# *SHALL* AND *WILL* IN THE *CORPUS OF HISTORY ENGLISH TEXTS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the meanings of the verbal forms *shall* and *will* in the late Modern English period, as evinced in the *Corpus of History English Texts (1700-1900)*. Earlier literature on modal verbs in historical periods includes Fachinetti (1997) and Gotti (2003). We study these modals using corpus tools in order to identify the senses of these two verbs in context and to group findings according to meaning. Our notion of modality mainly follows from Palmer (1986; 2001), Hoye (2008) and van der Auwera and Plungian (1998). Conclusions show that these verbal forms had indeed modal meanings, even if their periphrastic use to indicate future was evident.

KEYWORDS: modal verbs, modality, *Shall*, *Will*, late modern English, history texts.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia los significados de las formas verbales *shall* y *will* en inglés moderno tardío, tal y como aparecen en el *Corpus of History English Texts* (1700-1900). Existen trabajos específicos sobre verbos modales en períodos históricos de la lengua inglesa, como Fachinetti (1997) y Gotti (2003). Para el estudio de estos modales, se emplean herramientas de corpus para identificar los sentidos de estos dos verbos en contexto. Los datos resultantes de este análisis se agrupan de acuerdo con estos significados. El concepto de modalidad que seguimos se basa principalmente en Palmer (1986; 2001), Hoye (2008) y van der Auwera y Plungian (1998). Las conclusiones muestran que estas formas verbales tenían, de hecho, significados modales, incluso si su uso perifrástico para indicar futuro era evidente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: modalidad, verbos modales, *Shall*, *Will*, inglés moderno, textos de historia.

# INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the senses of *shall* and *will* in the *Corpus of History English Texts* (CHET). The study presented follows from a growing interest in the elaboration of modal meanings in periods other than PDE. We have decided to focus on these two modal forms because they have been often used with future and deontic senses. In many ways, these two forms have been argued to lack modal meaning, as they appear to be mainly deployed as a periphrastic means to talk about future events. Scholars such as Taavitsainen (2001), categorize *shall* and *will* as deontic structures to convey authority in pre-scientific documents. In general, modal verbs are used to show the authors' stance, as they are able to indicate the authors' perspective concerning the propositional content framed by these verbs, and that is a fundamental feature in scientific discourse (cf. Lareo 2010; Crespo and Moskowich 2014; Alonso-Almeida 2015, 2017). The meanings of modal verbs, we argue, are rich, and deserve attention from a historical perspective. The inspection of context is also in order to confidently disambiguate modal uses. In addition, Present day literature considers the value of person marking as a necessary constrain for the use of any of these two verbal forms. Our corpus, however, shows some difference in this respect, but we do not follow this path in depth in this article, as examples with pronouns as subjects are not sufficiently numerous as to develop a firm and influential conclusion. For the time being, we only focus on the senses they represent in CHET since they seem to be much more related to primary primitive meanings of these forms to meet the authors' demands to express stance, as we shall see in due course.

Our methodology combines corpus tools and manual examination to identify modal functions. Besides Collins (2009), we use the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) to verify senses of *shall* and *will* registered in this lexicographical work in order to compare these and the ones obtained in our corpus. Our notion of modality and modal verbs relies on such studies as Palmer (1986, 2001), Hoye (1997), and van der Auwera and Plungian (2008), among others. As to the description and contents of the corpus, this follows from Moskowich and Crespo (2007), and Crespo and Moskowich (2015).

Conclusions will show aspects concerning certain senses of these verbs, and how they still preserve some of their lexical rather than modal substance. Contents are organised, as follows. Section 2 presents information concerning our concept modality and the categories of modals as well as the meaning and history of the two modals *shall* and *will*. This is followed by a description of the data and method used in this presentation. The discussion of findings is given in the subsequent section preceding the conclusions.

