Well it wasn't important and you might have gone out of your way to give it to him, so I didn't really like to.* (Palmer, p. 142)

*Probably a good thing that it did hit him on the jaw; it might not have cleared it otherwise.* (Palmer, p. 142)

The first example has the meaning 'It is possible that I would have walked out', the second can be paraphrased by 'It is possible that it would not have mattered much', the third 'It is possible that you would have gone out of your way' and the fourth 'It is possible that it would not have cleared it'. Thus in all these examples it is not the epistemic modality that is past and tentative, but the proposition.

However, an ambiguity can arise in the usage of *might have* form because the first example could be also interpreted as 'I think it is possible that I walked out' and have the past meaning. Nevertheless, with *I* as the subject, it is the former interpretation that is more likely.

### 1.3.3 Epistemic *can*

While *may* is used as an epistemic modal indicating assertion, *can* is used in negation and non-assertion. However, there are some examples of *can* used in assertion which seem to be epistemic. All of them are in tentative forms *could* and *could have done*:

*This could be the all important round.* (Palmer, p. 156)

*The banging on the ceiling could have been water in the pipes or the central heating or something.* (Palmer, p. 156)

Nevertheless, if *might* was used to replace *could*, there would be a change in meaning. Palmer states that "although both may refer to what is conceptually possible, *might* commits the speaker to a judgment about the possibility of the truth of the proposition, whereas *could* merely says that it is theoretically possible, *ie* that such a judgment would be a reasonable one, without in any way committing the speaker."(Palmer, p. 156) This might be observed in the following example:

*This picture could be a Chagall, but is in fact a Braque.* (Palmer, p. 156)

There is another example in which *could* indicates that a judgment would be possible but it is in fact wrong:

*We could be in Africa.* (Palmer, p. 156)

*Could* in the following example suggests what is theoretically possible and the following judgment asserts the probability that it is true:

*Well, now we 're coming to this big fight of the evening described in the programme right here in front of me as 'Eliminating World Heavyweight Contest'. Well, it could well be that, and it probably is.* (Palmer, p. 156)

As already mentioned before, *can* is used rather frequently as an epistemic modal in non-assertive contexts:

*Yes, well, it couldn't have been in April, my lord.* (Palmer, p. 157)

Some researchers argue that the difference between *might* and *could* is that while *might* expresses subjective epistemic judgment, *could* clearly indicates objective epistemic judgment.

Nevertheless, in most cases it is possible to paraphrase *can* by 'possible for' and thus it is considered as a modal of dynamic rather than epistemic modality.

### 1.3.4 Dynamic *may*

There are some examples in which *may* and *might* is used in a rather dynamic sense and thus it can be respectively substituted by *can* and *could*. It can be paraphrased by 'possible for' as in the following examples:

*Caderlbris, however, may be climbed from other points on this tour.* (Palmer, p. 158)

*Where, in a secluded valley in the west, you may find the neat little Norman church of Pennant Melange 11.* (p. 158)

### 1.3.5 Negation

The negative form *may not* negates the proposition and it can be paraphrased by 'It is possible that...not...', while *can't* negates the modality itself and is paraphrased by 'It is not possible that...':

*You may not have met her.* (Palmer, p. 53)

*It sounds as though he can't be at Damion Sampson Hall any more.* (Palmer, p. 53)

*If he saw a light, it can't have been the light of the motor cycle.* (Palmer, p. 53)

In the following example, *can't* is more likely to be interpreted as dynamic rather than epistemic as it refers to the future and the main verb is a verb of an action:

*She can't come on Monday.* (Palmer, p. 54)

This example tends to mean 'It is not possible for her to come on Monday' rather than 'It is not possible that she will come on Monday'. However, an epistemic interpretation can be supported by using of a progressive form:

*She can't be coming on Monday.* (Palmer, p. 54)

The past tentative forms *mightn't* and *couldn't* behave in the same way as their present forms *may not* and *can't*, the first one negates the proposition, while the second the modality:

*It might not have been in April.* (Palmer, p. 55)

*Well, it couldn't have been in April, milord.* (Palmer, p. 55)

### **1.3.6 Interrogation**

Epistemic modality is seldom questioned. Nevertheless, *can* is used to question epistemic possibility:

*Can they be on holiday?* (Palmer, p. 56)

*I was wondering if it **could** have been fear?* (Palmer, p. 56)

### **13.7 The difference between *can* and *may***

F.R. Palmer classifies *can* as a modal indicates dynamic modality, namely dynamic possibility. In this case *can* indicates that an event is possible, a neutral possibility:

*Signs are the only things you can observe.* (Palmer, p. 71)

*Who knows? It can go either way.* (Palmer, p. 71)

The subject in the following examples is the impersonal *you* or the sentence is in the passive:

*You can actually use diagnostic skills.* (Palmer, p. 72)

*Well, I 'll see what can be done and give you a ring.* (Palmer, p. 72)

In all these examples it can be paraphrased by 'it is possible for...'

Nevertheless, in general there is a difference between *can* and *may*:

*The monsoon can be dangerous.* (Palmer, p. 154)

*The monsoon may be dangerous.* (Palmer, p. 154)

The latter is likely to be interpreted as epistemic possibility but frequently *may* is used in its existential sense.

There is a clear difference in the negative sentences:

*Lions cannot be dangerous.* (Palmer, p. 154)

*Lions may not be dangerous.* (Palmer, p. 154)

While the first sentence means 'No lions are dangerous' or 'Lions are never dangerous', the latter may have the meaning 'Lions are sometimes not dangerous' or 'Some lions are not dangerous'. Epistemic *cannot* has the meaning 'it is not possible that...', while *may not* means 'It is possible that...not...'. Thus *cannot* negates the modality and *may not* negates the proposition.

#### **1.4 Coates: The modals of Epistemic Possibility: *May* and *Might***

MAY and MIGHT are the modals of Epistemic Possibility. They express "the speaker's lack of confidence in the proposition expressed" (Coates, p. 131). MAY can be used in other ways (less frequently), and MIGHT functions as a conditional and as the past form of MAY.

##### **1.4.1 *May***

MAY is mainly used, primarily in spoken language, to express Epistemic 'Possibility'. It expresses "the speaker's lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition" (Coates, p. 133).

It can be paraphrased by 'it is possible that. . ./' 'perhaps'. It can refer both to moment of speaking (*may*) and time prior to the moment of speaking (*may have*).

Examples: 1) B: *Have you got a pen? I'll leave a message.*

A: *I **may** have one.* (Coates, p. 133)

(Main predication refers to moment of speaking

Paraphrase = 'it's possible that I have one')

2) (Speaker has lost his keys)

*I may have put them down on the table - they're not in the door.* (Coates, p. 133)

(Main predication refers to time prior to the moment of speaking

Paraphrase = 'it's possible that I put them down')

Epistemic MAY is subjective, flexible of time reference and is being used as a 'hedge', which means that the speaker avoids committing himself to the truth of the proposition. This is signaled by prosodic features. MAY is typically stressed in speech and connected with fall-rise intonation.

Hedging quality of Epistemic MAY contrasts completely with the implication of willingness or intention often found with Root Possibility (if the subject is animate). We can compare its usage in the following two examples:

*I may come tomorrow (but I'm not sure yet).* (Coates, p. 134)

Epistemic

(assessment of possibilities is approximately 50/50 - implies neither that the speaker will nor that he won't come)

*I may/can come tomorrow (- everything's already planned).* (Cotes, p. 134)

Root

(it implies that speaker will come - nothing prevents his coming)

The 50/50 assessment of possibilities is made explicit by using the collocation *may or may*  
e.g.

*They may or may not come and connect the television on Saturday.* (Coates, p. 134)

The main predication here is influenced by the negative (the modal predication is not influenced) and thus the speaker's assessment of possibilities is unaffected by the negation.

There are two important areas of using Epistemic MAY. Firstly, it's used as a concessive, where it can be paraphrased by a subordinate clause introduced by *although*-.

*A much better solution exists in the scheme drawn up by the London County Council's architects. It may not be perfect, but at least it has some of the qualities / . . . / that one looks for in a modern city centre.* (Coates, p. 135)

('although possibly it is not perfect, at least it has some of the qualities...')

Secondly, it may be used in a 'pragmatic' sense in speech, where the speaker softens his assertion or acknowledges the other person's opinion before contradicting it, e.g.

*And a lot of people don't want to be bothered to organize their holidays.*

*Well, you may be right, you may be wrong.* (Coates, p. 136)

### **Syntactic Co-occurrence Patterns**

There are strong associations between syntactic and semantic features. There are several Syntactic Co-occurrence patterns which are frequently associated with the Epistemic Possibility usage of *may*:

Perfective Aspect

*I may have put it there out of the way.* (Coates, p. 137)

Progressive Aspect

*They may be reading something by Shakespeare.* (Coates, p. 137)

Existential Subject

*January, I suppose, there may be in interview round about January.* (Coates, p. 137)

Quasi-modal

*I may be able to (leave) here and still own them my notice.* (Coates, p. 137)

Stative verb

*I think he may be a very violent man.* (Coates, p. 137)

Negation

*They say he may never work again because he's got a schizophrenia.* (Coates, p. 137)

### **May expressing Root Possibility**

MAY can have also root meaning. It expresses both Permission and Root Possibility. MAY is seen as a device indicating Root Possibility when "the constraining factors are not identified with human authority but with external circumstances" (Coates, 139) and is paraphrased by 'it is possible for' or as 'circumstances allow x'. It can be demonstrated on the following example:

*I am afraid this is the bank's final word. I tell you this so that you may make arrangements elsewhere if you are able to.* (Coates, p. 141)

The use of Root Possibility MAY is rather formal and prevails dramatically in written corpus. It never occurs with negation, which is different from the use of MAY + NOT with Epistemic meaning. MAY expressing Root Possibility is not stressed, which also contrasts with the stressed nature of Epistemic MAY.

However, some examples can be found, where it is not easy to distinguish the Root or Epistemic Possibility because both interpretations are possible:

*The quality of the final product must be influenced by the quality of the raw material of the industry, and the methods of processing may influence its nutritional quality.* (Coates, p. 145)

MAY in this example can be paraphrased by both 'it is possible that..(Epistemic) and 'it is possible for . . .' (Root). This merger occurs predominantly in formal and academic contexts, where the Root-Epistemic distinction is neutralized.

### 1.4.2 *Might*

MIGHT is also mainly used to express Epistemic Possibility. It doesn't only express the past of MAY, but in modern English it has its own status as an Epistemic modal. Many linguists (e.g. Palmer (1979)) have considered MIGHT as a tentative or unreal form of MAY but Coates' data show that MAY and MIGHT in their Epistemic usage are generally interchangeable.

Epistemic MIGHT can be paraphrased by 'it is possible that . . .' or by adverbs such as 'maybe' or 'perhaps'. It is subjective and it may refer to moment of speaking, to time subsequent to moment of speaking and to time prior to moment of speaking:

*Queen Radna with beautiful long white earrings, they might be ivory earrings.* (Coates, p. 149)

(proposition refers to moment of speaking)

*I'll be delayed a bit. So in fact it might be about half seven before I get back.* (Coates, p. 149)

(proposition refers to time subsequent to moment of speaking)

*And you know, it could be that the surveyor has in fact done the survey. He might have done it yesterday for all I know.* (Coates, p. 149)

(proposition refers to time preceding the moment of speaking)

MIGHT can also refer to time extending up to the moment of speaking, e.g.

*The train might have gone.* (Coates, p. 149)

MIGHT "is used as a hedge: the speaker avoids committing himself to the truth of the proposition" (Coates, 149). The assessment of possibilities is approximately 50/50.

## Syntactic Co-occurrence Patterns

Epistemic MIGHT occurs in similar syntactic co-occurrence patterns as Epistemic MAY:

Progressive Aspect

*/m not very good on mechanical language but one of the cylinders might be just missing a bit from the sound of it. (Coates, p. 150)*

Negation

*Well. .../I might see you or I might not. (Coates, P 151)*

Quasi-modals

*Oh, you take the good one and leave me the old one, fathead, you might have to take her somewhere. (Coates, p. 151)*

Stative verb

*I mean the protein value might well be low. (Coates, p. 151)*

Existential subject

*You can certainly give me a ring back this afternoon, there might be something. (Coates, P 151)*

The most remarkable difference between Epistemic MAY and MIGHT is the ambiguous use of Epistemic MIGHT and Perfective Aspect. *Might have* can mean not only 'it's possible that x (has) happened', but it can be also used to express the past of Epistemic MAY in reported speech, hypothetical Epistemic *might* or hypothetical Root *might*.

### Comparison of epistemic *Might* and *May*

According to Coates' data, Epistemic MIGHT and MAY seem to be semantically interchangeable and seem to occur in identical semantic contexts. MIGHT doesn't seem to express a more tentative meaning than MAY, but it seems as an alternative form for

expressing the modality 'it is possible that. . .'. Although Epistemic MIGHT seems to be gaining its popularity, Epistemic MAY occurs more frequently.

They are used with the same syntactic co-occurrence patterns (Progressive aspect, negation, quasi-modals, existential subject and stative verb). However, Epistemic MIGHT is not frequently associated with Perfective Aspect, which is the only striking difference.

### ***Might as a Past Tense Form***

MIGHT as a Past tense form can usually only occur in reported speech, according to the sequence of tenses rules. It functions as the past form of both Epistemic and Root MAY:

*Nightingale said that he might want to get away from Lower Netherhall.* (Coates, p. 155)

= past form of Epistemic MAY

(Following this example, it is impossible to find out which present tense was used in the direct speech, whether 'Nightingale said: "He may want to get away from Lower Netherhall" or "He might want to get away from Lower Netherhall"').

