

## Modality in four texts of the independence of the English and Spanish colonies

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**ABSTRACT:** Nowadays, we are accustomed to listening to or watching political speeches on television. However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century different means had to be used, such as pamphlets and sermons. One of the best resources to transmit some meanings subtly in these texts is modality, which shows the speaker's attitude towards a proposition. For these reasons, this paper analyses four influential texts from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> respectively about the independence of the British colonies (one in favour and one against) and the Spanish colonies (one in favour and one against as well), in order to compare the use of modal verbs (more specifically, *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *should* and *ought to* for English, and *deber* ('must') and *poder* ('can') in present, past, future and conditional tenses in indicative and subjunctive mood in the Spanish texts), aiming to point out how this strategy is used according to their purpose and language. From the results, it can be concluded that the English texts use modality in a higher degree than the Spanish ones, but so do those in favour of independence with respect to those against. In addition, the Spanish texts focus on the actual possibilities they have, while the English texts do also deal with hypothetical situations. Finally, the four texts emphasise the use of "we" linked to these verbs in order to unify the people and their opinions.

**Keywords:** Modality, Independence, Colonies, Spain, Great Britain, Pamphlet, Sermon.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Political texts are one of the most important means by which an ideology is communicated to the public. Nowadays the audience is used to watching politicians on television and hearing political speeches. However, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century different means were used in order to transmit somebody's ideas. One of the most common ways was political pamphlets, which played an important role in independence wars (Bailin, 1965; Jones and West, 2002). Aside from political texts, religious sermons may be added as greatly influential ideological texts, especially in those centuries. These texts, which have to try their best to convey their proposals in the most efficient way, are typically studied under the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis, an approach that, according to van Dijk (2003: 352),

primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.

As van Dijk explains, discourse is a very powerful tool. Many different strategies are devised to achieve their goals. One of these resources by which meaning is subtly introduced in texts is modality. Generally, modality shows the speaker's attitude towards a proposition. Although much literature has been written on mood and modality in different languages, with special interest in English (Lyons, 1977; Palmer, 1983, 1990; Bybee et al., 1994; van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998; Li, 2004), less attention has been paid to previous centuries and specific contrastive studies between

English and Spanish (Marrano, 1998; Villamil, 2001; Rabadán, 2006) or regarding political issues (Marín Arrese *et al.*, 2004; Marín Arrese, 2007, 2009).

For that reason, a contrastive study has been chosen, in order to compare the strategies followed by the authors of four texts dated from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The purpose of this paper is to point out the differences across languages and perspectives (in favour or against independence) inside the frame of the English and Spanish colonies' independence revolution. More specifically, the paper will focus, through a quantitative study, on the presence of a group of modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, should, ought to* and *must*) in the English texts, and *deber* and *poder* in the Spanish ones. In addition, the types of modality they involve will be described, as well as the syntactic subjects they are associated with. Answers will be sought to the following questions: are the differences in the use of modal verbs and modality language or topic determined? How is modality related to the message? Who are the participants linked to modal verbs?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: section 1 explains the main theoretical concepts regarding modality and modal verbs; section 2 describes the corpus and methodology used in the paper; section 3 presents and discusses the results; and finally, section 4 sums up the main conclusions.

## 1. MODALITY AND MODAL VERBS

A factor to be taken into account is that English and Spanish are not completely equivalent when talking about mood: while Spanish has a system of moods (indicative, subjunctive and imperative), English has a system of modal verbs (*can, may, must, will*, etc.). However, there are some similarities as well. In order to do a contrastive study, this paper will take the English system and look for equivalences in Spanish. More specifically, two Spanish periphrases will be analysed (*deber (de) + infinitive*, and *poder + infinitive*), which can be considered quite a direct equivalent (both syntactically or formally and semantically or functionally) of a group of English modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, must, ought to* and *should*), as it is explained in section 1.2.

A detailed discussion about the cross-linguistic equivalences of the systems of mood and modal verbs is beyond the purposes of the present study<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, this section will only present the main types of modality and those which will be included in the study, as well as the specific (modal) verbs that will be analysed in the texts.

**1.1. Modality.** Broadly speaking, modality is a semantic concept that refers to the speaker's attitude or opinion towards the truth of a proposition, as well as the situation or event described in the sentence (Simpson, 1993: 47), and includes meanings such as ability, possibility, probability, necessity, permission, obligation and volition. These notions have been used to classify modality in different types. This paper will follow van der Auwera and Plungian's (1998) classification of modality in deontic, epistemic and participant internal/external, in as much as it is the most transparent regarding the meanings which can be compared between the selected group of modal English verbs (*can, could, may, might, must, ought to* and *should*) and the Spanish *poder* and *deber*. Other types of modality, such as commissive or volitive, will not be included in the study, because other structures whose inclusion in modality is doubtful would be needed in Spanish in order to realize those meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> The reader is remitted to the discussion on typological studies about mood and modality between Comrie (1981, 1983) and Smith (1981, 1983).

