

Sự liên kết từ vựng của các động từ tình thái trong những bài hát tiếng Anh về tình yêu

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TÓM TẮT

Bài viết trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu về kết hợp từ có động từ khiếm khuyết (động từ khuyết thiếu) trong những bài hát tiếng Anh về tình yêu. Chúng tôi xác định các nhóm và tần suất sử dụng các nhóm kết hợp từ có động từ khiếm khuyết. Mục tiêu quan trọng của nghiên cứu là cung cấp thông tin về tần suất của các liên kết từ vựng của những động từ khiếm khuyết, qua đó những ai có quan tâm đến học thuật sẽ thấy hữu ích khi biết sự liên kết nào là xuất hiện phổ biến cũng như những động từ nào là thường xuất hiện trong những liên kết đó. Ngoài ra, nghiên cứu cũng giúp người học tiếng Anh có cái nhìn đầy đủ hơn về những đặc tính ngữ nghĩa cũng như cú pháp của các liên kết từ vựng với động từ khiếm khuyết mà trong đó một động từ khiếm khuyết có thể được sử dụng.

Từ khóa: *Sự liên kết từ vựng, động từ khiếm khuyết, tính tình thái, miền ngữ nghĩa.*

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Lexical associations of modal verbs in English love songs

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the use of modal verbs in English songs. Specifically, it aims to investigate the collocations of modals and lexical verbs in the English songs, the frequencies of each group, the grammatical aspects of voice and aspect commonly associated with these combinations. Data consist of 250 widely-circulated songs in English, qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. The findings reveal activity verbs and mental verbs as the most common; in addition, the modal verbs are most frequently used to express volition and prediction. As regards aspects, the combination of modals and perfect aspect accounts for the highest proportion. The findings hold pedagogical implications to the use of English songs in teaching and learning of EFL.

Keywords: *Lexical associations, modal verbs, modality, semantic domains.*

1. INTRODUCTION

During recent years, much attention has been paid to the selection of vocabulary for use in courses for those learning English as a foreign language (EFL). However, little attention has been paid to the patterns or structures of the language. A knowledge of grammatical rules as well as of how to put words together is as important as, perhaps more important than, a knowledge of their meanings. Actually, there are many aspects discussed in English grammar and one of the problems students have to face is modals and their patterns. Grammarians and teachers of English also admit that modality is one of the most difficult areas to deal with in English grammar, and it is particularly difficult for learners of English to master this area of grammar. Unless the learner becomes familiar with these patterns, he will be unable to use his

vocabulary to produce the desired meaning.

Below are some examples of the mistakes learners of English usually make (* to indicate unacceptable in English and the ones marked with ✓ to indicate correct):

a. Using the full infinitive: Learners often use full infinitives after “pure” modal verbs instead of bare infinitives.

* *You must to do it.* (✓ *You must do it.*)

* *I can't to swim.* (✓ *I can't swim.*)

* *You need not to stay.* (✓ *You need not stay.*)

b. Question and negative forms: Learners may over-generalize the rules for forming questions and negative statements which involve adding *do* or *did*.

* *Do you can swim?* (✓ *Can you swim?*)

* *Dare I to say it?* (✓ *Dare I say it?*)

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* *She doesn't must finish it. (✓She doesn't have to finish it.)*

It is undeniable that modals (also known as modal auxiliaries), are difficult to learn because they seem to function like an ordinary verb but do not follow the same rules. In addition, modal verbs have their own patterns which allow for a variety of meanings to be expressed; this makes Vietnamese learners of English in general and students in particular more confused in speaking and writing. So how to help them acquire all this in a better way? Aiming to gain insights into the semantic features of English songs, which certainly help learners of English acquire this grammatical area in an engaging manner, we explored the collocation of modals and lexical verbs with a focus on meanings. The research questions are: (1) What are the collocations of modals and lexical verbs in the English songs? (2) What are the frequencies of each group? (3) How are the grammatical aspects of voice and aspect commonly associated with these combinations? And (4) what practical implications do these characteristics hold for EFL learners?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Major theoretical works

Up to now, there has been a lot of research and exploration into the field of English modal verb patterns. Most linguists discussed the points such as the meanings and the use of the modals such as Quirk et al.,¹ Huddleston,² Eastwood,³ and Biber et al.⁴ Generally speaking, none of them mentioned their occurrences in any registers, except Biber et al.⁴ They considered and showed the frequency of lexical associations of modality in four registers: conversation, fiction, news and academic prose. They also pointed out the percentage of combinations of modal verbs with marked aspect or voice. Occurrences of sequences of modals and semi-modals were noted down.