*The fifth boy, Sidney, left for the Navy and died after entering upon unsatisfactory courses which Georgina said would bring him to certain misery in this world, quite apart from what might be expected to happen to him hereafter.* (Coates, p. 155)

= past form of Root MAY

(Georgina said: "Apart from what may be expected to happen to him hereafter")

### ***Might and Epistemic Hypothetical Meaning***

When MIGHT functions as the hypothetical form of Epistemic MAY, it can be paraphrased as 'it is possible that . . . would . . .'. 'The distinctive feature of Epistemic hypothetical meaning is that it is the main predication and not the modal predication which is affected'(Coates, p. 158):

*Don't on any account say that you 're getting these things at a reduction - especially to neighbours. The chap who gets them might get into trouble for not doing it through a shop.*(Coates, p. 159)

(= 'it's possible that he would get into trouble')

On the other hand, when MIGHT functions as a past form of Root MAY, it can be paraphrased by 'it would be possible for'. In this case it is the modal predication that is affected and *could* can be substituted for *might* in most of the examples:

*You might try nagging the Abbey National again.*(Coates, p. 160)

(= 'it would be possible for you to try nagging the Abbey National again (if you wanted)')

### **1.43 Could**

Coates argues that COULD is mainly used to express Root Possibility in unreal conditions (as a hypothetical form). It also expresses Past form of CAN. Like CAN, it conveys the meaning of 'Ability', 'Permission' and 'Possibility'. She adds that in some examples it also functions as a modal of Epistemic Possibility and it is synonymous with Epistemic MAY and MIGHT.

'Possibility' COULD occurs frequently as a past form of Root 'Possibility' CAN:

*With all but one of the cookers the grid of the grill pan could be at one of two possible distances from the heat. The exception was the Cannon, which had four available positions.* (Coates, p. 108)

Coates argues that 'the most clear-cut examples of past tense Root 'Possibility' COULD are those where the "enabling' or 'disabling' circumstances are spelled out, in other words, where it is clear that it is external circumstances, not inherent properties of the subject nor some authority-source, which affect the outcome of the proposition"(Coates, p. 113):

*Electricity supplies were restored in Paris for the hour between noon and one p.m. local time - so that housewives could prepare the midday meal. (Coates, p. 114)*

*I actually couldn't finish reading it because the chap whose shoulder I was reading the book over got out at Leicester Square. (Coates, p. 114)*

'Possibility' COULD frequently occurs with Iterative aspect which refers to habitual and repeated actions:

*You could buy buns for a penny. (Coates, p. 115)*

(= it was possible for [you used to buy buns for a penny])

'Possibility' COULD seldom occurs with Dynamic aspect because it doesn't express the fulfilment of possibility but only the state of possibility. In most cases COULD is normally replaced by simple past tense because it refers to a single event in the past and the past is usually known.

The negative form *couldn't* occurs both with Dynamic and Iterative aspect because 'to deny the possibility is to make a more informative statement than to deny the fulfilment of a possibility' (Coates, p. 116):

*and it was bloody annoying cos they came with this child you know who was running all over the place and they kept coming in and chatting to me and I couldn't get on with things* (Coates, p. 116)

(Dynamic aspect was used in this example.)

*but before string they couldn't do this cos there was nothing to tie the gateposts up with you* (Coates, p. 116)

(Iterative aspect was used in this example.)

COULD also functions as a hypothetical form and in its Root 'Possibility' meaning can be paraphrased by 'it would be possible for...' Most of the examples either occur in a subordinate conditional clause or have an expressed condition:

*you know I mean I could do that if I was certain I'd got the degree results* (Coates, p. 119)

*if he got free now, he could run me through in an instant* (Coates, p. 119)

Hypothetical 'Possibility' COULD has the meaning of "if certain conditions were fulfilled, then nothing would prevent x" (Coates, p. 119).

COULD also substitutes for CAN in requests or suggestions as a device of expressing politeness:

*well I wondered if you could perhaps give her a message* (Coates, p. 121)

*could you ask him to ring me* (Coates, p. 121)

*You could always ring us up you know.* (Coates, p. 121)

Hypothetical COULD is often found in the construction COULD + HAVE + EN and can be paraphrased by 'it would have been possible for...but...not':

*I could have gone straight there but I just couldn't get there.* (Coates, p. 121)

( = 'it would have been possible for me to go straight there but I wasn't able to get there')

There are four possible interpretations of the form COULD + HAVE + EN:

- 1) Root hypothetical = 'it would have been possible for...'
- 2) Epistemic = 'it is possible that x was...'
- 3) Epistemic in indirect speech = 'it was possible that x had...'
- 4) Root in indirect speech = it was possible for x to have...'

### **Epistemic Could**

Epistemic COULD also expresses 'the speaker's lack of confidence in the proposition expressed' (Coates, p. 165). We can paraphrase it by 'it is possible that.../ 'perhaps'. Coates states that while MAY and MIGHT express a 50/50 assessment of possibility, COULD indicates tentative possibility:

*Mambo, from Peter Ashworth's Treadwell stables, could be the one to give King's Probity most trouble /.../ but Nightingalls' charge may just have the edge.* (Coates, p. 165)

*Carol Carstairs /.../ began by agreeing that she could have been mistaken about the precise minute of Dackson's visit the previous Wednesday.* (Coates, p. 165)

Epistemic COULD seems to be analogical with the use of MIGHT ( they both express Root Possibility and Root Permission in the past, hypothetical meaning and Permission). Although MIGHT is used also to indicate past tense ('it was possible that...') and hypothetical meaning ('it is possible that...would...'), COULD conveys also a non-past, non-hypothetical meaning. In some examples it might be difficult to distinguish between 'Ability' and 'Possibility' COULD and also between 'Permission' and 'Possibility' meaning of COULD.

Coates suggests that while MIGHT is in most contexts synonymous with MAY and it is the main device of expressing Epistemic possibility in everyday spoken language no longer conveying a more tentative meaning, COULD is becoming a new device of expressing tentative Epistemic possibility.

#### **1.4.4 Can**

Coates argues that CAN is the only modal auxiliary with no Root-Epistemic distinction because it expresses only Root Possibility. CAN conveys meaning of 'Permission', 'Possibility' and 'Ability'.

CAN expressing possibility can be paraphrased as 'it is possible for...':

*and we can make coffee like this upstairs* (Coates, p. 95)

*well I think there is a place where I can get a cheap kettle*(Coates, p.95)

Examples of CAN expressing 'Possibility' are fuzzy, both semantically and aspectually. They may refer to a single future event or even refer to generic 'Possibility':

*Lightning can be dangerous.* (Coates, p. 100)

Negative forms CANNOT and CAN'T can be paraphrased by 'it is not possible for...' or 'something prevents'. Thus it is the modality and not the proposition which is negated, which is one of the features of Root modality. This usage can be illustrated by following examples:

*they were just engaged all the time so he can't even find whether it's been sent off to him or not* (Coates, p. 96)

( = it is not possible for him to find out whether it's been sent off to him or not)

*but of course it was a kit: as I say and you can't really go wrong with them* ( Coates, p. 98)

( = it is not possible for you to go wrong with them)

This usage is different from CAN'T (invariant form) which functions as the negative for Epistemic MUST and can be paraphrased by 'it's not possible that' or 'it's necessarily the case that...not...'. This form has the same syntactic features as Epistemic MUST, such as Progressive and Perfective Aspect (there are no examples in the corpuses of Root *can't* +have +en), Existential subject, etc. These features are incompatible with the usage of Root *can't/cannot*. The following example provides the usage of Epistemic *can't*:

*you can't have just given up painting completely not if you had that kind of talent* {Coates, P-101)

( = 'it's not possible that you have given up...')

Coates argues that this usage of CAN'T doesn't provide an alternative to MAY + NOT. This concept is different from some other linguists, e.g. Palmer states that *can't* and *may not* both negate Epistemic Possibility. Coates supports her argument by following facts : the co-occurrence patterns of Epistemic *can't* are different from those of Root CAN and 'the meaning of examples with Epistemic *can't* corresponds to that of epistemic MUST - it expresses the speaker's confidence in the truth of the proposition'(Coates, 102).

Coates concludes that while Root *cannot/can't* occurs frequently, Epistemic *can't* occurs rather sporadically.

Moreover, according to Coates, CAN and MAY do not overlap much in their meaning. If they do, they are not in free variation but MAY is marked for formality. While MAY is most frequently used to express Epistemic 'Possibility' and can be paraphrased by 'it is possible that...'/ 'perhaps', CAN cannot substitute for MAY in this meaning:

*Have you got a pen? I'll leave a message.*

*I may have one.* (Coates, p. 103)

( = 'it's possible that I have one')

This example can't be paraphrased by *I can have one.*

There is an overlap between MAY and CAN in expressing Root 'Possibility' because MAY is used to indicate Root 'Possibility' in formal contexts:

*but some years of experience suggest two or three guiding principles by which the speaker's efforts may be judged* (Coates, p. 105)

In this example, both MAY and COULD could be used but MAY is marked for formality. Coates argues that many textbooks for foreign learners state that CAN also conveys Epistemic 'Possibility' and thus MAY and CAN can be in free variation:

*He may be there now.* (Coates, p. 107)

*He can be there now.* (Coates, p. 107)

Nevertheless, Coates finds the second example unacceptable.

## **1.5 Geoffrey N. Leech: Semantics of the Epistemic Possibility**

Geoffrey N. Leech starts with the basic classification and argues that MAY expresses 'Possibility' but not in questions, while CAN expresses 'Possibility' especially in negatives and questions:

*It may be raining in Devon.* ('It is possible that it is...') (Leech, p.203)

*He may recover.* ('It is possible that he will recover') (Leech, p.203)

*Electricity can kill.* ('It is possible for electricity to kill') (Leech, p.203)

*Can I be dreaming?* (is it possible that I am dreaming?') (Leech, p.203)

He continues with the observation that *can* and *may* are not mutually interchangeable in the 'Possibility' meaning. The difference can be expressed by the difference of the grammatical construction *It is possible*.

*The Monsoon can be dangerous.* (Leech, p. 220)

(= it is possible for the Monsoon to be dangerous')

*The Monsoon may be dangerous.* (Leech, p. 220)

(= it is possible that the Monsoon is/will be dangerous')

Leech points out that it is difficult to express the difference in meaning. The possibility in the previous examples is general and theoretical, while the second pair of examples conveys a more practical and particular possibility, often in the future:

*The pound can be devalued.* (Leech, p.221)

*The pound may be devalued.* (Leech, p.221)

Leech argues that the first example is "merely a statement which everyone knows to be true : that it is possible for currencies to be devalued, and the pound is no exception"(Leech, p.221), while the second example is "a much more threatening statement, suggesting that the devaluation of the pound, as a practical course of action, is now under consideration".(Leech, p.221) The former example indicates a theoretical possibility, whereas the latter conveys a practical possibility. The weaker meaning is implied by the stronger one:

**'The pound may be devalued'** implies **'The pound can be devalued'**. (Leech, p.221)

Leech also comments on a special development of the 'theoretical possibility' meaning of *can* and its usage in the context of familiar discourse between friends, where it is more polite and tactful than using of direct imperative:

*You can pass me the hammer now, Tom.* (Leech, p. 222)

The practical possibility indicated by *may* can be paraphrased by the adverbs *possible* and *perhaps*.

*'He may not have heard the news'* (Leech, p.224)

= 'Possibly he hasn't heard the news'

= 'Perhaps he hasn't heard the news'

= 'It is possible that he hasn't heard the news'.

There is also a difference in the negative forms *may not* and *can't*. In the former there is "principal negation", while in the latter there is negation of the main predication, so called "modal negation":

*They may not be coming.* (Leech, p.230)

(= 'It is possible that...not...')

*They can't be coming.* (Leech, p.230)

(= 'It is not possible...')

*May not* seems to retain its 'practical' sense even in the negative form, while the sense of *can't* is rather difficult to determine.

In the hypothetical forms the difference between 'theoretical' and 'practical' meaning seems to be less distinct and thus *could* and *might* can be in many examples more or less interchangeable. This is caused by the absence of *that-clause* following *It would be possible*, there is only the/or... to + Infinitive construction allowable:

*It would be possible for you to pass the exam.* (Leech, p.237)

\* *It would be possible that you will pass the exam.* (Leech, p. 237)

Nevertheless, there are some examples, in which *could* and *might* are not synonymous and mutually interchangeable because *might* can be sometimes paraphrased by 'It is possible that...would...!', for instance in tentative offers:

*You might like to borrow this book.* (Leech, p. 237)

(= it is possible that you would like...')

The form *might have* + Past Participle tends to be ambiguous as there are more possible interpretations:

*I might have enjoyed the trip more if it hadn't been so hot.* (Leech, p.237)

(= it is possible that I would have...')

*You might have warned me he was in a temper.* (Leech, p.237)

(= it would have been possible for you to warn me that he was in a temper')

*You might have left it at the station.* (Leech, p.237)

(= it is (barely) possible that you have left it at the station')

The 'contrary to fact' presupposition is included in the first two examples, while this presupposition is missing in the last example.

## **1.6 Ambiguous approaches**

Taking into account all of these studies, we can see that there is a different attitude towards the status of CAN.

While Dušková states that *can* is also a modal verb of Epistemic possibility and expresses a theoretical possibility and *may* expresses a factual possibility and a chance, adding that both these modals are sometimes in free variation and mutually interchangeable (p. 186), Coates claims that "CAN is the only modal auxiliary where we do not find the Root-Epistemic distinction"(p. 85). She states that CAN is in its positive form never Epistemic and only supplies the missing negative for MUST.

Palmer supports Coates' point of view by claiming that CAN is used for epistemic modality only in non-assertion: negation and interrogation. However, he admits that there are some uses of CAN that look epistemic at first sight. All of them are the tentative forms *could* and *could have*:

*This could be the all important round,* (p. 156)

Geoffrey N. Leech distinguishes *betweenfactual* and *theoretical possibility*. He argues that MAY *expressesfactual possibility* and is paraphrased by *It is possible* followed by a *that*-clause:

*The road may be blocked.*(p. 76)

= *It is possible that the road is blocked*

=*Perhaps the road is blocked*

CAN expresses *theoretical possibility* and is paraphrased by *It is possible for* + Noun Phrase or *to* + Infinitive construction:

*The road can be blocked.*(p. 76)=

*It is possiblefor the road to be blocked*=

*It is possible to block the road*

He argues that sentence *The road can be blocked* "describes a theoretical conceivable happening, whereas the first feels more immediate, because the actual likelihood of an event is being considered"(p. 76) Moreover, the sentences evoke different situations:

*The road can be blocked by police* ('and if we do this, we might intercept the criminals'-said by one detective to another), (p. 76)

*The road may be blocked byflood water* ('that possibly explains why our guests haven't arrived'-dialogue between husband and wife expecting visitors), (p. 76)

Leech thus seems to hold the same opinion as Dušková, distinguishing between *theoretical* and *factual possibility*. However, he doesn't talk about Epistemic and Root Modality as Dušková in her approach does.