## MODALITY AND MODAL CATEGORIES.
### *SHALL* AND *WILL* IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

Modality can be broadly defined as the linguistic encoding of the speaker's or writer's beliefs and attitudes towards the proposition manifested. In other words, modality refers to the status of the proposition in context. Palmer (1986, 2) refers to modality as a 'vague' notion, but admits that 'something along the lines of Lyon's (1977, 452) "opinion or attitude" of the speaker is promising'. There are several ways in which modality can be manifested in the language other than modal verbs. These can be lexical or grammatical. Palmer (1986, 33ff) describes modal verbs, mood, and particles and clitics as examples of grammatical marking of modality. The lexical marking includes adverbs and other related expressions that may show the speaker's attitude towards the proposition.

There seems to be sufficient critical agreement that modality can be divided into epistemic and deontic modality in the fashion of Lyon's (1977), as put forward in Palmer (1986, 19). Epistemic is "concerned with matters of knowledge or believe on which basis speakers express their judgements about state of affairs, events or actions" (Hoye 1997, 42). Deontic modals refer to the "necessity of acts in terms of which the speaker gives permission or lays and obligation for the performance of actions at some time in the future (Hoye 1997, 43).

Another way of looking at modality is the distinction between propositional modality and event modality (Palmer 2001). The former concerns the speaker's or writer's judgment regarding the proposition manifested. The latter is related to the speaker's or writer's attitude towards a likely event in the future. Propositional modality divides into epistemic (judgement about the factual status), and evidential (evidence for factual status is given). In our study of *shall* and *will*, the presence of evidentials is of utmost importance in the classification of modal verbs, as we shall see in the discussion section, below. Evidentials can be both reported and sensory, and Willet (1988) has classified them according to (a) direct evidence (visual, auditory, and sensory), (b) indirect evidence (reported or inferred from reason or results).

Event modality includes a further twofold distinction: deontic and dynamic. In deontic modality, conditions are external. Senses of obligation and permission depend on external factors rather than internal ones. In dynamic modality, conditions are external, and it involves senses of willingness and ability on the part of the speaker or writer. Other classifications include more modal categories than two types according to different established pragmatic, philosophical/logical or cognitive criteria. We will not refer to any of these in our present paper.

As concluded from our working definition of modality, modality can be formally manifested in a variety of ways, one of which is a modal verb. Modal verbs can be categorized from a morphological, syntactic, and semantic perspective (Denison 1993, 292ff). Criteria are, as follows: (a) modal verbs do not present non-finite forms, (b) tense-distinction takes place in the majority of these verbs, although traditional past forms may contextually carry a different meaning, (c) modal verbs do not inflect for third person singular present indicative, (d) most modals present contracted forms for the negative (can't, won't, mustn't), and some of them also

show a phonological reduction in form of a clitic form ('ll, 'd, for shall/will and would, respectively), (e) they show no imperative forms, (f) they are followed by a bare infinitive, (g) modal verbs affect the complete proposition in which they are embedded, (h) dialectally, more than one modal verb co-occur syntagmatically, and (i) as operators, they share a same set of NICE properties: 'They can be negated by a following n't/not, take part in the subject-verb inversion, survive post-verbal ellipsis, and be stressed for emphatic polarity'.

The form *shall* traces back to OE *sceal* (pt. *sculon* – ppt. *sceolde*), and it could be followed either by a bare infinitive or stand alone, as shown in the following examples taken from the OED:

1. Seþe sculde him undred denera (The Rushworth Gospels · 975).
2. Nu scylun hergan hefænricæs uard (Cædmon · Hymn · 700).

The meanings registered in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for *shall* refer to deontic and dynamic senses. Thus, this form is used to express necessity, necessary conditions, planned events, fate-based events, and also dynamic possibility to indicate potentiality. The form *will* follow from OE *wyllan* (pt. *wolde*, ppt. *wolde*). As in the case of *shall*, *will* may carry bare infinitive or stand alone, but it could also be followed by an infinitive with 'to':

3. Wult þu castles kinedomes (c. 1225 · The English text of the Ancrene Riwle (ed. Eric John Dobson) · EETS edition, 1972 (1 vol.) · (EETS 267)).
4. Se ðe wyle soð specan (Beowulf · c1000).

The OED meanings associated to the use of *will* in the history of English concern to senses of desire, wish, intended action, the expression of habitual actions, and the expression of potentiality and capacity. Some of these uses coincide with those listed for *shall* in the same resource.