Apart from the linguists' studies, many other researchers took part in exploring the field of modals more recently. However, these studies (except Maximiliano's one) only pointed out the relative frequencies of a few modals in directives, commissives and representatives conveying the obligation (Nguyễn⁵); examined modal devices expressing possibility in novels (Đinh⁶); mentioned using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility by English BA majoring students at MEU (Middle East University) (Ahmad Al-Hessa⁷). There was considerable focus on frequencies of modal verb patterns in the study of Maximiliano Eduardo Orlando,⁸ however, he examined them across the three corpora (BNCW = British National Corpus Written, BNCS = British National Corpus Spoken and Textbook Corpus), he was not interested in register of English songs and seemed to ignore dealing with particular modal verbs used in each modal verb pattern.

In a word, each of them has his strong or weak points, but still remains a gap - none of them studies: modal verb patterns in English songs as well as occurrences of lexical associations with modals in this register.

2.2. Classifications of modal verbs

According to Richards, Platt and Platt,⁹ "*Modal verbs are the auxiliary verbs which indicate attitudes of the speaker/writer towards the state or event expressed by another verb.*" According to Biber et al.,⁴ modality in English can be expressed by nine central modal auxiliary verbs, i.e. *can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would* and *must*. In addition, marginal auxiliary verbs, e.g. *need (to), ought to, dare (to), and used to* can also behave like modals. A number of fixed idiomatic phrases with functions similar to those of modals: *(had) better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to, be going to, ...*

Types of modal verbs can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of modals

MODALS		SEMI-MODALS (= quasi modals = periphrastic modals)
Central modal auxiliaries	Marginal modal auxiliaries	
<i>can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must</i>	<i>need (to), ought to, dare (to), used to</i>	<i>(had) better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to, be going to, be able to, be obliged to, be likely to, be willing to, be allowed to,...</i>

(Source: Quirk,¹⁰)

These auxiliaries (except for *must*) can be grouped into pairs with related meanings: modals referring to non-past time and modals referring to past time (*can* and *could*, *may* and *might*, *shall* and *should*, *will* and *would*). They can convey meanings relating to time differences but these differences among them relate primarily to modality rather than tense:

“...at the end of the day,
We **should** give thanks and prays to the one...”
(‘Have I told you lately’ – Rod Stewart)

“I wish I **could** carry your smile in my heart
For times when my life seems so low
It **would** make me believe
What tomorrow **could** bring.”
(‘All out of love’ – Air Supply)

These are invariant forms taking the role of auxiliary; they precede the negative particle *not* in negation and precede the subject in *yes-no* questions. They are followed in the verb phrase by a bare infinitive verb and reject *do*-insertion.

“My girl, my girl, where **will** you go?”
(‘Where did you sleep last night?’ – Nirvana)

“But you know I **won’t** be traveling forever.”
(‘When I need you’ – Leo Sayer)

The verbs *need (to)*, *ought to*, *dare (to)* and *used (to)* are on the borderline between auxiliaries and lexical verbs and can be regarded as marginal modal auxiliaries. These verbs can behave like modals in taking auxiliary negation and *yes-no* question inversion (*needn’t*, *ought we*

to..., *She dare not*, etc.). They vary with respect to *do*-insertion. Orthographic representations of the spoken language such as *oughta* sometimes occur as reduced form of *ought to*.

“Well, I’m here, to remind you
Of the mess you left when you went away
It’s not fair, to deny me
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me
You, you, you **oughta** know.”
(‘You oughta know’ – Alanis Morissette)

Together with the marginal modal auxiliaries, the expressions in column three of the above table can be referred to as semi-modals. They are important resources for the expression of modal meanings. No *do*-insertion is used with the semi-modals, apart from with *have to*:

“You don’t **have to** say you love me.”
(‘You don’t have to say you love me’ –
Dusty Springfield)

Unlike the central modal verbs, many of the semi-modals can sometimes co-occur with a central modal verb or another semi-modal (See Table 2).

Orthographic variations such as *gonna* (= *going to*), *gotta* (= *got to*) can also appear:

“I’m a genie in a bottle, baby.
{-} **Gotta** rub me the right way, honey.
I’m a genie in a bottle, baby.
Come, come, come and let me out.”
(‘Genie in a bottle’ – Christina Aguilera)
(*You have/ you ‘ve* is omitted.)