**He argues that the use of *can* expressing possibility is common in negative and interrogative clauses but is not frequent in positive statements, where it competes with *may*.** He also paraphrases it by 'it is possible for...'. Regarding this fact, he tends to hold the same approach as Palmer and Coates. However, as I have already mentioned, he does not use the heading Root possibility.

## **PART TWO**

## 2.1 Introduction to research section

In this part of my thesis I created my own corpus based on twelve books representing contemporary British and American fiction and non-fiction. I tried to investigate which means of expressing Epistemic Possibility prevails in my samples. I took a sample of approximately 20000 words from each book, counting from the beginning of the book. Thus the whole corpus consists of approximately 240000 words. The corpora based on British fiction, British non-fiction, American fiction and American non-fiction each consists of approximately 60000 words and thus they are mutually comparable.

It was rather difficult for me to choose one approach because especially the status of CAN is somewhat problematical and ambiguous. However, I decided to follow Leech's approach of *theoretical* and *factual* possibility. Nevertheless, the difficulties arose in the terminology itself, as Leech uses the term Possibility but doesn't distinguish between Epistemic and Root Possibility. I was thus supporting my achieved data by both Palmer's and Coates' approaches.

Also the status of MAY and MIGHT is treated rather differently. Coates states that MAY and MIGHT are mainly the modals of Epistemic Possibility. She adds that MAY has also some other less frequent uses and MIGHT functions as a conditional and as the past form of MAY. Nevertheless, she comments also on the Root Possibility usage of MAY "where no deontic source can be identified, granting or withholding permission, or where 'enabling circumstances' are mentioned in the context"(p. 141). It can be paraphrased by 'it is possible for' or as 'circumstances allow x':

*I am afraid this is the bank's final word. I tell you this so that you may make arrangements elsewhere if you are able to.* (Coates, p. 141)

Coates proposes that there are some examples where both Epistemic and Root interpretations are possible:

*It is important to note that where high concentrations are theoretically possible in the plant evaporator the time required to build them may be considerable. (Coates, p. 145)*

*The quality of the final product must be influenced by the quality of the raw material of the industry, and the methods of processing may influence its nutritional quality. (Coates, p. 145)*

Both these examples can be paraphrased by 'it is possible that...' (Epistemic) and 'it is possible for...' (Root). This Root-Epistemic distinction is neutralized mainly in formal and academic texts. Also in my research of non-fiction literature, I have found quite many ambiguities:

*Years into recovery, families may go back to remember and resolve the trauma... (Brown, p. 9, [7])*

This instance can be paraphrased by both 'It is possible that families will go back to remember...' and 'It is possible for families to go back to remember and resolve the trauma...' and thus the Root-Epistemic distinction is not clearly defined in this case.

Another example can be:

*However, social circumstances may differ elsewhere. (James, p. 24, [10])*

This example can also be paraphrased by 'It is possible that social circumstances differ elsewhere' and 'It is possible for social circumstances to differ elsewhere'. The Root-Epistemic distinction is also neutralized in this context.

According to Coates, Epistemic meaning of MAY is most common in informal speech and in personal writings, diaries and letters.

## 2.4 Expressing Epistemic Possibility in British non-fiction

In this chapter I will deal with the distribution and proportion of positive statements, questions and negative statements in my corpus of British Fiction.

There are:

- 20 instances of MAY in positive statements:

*It may be relevant to record that my first general feeling on hearing what Arnold had to say was one of curious joy.* (Murdoch, p.28, [28])

*I mean you go to a place where you know you may see something rare and you don't...* (Fowles, p.26, [8])

*Emotionally it is still for him a kind of Paradise, the place where he was once happy and free and may be so once again.* (Lodge, p. 21, [9])

- 0 instances of MAY in questions

- 3 instances of MAY in negative statements:

*You mayn't think it, but Rachel is a bit of a nagger.* (Murdoch, p. 46, [40])

*She kicked and struggled, but of course she was too small and I may not be Mr Atlas but I am not a weakling either.* (Fowles, p.21, [45])

*Then again - it may not have been that first morning she drew me...* (Fowles, p. 59, [23])

- 37 instances of MIGHT in positive statements:

*'I might be useful. After all, I am still a doctor in the eyes of God.'* (Murdoch, p. 29, [30])

*All the time she asked questions, no, all the time I felt she might ask a question, she'd come out quickly with a question to try and catch me.* (Fowles, p.35, [14])

*After nearly two years his work was still far from completion and, thinking that a change of scene might help, he applied in an idle moment for a Fellowship to America and for an Assistant Lectureship at the University of Rummidge.* (Lodge, p. 19, [8])

- 0 instances of MIGHT in questions

- 2 instances of MIGHT in negative statements:

*But I make him as it were the mascot of the tale, partly because in a purely mechanical sense he opens it, and if on a certain day he had not, and so on, I might never, and so on.* (Murdoch, p. 14, [9])

*'Gordon might not be Chairman of this committee again.'* (Lodge, p. 25, [11])

- 2 instances of CAN in positive statements:

*Sheer silliness can be attractive in a woman.* (Murdoch, p. 25, [20])

*A dressing-table can be a terrible thing.* (Murdoch, p. 38, [35])

- 1 instance of CAN in questions:

*And yet: what can be simpler than a tale of love and more charming?* (Murdoch, p. 9, [2])

- 10 instances of CAN in negative statements:

*A work of art is as good as its creator. It cannot be more so.* (Murdoch, p. 11, [4])

*It can't be England if it's not raining.* (Lodge, p. 52, [19])

*You must know my father is not rich or anything. So it can't be ransom.* (Fowles, p. 36, [15])

- 12 instances of COULD in positive statements:

*Perhaps I could fall in love with you somewhere else.* (Fowles, p. 39, [17])

*And it could be a measure of this quietness, and of the gentle timidity of which I have spoken, that a summer spent out of London could even for a second present itself to me as a trial.* (Murdoch, p. 18, [16])

*Now, for example, the stewardess lay before him a meal of ambiguous designation (could be lunch, could be dinner, who knows or cares four miles above the turning globe)...* (Lodge, p. 22, [10])

- 1 instance of COULD in questions:

*Could it conceivably be true?* (Lodge, p. 50, [18])

- 1 instance of COULD in negative statements:

*'7 figured you couldn't be needing an abortion.'* (Lodge, p. 30, [14])

### 2.2.1 Conclusion

In my material of 71 instances I have found out that MIGHT dramatically prevails in positive statements (52%), followed by MAY (28%), COULD (17%) and finally CAN (only 3%). Table 1 summarizes the expressing of Epistemic Possibility in positive statements.

My material contains only 2 instances of questions (see Table 2). I found only 1 question with CAN (50%) and 1 question with COULD (50%).

Table 3 summarizes the distribution of the devices of expressing Epistemic Possibility in negative statements in my corpus of British Fiction. I found 16 examples. These were mostly expressed by CAN (62%), followed by MAY (19%), MIGHT (13%) and finally COULD (6%).

## 2.4 Expressing Epistemic Possibility in British non-fiction

I also investigated the distribution and proportion of positive statements, questions and negative statements in American fiction.

There are:

- 12 instances of MAY in positive statements:

*...because I am afraid that I may well be the "hillbilly" and "hayseed" that he delights in calling me when we disagree about the deep meaning of some masterpiece... (Roth, p. 20, [15])*

*Ridding himself of what he is by nature may be a more difficult task... (Roth, p. 51, [38])*

- 0 instances of MAY in questions

- 2 instances of negative statements:

*...I begin to understand that for an unknown lad to have traveled to an unknown land may not have been a mistake after all. (Roth, p. 28, [21])*

*...I head back across London to our basement, finishing up as I go with that day's inquiry into the evil I may or may not have done. (Roth, p. 38, [26])*

- 24 instances of MIGHT in positive statements:

*Of course this leads me to seek out girls I might otherwise find commonplace or silly or dull...* (Roth, p. 23, [18])

*Tayo felt weak, and the longer he walked the more his legs felt as though they might become invisible again...* (Silko, p. 16, [2])

*We watched, afraid they might notice us and turn their energies our way.* (Morrison, p. 50, [11])

- 0 instances of MIGHT in questions

- 0 instances of MIGHT in negative statements:

- 0 instances of CAN in positive statements

- 12 instances of CAN in questions:

*How, I wonder, can it be so neat and nasty at the same time?* (Morrison, p. 6, [2])

*Can this be true?* (Roth, p. 40, [28])

*How many such girls can there be in the world?* (Roth, p. 49, [36])

- 2 instances of CAN in negative statements:

*... "of course" my friend is "practicing" homosexual. My friend? It cannot be.* (Roth, p. 18, [12])

*Nothing can stop you now except one thing...* (Silko, p. 51, [8])

- 9 instances of COULD in positive statements:

*"But, " protests Herbie, "my fart is perfect. " "Could be, for all I know, " replies the boss, "but not in front of a mixed crowd. "* (Roth, p. 6, [7])

*She could be dead for all he know.* (Morrison, p. 17, [6])

*But mostly we waited for spring, when there could be gardens.* (Morrison, p. 47, [10])

- 5 instances of COULD in questions:

*Could it be somebody she knows?* (Roth, p. 44, [31])

*Could it be somebody she knows?* (Roth, p. 44, [32])

*...and could Elisabeth be more delighted by anything than to be caught in a screaming, hilarious rundown between Birgitta and myself?* (Roth, p.31, [24])

- 4 instances of COULD in negative statements:

*Teeth that couldn't be whiter...* (Roth, p. 43, [30])

*If you had to pay 4.80 a month for a sofa that started off split, no good, and humiliating- you couldn't take any joy in owning it.* (Morrison, p. 26, [8])

*... so there could be no mistake in what had been said...* (Silko, p. 36, [7])

### 2.3.1 Conclusion

In my material of American fiction I found 45 instances of Epistemic Possibility in positive statements (see Table 4). These are conveyed by MIGHT in more than half of the instances (53%), followed by MAY (27%), COULD (20%). I discovered no instance of CAN in positive statements (0%).

I found 17 examples of questioning Epistemic Possibility in American Fiction (see Table 5). These were expressed by CAN in almost three quarters of my examples (71%), followed by COULD (29%).

I found no examples of questions with MAY or MIGHT.

My material contains 8 instances of Epistemic Possibility in negative statements (see Table 6). Half of my examples are expressed by COULD (50%), followed by the equal number expressed by MAY and CAN (25%). I found no example of MIGHT in negative statements.

## 2.4 Expressing Epistemic Possibility in British non-fiction

This part deals with the expression of Epistemic Possibility in my corpus of 60000 words representing contemporary British Non-fiction.

I found:

- 56 instances ofMAY in positive statements:

*Process-control devices may be more or less sophisticated...*(Bird, p. 7, [18])

*What makes a set of individuals a society is not necessarily obvious; it may be silent, or implicit, because people often relate to each other through unspoken memories and expectations.* (James, p. 4, [1])

*Although CJegg may well over-state the significance of these new organizational forms, he is emphatic about their departure from the Weberian model.*:Savage, p. 9, [2])

- 0 instances ofMAY in questions

- 2 instances ofMAY in negative statements:

*While language may not yet have developed, it is possible that there was a great increase in pre-linguistic communicative activity including the practice of imagining the intentions and actions of others.* (James, p. 26, [11])

*If the experiment is unlikely to be repeated in its original form, if the program would be of little foreseeable value to others, or if it would take longer to learn and use a tool which you may never want to use again, it may be better to turn to other methods.* (Bird, p. 5, [11])

- 9 instances ofMIGHT in positive statements:

*The increasing complexity of such experiments might lead to some understanding of the human processes involved when we do experiments in general..*{Bird, p. 2, [3]}

*...social relations might change over time.* (James, p. 46, [20])

*Ferguson does not go quite as far as saying this, it is implied by her analysis that there may be ways in which men act in the world which, if women could adopt them, might be liberating.* (Savage, p. 21, [3])

- 0 instances of MIGHT in questions

- 0 instances of MIGHT in negative statements

- 1 instance of CAN in positive statements:

*It has even been argued that limitations on the birth of children can be an evolutionary strategy for the reproductive success of one's genes, because...* (James, p. 20, [7])

- 0 instances of CAN in questions

- 1 instance of CAN in negative statements:

*There can be no doubt that...*(James, p. 27, [12])

- 0 instances of COULD in positive statements

- 0 instances of COULD in questions

- 0 instances of COULD in negative statement

### 2.4.1 Conclusion

Table 7 shows the distribution of the modals in positive statements. In my total number of 66 examples MAY dramatically prevails (85%). MIGHT expresses Epistemic Possibility only in 14% of my examples. I found only 1 instance with CAN (less than 1 %) and no instance conveyed by COULD.

I found no examples of questions, which confirms the hypothesis that Epistemic modality in non-fiction is seldom questioned.

My corpus contains only 3 instances of negative statements (see Table 9). I found 2 examples conveyed by MAY (67%) and only 1 instance expressed by CAN (33%). I found no examples of MIGHT and COULD in negative statements.

## 2.5 Expressing Epistemic Possibility in American non-fiction

I have been dealing with the distribution of positive statements, questions and negative statements in my corpus of American Non-fiction based on the sample of 60000 words.