THE DATA AND THE METHOD

The corpus used for the present research is *The Corpus of History English Texts* (henceforth CHET), which is one of the sub-corpuses within the Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing, and it aims at compiling Modern English history texts. Crespo and Moskowich (2015) has offered a detailed description of this corpus in their paper 'A Corpus of History English Texts (CHET) as Part of the Coruña Corpus Project', description that is followed in the present work. The time span represented in the subcorpus comprises 1704 for the first text and 1895 for the last text. This period is marked off by changes in scientific-thought styles and by the use of new methodological procedures based on observation (cf. Moskowich and Parapar 2008 and Moskowich 2016).

The end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century have been recognised by Taavitsainen and Pahta (1997) as the moment at which the

medieval scholastic thought-style started to be gradually superseded by new patterns of thought and new methodological procedures based on observation. The foundation of the Royal Society in 1660 and the publication of the guidelines for presenting scientific works in a clear and simple way had a greater impact on accentuating the importance of style in scientific communication. As regards the genres represented in CHET, there are articles, essays, lectures, textbooks and treatises written by both male and female authors. Regarding the size of CHET, it covers about 400 000 words. For the purpose of this study we have used the *Coruña Corpus Tool* for quantification and text retrieval. Then manual analyses have been performed as well in order to evaluate and categorise the meanings of *shall* and *will*. The findings of our analysis have been grouped according to the meanings found in the text. All the examples given as evidence in this paper are excerpted verbatim, as transcribed in the corpus.

## *SHALL* AND *WILL* IN THE CORPUS OF HISTORY ENGLISH TEXTS

The results of the corpus enquiry are given in Figure 1 for the case of *shall*. Three possible meanings have been identified for this verb. Of these, volition is clearly in the lead with 71% of the cases, showing the authors' subjective stance and disposition concerning the events described, as shown in the following instance, hence the massive use of the first person occurring with *shall*:

(1)  **I ſhall conclude** this Year with ſome Foreign Affairs of Moment. (Tyrrell, 1704)
(2)  But, as it may remind us of our obligations to God, who has often appeared for us in ſeaſons of peculiar diſtreſs, **I ſhall give** you a ſummary view of the ſeries of calamities, which befel us, during that long war. (Adams, 1769)
(3)  In this work **I shall be** brief, and endeavour to sketch his portrait in a slight, but decided and faithful manner. (Britton, 1814)
(4)  These remarkable transactions have been a fruitful source of political discussion; and as it is difficult, indeed impossible, to refer to the various inferences that have been drawn from them with respect to the constitution of England, **I shall select** as prominent specimens, and of an opposite nature, the sermon of Dr. Price on the Love of our Country, and the Reflections of Mr. Burke on the French Revolution; and it is to them that I shall chiefly allude, in the observations which **I shall** now offer.

Second most frequent (17%) is the sense of dynamic possibility, by means of which the author offers an intersubjective view in order to share responsibility concerning their statements:

(5)  But what **shall** we say of the legislative intermeddling, which occurred in 1447, at a Parliament held in Trim, where it was enacted, that every man should shave his upper lip, under the penalty of being used as an Irish enemy? (Bennett, 1862)
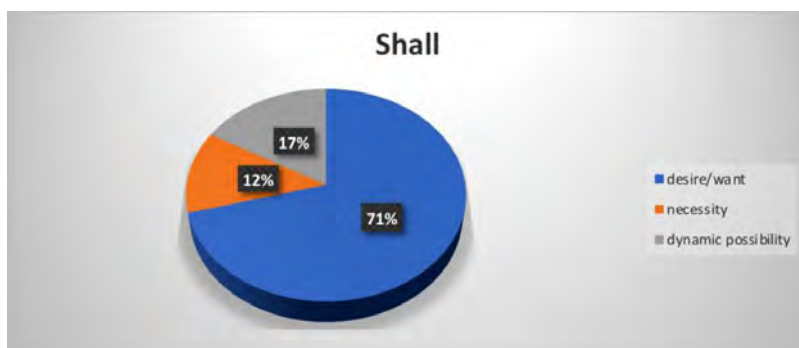
Figure 1. The meanings of functions of *shall* in the corpus.