In order to carry out this research, we are obviously much indebted to many English grammarians, especially to Biber et al.⁴ The descriptive framework as well as terminology of this research closely follows them. We considered the use of modals with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings based on their meaning classification: intrinsic meanings relate to permission, obligation, or volition (or intention); extrinsic meanings refer to possibility, necessity or prediction. Modals and semi-modals can be grouped into three major categories according to their main meanings:

+ permission/possibility/ability (*can, could, may, might*)

+ obligation/necessity (*must, should, (have) got to, need to, ought to, be supposed to*)

+ volition/prediction (*will, would, shall, be going to*)

We also mentioned the classification of verbs into seven major semantic domains for lexical verbs: activity verbs, communication verbs, mental verbs, causative verbs, verbs of simple occurrence, verbs of existence or relationship, and aspectual verbs. This classification is based on their core meanings, i.e. the meaning that speakers tend to think of first.⁴

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection

The number of collected songs is 250. The songs have been collected from different books across a wide range of disciplines and published in collections such as “The best song book of all time”,¹¹ “World Best Collection’s Song Book”¹² (with musical scores and chords), “A collection of unforgettable love songs”,¹³ and “The best ABBA collection”.¹⁴ The selected songs are based on the following themes: romantic love, familial love, friendship, the love of nature, life, homeland, peace, etc. The words in each song are written completely in English. So, the English song which is interrupted by any words that is not written in English is excluded. For example,

the songs like these are not included in the list of songs for our study.

“Let every good person here join in the song. Let’s sing this song together.

Success to each other and pass it along. Let’s sing this song together.

CHORUS: *Vive la, vive la, vive l’amour.*
(Repeat)

Vive l’amour, vive l’amour. Vive la compagnie!...

(‘Vive l’amour’ – Traditional French song)

or “... ***Voulez – vous*** (Ah ha).

Ain’t no big decision (Ah ha)

You know what to do (Ah ha)

La question, c’est voulez vous?...

(‘Voulez – vous?’ – ABBA)

Most of songs are written in verse but some are in prose (Verse is form of writing arranged in lines, often with a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme¹⁵). For example, the song ‘Tears in heaven’ (by Eric Clapton) below is written in verse, and the song ‘Happy New Year’ (by the ABBA), in prose (We only extract part of the song for illustration):

*“Would you know my **name***

*If I saw you in **heaven***

*Would it be the **same***

*If I saw you in **heaven.**”*

(‘Tears in heaven’ – Eric Clapton)

“Happy New Year! Happy New Year! May we all have a vision now and then of a world where every neighbor is a friend. Happy New Year! Happy New Year! May we all have our hopes our wills to try. If we don’t we might as well lay down and die, you and I.”

(‘Happy New Year’ – ABBA)

There are also many songs in which lyrics are written under staves. Stave, or called staff, is a set of five horizontal parallel lines on which music is written¹⁵ (Figure 1).

Our approach is descriptive, quantitative and also qualitative. The descriptive analysis

makes information received become specific and vivid. The quantitative analysis provides us with concrete figures of the patterns of modal verbs. The qualitative analysis will illustrate these figures. As a result, the study will be concrete, persuasive and have a high reliability.

3.2. Data analysis

All the verb phrases with a modal verb were identified, classified, and statistically analyzed. The process of analyzing the data was as follows: we picked out all the lexical associations in which modal verbs are used; then we calculate the overall number of different lexical verbs that associate with these modals with the help of Excel software, and put the results in the statistical tables.

So as to get an exact counting of occurrence of modal verb patterns in combination with lexical verbs, we also paid careful attention to the number of their repeated times. There are many songs in which some verses, especially choruses, are repeated. Of course, the occurrences of modal verbs patterns depend on the number of repeated times of that verse. For instance, the chorus in the song below is repeated four times. That means learners can hear (or repeat) four times the same verbs appearing in this chorus (*I, know*) and the same patterns used with these modal verbs, e.g. modal + verb pattern for *will know*:

“CHORUS:

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.

You make me happy when skies are gray.

*You'll never **know**, dear, how much I love you.*

Please don't take my sunshine away.

*1. The other night, dear, as I lay sleeping,
I dreamt I held you in my arms.*

*When I awoke, dear, I was mistaken, so I
hung my head and cried.*

CHORUS

*2. I'll always love you and make you
happy, if you will only do the same.*

*But if you leave me, how it will grieve me!
Nevermore I'll breathe your name.*

CHORUS

*3. You told me once, dear, there'd be no
other, and no one else could come between.*

*But now you've left me to love another.
You have broken all my dreams.*

CHORUS

(*'You are my sunshine' – Jimmy Davis
and Charles Mitchell*)

We can also recognize the repeated passage with “Back to Ref.”, “Repeat *”, “Repeat ...”, “Repeat verse 1 and Chorus”, or with a point of reprise¹⁶ which is the colon placed at the end of a passage, telling us to repeat it. (Figure 1.)