There are:

- 38 instances of MAY in positive statements:

*That view may be as obvious as many a verdict in a murder trial..* (Boulter, p. 7, [1])

*Reanalysis of the data these tables are based on indicates that the tables may be correct for people about 40 years old, but that as people age, ideal weight may be heavier than the tables suggest. (Ornstein, p. 8, [9])*

*It sometimes shocked the families, and it may also surprise our readers. (Brown, p. 6, [3])*

- 0 instances of MAY in questions

- 4 instances of MAY in negative statements:

*In the short run, what is best for one person may not seem best for everyone else or the family as a whole, which poses a challenge for the therapist. (Brown, p. 25, [16])*

*You may not believe... (Ornstein, p. 26, [21])*

*Some may be related, some may not. (Boulter, p. 52, [16])*

- 10 instances of MIGHT in positive statements:

*It was the first time I had cause to feel that my research group's new approach might succeed. (Boulter, p. 37, [9])*

*These observations would suggest that at least one of the properties of stressful social situation might be that the actor is not receiving adequate evidence.. (Ornstein, p. 39, [26])*

*There might well be other interpretations than ours; there certainly could be other interpretations.. (Brown, p. 25, [14])*

- 1 instance of MIGHT in questions:

*Might there be a regular visitor past our planet or solar system with this same frequency? (Boulter, p. 48, [15])*

- 0 instances of MIGHT in negative statements

- 9 instances of CAN in positive statements:

*The change can be negative, but it can also be adaptive. (Ornstein, p. 7, [6])*

*Adapting can be a change in the whole organism, making it better able to meet new challenges. (Ornstein, p. 7, [7])*

*As in any other clinical work, therapist beliefs can be a major source of help and hindrance. (Brown, p. 11, [9])*

- 0 instances of CAN in questions

- 1 instance of CAN in negative statements:

*While there can be no question regarding the use of the concept of stress.. (Ornstein, p. 33, [23])*

- 5 instances of COULD in positive statements:

*It is possible that cortical cells are being lost and the cortex is decreasing in actual structure, or the cells are losing their branches, or it could be that the subcortical mass is increasing. (Ornstein, p. 23, [18])*

*There could actually be dendritic growth in the old animals; or we could be retaining a certain length in the enriched animals and the dendrites could be shrinking in the standard colony animals. (Ornstein, p. 26, [20])*

- 1 instance of COULD in questions:

*Could it be that just as the environment appears to have changed in sudden bursts, separated by millions of years of quiet calm, so organisms respond with matching steps of structural change, either extinction or radiation, and stasis? (Boulter, p. 47, [13])*

- 3 instances of COULD in negative statements:

*The contrasts between good and bad couldn't be clearer and the eventual triumphs of right over wrong are an inevitability.* (Boulter, p. 23, [7])

*Nothing could be more offbase.* (Brown, p. 11, [8])

*In his view, 'normal' could not also be too much, so he could not see six or seven drinks as a problem.* (Brown, p. 45, [26])

### **2.5.1 Conclusion**

Epistemic Possibility in the total number of 63 positive statements is expressed by MIGHT in 60% of my examples. MIGHT is used in 16 %, followed by CAN (14%) and COULD (10%). Table 10 summarizes the distribution of the examples in positive statements.

I found only 2 instances of questions (see Table 11). These were expressed by MIGHT (50%) and COULD (50%). I found no example with MAY or CAN.

My corpus of American non-fiction comprises 8 instances of negative statements (see Table 12). MAY is used in half of my examples (50%), COULD occurs in 3 instances (37, 5%), and CAN in 2, 5 %. I found no example with MIGHT.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

### **2.6.1 Conclusion (comparison of expressing Epistemic Possibility in British and American fiction)**

My corpus of British fiction comprises 89 instances of expressing Epistemic Possibility. These occurred mostly in positive statements respectively (80% of the examples). Epistemic Possibility in positive statements is expressed by MIGHT in more than half of the examples (52%), followed by MAY (28%), COULD (17%) and CAN (only 3%).

My material of American fiction contains totally 70 examples of expressing Epistemic Possibility. They also prevailed in positive statements (64%). They were expressed by MIGHT in 53% of the instances, followed by MAY (27%) and COULD (20%). I found no instance with CAN (0%).

The figures show that there is not a big difference in expressing Epistemic Possibility in positive statements in these two registers. Epistemic Possibility is expressed predominantly by MIGHT (52% in British fiction and 53% in American fiction). MAY is used in 28% of positive statements in British fiction and almost an equal figure stands for American fiction (27%). COULD prevails slightly in American fiction (20%) but the figure for British fiction is not much different (17%). CAN is used only in 3% of my examples of British fiction. I found no example of CAN in American fiction.

I found only 2 instances of questions in British fiction (only 2 % of the total number of my samples). These were conveyed by CAN (50%) and COULD (50%). My corpus of American fiction comprises 17 instances of questions (24% of the total number of my examples of American fiction). They are expressed by CAN in almost three quarters of my samples (71%). I found 5 questions with COULD (29%).

The data show that in both British and American fiction CAN and COULD are used predominantly in questions. CAN prevails slightly in American fiction (71% compared to 50% in British fiction). COULD is used in 50% of my samples of British fiction and in 29% of American fiction.

My research proves that MAY is not used to question Epistemic Possibility. However, I found no example of MIGHT either.

My material of British fiction comprises 16 instances of negative statements (18% of the total number of examples). I found 10 examples expressed by CAN (62%), followed by MAY (19%), MIGHT (13%) and COULD (6%).

My corpus of American fiction contains 8 negative statements (12%). While CAN prevails in British fiction (62%), I found only 2 occurrences in American fiction (25%). While COULD is used in half of my examples of American fiction (50%), I found it only in 6% of examples of British fiction. I found 2 instances with MAY (2%) and no instances with MIGHT (0%).

### **2.6.2 Conclusion (comparison of expressing Epistemic Possibility in British and American non-fiction)**

My corpus of British non-fiction contains 69 instances. I found a vast majority of them in positive statements (96%). My material of the same extent of American non-fiction comprises 73 occurrences of expressing Epistemic Possibility. 86% occur in positive statements.

MAY prevails dramatically in expressing Epistemic Possibility in positive statements both in British (85%) and American (60%) non-fiction, followed by MIGHT in both corpora (14% in British and 16% in American), CAN (14% in American and only 1% in British) and COULD (10% in American but 0% in British).

I found no instances of questions in British non-fiction and only 2 instances of questions in my corpus of American non-fiction. These were expressed by MIGHT (50%) and COULD (50%).

My corpus of British non-fiction comprises 3 instances of negative statements (only 4% of the total number of my samples). My material of American non-fiction contains 8 instances of negative statements (11% of the total number).

MAY prevails both in British (67%) and American (50%) non-fiction. I found 3 instances of COULD (37,5%) in American non-fiction but no instance of COULD in British non-fiction. In both corpora there is one occurrence of CAN (33% of British and 12,5% of American instances). I found no examples of MIGHT in my corpora.

### **2.63 Conclusion (comparison of Epistemic Possibility in British fiction and non-fiction)**

Modal verbs expressing Epistemic Possibility prevail significantly in positive statements in both registers. I found 71 instances (80% of the whole corpus) in British fiction and 66 examples (96% of the total number of examples) in British non-fiction. While MAY occurs only in 28% of examples of British fiction, it prevails rather significantly in British

non-fiction (85%). MIGHT is used in more than half of the instances in British fiction (52%) but occurs only in 14% of examples of non-fiction. I found 2 instances of CAN in fiction (3%) and only 1 instance in non-fiction (1%). There are 12 examples of COULD (12%) in fiction but no instance of COULD in non-fiction.

There is no instance of questions in my corpus of British non-fiction. I found only 2 instances of questions in my corpus of British fiction (only 2% of the whole corpus). These were expressed by CAN (50%) and COULD (50%).

16 instances of negative statements occur in my corpus of British fiction (18% of the whole corpus) but I found only 3 examples in non-fiction. While CAN prevails significantly in fiction (62%), I found only 1 instance in non-fiction (33%). MAY occurs predominantly in non-fiction (67%) but is used only in 19% of examples in fiction. There are 2 instances of MIGHT in fiction (13%) but I found no instance of MIGHT in non-fiction. There is one occurrence of COULD in fiction (6%) but I found no instance of COULD in non-fiction.

#### **2.6.4 Conclusion (comparison of expressing Epistemic Possibility in American fiction and non-fiction)**

Positive statements prevail significantly in both registers (64% of fiction and 86% of non-fiction). While MIGHT occurs in more than half of my examples of positive statements in American fiction (53%), I found only 10 instances in non-fiction (16%). MAY is significantly used in non-fiction (60%) but occurs only in 27% of my examples of fiction. I found no instance with CAN in fiction (0%) and there are 9 instances of CAN in non-fiction (14%). COULD represents 20% of examples in fiction and 10% of instances in non-fiction.

There are only 2 instances of questions in my corpus of American non-fiction (only 3% of the whole corpus). These are conveyed by MIGHT (50%) and COULD (50%). However, I found 17 instances of questions in my corpus of American fiction. CAN prevails

significantly in my examples (71%), followed by COULD (29%). There is no instance of MAY and MIGHT in questions.

I found 8 instances of negative statements in both corpora. These represent 12% of American fiction and 11% of non-fiction. MAY is used in half of the examples in non-fiction (50%) but occurs only in 25% instances of fiction. There are 4 occurrences of COULD in fiction (50%) and 3 instances of COULD in non-fiction (37,5%). I found 2 instances of CAN in negative statements in fiction (25%) and only 1 example in non-fiction (12,5%). There is no instance of MIGHT in either of the corpora.

### **2.6.5 Final Conclusion**

According to my data, I found out that Epistemic Possibility is expressed by the same means in positive statements in both corpora of British and American non-fiction. MAY prevails significantly in positive statements (85% of British and 60% of American non-fiction). Expressing Epistemic Possibility in questions is rather difficult to compare, as I found no instances of questions in British non-fiction. MAY prevails also in negative statements (67% of British and 50% of American non-fiction).

In both registers of British and American fiction, MIGHT prevails in positive statements (52% of British and 53% of American non-fiction). Questions are expressed by CAN (71% of British and 50% of American) and COULD (29% of British and 50% of American non-fiction). The striking difference is in expressing Epistemic possibility in negative statements. While CAN occurs predominantly in British fiction (62%), it is used only in 25% of my examples of American fiction. Also, COULD is represented by half of my examples (50%) of American fiction but used only in 6% of my examples of British fiction.

## 2.7 Syntactic Co-occurrence patterns

Following Coates's approach, I focused on the *Syntactic Co-occurrence Patterns* associated with MAY and MIGHT and tried to find out whether it was possible to apply them also on the Epistemic usage of CAN and COULD. The patterns are following:

Perfective Aspect

Progressive Aspect

Existential Subject

Quasi-modal

Stative Verb

Negation

### 2.7.1 British fiction

I discovered 12 examples of the combination MAY + Stative verb:

*... emotionally it is still for him a kind of Paradise, the place where he was once happy and free and may be so once again.* (Lodge, p. 21, [9])

*In my opinion a lot of people who may seem happy now would do what I did...* (Fowles, p. 24, [6])

*Yet I would with better grace appear as Bradley's fool than as his judge. It may be that in some sense I am both.* (Murdoch, p. 10, [3])

There are 4 instances of May + Perfective Aspect:

*Then again - it may not have been that first morning she drew me...* (Fowles, p. 59, [23])

*'Bradley, could you come round here please - I think that I may have just killed Rachel.'* (Murdoch, p. 28, [26])

*His unconscious may have been otherwise occupied...* (Lodge, p. 28, [13])

MAY + Negation occurred 3 times in my corpus:

*She kicked and struggled, but of course she was too small and I may not be Mr Atlas but I am not a weakling either.* (Fowles, p. 45, [21])

*Then again - it may not have been that first morning she drew me...* (Fowles, p. 59, [23])

*You mayn't think it, but Rachel is a bit of a nagger.* (Murdoch, p. 46, [40])

I found 12 instances of MIGHT + Stative verb:

*He said they thought it might be because the cottage was so on its own.* (Fowles, p. 21, [2])

*I didn't risk pictures, I knew she might have advanced taste.* (Fowles, p. 23, [5])

*'Gordon might not be Chairman of this committee again.'* (Lodge, p. 25, [11])

There are 8 instances of MIGHT + Perfective Aspect in my corpus:

*Or it might have been a secret Roman Catholic Chapel.* (Fowles, p. 21, [3])

*A sort of Seducer's Diary with metaphysical reflections might have been an ideal literary form, I have often thought.* (Murdoch, p. 16, [12])

*...a little mime of mutual appraisal might have been played out through the windows of two railway compartments...* (Lodge, p. 7, [2])

I found 2 instances of MIGHT + Negation:

*But I make him as it were the mascot of the tale, partly because in a purely mechanical sense he opens it, and if on a certain day he had not, and so on, I might never, and so on.* (Murdoch, p. 14, [9])

*'Gordon might not be Chairman of this committee again.'* (Lodge, p. 25, [11])

In my corpus of British fiction I also found 2 instances of CAN in combination with a stative verb in a positive statement, which confirms the hypothesis that CAN also expresses Epistemic Possibility, namely theoretical possibility:

*Sheer silliness can be attractive in a woman.* (Murdoch, p. 25, [20])

*A dressing-table can be a terrible thing.* (Murdoch, p. 38, [35])

There are 10 instances of CAN + Negation:

*This is called Finals, the very name of which implies that nothing of importance can happen after it.* (Lodge, p. 16, [5])

*There can be no possible communication, this was utterly finished with years ago.* (Murdoch, p. 26, [23])

*You must know my father is not rich or anything. So it can't be ransom.* (Murdoch, p. 36, [15])

I found one instance of CAN + Existential Subject in a negative statement:

*There can be no possible communication, this was utterly finished with years ago.* (Murdoch, p. 26, [23])

There are 5 instances of Epistemic COULD + Stative verb. Four out of these five examples are in combination with the verb *to be*, which confirms the hypothesis that 'Epistemic COULD is most commonly associated with the verb *to be*' (Coates, p. 166) :

*And it could be a measure of this quietness, and of the gentle timidity of which I have spoken, that a summer spent out of London could even for a second present itself to me as a trial.* (Murdoch, p. 18, [16])

*Now, for example, the stewardess lay before him a meal of ambiguous designation (could be lunch, could be dinner, who knows or cares four miles above the turning globe)...* (Lodge, p. 22, [10])

*This too could be a help in marriage.* (Murdoch, p. 44, [38])

I found 1 instance of COULD + Perfective Aspect:

*Without my help this could have been so with Bradley Pearson.* (Murdoch, p. 9, [1])

**There is one instance of COULD + Negation together with a combination of Progressive Aspect:**

*'I figured you couldn't be needing an abortion.'* (Lodge, p. 30, [14])

I found no instance of the combination of Epistemic Modal and a Quasi-modal.