Likewise, a deontic nuance is also perceived in the following instance with the sense of inner obligation to introduce an event deduced from the author's own knowledge of the fact, as evinced in the use of the epistemic necessity use of *must* later in the text:

(6)  I **ſhall here** add a Remarkable Tranſaction, which muſt have been done about this time (if it were ever done at all) which I have ſome reaſon to doubt it was not, becauſe our own Hiſtorians are wholy ſilent in it; but however, ſince it is related by Froiſſart. (Tyrrell, 1704)

A deontic meaning is also perceived in the following instances. The authors deploy *shall* in these excerpts to indicate and signal the way in which he wants to proceed in their texts. It is interesting the way in which the authors refer to their readers in these instances, below.

(7)  But, as it may remind us of our obligations to God, who has often appeared for us in ſeaſons of peculiar diſtreſs, **I ſhall give you** a ſummary view of the ſeries of calamities, which befel us, during that long war. (Adams 1769)
(8)  In proſecution of this deſign **I ſhall ſtudy** all poſſible brevity, **begging your candour and patience**, hoping what I ſhall ſay will not be unprofitable, eſpecially to our young people, who have not had conſiderable advantages to know the wonderful acts of the Lord. (Adams 1769).
(9)  They were these; and they form a sort of summary of the reign of James II., and therefore **I shall read** them to **you**. (Smyth 1710).

Clearly, many of the senses recorded in the OED, viz. necessity, necessary conditions, planned events, fate-based events, are not present in our sample. The use of *shall* in this period seems to lie near the sense of intention and desire, but not really to indicate a planned status of the information framed by the modal. The
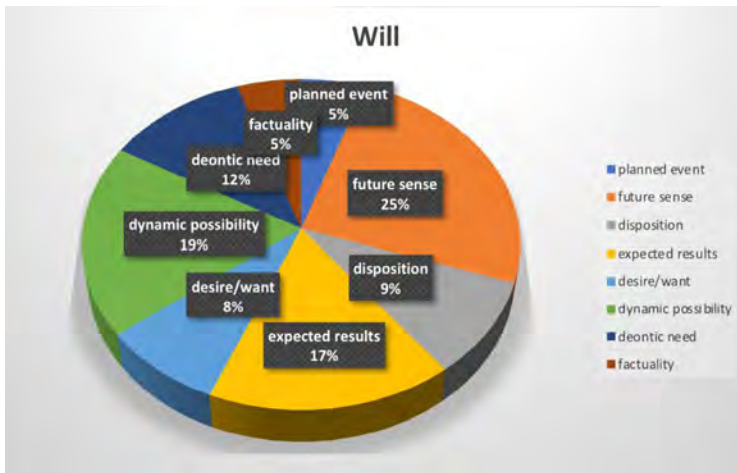
Figure 2. The meanings of *will* in the corpus.

sense of futurity may also evolve from the notion of volition as this often depicts something expected to happen later in time.

The senses recorded for *will* are richer than for *shall*; actually, *will* outnumbers the cases of *shall*, which seems to have already started into decay as suggested by the small contexts of occurrences in which it may appear. Once such context is person marking. In the corpus, *I* and *we* are extensively used with *shall* and very few with *will*. Other persons fall on the side of *will*. The cases of *I will* in the corpus suggests volition, and so *will* and *shall* seem to be functionally and semantically equivalent, as shown in (10) and (11):

(10)  The Particulars of this Embaſſy, of which I have the very Minutes, in divers Letters ſent to the King and Cardinal, **I will give** ſome Account of; eſpecially of ſuch Things as the Lord *Herbert*, or the Right Reverend Author of the *Hiſtory of the Reformation*, have made no mention of, or but briefly and imperfectly. (Strype 1710).

(11)  As it is impossible for me to detail the history, not an incident of which is without its importance, **I will just state** what that indictment was. (Smyth 1840).

The results clearly indicate a less restricted selection of contexts for *will*. A quarter of the total number of cases are associated with the sense of future, and we have found that these uses do not give much room for any further interpretation, if otherwise deontic overtones may be agreed:

(12)  If any one ſteal at a Fire, you may toſs them into it, without any more to do; or if any takes Servants, and keeps them above Two Days in the Houſe before

they have them regiſtred in the Police, **they will be obliged** to pay ſuch a Fine, as the Maſter of the Police ſhall think fit. (Justice, 1739).