Love story

Andy Williams

Where do i be - gin To tell the sto - ry Of how great - ful love can be The sweet love sto - ry That is ol - der than the sea
With the first hel - lo She gave the mean - ing To this emp - ty world of mine That ne - ver did A - no - ther love a - no - ther time
How long does it last Can love be mea - sured by the ho - urs in a day I have no ans - wers no But this much i can say

That sings the truth a - bout the love she brings to me Where do i start
She came in - to my life And made a li - ving fine
I know i'll need her till this love song burn a - way And shell be there...

Fine

Figure 1. A paragraph with a point of reprise

Apart from identifying modal verbs correctly, it is very necessary to recognize modal verbs of non-standard English in the process of picking them out. Some examples of non-standard modal verbs are orthographic variations (*going to v. gonna, got to v. gotta, can't you v. cantcha, ...*), oscillation (*can v. cin, con, ...*).

In order to interpret the overall distribution of modal verbs patterns properly in English love songs, we explored modals of extrinsic and intrinsic meanings in combination with the semantic domains of verbs, then combinations

of modals with voice, aspect and modals.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. Lexical associations of modal verbs

Modal verbs cannot work without another verb. The common lexical associations of modal verbs are in Table 2. The most general lexical association of modal verbs is: modal + verb (infinitive). Table 3 depicts the frequency of the modals in combination with the semantic domains of verbs.

Table 2. Common lexical associations of modal verbs

Lexical associations of modal verbs	Examples
Modal + verb (infinitive)	<i>"I'll find my way through night and day."</i> ('Tears in heaven' – Eric Clapton) <i>"I remember every word my papa used to say."</i> ('Papa' – Paul Anka) <i>"Nothing's gonna stop us now."</i> ('Nothing's gonna stop us now' – Starship)
Modal + passive voice	<i>"I'll be wrapped around your finger."</i> ('Wrapped around your finger' – The Police) <i>"In March or May - I can't be bothered now."</i> (George Gershwin)
Modal + perfect aspect	<i>"I must have made my desk around a quarter after nine,..."</i> ('The day before you came' – ABBA) <i>"It must have been our love but it's over right now"</i> <i>It must have been good and better but I lost it somehow.</i> <i>It must have been love but unfortunately it's over now."</i> ('It must have been love' – Roxette)
Modal + progressive aspect	<i>"Yeah, I'll be standin' there by you."</i> ('Heaven' – Bryan Adams)
Modal + semi-modal + verb	<i>"Will I have to wait forever?"</i> ('When will I see you again?' – Three Degrees)
Semi-modal + semi-modal + verb	<i>"I'm gonna have to hide it."</i> ('When will I see you again?' – Three Degrees)

Table 3. Frequency of lexical association of modal verbs in English love songs

Modals +	Occurrences	Frequency
Activity verbs	605	44.58%
Communication verbs	131	9.65%
Mental verbs	368	27.12%
Causative verbs	39	2.87%
Occurrence verbs	77	5.67%
Existence verbs	73	5.38%
Aspectual verbs	64	7.42%
Total	1357	100%

It is easy to see the high frequency of modals with activity verbs (44.58%) and with mental verbs (27.12%). The combination of modals with communication verbs and with aspectual verbs are relatively common (9.65% and 7.42%, respectively); with occurrence verbs

and existence verbs, generally rare; and causative verbs are the ones that show the weakest association with modal verbs (only 2.87%).

Table 4 gives data on what common lexical verbs the modals usually combine with in English love songs.

Table 4. Number of occurrences of modal verbs with most common lexical verbs in English love songs

Semantic domains	No.	Modals +	Occurrences
Activity verbs	01	give	52
	02	go	43
	03	make	43
	04	buy	26
	05	come	20
	06	take	17
	07	try	14
	08	cry	11
	09	meet	11
	10	hurt	10
	11	leave	10
	12	show	10
Communication verbs	01	say	42
	02	tell	27
Mental verbs	01	see	77
	02	love	46
	03	know	36
	04	feel	35
	05	find	20
	06	hear	18
	07	learn	13
	08	understand	12
	09	believe	11
	10	forget	10
	11	like	10
Causative verbs	01	help	11
	02	let	19
Occurrence verbs	01	change	21
	02	die	11
	03	last	11
Existence verbs	01	live	21
	02	stay	17
	03	survive	12
Aspectual verbs	01	stop	33
	02	go on	10