## **Conclusion**

Table 13 illustrates the distribution and proportion of syntactic co-occurrence patterns in British fiction.

The most frequent syntactic co-occurrence pattern is a modal verb + Stative verb. I found 31 occurrences (MAY - 12x, MIGHT - 12x, CAN - 2x, COULD - 5x). The most frequent stative verb is the verb *to be* (22 occurrences).

Negation occurred 16 times in my corpus (MAY- 3x, MIGHT- 2x, CAN- 10x, COULD- 1x).

There are 14 occurrences of Perfective aspect (MAY - 4x, MIGHT- 9x, COULD - 1x).

I found one example of CAN + Existential subject in a negative statement. I found one instance of COULDN'T + Progressive Aspect.

There is no example of a Quasi-modal.

### **2.1.2 American fiction**

I found 10 instances of MAY + Stative Verb in my corpus:

*Herbie's enthusiasm and virtuosity are such that my father must sometimes caution him to keep certain of his imitations and virtuosity are such that my father must sometimes caution him to keep certain of his imitations to himself, unique though they may be.* (Roth, p. 6, [6])

*Ridding himself of what he is by nature may be a more difficult task...* (Roth, p. 51, [38])

There are 4 instances of MAY + Perfective Aspect (2 instances are in a combination with Negation):

*...I head back across London to our basement, finishing up as I go with that day's inquiry into the evil I may or may not have done.* (Roth, p. 38, [26])

*Well, whatever my talent may have been for that profession, graduate school has not exactly encouraged its development...* (Roth, p. 52, [39])

I discovered only one example of MAY + Progressive Aspect:

*I get the sense that you may be riding for a very bad fall.* (Roth, p. 60, [44])

There are 8 instances of MIGHT + Stative Verb:

*...as though the "problem," for all he knows, might be somewhere in the air above us.* (Roth, p. 21, [16])

*"I might be there right now, living on top of some mesa, if my father hadn't talked her into sending me to the ranch.* (Silko, p. 24, [3])

*...to dwell on any redeeming features she might have.* (Morrison, p. 60, [12])

I have found 6 examples of MIGHT + Perfective Aspect:

*It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding.* (Morrison, p. 4, [1])

*"I only meant that you might have decided youth and beauty weren't going to get you through indefinitely."* (Roth, p. 58, [43])

I discovered 6 instances of CAN + Stative Verb (to be) in questions and 1 instance of CAN + Stative Verb in a negative statement but I found no example of CAN + Stative Verb in a positive statement, which would illustrate its Epistemic usage in positive statements.

I found 2 instances of CAN + Negation:

*Nothing can stop you now except one thing...* (Silko, p. 51, [8])

... *"of course" my friend is "practicing" homosexual. My friend? It cannot be.* (Roth, p. 18, [12])

There are 12 instances of COULD + Stative Verb: 4 instances in questions, 3 instances in negative statements and 5 instances in positive statements illustrating its Epistemic usage:

*She could be dead for all he know.* (Morrison, p. 17, [6])

*"But," protests Herbie, "my fart is perfect." "Could be, for all I know," replies the boss, "but not in front of a mixed crowd."* (Roth, p. 6, [7])

I found only one example of COULD + Perfective Aspect in an Unreal Conditional:

*'If he had known then maybe he could have told you before you went to the white people's big war'.* (Silko, p. 35, [6])

Only 2 instances of COULD + Existential Subject occurred in my corpus:

... *so there could be no mistake in what had been said...* (Silko, p. 36, [7])

*But mostly we waited for spring, when there could be gardens.* (Morrison, p. 47, [10])

There are 3 occurrences of COULD + Negation:

*He couldn't be sure.* (Roth, p. 63, [45])  
... *so there could be no mistake in what had been said...* (Silko, p. 36, [7])

*Teeth that couldn't be whiter,...*(Roth, p. 43, [30])

## **Conclusion**

Table 14 summarizes the distribution of syntactic patterns in American fiction.

The most frequent Syntactic co-occurrence pattern is again a Stative verb. I found 36 occurrences (MAY- 10x, MIGHT- 8x, CAN- 6x, COULD- 12x).

I found 11 occurrences of Perfective aspect (MAY- 4x, MIGHT- 6x, COULD- 1x).

There are 7 instances of Negation (MAY- 2x, CAN- 2x, COULD- 3x).

I found only 1 instance of MAY + Progressive Aspect.

There are 2 occurrences of COULD + Existential subject, one of them occurs together with a Negation.

I found no instance of a Quasi-modal in my corpus of American fiction.

### **2.13 British non-fiction**

I found 33 instances where the combination MAY + Stative Verb occurred:

*An experiment may have an uncertain outcome, but the procedures to be followed by the experimenter are determined in advance.* (Bird, p. 2, [2])

*..., and while self-interest and group interest may coincide, for instance where the group offers protection to the individual, they may also be at odds with each other...*(James, p. 34, [19])

*Tensions, however, may be productive.* (Savage, p. 47, [6])

There are 4 examples of MAY + Perfective Aspect in my corpus of British Non-fiction:

*The method gives possibly arbitrary prominence to Ursula while omitting a large number of people in her band who may have contributed to its survival without leaving a genetic*

*trace through a line of daughters (they might have died off, or been incorporated elsewhere).* (James, p. 23, [9])

*Mithcm argues that enviromental, bodily and demographic changes, along with increased overall brain size and the need for better nourishment and prolonged child care, may have triggered a crucial increase in this kind of 'dedicated' social intelligence.* (James, p. 28, [14])

I found only 2 occurrences of MAY + Existential Subject:

*There may be as many aspects of connection as of distinction in such a series, for example as between steam, water, and ice.* (James, p. 7, [4])

*If you have access to a computer already, do not assume that it is best to use it whenever possible; there may be cheaper and quicker ways of achieving what you want.* (Bird, p. 5, [9])

The Syntactic co-occurrence pattern MAY + Negation occurs twice in my corpus:

*While language may not yet have developed, it is possible that there was a great increase in pre-linguistic communicative activity including the practice of imagining the intentions and actions of others.* (James, p. 26, [11])

*If the experiment is unlikely to be repeated in its original form, if the program would be of little foreseeable value to others, or if it would take longer to learn and use a tool which you may never want to use again, it may be better to turn to other methods.* (Bird, p. 5, [11])

**There are 2 instances of MIGHT + Stative Verb:**

*The reader might like to continue the series...* (Bird, p. 15, [24])

*Most accounts would be angled and might seem to miss the wholeness, what we might call, evoking Marcel Mauss, the morphology of these occasions as social phenomena.* (James, p. 4, [2])

I discovered only 2 occurrences of MIGHT + Perfective Aspect in my corpus of British Non-fiction:

*The method gives possibly arbitrary prominence to Ursula while omitting a large number of people in her band who may have contributed to its survival without leaving a genetic trace through a line of daughters (they might have died off or been incorporated elsewhere). (James, p. 23, [9])*

*We cannot deny that aspects of Wittgenstein's observation about the prevalence of ritualistic activities might well have applied to aspects of the lives of Early Humans... (James, p. 31, [16])*

There is one example supporting the theory that CAN expresses Epistemic Possibility also in positive statements, namely a theoretical possibility. The syntactic co-occurrence pattern is CAN + Stative Verb:

*It has even been argued that limitations on the birth of children can be an evolutionary strategy for the reproductive success of one's genes, because... (James, p. 20, [7])*

I found 1 occurrence of the usage of CAN + Existential Subject in a negative statement:

*There can be no doubt that... (James, p. 27, [12])*

I found no instance of the Epistemic COULD in my corpus of British Non-fiction thus I did not investigate any Syntactic Co-Occurrence Patterns.

## **Conclusion**

Table 15 shows the proportion of syntactic patterns in British non-fiction.

The most frequent Syntactic co-occurrence pattern is also a Stative verb. It is used most frequently in a combination with MAY (33 occurrences). I found 2 instances of MIGHT + Stative verb and one example of CAN + Stative verb.

There are 6 instances of Perfective aspect in my corpus of British non-fiction (MAY- 4x, MIGHT- 2x).

I found only 3 instances of Existential subject (MAY- 2x, CAN - 1x in a negative statement).

Negation occurs 3 times in my corpus (MAY- 2x, CAN- 1x).

I found no examples of a Quasi-modal and Progressive aspect.

#### **2.7.4 American non-fiction**

There are 22 instances of MAY + Stative Verb in my corpus of American Non-Fiction:

*What we've done in our short sojourn on Earth may be comparable to other catastrophic events that happened millions of years ago.* (Boulter, p. 10, [2])

*Recent evidence suggests that the tears produced by emotional crying may be a way the body disposes of toxic substances.* (Ornstein, p. 17, [15])

*It may seem and, in fact, it may be very negative in the up-close moment, but a wide-angle lens casts a different view.* (Brown, p. 8, [6])

MAY + Perfective Aspect occurred 5 times in my corpus:

*These adaptations may have included the ability to function..* (Brown, p. 27, [18])

*Rene Dubos has pointed out, however, that this formulation which may have provided a satisfactory basis for inferences...* (Ornstein, p. 32, [22])

*In their turn, the arthropods may have fed on small ammonite species, which then lived on the plankton ooze.* (Boulter, p. 25, [8])

There are 3 instances of MAY + Progressive Aspect:

*But through this same time interval changes in the genes may be going on inside the cells, without expression outside.* (Boulter, p. 43, [10])

*War has been declared on heart disease and on cancer, but we may be working feverishly to control diseases that we ourselves are causing.* (Ornstein, p. 6, [3])

*Otherwise, the therapist may be working against the natural flow of recovery.* (Brown, p. 25, [15])

I found only 2 examples of the combination of MAY + Existential Subject in my corpus of American Non-Fiction:

*There may be specific disturbances in the organs of the body, an inborn error in the genes, a break in personal relationships, a radical change in one company's prospects, a shift in the government, or an improvement in economic conditions, all of which can occur separately and independently, yet each one can destabilize the organism and contribute to the progress of disease.* (Ornstein, p. 10, [11])

*If this is true it might be necessary to modify my stance and admit there may be several clusters of diseases associated with different psychosocial situations.* (Ornstein, p. 36, [24])

There are 4 occurrences of MAY + Negation:

*Some may be related, some may not.* (Boulter, p. 52, [16])

*You may not believe...*(Ornstein, p. 26, [21])

*In the short run, what is best for one person may not seem best for everyone else or the family as a whole, which poses a challenge for the therapist.* (Brown, p. 25, [16])

I found 1 instance of MAY + Quasi-modal:

*Today, the facts are telling a new story, less welcome than some of the earlier ones, and with an ending that we may not be able to change.* (Boulter, p. 22, [6])

MIGHT + Stative Verb occurred 3 times in my corpus:

*If this is true it might be necessary to modify my stance and admit there may be several clusters of diseases associated with different psychosocial situations. (Ornstein, p. 36, [24])*

*These observations would suggest that at least one of the properties of stressful social situation might be that the actor is not receiving adequate evidence...(Ornstein, p. 39, [26])*

There are 2 instances of MIGHT + Perfective Aspect:

*But the price of progress has too often been a severe limit on acceptable inquiry what is currently understandable and a set of beliefs that, somehow, the current set of problems is the correct set, even though they might have been selected on the basis of solvability. (Ornstein, p. 20, [16])*

*Marital problems might have led to drinking in the beginning.. (Brown, p. 29, [23])*

I found 2 examples of MIGHT + Existential Subject in my corpus of American Non-Fiction:

*There might well be other interpretations than ours; there certainly could be other interpretations...(Brown, p. 25, [14])*

*Might there be a regular visitor past our planet or solar system with this same frequency? (Boulter, p. 48, [15])*

I found 9 occurrences of CAN + Stative Verb, only 1 out of these all examples is in a question. 8 instances demonstrate the Epistemic usage of CAN in positive statements, a theoretical possibility:

*While a focus on problem resolution can be enormously useful for many kinds of difficulties, it can severely limit the therapist who is working with the drinking or recovering alcoholic family. (Brown, p. 7, [5])*

*The change can be negative, but it can also be adaptive. (Ornstein, p. 7, [6])*

*Conversely, stimulation or destruction of other areas of the hypothalamus causes incessant eating, which can be fatal.* (Ornstein, p. 12, [12])

There is only 1 example of CAN + Progressive Aspect in my corpus:

*At least three factors can be functioning here.* (Ornstein, p. 23, [17])

I discovered also only 1 example of the Syntactic Co-Occurrence Pattern CAN + Existential Subject. This example was found in a negative statement:

*While there can be no question regarding the use of the concept of stress..* (Ornstein, p. 33, [23])

There is one example of CAN + Negation:

*While there can be no question regarding the use of the concept of stress..* (Ornstein, p. 33, [33])

8 instances of COULD + Stative Verb occur in my corpus. One of these examples was found in a question, 3 in negative statements and 4 out of these 8 instances were found in positive affirmative sentences, all of them illustrating the Epistemic Possibility usage of COULD:

*It is possible that cortical cells are being lost and the cortex is decreasing in actual structure, or the cells are losing their branches, or it could be that the subcortical mass is increasing.* (Ornstein, p. 23, [18])

*Two factors could be responsible for this difference.* (Ornstein, p. 25, [19])

*There might well be other interpretations than ours; there certainly could be other interpretations...* (Brown, p. 25, [14])

I found 2 examples of COULD + Progressive Aspect. Both of them were included in the same sentence:

*There could actually be dendritic growth in the old animals; or we could be retaining a certain length in the enriched animals and the dendrites could be shrinking in the standard colony animals. (Ornstein, p. 26, [20])*

There is 1 example of COULD + Existential Subject in my samples:

*There might well be other interpretations than ours; there certainly could be other interpretations...(Brown, p. 25, [14])*

I discovered 3 instances of COULD + Negation:

*The contrasts between good and bad couldn't be clearer and the eventual triumphs of right over wrong are an inevitability. (Boulter, p. 23, [7])*

*Nothing could be more offbase. (Brown, p. 11, [8])*

*In his view, 'normal' could not also be too much, so he could not see six or seven drinks as a problem. (Boulter, p. 45, [26])*

## **Conclusion**

Table 16 summarizes the syntactic patterns in American non-fiction.