*Will* has been also found productive to indicate dynamic possibility and expected results, as in the examples in (13) and (14). In (13), the modal verb is used to indicate the inclination of some people to wear the cloak considering the properties of this piece of garment have. The use of *will* in example (14) introduces the conclusions of a logical assumption, i.e. *be in bumps*.

(13) ...they wear a Cloack, lined with rich Furr, which reaches to their Waſtes; and **ſome will** [dynamic possibility] wear them in Summer, as they ſay, to keep out the Heat; but I am of Opinion it is to ſhow them, they being commonly made of rich Silk; and they will have a fine Cloack and Cap, tho' they are not worth one Penny of Money more, than what they give for them. (Justice, 1739).

(14) ...they are very much troubled with what they call *Muskettoes*, or named *Gnats* by us in *England*; and when you are bit by them, **your Fleſh will** [expected results] be in Bumps. (Justice, 1739).

Senses indicating deontic need, disposition and volition are also registered in our compilation. Examples are given in (15), (16) and (17), and senses are given in square brackets. In the first example, the modal verb refers to the necessity of the proposition to be true in the context described earlier in the text. The use of *will* in (16) relies on the inner disposition of the subject to do the event. In the last example, the modal verb indicates the desire of the speaker to carry out the described event, i.e. *tell you what will be said of your conjectures*.

(15) Thus the people found themſelves compleatly ſtripped of all their privileges, civil and ſacred, and ſubjecʹted to a governour and council, as to the ruling part of them, entirely devoted to the will and pleaſure of a popiſh prince, **whoſe arbitrary meaſures will** [need] be deteſted... (Adams, 1769)

(16) ...upon which ſuch great Alterations afterwards depended; and wherein our Cardinal bore ſo conſiderable a Part: And that, **if you will** [disposition] believe his own Proteſtations, becauſe he judged the Marriage, in which the King lived, to be unlawful. (Strype, 1721)

(17) **I will** [volition] tell you what will be ſaid of your conjecʹtures (Anderson, 1775)

Finally, a 10% of the cases in even percentages is deployed to accentuate factuality, as in (18), and to indicate planned events, as in (12). The contribution of *will* in (18) is to make explicit the informational quality of the book in earlier wars, and this is, therefore, taken as a fact. The case of *will* in the context of *in due time* in (19) suggests an event that is bound to occur.

(18)  I ſhall bring with me alſo the book of Froiſſart, who **will** [factuality] ſhew your
      Grace, how the wars were led in thoſe days. (Birch, 1760)

(19)  and the Lord Marſhal conveyed him to Calais, where he was kept Cloſe Priſoner,
      till he was made away not long after, of which you **will** hear more in due
      time. (Tyrrell, 1704)


CONCLUSION

The present paper represents work in progress concerning the meanings
of modal verbs in scientific writing of the Modern English period. This is a first
step towards a more ambitious programme to analyse the evolution of modals in
various disciplinary genres. As suggested here, there seems to be some pragmatic
restrictions in the use of these two verbs, and *will* appears to occur more frequently
than *shall*, and the meanings are virtually identical as those given in the OED.
Major functional coincidence with *shall* is found in the subjective use of this form to
indicate volition, a meaning which seems to be the sole domain of *shall* in these texts,
apparently a role to be taken over by *will* across the next century. Up to our present
interrogation of CHET, *will* is indeed a modal verb and so is *shall*, even if some
degree of semantic bleaching seems to be taken place according to some evidence
which indicate grammatical codification of future tense. These findings need to be
revised and analysed in terms of gender and genre-specific criteria, and CHET and
CCT allow for this. The results from CHET will be compared with other corpora
from CC and with the Late Modern English texts compiled by Taavitsainen and her
team. From a diachronic perspective, we are elaborating the meanings of these two
modals with evidence taken from the Middle English Medical Texts Corpus and
from the *Corpus of Early English Recipes* to evaluate and date changing patterns of use.

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