4.1.2. Modals of extrinsic and intrinsic meanings in combination with lexical verbs

As mentioned in 2.2, the modals and the semi-modals can be interpreted based on their intrinsic and extrinsic meanings: permission/possibility/ability (*can, could, may, might*), obligation/necessity (*be to, be supposed to, have to, (have) got to, must, need (to), ought to, and should*), and volition/prediction (*be about to, be going to, shall, will, would, dare (to) and used to*). Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huong et al.¹⁷ found that the face threatening device (obligation/necessity) is rarely used in English love songs. In contrast, the devices for marking possibility or ability,

especially for marking intention or willingness (volition/prediction) are preferred. Figure 2 indicates performance of these three groups in English love songs.

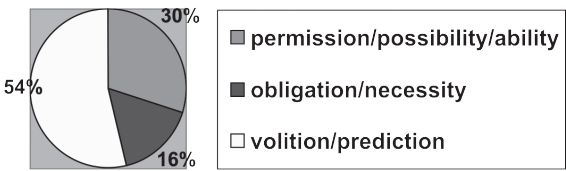


Figure 2. Performance of groups of intrinsic and extrinsic meanings in English love songs

The Tables 5-7 below reveal us the most common lexical associations of modals in extrinsic and intrinsic uses.

Table 5. Occurrences of the permission/possibility/ability modals with most common lexical verbs in English love songs

Semantic domains	No.	Permission/possibility/ability modals +	Occurrences
Activity verbs	01	do	21
	02	give	20
	03	make	18
	04	buy	15
Communication verbs	05	say	17
	06	tell	12
Mental verbs	07	see	32
	08	feel	30
	09	hear	13
	10	believe	10
Existence verbs	11	be	73
	12	have	13
Aspectual verbs	13	stop	13

Table 6. Occurrences of the obligation/necessity modals with most common lexical verbs in English love songs

Semantic domains	No.	Obligation/necessity modals +	Occurrences
Activity verbs	01	do	24
	02	go	19
Communication verbs	03	say	10
Mental verbs	04	know	18
Existence verbs	05	be	48
	06	have	28

Table 7. Occurrences of the volition/prediction modals with most common lexical verbs in English love songs

Semantic domains	No.	Volition/prediction modals +	Occurrences
Activity verbs	01	come	14
	02	do	42
	03	give	24
	04	go	21
	05	make	22
	06	meet	11
	07	try	12
Communication verbs	08	say	12
Mental verbs	09	find	20
	10	know	17
	11	learn	12
	12	love	40
	13	see	45
Causative verbs	14	let	11
Occurrence verbs	15	change	15
Existence verbs	16	be	215
	17	have	13
	18	stay	10
Aspectual verbs	19	stop	19

In addition, there is one more group made up by some marginal modals (*dare (to)* and *used to*), with an unremarkable occurrence (Table 8). These verbs can behave like modals in taking auxiliary negation and yes-no question

inversion. Such constructions are extremely rare and largely confined to English love songs, they made up only 1.04% of the total occurrences of modal verbs (Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huong et al).¹⁷

Table 8. Some of marginal modals with lexical verbs in English love songs

No.	Lexical verbs	<i>dare (to)</i> +	<i>used to</i> +
01	be		3
02	disturb	1	
03	do		3
04	feel		1
05	kiss	2	
06	laugh at		1
07	play		1
08	reach for	1	
09	ride		1
10	run		1
11	say	1	3
12	shoot		1
TOTAL		5	15

4.1.3. Combinations of modal verbs with voice, aspect, and modals

Modal verbs and semi-modals not only occur close to the lexical verbs but also are not placed directly next to lexical verbs they colligate with.

In other words, modals can also combine with aspect, voice, and with themselves in English love songs. Table 9 enumerates the occurrences of modals in combination with passive voice, aspect, and modals. Figure 3 denotes the total number of occurrences in percentages.

Table 9. Combinations of modal verbs with aspect, voice, and modals

Combinations of modals with voice, aspect and modals	Examples	Occurrences
Modal + passive voice	must be filled with	2
	'll be wrapped around	4
	can't be bothered	3
Modal + perfect aspect	could have been	1
	could have done	1
	could have lived	1
	could have played	1
	might have been closed	1
	must have been	10
	must have frowned	1
	must have gone	2
	must have heard	1
	must have kept on	1
	must have left	2
	must have lit	1
	must have made	1
	must have opened	1
	must have rained	1
	must have read	3
	must have yawned	1
	should have been	1
	would have done	1
Modal + progressive aspect	'll be standing	1
Modal + modal	ain't going to need to	1
	'd have to	1
	'm gonna have to	1
	may have to	1
	will have to	2
	would have to	2
TOTAL		50