In my corpus there are 42 occurrences of Stative verb. Most of them were found in the combination with the modal verb MAY (22 occurrences), followed by CAN (9x), COULD (8x) and MIGHT (3x).

There are 7 instances of Perfective aspect (MAY- 5x, MIGHT- 2x).

I found 6 examples of Progressive aspect (MAY- 3x, CAN- 1x, COULD- 2x).

Existential subject occurred 6 times in my corpus of American non-fiction (MAY- 2x, MIGHT- 2x, CAN- 1x, COULD- 1x).

There are 8 examples of Negation (MAY- 4x, CAN- 1x, COULD- 3x).

I found only one occurrence of a Quasi-modal in the combination with the modal verb MAY.

### 2.7.5 Conclusion (Syntactic Co-Occurrence Patterns)

According to my research, the most frequent Syntactic Co-Occurrence Pattern is a Stative Verb (British fiction - 31x, American fiction - 36x, British non-fiction - 36x, American non-fiction- 42x). The most used Stative Verb is the verb *to be*, respectively.

Perfective Aspect occurs also quite frequently (British fiction- 14x, American fiction - 11x, British non-fiction - 7x, American non-fiction - 7x).

I found 34 occurrences of Negation in my corpus (British fiction - 16x, American fiction - 7x, British non-fiction - 3x, American non-fiction - 8x).

There are only 8 examples of Progressive Aspect, which is much less than combination with Perfective Aspect (British fiction - 1x, American fiction - 1x, British non-fiction - 0x, American non-fiction - 6x).

I discovered 12 instances of Existential Subject in my research (British fiction - 1x, American fiction - 2x, British non-fiction - 3x, American non-fiction - 6x).

The least frequent Syntactic Co-Occurrence Pattern was a Quasi-Modal. I found only one instance in my corpus of American non-fiction in combination with *MAY*.

### 3 Conclusion

The study deals with ways of expressing Epistemic Possibility in four registers - British fiction and non-fiction and American fiction and non-fiction. The first part provides a theoretical background based on *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by Randolph Quirk et al., *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny* by L. Dušková and four studies. The second part includes statistical data based on my own corpus consisting of examples found in twelve books representing contemporary British and American fiction and non-fiction.

My results show that Epistemic Possibility prevails dramatically in positive statements in all four registers. My data confirm that there are similar tendencies of expressing Epistemic Possibility in positive statements in British and American fiction, where MIGHT is used in more than a half of my instances (52% of British and 53% of American fiction), followed by MAY (28% of British and 27% of American fiction), COULD (17% of British and 20% of American) and CAN (only 3% of British and 0% of American). The data for positive statements in British and American fiction are thus almost identical. I found only 2 instances of questions in my corpus of British fiction. They were expressed by CAN (50%) and COULD (50%). There are 17 occurrences of questions in my corpus of American fiction. Nevertheless, the devices of expressing Epistemic Possibility in questions are the same as in British fiction - CAN (71%) and COULD (29%). My data show a different tendency in conveying Epistemic Possibility in negative statements. In British fiction, CAN prevails rather significantly (62% of my instances), while a tentative COULD is preferred (50%) in American fiction.

Equally, there are similar tendencies of expressing Epistemic Possibility in British and American non-fiction, where MAY prevails significantly in positive statements (85% of British and 60% of American non-fiction), followed by MIGHT (14% of British and 16% of American), CAN (only 1% of British and 14% of American) and COULD (0% of British and 10% of American). Expressing Epistemic Possibility in questions was difficult to compare, as I found no instances of questions in my corpus of British non-fiction. I found two instances of questions in American non-fiction, expressed by MIGHT (50%) and COULD (50%). In negative statements, MAY prevails in both registers (67% of British

and 33% of American non-fiction), followed by CAN (33% of British and 12,5% of American non-fiction) and COULD (0% of British and 37,5% of American non-fiction). I found no instance of MIGHT in negative statements in either of the registers.

My data thus show that the devices of expressing Epistemic Possibility are similar in fiction, regardless the British and American English distinction. The same result appears to be valid for non-fiction, where the data do not seem to depend on these varieties.

There are 159 occurrences of conveying Epistemic Possibility in fiction 142 samples in non-fiction. I expected more instances of Epistemic Possibility to be found in non-fiction, nevertheless, this result might be influenced by the fact that the distinction of Epistemic and Root Possibility is often neutralised in academic style. Many ambiguous examples were found namely in my corpus of non-fiction. After a detailed study, I considered some of the instances as devices of expressing Root Possibility. This determining might have influenced the number of examples found in fiction and non-fiction, which is almost equal (159 for fiction and 142 for non-fiction).

Another important issue in my thesis was the ambiguous status of CAN. While Coates and Palmer argue that CAN is used to express Epistemic Possibility only in non-assertion (negations and questions), Dušková and Leech state that CAN expresses Epistemic Possibility also in positive statements, namely a theoretical possibility. My research supports the latter approach, as I found 10 instances of CAN used in positive statements in non-fiction and only two samples in fiction.

Epistemic Possibility is a complex linguistic issue and my research shows that sometimes there are more possible interpretations (e.g. determining Epistemic Possibility and Root Possibility) and that there is not only one point of view.

## 4 Tabulation of the data

### 4.1 British fiction

#### 4.1.1 Positive statements

Table No. 1

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Changing Places	5	8	0	4
The Black Prince	13	13	2	7
The Collector	2	16	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	20	37	2	12

#### 4.1.2 Questions

Table No. 2

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Changing Places	0	0	0	1
The Black Prince	0	0	1	0
The Collector	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	0	0	1	1

#### 4.1.3 Negative statements

Table No. 3

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Changing Places	0	1	2	1
The Black Prince	1	1	5	0
The Collector	2	0	3	0
<b>Totals</b>	3	2	10	1

### 4.2 American fiction

#### 4.2.1 Positive statements

Table No. 4

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Ceremony	0	5	0	1
The Bluest Eye	1	4	0	4
The Professor of Desire	11	15	0	4
<b>Totals</b>	12	24	0	9

### 4.2.2 Questions

Table No. 5

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Ceremony	0	0	0	0
The Bluest Eye	0	0	2	0
The Professor of Desire	0	0	10	5
<b>Totals</b>	0	0	12	5

### 4.2J Negative statements

Table No. 6

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Ceremony	0	0	1	1
The Bluest Eye	0	0	0	1
The Professor of Desire	2	0	1	2
<b>Totals</b>	2	0	2	4

## 4.3 British non-fiction

### 4.3.1 Positive statements

Table No. 7

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Gender and Bureaucracy	6	1	0	0
The Ceremonial Animal	14	5	1	0
The Computer	36	3	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	56	9	1	0

### 4.3.2 Questions

Table No. 8

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Gender and Bureaucracy	0	0	0	0
The Ceremonial Animal	0	0	0	0
The Computer	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	0	0	0	0

### 4.33 Negative statements

Table No. 9

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Gender and Bureaucracy	0	0	0	0
The Ceremonial Animal	1	0	1	0
The Computer	1	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

## 4.4 American non-fiction

### 4.4.1 Positive statements

Table No. 10

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Extinction	8	2	0	0
The Alcoholic Family	15	4	4	0
The Healing Brain	15	4	5	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>

### 4.4.2 Questions

Table No. 11

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Extinction	0	1	0	1
The Alcoholic Family	0	0	0	0
The Healing Brain	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

### 4.4.3 Negative statements

Table No. 12

Title	MAY	MIGHT	CAN	COULD
Extinction	2	0	0	1
The Alcoholic Family	1	0	0	2
The Healing Brain	1	0	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>

## 4.5 Syntactic Co-Occurrence patterns

### 4.5.1 British fiction

Table No. 13

<b>Syntactic Co-occurrence Pattern</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>MIGHT</b>	<b>CAN</b>	<b>COULD</b>
Perfective Aspect	4	9	0	1
Progressive Aspect	0	0	0	1
Existential Subject	0	0	1	0
Quasi-Modal	0	0	0	0
Stative Verb	12	12	2	5
Negation	3	2	10	1

### 4.5.2 American fiction

Table No. 14

<b>Syntactic Co-occurrence Pattern</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>MIGHT</b>	<b>CAN</b>	<b>COULD</b>
Perfective Aspect	4	6	0	1
Progressive Aspect	1	0	0	0
Existential Subject	0	0	0	2
Quasi-Modal	0	0	0	0
Stative Verb	10	8	6	12
Negation	2	0	2	3

### 4.5.3 British non-fiction

Table No. 15

<b>Syntactic Co-occurrence Pattern</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>MIGHT</b>	<b>CAN</b>	<b>COULD</b>
Perfective Aspect	4	2	0	0
Progressive Aspect	0	0	0	0
Existential Subject	2	0	1	0
Quasi-Modal	0	0	0	0
Stative Verb	33	2	1	0
Negation	2	0	1	0

#### 4.5.4 American non-fiction

Table No. 16

<b>Syntactic Co-occurrence Pattern</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>MIGHT</b>	<b>CAN</b>	<b>COULD</b>
Perfective Aspect	5	2	0	0
Progressive Aspect	3	0	1	2
Existential Subject	2	2	1	1
Quasi-Modal	1	0	0	0
Stative Verb	22	3	8	8
Negation	4	0	1	3

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## **Appendix**

## British fiction

### Fowles, J.: The Collector

- 1) She said a lot about it being my money and my life and how generous I was and all that, but I could see she was really scared I *might* marry some girl and they'd lose all the money they were so ashamed of, anyway, (p. 16)
- 2) He said they thought it *might* be because the cottage was so on its own. (p. 21)
- 3) Or it *might have been* a secret Roman Catholic Chapel, (p. 21)
- 4) Some *might* say I was lucky to find the place first go... (p. 22)
- 5) I didn't risk pictures, I knew she *might* have advanced taste, (p. 23)
- 6) In my opinion a lot of people who *may* seem happy now would do what I did...(p. 24)
- 7) I thought she *might* know about electricity... (p. 25)
- 8) I mean you go to a place where you know you *may* see something rare and you don't... (p. 26)
- 9) I mean I felt I was swept on, like down rapids, I *might* hit something, I *might* get through, (p. 27)
- 10) You *can't* be heard outside and anyway there's never anyone to hear. (p. 30)
- 11) I was determined, she *couldn't have won*. (p. 32)
- 12) I don't know why, the only name I *could* think of she *might* know was Mr. Singleton, (p. 33)
- 13) Then she suddenly looked as if she'd thought of something nasty, what I said *might* be true sort of thing, (p. 34)
- 14) All the time she asked questions, no, all the time I felt she *might* ask a question, she'd come out quickly with a question to try and catch me. (p. 35)
- 15) You must know my father is not rich or anything. So it *can't* be ransom, (p. 36)
- 16) If you love me in any real sense of the word love you *can't* want to keep me here. (p. 39)
- 17) Perhaps I *could* fall in love with you somewhere else. (p. 39)
- 18) But I *couldn't* possibly fall in love with you in this room, I *couldn't* fall in love with anyone here. (p. 39)
- 19) 'You *might* go to prison for years, (p. 40)
- 20) It was almost a kindness, as you *might* say. (p. 43)
- 21) She kicked and struggled, but of course she was too small and I *may not* be Mr Atlas but I am not a weakling either, (p. 45)
- 22) It didn't really hurt but the shock of it was most nasty, coming when I least expected it and after I'd been so reasonable when others *might have* lost their head. (p. 45)
- 23) Then again - it *may not* have been that first morning she drew me... (p. 59)
- 24) 'I *might* become a very clever artist, but I shan't ever be a great one.'(p. 59)
- 25) I don't actually say it but you get the idea that I *might*, (p. 61)

## Lodge D.: Changing places

- 1) ...and in an age of more leisurely transportation the intersection of their respective routes *might have* been marked by some interesting human gesture...(p. 7)
- 2) ...a little mime of mutual appraisal *might have* been played out through the windows of two railway compartments...(p. 7)
- 3) *may*, indeed, return to him along the other party's cord of communication...(p. 8)
- 4) 4)...buying the most distinguished scholars it *could* find and retaining their loyalty by the lavish provision of laboratories, libraries, research grants and handsome, longlegged secretaries, (p. 13)
- 5) This is called Finals, the very name of which implies that nothing of importance *can* happen after it. (p. 16)
- 6) The British postgraduate student is a lonely, forlorn soul, uncertain of what he is doing or whom he is trying to please - you *may* recognize him in the tea-shops..^. 16)
- 7) But at certain age, the age at which promotions and Chairs begin to occupy a man's thoughts, he *may* look back with wistful nostalgia to the days when his wits ran fresh and clear, directed to a single, positive goal. (p. 16)
- 8) After nearly two years his work was still far from completion and, thinking that a change of scene *might* help, he applied in an idle moment for a Fellowship to **America and for an Assistant Lectureship at the University of Rumidge.** (p. 19)
- 9) - emotionally it is still for him a kind of Paradise, the place where he was once happy and free and *may* be so once again, (p. 21)
- 10) **Now, for example, the stewardess lay before him a meal of ambiguous designation** (*could* be lunch, *could* be dinner, who knows or cares four miles above the turning globe)..(p. 22)
- 11) 'Gordon *might not* be Chairman of this committee again.' (p. 25)
- 12) Philip was not to know this of course, though a less innocent politician *might have* suspected it. (p. 25)
- 13) His unconscious *may have* been otherwise occupied...(p. 28)
- 14) 'I figured you *couldn't* be needing an abortion.' (p. 30)
- 15) Underneath that tough exterior of the free-thinking Jew (exactly the kind T.S. Eliot thought an organic community *could* well do without)., (p. 31)
- 16) ...then the plane *might* be struck by a thunderbolt, (p. 32)
- 17) Jane Austen *might* turn realist on him...(p. 47)
- 18) *Could* it conceivably be true? (p. 50)
- 19) It *can't* be England if it's not raining, (p. 52)
- 20) The search, he understood, *might* take several hours;...(p. 59)
- 21) Well, there *might* be. (p. 62)
- 22) There are a few points you *might* like to bear in mind. (p. 63)

## Murdoch L: The Black Prince

- 1) Without my help this *could have* been so with Bradley Pearson, (p. 9)
- 2) And yet: what *can* be simpler than a tale of love and more charming? (p. 9)

- 3) Yet I would with better grace appear as Bradley's fool than as his judge. It *may* be that in some sense I am both. (p. 10)
- 4) A work of art is as good as its creator. It *cannot* be more so. (p. 11)
- 5) Nor, such as he in this case is, *can* it be less. (p. 11)
- 6) The paradox perhaps of my whole life, and it is an absurdity upon which I do not cease to meditate, is that the dramatic story which follows, so unlike the rest of my work, *may* well prove to be my only 'best seller', (p. 12)
- 7) The three slim volumes which have emerged from this wrack *may* seem a meagre foundation upon which to rest the sacred claim of being 'a writer', (p. 13)
- 8) *May* it be worthy of those deeper motives which it also owns. (p. 14)
- 9) But I make him as it were the mascot of the tale, partly because in a purely mechanical sense he opens it, and if on a certain day he had not, and so on, I *might* never, and so on. (p. 14)
- 10) Only art explains, and that *cannot* itself be explained, (p. 15)
- 11) Some people *might* call it dull. (p. 15)
- 12) A sort of Seducer's Diary with metaphysical reflections *might have* been an ideal literary form for me, I have often thought, (p. 16)
- 13) But the years are spent and gone to oblivion that *might have* filled it. (p. 16)
- 14).. and also out of delicacy since they *may* no longer wish to be associated with me. (p. 16)
- 15) Of course, as *might* be pointed out with barbed humour, I had always in a sense been a devotee of silence, (p. 18)
- 16) And it *could* be a measure of this quietness, and of the gentle timidity of which I have spoken, that a summer spent out of London *could* even for a second present itself to me as a trial, (p. 18)
- 17)..., such a departure *could* reasonably be thought of as an adventure, a daring and unpredictable move. (p. 18)
- 18) It *might* be most dramatically effective to begin the tale at the moment when Arnold Baffin rang me up and said, 'Bradley, could you come round here please, I think that I have just killed my wife.' (p. 21)
- 19) In a complex explanation any order may seem arbitrary, (p. 21)**
- 20) Sheer silliness *can* be attractive in a woman, (p. 25)
- 21) How *can* such a person dare to be happy? (p. 25)
- 22) I lived for years with a sense of things irrevocably soiled and spoiled, it *could* give suddenly such a sad feel to the world sometimes, (p. 25)
- 23) There *can* be no possible communication, this was utterly finished with years ago. (p. 26)
- 24) She *might* indeed almost instinctively come to me, out of curiosity.. (p. 26)
- 25)- Now Chris sort of paid me off you *might* say some time back, and I thought that if you and Chris were likely to get together again- (p. 27)
- 26) 'Bradley, could you come round here please - I think that I *may have* just killed Rachel.' (p. 28)
- 27) 'Arnold,' I said, 'you *can't have* killed her - You're talking nonsense - You *can't have*- (p. 28)
- 28) It *may* be relevant to record that my first general feeling on hearing what Arnold had to say was one of curious joy. (p. 28)
- 29) Such reactions are not after all so abnormal and *may* be said in that minimal sense at least to be almost excusable, (p. 28)
- 30) 'I *might* be useful. After all, I am still a doctor in the eyes of God.' (p. 29)

- 31) In some way he was 'the ordinary chap', and eschewed the vision which *might*, for better as well as worse, have made a very different use of his money, (p. 31)
- 32) **This may be to make a mystery of what had simpler causes, (p. 34)**
- 33) She had been putting on weight and some *might have* called her fat. (p. 34)
- 34) 'Do you know, I think she *may have* been shamming all the time.' (p. 37)
- 35) A dressing-table *can* be a terrible thing, (p. 38)
- 36) If he had not lost his nerve he *could have* kept the whole thing secret, he was probably thinking now. (p. 43)
- 37) His having met Arnold *could* have some undesirable consequence, (p. 43)
- 38) This too *could* be a help in marriage, (p. 44)
- 39) This *may* be hard for an outsider to understand, (p. 44)
- 40) You *mayn* think it, but Rachel is a bit of a nagger, (p. 46)
- 41) It (knowing the details) *may* make your kind of writer, (p. 49)
- 42) 'We are going there too, we *might* meet. (p. 51)
- 43) However it was also possible that I *might* have to pay the penalty for this. (p. 52)
- 44) Both Arnold and Rachel *might* resent my role and wish to punish me for it. (p. 52)

## American fiction

### Morrison T.: The Bluest Eye

- 1) It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself *might have been* unyielding, (p. 4)
- 2) How, I wonder, *can* it be so neat and nasty at the same time? (p. 6)
- 3) If somebody ate too much, he *could* end up outdoors, (p. 11)
- 4) If somebody used too much coal, he *could* end up outdoors, (p. 11)
- 5) "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you *may* have it." (p. 14)
- 6) She *could* be dead for all he know. (p. 17)
- 7) "Is it true that I *can* have a baby now?" (p. 23)
- 8) If you had to pay 4.80 a month for a sofa that started off split, no good, and humiliating-you *couldn't* take any joy in owning it. (p. 26)
- 9) Dropping to his knee, he struck her several times in the face and she *might have* succumbed early had he not hit his hand against the metal bed frame when his wife ducked, (p. 33)
- 10) But mostly we waited for spring, when there *could* be gardens, (p. 47)
- 11) We watched, afraid they *might* notice us and turn their energies our way. (p. 50)
- 12) ... to dwell on any redeeming features she *might* have. (p. 60)

### Roth P.: The Professor of Desire

- 1) The suggestion that something other than Mother Nature *might have* rendered Herbie unfit to fight Tojo... (p. 4)
- 2) "If that kid sang serious he *could* be in the Metropolitan Opera." (p. 5)

- 3) "If he sang serious, he *could* be a cantor, for Christ sakes, with no problem." (p. 5)
- 4) "He *could* break your heart." (p. 5)
- 5) Yet, ladies, who else *could* it be? (p. 6)
- 6) Herbie's enthusiasm and virtuosity are such that my father must sometimes caution him to keep certain of his imitations and virtuosity are such that my father must sometimes caution him to keep certain of his imitations to himself, unique though they *may* be. (p. 6)
- 7) "But," protests Herbie, "my fart is perfect." "*Could* be, for all I know," replies the boss, "but not in front of a mixed crowd." (p. 6)
- 8) How *can* Herbie know so much and care so passionately about the tintinnabulations of the can? (p. 7)
- 9) ...regardless of how tempted I *may* be to light my fuse and show these hicks a few of Herbie's fireworks...(p. 8)
- 10) ...no matter how illmannered they *may* be, treating them like human beings, (p. 13)
- 11) ...that he thought at first she *might* actually be Spanish, (p. 15)
- 12) ..."of course" my friend is "practicing" homosexual. My friend? It *cannot* be. (p. 18)
- 13) ...I replied, and as quickly as I *could* moved out of the men's room...(p. 19)
- 14) Or *could* it be that while my shameful secret with Louis is that under it all I am altogether ordinary and respectable,...(p. 20)
- 15) ...because I am afraid that I *may* well be the "hillbilly" and "hayseed" that he delights in calling me when we disagree about the deep meaning of some masterpiece...(p. 20)
- 16) ...as though the "problem," for all he knows, *might* be somewhere in the air above us. (p. 21)
- 17) ...regardless of how unsubstantial and quirky, or childish and perverse, the source of the appeal *might* strike anyone else. (p. 22)
- 18) Of course this leads me to seek out girls I *might* otherwise find commonplace or silly or dull...(p. 23)
- 19) Oh God, how *can* my coveting that pelvis thrust so provocatively toward the mouth of the howling mob, how *can* coveting those hard and tiny fists which speak to me of the pleasantest of all struggles, how *can* coveting those long and strong tomboyish legs that quiver ever so slightly as the arc is made and her silky hair sweeps back against the gymnasium floor- how *can* coveting the minutest pulsations of her being be "meaningless" or "trivial"...(p. 25)
- 20) ...the hours that *might have been* spent cheering one another on to oceanic orgasms...(p. 25)
- 21) I begin to understand that for an unknown lad to have traveled to an unknown land *may not have been* a mistake after all. (p. 28)
- 22) Of course if I chose whores less whorish-looking my chances of dying of VD rather than of old age *might* appreciably diminish, (p. 29)
- 23) ...how much truth there *may* be in all this titillating schoolboy speculation, (p. 29)
- 24) ...and *could* Elisabeth be more delighted by anything than to be caught in a screaming, hilarious rundown between Birgitta and myself? (p. 31)
- 25) "How on earth *can* she be going to pieces? (p. 32)
- 26) ...I head back across London to our basement, finishing up as I go with that day's inquiry into the evil I *may* or *may not have* done. (p. 38)

- 27) *Can* it be? (p. 39)
- 28) *Can* this be true? (p. 40)
- 29) An hour earlier I had been fearful that it *might* be decades before I was potent again, that my punishment, if such it was, *might* even last forever, (p. 41)
- 30) Teeth that *couldn't* be whiter,...(p. 43)
- 31) *Could* it be somebody she knows? (p. 44)
- 32) *Could* it be Dr. Leigh from the Brompton Road? (p. 44)
- 33) But what excites me is that she *might*, that she could...(p. 44)
- 34) I don't, not simply for fear that she will say yes (as she *might*, if only for the thrill of saying it), but because I *might* reply...(p. 45)
- 35) Rather, each thinks : Given what has been, what else *can* be? (p. 48)
- 36) How many such girls *can* there be in the world? (p. 49)
- 37)—if I were to give myself completely over to what I have, to whom I am with, to what *may* actually be my nature-(p. 50)
- 38) Ridding himself of what he is by nature *may* be a more difficult task...(p. 51)
- 39) Well, whatever my talent *may have* been for that profession, graduate school has not exactly encouraged its development...(p. 52)
- 40) "Because," Helen answers, and without any irony at all for protection-which *may* be what makes me begin to surrender some of my own,...(p. 54)
- 41) Now that seems to be over, but, frankly, from the way I feel when I wake up in the morning I *might* as well be in tears, (p. 55)
- 42) -or *perhaps* it is in fact the true measure of a courtesanlike power that emanates from Helen's sense of herself as an idolized object that *might* just as well *have* been carved of one hundred pounds of jade- (p. 57)
- 43) "I only meant that you *might have* decided youth and beauty weren't going to get you through indefinitely." (p. 58)
- 44) I get the sense that you *may be* riding for a very bad fall. (p. 60)
- 45) He *couldn't* be sure. (p. 63)

### **Silko L. M.: Ceremony**

- 1) And if he could hold that image of the deer in his mind long enough, his stomach *might* shiver less and let him sleep for a while, (p. 7)
- 2) Tayo felt weak, and the longer he walked the more his legs felt as though they *might* become invisible again...(p. 16)
- 3) "I *might* be there right now, living on top of some mesa, if my father hadn't talked her into sending me to the ranch, (p. 24)
- 4) Now she stood over the bed and looked at him, and if he opened his eyes, he knew he would see her probing for new shame, the anticipation of what she *might* find swelling inside her. (p. 29)
- 5) But advantages wear out; she needed a new struggle, another opportunity to show those who *might* gossip that she has still another unfortunate burden which proved that, above all else, she was a Christian woman, (p. 30)
- 6) if he had known then maybe he *could have* told you before you went to the white people's big war', (p. 35)
- 7) ... so there *could* be no mistake in what had been said... (p. 36)
- 8) Nothing *can* stop you now except one thing... (p. 51)

## British non-fiction

### Bird R.J.: The Computer in Experimental Psychology

- 1) ...the computer *may* be a more economical than conventional apparatus in achieving given research objectives...(p. 1)
- 2) An experiment *may* have an uncertain outcome, but the procedures to be followed by the experimenter are determined in advance, (p. 2)
- 3) The increasing complexity of such experiments *might* lead to some understanding of the human processes involved when we do experiments in general...(p. 2)
- 4) One implication of this is that a pattern of reaction-times *may* be observable on the finer scale which would not be apparent on a coarser one. (p. 2)
- 5) These interactions *may* be auditory cues, they *may* be social interactions leading to the subject's enhanced willingness to please the experimenter, or they *may* be of yet other kinds, (p. 3)
- 6) Many experiments, especially in the area of visual perception, *may* require stimuli that are not only precisely specified but also of considerable complexity, (p. 3)
- 7) Computer control techniques *may* be the best way of generating such complex stimulus patterns, (p. 4)
- 8) Computers are expensive : although becoming progressively cheaper, they *may* cost, together with the necessary ancillary equipment for experimental work, many thousands of pounds, (p. 5)
- 9) If you have access to a computer already, do not assume that it is best to use it whenever possible; there *may* be cheaper and quicker ways of achieving what you want. (p. 5)
- 10) If a number of related experiments are being undertaken, or if there is no other way of reaching the objective, it *may* be worth while to go ahead, (p. 5)
- 11) If the experiment is unlikely to be repeated in its original form, if the program would be of little foreseeable value to others, or if it would take longer to learn and use a tool which you *may* never want to use again, it *may* be better to turn to other methods, (p. 5)
- 12) A real and serious objection to certain types of computer application is that they *may* deprive the experimenter of the opportunity for the direct observation of his subjects, (p. 5)
- 13) Among the possible outcomes *may* be behaviour which the human observer would notice but which will not be recorded by the measuring system he has devised, (p. 5)
- 14) If the advantage of avoiding experimenter bias is sought, the way round this problem of observation *may* be by suitable planning of the experimental area so that one-way mirrors, fish-eye lenses, or even closed-circuit television can be used. (p. 5)
- 15) ...and he *may* be unwilling to spend time in making corrections of a minor nature in his procedure...(p. 5)
- 16) A program which does not cover all contingencies *may* lead to system failure...(p. 6)
- 17) ...and the computer itself, *may*, as a total system, become increasingly **unreliable** as the number of parts in the system increases, (p. 6)