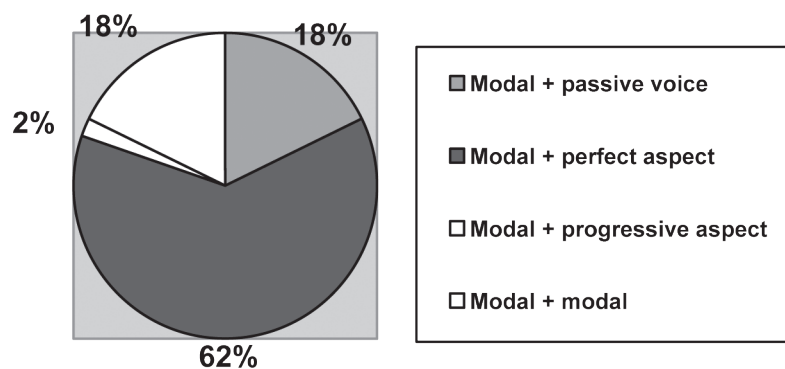


Figure 3. Performance of combinations of modal verbs with voice, aspect, and modals in English love songs

While the majority of modals do not co-occur with marked aspect or voice (they appear just 50 times in English love songs), particular modals represent differing preferences for these combinations. Passive voice with modals is rare (18%). With the passive, *will* tends to be particularly common; *can* and *must* are also fairly common. Perfect aspect with modals is the predominant use in English love songs (62%). One striking observation is the heavily biased distribution of the obligation/necessity modal *must*, which is many times more frequent overall than the other modal categories; the modal with past time connotations *could* is rare; and *might*, *should* and *would* extremely rarely occur with the perfect aspect. The rarity of progressive aspect with modals can be clearly seen - this combination contributes only 2% to the total of occurrences of modals in association with passive voice, aspect, and modals.

Modal + semi-modal sequences are by far most common with *have to*. At the other extreme, sequences of modal + *need to* and that of modal + *be going to* are rare in English love songs.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Lexical associations of modal verbs

The verbs that show the strongest association with modal verbs in English love songs are mostly activity verbs and mental verbs. This reflects that people are very fond of using these types of verbs to express their stance, personal feelings, various emotions or attitudes. The

modal verb *can*, often combined with negation, are particularly common. *Could* is also relatively common:

"I can't live

If living is without you

I can't live

I can't give anymore."

(‘Without you’ – Mariah Carey)

"I wish I could carry your smile in my heart

For times when my life seems so low

It would make me believe

What tomorrow could bring."

(‘All out of love’ – Air Supply)

"I can never love again the way I loved you.

Oh! I can never cry again like I did when

I left you...

I can never love again now that we're

apart..."

(‘Foolish beat’ – Debbie Gibson)

4.2.2. Modals of extrinsic and intrinsic meanings in combination with lexical verbs

The lexical verbs that are strongly associated with the permission/possibility/ability modals, typically *can* (See Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huong et al.)¹⁷, are *do*, *give*, *make*, *buy* (activity); *say*, *tell* (communication); *see*, *feel*, *hear*, *believe* (mental); *be*, *have* (existence); and *stop* (aspectual). From these results, we can know partly what people in English love songs can (or cannot) often do through musicians' pens:

*“Only you **can make** all this world seem right.*

*Only you **can make** the darkness bright...*

*Only you **can make** this change in me*

For it's true, you are my destiny.”

(‘Only you’ – The Platter)

*“How **can I tell** her I don't miss her*

Whenever I am away

*How **can I say** it's you I think of*

Every single night and day

But when is it easy telling someone the truth

Oh girl, help me tell her about you.”

(‘How can I tell her’ – Lobo)

*“I **can see** the pain living in your eyes*

and I know how hard you try

You deserve to have so much more

*I **can feel** your heart and I sympathize.”*

(‘Goodbye’ – Air Supply)

“Please believe me! Every word I say is true

*Please forgive me! I **can't stop** loving you.”*

(‘Please forgive me’ – Bryan Adams)

Go, say, and know are the most common lexical verbs combined with the obligation/necessity modals in English love songs. As said above, these modals are often avoided because they are face threatening. The most common modal is *(have) got to* (See Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huong et al.),¹⁷ which conveys a reluctant obligation from an external source:

“‘Cause with fifteen kids and a fam'ly on the skids,

*I **gotta go** for a Sunday drive.*

Fifteen kids and a fam'ly on the skids,

*I **gotta go** for a Sunday drive.”*

(‘Marley purt drive’ – Jose Feliciano)

*“Though we **gotta say** goodbye for the summer*

Darling, I promise you this

I'll send you all my love

Everyday in a letter sealed with a kiss.”