- 18) Process-control devices *may* be more or less sophisticated...(p. 7)
- 19) ...which the reader *may* already be familiar in another guise, (p. 8)
- 20) The software is thus thought of as an object which remains constant whatever its mode of representation *may* be. (p. 9)
- 21) In mathematical computation, for example, real-time *may* simply mean...(p. 9)
- 22) ...and the amount of data obtained *may* require a considerable storage capacity of the kind that the computer can easily provide, (p. 10)
- 23) They *may* be (input and output) direct input and output devices such as video display units and keyboards; they *may* be a means of acquiring data from written source documents, such as document readers or punched card or paper tape readers; or they *may* be a means of producing printed output of the computer's results, for example line printers or tele-typewriters, (p. 14)
- 24) The reader *might* like to continue the series...(p. 15)
- 25) Where any confusion *might* arise between differently based systems... (p. 15)
- 26) Other types of semiconductor memory device can be read only, having been preprogrammed to contain the required information which *may* be either program or data. (p. 24)
- 27) ...where the basic operating system (monitor) *may* be contained in ROM. (p. 25)
- 28) Instructions *may* have one or two operands, (p. 30)
- 29) A fixed disk engineered to finer tolerances than an exchangeable disk so the amount of data storage and its speed of transfer *may* be higher, (p. 34)
- 30) In function also the graphics display terminal *may* overlap the VDU...(p. 36)
- 31) ...therefore a device known as a direct memory access (DMA) *may* be needed to allow information to be transferred directly from memory to disk and vice versa, (p. 38)
- 32) The program that is preferred *may* satisfy one or more of a number of criteria: it *may* be the most economical in terms of the number of instructions used; it *may* be the fastest in execution; or it *may* combine these two qualities, (p. 40)

**James W.: The Ceremonial Animal  
A New Portrait of Anthropology**

- 1) What makes a set of individuals a society is not necessarily obvious; it *may* be silent, or implicit, because people often relate to each other through unspoken memories and expectations, (p. 4)
- 2) Most accounts would be angled and *might* seem to miss the wholeness, what we *might* call, evoking Marcel Mauss, the morphology of these occasions as social phenomena, (p. 4)
- 3) He suggested, for example, 'One *could* begin a book on anthropology by saying: When one examines the life and behaviour of humankind throughout the world, one sees that, except for what *might* be called animal activities...(p. 6)
- 4) There *may* be as many aspects of connection as of distinction in such a series, for example as between steam, water, and ice. (p. 7)
- 5) ...and the understandable ways in which these strategies *may* provoke resistance, (p. 17)

- 6) Even a stranger 'altruistically' helped by us *may* one day assist our survival in return, and in this way we can account for almost any kind of human act. (p. 20)
- 7) It has even been argued that limitations on the birth of children *can* be an evolutionary strategy for the reproductive success of one's genes, because...(p. 20)
- 8) The collectivity of our genetic inheritance *may* well dispose us to be inventive, communicative, and to make and remake language and culture...(p. 21)
- 9) The method gives possibly arbitrary prominence to Ursula while omitting a large number of people in her band who *may have* contributed to its survival without leaving a genetic trace through a line of daughters (they *might have* died off, or been incorporated elsewhere), (p. 23)
- 10) However, social circumstances *may* differ elsewhere, (p. 24)
- 11) While language *may not* yet have developed, it is possible that there was a great increase in pre-linguistic communicative activity including the practice of imagining the intentions and actions of others, (p. 26)
- 12) There *can* be no doubt that...(p. 27)
- 13) ...intra-communal interactions which themselves *may* be the sharpest mental stimulant to individuals, (p. 27)
- 14) Mithan argues that environmental, bodily and demographic changes, along with increased overall brain size and the need for better nourishment and prolonged child care, *may have* triggered a crucial increase in this kind of 'dedicated' social intelligence, (p. 28)
- 15) Chris Knight has offered a vivid model of the way that cultural rules about social relations *may have* been consciously created in early human history, (p. 30)
- 16) We cannot deny that aspects of Wittgenstein's observation about the prevalence of ritualistic activities *might well have* applied to aspects of the lives of Early Humans...(p. 31)
- 17) ...forming a virtual or ideal schema which *may have* its own moral compulsion, (p. 32)
- 18) ...; and the same people *may* change their minds in their own self-interest at anytime, (p. 34)
- 19) ...; and while self-interest and group interest *may* coincide, for instance where the group offers protection to the individual, they *may* also be at odds with each other...(p. 34)
- 20) ...social relations *might* change over time. (p. 46)

### **Savage M., Witz A.: Gender and Bureaucracy**

- 1) Be this as it *may*, what has more frequently escaped discussion is the instrumental way of thinking about organizations which Weber helped to establish, (p. 5)
- 2) Although Clegg *may* well over-state the significance of these new organizational forms, he is emphatic about their departure from the Weberian model...(p. 9)
- 3) Ferguson does not go quite as far as saying this, it is implied by her analysis that there *may* be ways in which men act in the world which, if women could adopt them, *might* be liberating, (p. 21)

- 4) On the contrary, individual women in senior bureaucratic positions *may* perform have to learn to act like men in order to function effectively at these levels, (p. 43)
- 5) Halford believes that local state institutions *may* in principle bring about some positive changes for women,...(p. 46)
- 6) Tensions, however, *may* be productive, (p. 47)

### **American non-fiction**

#### **Boulter M.: Extinction**

##### **Evolution and the End of Man**

- 1) That view *may* be as obvious as many a verdict in a murder trial...(p. 7)
- 2) What we've done in our short sojourn on Earth *may* be comparable to other catastrophic events that happened millions of years ago. (p. 10)
- 3) *Can* the behaviour of our ancestors building Tirefour Broch 2100 years ago, or hunting mammals in Alaska 8000 years ago, be seen as part of the same evolutionary process that I've painted for the last 65 million years? (p. 16)
- 4) Even more basically, *can* the human mind, from our position inside the system, have the ability to interpret these complex patterns and explain the way life works on the whole Earth? (p. 16)
- 5) They also got caught in a Catch-22 situation, which *may* mean that they can never succeed, (p. 19)
- 6) Today, the facts are telling a new story, less welcome than some of the earlier ones, and with an ending that we *may not* be able to change, (p. 22)
- 7) The contrasts between good and bad *couldn't* be clearer and the eventual triumphs of right over wrong are an inevitability, (p. 23)
- 8) In their turn, the arthropods *may have* fed on small ammonite species, which then lived on the plankton ooze. (p. 25)
- 9) It was the first time I had cause to feel that my research group's new approach *might* succeed, (p. 37)
- 10) But through this same time interval changes in the genes *may be* going on inside the cells, without expression outside, (p. 43)
- 11) Their size *may* be one of the reasons why they were becoming extinct...(p. 44)
- 12) Subsequently the tastier, more tender angiosperm leaves *may have* encouraged these forms...(p. 45)
- 13) *Could* it be that ...(p. 47)
- 14) ...catastrophe *might* yield clues to understanding the aftermath...(p. 48)
- 15) *Might* there be a regular visitor past our planet or solar system with this same frequency? (p. 48)
- 16) Some *may* be related, somehow *not*. (p. 52)

#### **Brown S., Lewis V.: The Alcoholic Family in Recovery**

- 1) But many more couples *might* decide to wait with a little more knowledge about what is normal based on the experience of those who have come before. (P- 4)

- 2) We heard few, if any, worries that therapy *might* interfere with 12-step philosophy...(p. 5)
- 3) It sometimes shocked the families, and it *may* also surprise our readers, (p. 6)
- 4) So, some therapists *may well* have to shift figure and ground...(p. 6)
- 5) While a focus on problem resolution *can* be enormously useful for many kinds of difficulties, it *can* severely limit the therapist who is working with the drinking or recovering alcoholic family, (p. 7)
- 6) It may seem and, in fact, it *may* be very negative in the up-close moment, but a wide-angle lens casts a different view. (p. 8)
- 7) Years into recovery, families *may* go back to remember and resolve the trauma...(p. 9)
- 8) Nothing *could* be more offbase. (p. 11)
- 9) As in any other clinical work, therapist beliefs *can* be a major source of help and hindrance, (p. 11)
- 10) This way be true for some...(p. 14)
- 11) One partner's entry into recovery *may* be the crisis...(p. 20)
- 12) From the perspective of the children, it *may* very well look and feel worse...(p. 23)
- 13)-while recognizing how very difficult this 'double focus' *can* be. (p. 24)
- 14) There *might well* be other interpretations than ours; there certainly *could* be other interpretations...(p. 25)
- 15) Otherwise, the therapist *may* be working against the natural flow of recovery, (p. 25)
- 16) In the short run, what is best for one person *may not* seem best for everyone else or the family as a whole, which poses a challenge for the therapist (p. 25)
- 17) ...including trauma, that *may* interfere with progress, (p. 26)
- 18) These adaptations *may have* included the ability to function...(p. 27)
- 19) He or she *may* need to challenge...(p. 27)
- 20) In working with a drinking family, the next step *may* be an acute intervention...(p. 28)
- 21) Working with a family in the early weeks of abstinence *may* require direct advice...(p. 28)
- 22) It *may* be that a couple talks only about the chaos and fighting in their family and the therapist never asks about the alcohol use. (p. 28)
- 23) Marital problems *might have* led to drinking in the beginning...(p. 29)
- 24) The emphasis on narrow, specialized training *can* be a major problem for all therapists...(p. 31)
- 25) An in-depth psycho-dynamic view *may* be necessary if resistance to abstinence or recovery and the new learning is strong...(p. 31)
- 26) In his view, 'normal' *could not* also be too much, so he could not see six or seven drinks as a problem, (p. 45)

### **Ornstein R., Swencionis Ch.: The Healing Brain**

- 1) The brain does not grow new cells, but the connections between cells *may* be as important, (p. 5)

- 2) Placebo effectiveness varies with the expectations of both physician and patient, and some patients *may* be placebo responders in certain situations but not in others, (p. 5)
- 3) War has been declared on heart disease and on cancer, but we *may* be working feverishly to control diseases that we ourselves are causing, (p. 6)
- 4) The damage that social upheaval, conflict and loss cause *may* be remediable by psychophysiological treatment to some degree, but such dislocation *might* also be prevented by improving social networks, (p. 6)
- 5) ...suggesting that negatively ionized air *might* accelerate maturation and aging...(p. 6)
- 6) The change *can* be negative, but it *can* also be adaptive, (p. 7)
- 7) Adapting *can* be a change in the whole organism, making it better able to meet new challenges, (p. 7)
- 8) We *may have* been brainwashed by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's tables of height and weight, (p. 8)
- 9) Reanalysis of the data these tables are based on indicates that the tables *may* be correct for people about 40 years old, but that as people age, ideal weight *may* be heavier than the tables suggest, (p. 8)
- 10) The healthiest people *may* be those who gain a little weight with age. (p. 8)
- 11) There *may* be specific disturbances in the organs of the body, an inborn error in the genes, a break in personal relationships, a radical change in one company's prospects, a shift in the government, or an improvement in economic conditions, all of which can occur separately and independently, yet each one can destabilize the organism and contribute to the progress of disease, (p. 10)
- 12) Conversely, stimulation or destruction of other areas of the hypothalamus causes incessant eating, which *can* be fatal, (p. 12)
- 13) It (discussion about your marriage) *may* seem quite important at the moment, but what happens when you get a cinder in your eye, or put your hand over a flame? (p. 15)
- 14) These intrinsic healing and self-regulatory systems of the brain *may* be commonplace but should not be overlooked in favor of striking medical successes; they are not trivial to our health, (p. 16)
- 15) Recent evidence suggests that the tears produced by emotional crying *may* be a way the body disposes of toxic substances, (p. 17)
- 16) But the price of progress has too often been a severe limit on acceptable inquiry what is currently understandable and a set of beliefs that, somehow, the current set of problems is the correct set, even though they *might have* been selected on the basis of solvability, (p. 20)
- 17) At least three factors *can be* functioning here. (p. 23)
- 18) It is possible that cortical cells are being lost and the cortex is decreasing in actual structure, or the cells are losing their branches, or it *could* be that the subcortical mass is increasing, (p. 23)
- 19) Two factors *could be* responsible for this difference, (p. 25)
- 20) There *could* actually be dendritic growth in the old animals; or we *could* be retaining a certain length in the enriched animals and the dendrites *could be* shrinking in the standard colony animals, (p. 26)
- 21) You *may not* believe...(p. 26)
- 22) Rene Dubos has pointed out, however, that this formulation which *may have* provided a satisfactory basis for inferences...(p. 32)

- 23) While there *can* be no question regarding the use of the concept of stress..(p. 33)
- 24) If this is true it *might* be necessary to modify my stance and admit there *may* be several clusters of diseases associated with different psychosocial situations, (p. 36)
- 25) Furthermore, if we can identify the attributes of this class of stressors, it *may well* be that the same relationships or social circumstances within a given culture regularly produce such a class of signals, (p. 37)
- 26) These observations would suggest that at least one of the properties of stressful social situation *might* be that the actor is not receiving adequate evidence...(p. 39)