(‘Sealed with a kiss’ – Brian Hyland)

“Don't you know I need you so

*Tell me please, I **gotta know***

Do you mean to make me cry

Am I just another guy?”

(‘More than I can say’ – Bobby Vee)

The volition/prediction modals are the most frequently used of the three groups (See Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huong et al.)¹⁷. The preference for this device is particularly strong in English love songs for different reasons. The reliance on this device reflects musicians or composers' general focus on conveying their intentions, willingness or predictions as illustrated by the following examples. The two most commonly used modals are *will* (or *'ll*) and *be going to*. *Would* is also a noteworthy modal. The distinction between volition and prediction is occasionally blurred. In English love songs, *will* and *would* are commonly used to mark prediction as well as personal volition (and prediction of one's own future actions). The meaning is past or hypothetical in the case of *would*. The most common lexical verbs occurring with these volition/prediction modals are: *come*, *give*, *go*, *make*, *meet*, and *try* (activity); *say* (communication); *find*, *know*, *learn*, *love*, and *see* (mental); *let* (causative); *change* (occurrence); *stay* (existence); and *stop* (aspectual).

+ *Will* and *would* expressing a volition:

“I'm holding a fortune that heaven has given to me

*I'll **try** to show you each and ev'ry way I can.”*

(‘Now and forever’ – Richard Max)

“I'm so young and you're so old.

This, my darling, I've been told.

I don't care just what they say.

*‘Cause forever I **will pray**.*

You and I will be as free

as the birds up in the trees.

Oh, please stay by me, Diana.”

(‘Diana’ – Paul Anka)

"Time **will** never **change** the things you told me."

(*'Soledad' – Westlife*)

"And I **would roll** 500 miles
And I **would roll** 500 more
Just to be the man who rolls a thousand miles
To fall down at your door."

(*'I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) - The Proclaimers*)

+ Will and would expressing a prediction:
"There's a place in your heart
And I know that it is love
And this place it was brighter than tomorrow
And if you really try
You'll **find** there's no need to cry
In this place you'll **feel** there's no hurt or sorrow."

(*'Heal the World' - Michael Jackson*)

"**Would** you **know** my name?

If I saw you in heaven

Would it **be** the same?

If I saw you in heaven

...

Would you **hold** my hand?

If I saw you in heaven

Would you **help** me stand?

If I saw you in heaven."

(*'Tears in heaven' – Eric Clapton*)

Apart from lexical verbs, modal verbs can also occur with the primary main verbs *do*, *have*, and *be*, typically the combination of the volition/prediction modals and the verb *be*:

"Try, baby, try to trust in my love again.

I **will be** there, I **will be** there."

(*'Still loving you' – Scorpions*)

"You thought that I would die without you
But I'm livin'

Thought that I would fail without you

But I'm on top

Thought that I would self destruct

But I'm still here

Even in my years to come

I'm still gon be here."

(*'Survivor' – Destiny's Child*)

Like *will* and *would*, the semi-modal *be going to* in English love songs is also used mainly for marking personal volition and prediction.

+ *be going to* expressing a volition:

"When I'm working, yes I know **I'm gonna be**

I'm gonna be the man who's working hard for you

And when the money, comes in for the work I do

I'll pass almost every penny on to you

When I come home (When I come home), well I know **I'm gonna be**

I'm gonna be the man who comes back home to you

And when I grow old, well I know **I'm gonna be**

I'm gonna be the man who's growing old with you."

(*'I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) - The Proclaimers*)

+ *be going to* expressing a prediction:

"If you're going to San Francisco

You're **gonna meet** some gentle people there."

(*'San Francisco' – Scott Mckenzie*)

"Someday we're **gonna love** again

Someday we're **gonna love** again

When we broke up I still wore a smile

I told myself you'd only gone for a while

But in my heart I grinned, I held up my chin

Because I knew someday we're **gonna love** again

Someday we're **gonna love** again."

(*'Someday we're gonna love again' – The Searchers*)

Finally, *used to* marks past habitual behavior or a past state; this marginal auxiliary modal is more common in English love songs in comparison with *dare (to)*:

*"Seasons came and changed the time
When I grew up, I called him mine
He would always laugh and say
"Remember when we **used to play**?"
Bang bang, I shot you down
Bang bang, you hit the ground
Bang bang, that awful sound
Bang bang, I **used to shoot** you down."
(‘Bang Bang’ - Nancy Sinatra)*

4.2.3. Combinations of modal verbs with voice, aspect, and modals

Modal verbs in combination with passive voice are rare; this reveals a fact that most of modals used in English songs often overtly express the agent of the main verb, with the human agent expressed as the subject of the verb – the person who is able to carry out the reported action.

The strongest association with modal verbs is perfect aspect, where in the absence of tense the aspect marker serves to provide a past time reference. The most common modal verb with this aspect is usually *must*. In English love songs, the modal accounts for logical necessity, not obligation, as Douglas Biber et al.² state *"The association of modal + perfect aspect usually marks logical necessity (rather than personal obligation). That is, the logically necessary events and situations are often those that occurred at some point in the past."* We can see this association in a few English songs, for example *"The day before you came"* by ABBA¹⁴ (only a few sentences are extracted for illustration):

*"I **must have left** my house at eight
because I always do..."*

*I **must have read** the morning paper going
into town..."*

*I **must have gone** to lunch at half past
twelve..."*

In brief, modals strongly combine with activity and mental verbs, which usually express various activities, emotions, attitudes, or cognitive states that are personal, and thus they often co-occur with modals expressing a personal stance. Therefore, modal verbs can be considered as a device for people to express their personal perspective as well as their abilities or possibilities. We also know that the volition or prediction device is much preferred to the face threatening device. Moreover, modals can combine with other kinds of modals, with voice, and typically with aspect (mainly perfect aspect). The most common modal occurring with this pattern is *must* marking logical necessity. It is noticeable that these complex verb phrases are on the whole less common in English love songs (occurring only 50 times). This could be due to the preference of shorter, less-complex structures in English love songs. The only complicated modal combination occurring in English songs is *be going to need to* and *be gonna have to*.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our research was concerned with the frequency and distribution of lexical associations of modals in English love songs. The infinitive following the modal verbs is the most frequent pattern. The major linguistic features in songs are revealed by intrinsic and extrinsic uses of modals in combination with common lexical verbs. The two semantic domains frequently show the strongest association with modals are activity and mental verbs. This predominant colligation proves that composers or writers of the lyrics have a passion for expressing their personal perspective of various activities, emotions, attitudes, or cognitive states. The lexical verbs generally go with the group of permission/possibility/ability modals (of which *can* is the most common modal verb, and also of all the modals) are *buy, do, give, make* (activity); *believe, feel, hear, see* (mental). The lexical verbs often occurring with group of obligation/necessity modals (with *(have) got to* as the most common modal) are *go, say, and know*. The lexical verbs usually combining

with the volition/prediction modals (*will* and *be going to* are the most common modals of this group) are *come*, *give*, *go*, *make*, *meet*, and *try* (activity); *say* (communication); *find*, *know*, *learn*, *love*, and *see* (mental); *let* (causative); *change* (occurrence); *stay* (existence); and *stop* (aspectual). The lexical association with this third group of modals is considered as a favourite device in English love songs, used to convey the power to make someone's own decisions:

"The world is always changing

Nothing stays the same

*But love **will stand** the test of time."*

(‘Cherish’ – Kool and The Gang)

*"Whatever it takes, I **will stay** here with you."*

(‘Nothing’s gonna stop us now’ – Starship)

*"Nothing’s **gonna change** my love for you*

You oughta know by now how much I love you

The world may change my whole life through

*But nothing’s **gonna change** my love for you."*

(‘Nothing’s gonna change my love for you’ – Glenn Medeiros)

Modal verbs can combine with not only lexical verbs but also with perfect aspect and other kinds of modals in English love songs. *Must* is the most common modal verb to be used with the perfect aspect and *have to* usually follows another modals or semi-modals (typically the volition/prediction modals). However, this combination is very scarce in English love songs. This demonstrates that English love songs especially favour short and simple structures, which help the singer(s) convey their messages to listeners faster and more easily.

Teaching modal verbs can be a challenge because, for the most part, it is not considered to be fun for most students. Learning intricate rules can be boring and time consuming for many, so a lot of teachers tend to disregard teaching this kind of grammar or provide learners of English with sketchy information about this. Moreover,

it is noticeable that songs written by poets or musicians are not designed to teach English. Songwriters like to have fun with words, so they do not usually limit themselves to grammatical rules! It is for these reasons that we hope that our research will be useful to the teaching and learning English language. Our collection of English songs will be a rich source, giving English teachers an opportunity to help learners expand their vocabulary, test their understanding of the content of the song, practice grammatical structures, and especially sharpen their communicative skills.

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