**1.1.1. Participant-internal/external modality.** Participant-internal modality comprises the internal ability, capacity or need of participants (e.g. (1)), while participant-external modality focuses on participant's external necessity or enabling circumstances (van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998: 80) (e.g. (2)).

- (1) *es evidente que a nosotros solos pertenece el derecho de ejercerla, y que solos podemos [PINT] right to exercise-it and that alone we-can llenar sus funciones (Viscardo) fulfill its functions*  
 it's evident that the right to exercise it only belongs to us, and that only we can fulfill its functions'
- (2) Under our present denomination of British subjects we can [PEXT] neither be received nor heard abroad. (Paine)

As this sense of 'necessity' is typically expressed by the verb *need*, this meaning is not likely to appear in the analysis carried out in this paper.

**1.1.2. Epistemic modality.** Epistemic modality belongs to the speaker's knowledge concerning an event, and thus involves estimations on the likelihood of the realization of the event. In this sense, it is also related with "the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed" (Simpson, 1993: 48). The speaker's assessment typically involves various degrees of certainty. While the strongest degree of speaker's commitment would be, according to Lyons (1977: 763), categorical assertions, which would be 'epistemically non-modal', modal verbs express those different degrees: necessity, probability and possibility. Examples (3) and (4) illustrate this type of modality:

- (3) *se podría [EPIS] creer que los fondos que debemos ø could think that the funds that we-must suministrar para el pago de los enormes gastos provide for the payment of the huge expenses de la marina (Viscardo) of the navy*  
 It could be thought that the funds that we must provide for the payment of the huge expenses of the navy'
- (4) like Rome, she may [EPIS] be constrained to defend herself from the Huns and Alaricks of the north (Chalmers)

**1.1.3. Deontic modality.** Deontic modality deals with the meanings of permission (deontic possibility) and obligation (deontic necessity). This type of modality is related to the realization of events and what happens in the real world. As van der Auwera and Plungian (1998: 81) explain, "deontic modality identifies the enabling or compelling circumstances external to the participant as some person(s), often the speaker, and/or some social or ethical norm(s) permitting or obliging the participant to engage in the state of affairs". Furthermore, in deontic modality, typically, a participant (usually the speaker) compels another participant to do something, either it is specified in the sentences or not, as examples (5) and (6) show:

- (5) *No debe [DEON] reconocerse á Fernando por rey No must acknowledge to Fernando as king (Beristáin)*  
 'Fernando must not be acknowledged as king'

- (6) although I do not wish to mortify my countrymen, I must [DEON] acknowledge, that the neat proceeds of all our produce is inadequate to that end (Chalmers)

Moreover, being the modal system of ‘duty’, Simpson (1993: 48) points out that “clearly, the deontic system is of crucial relevance to the strategies of social interaction, especially to tactics of persuasion and politeness”. Of special interest to this paper is the act of persuasion, as the texts analysed are supposed to seek that purpose.

**1.2. Modal verbs.** Modality affects semantically the whole sentence, and consequently it can be realized or marked in other forms than with verbs; however, in order to compare the selected English and Spanish texts, this paper will focus only on a specific group of modal verbs which can be perceived as equivalent in these two languages.

**1.2.1. In English.** Several verbs pertain to the category of modal verbs. However, they all do not share the same status, as some of them are considered to be central versus other more marginal members. According to Leech et al. (2009: 72), the core modals can be said “to express central modal meanings of possibility, necessity, permission, obligation, prediction and volition, as well as to share the syntactic properties associated with the class of auxiliaries in English”. In this group, they include the following modal verbs: *will, would, can, could, may, might, should, shall* and *must*. As marginal modals, they name *dare, need, ought to* and *used to*, which are characterised by their “ability to adopt both auxiliary and main verb characteristics” (Leech et al., 2009: 93).

**1.2.2. In Spanish.** Regarding Spanish, modal verbs belong to the category of verbal periphrases, which are fixed groups in which the meaning of the main verb is affected by the group (RAE, 2005: 444). Five verbs are the most frequently used in this way: *deber, querer* (‘to want’), *saber* (‘to know’), *poder* and *soler* (‘to do usually’). However, all verbs expressing behaviour, will, intention and volition would also be included, for example *intentar* (‘to try’), *mandar* (‘to order’), *desear* (‘to wish’), *prometer* (‘to promise’), *esperar* (‘to hope’, ‘to expect’), *proponerse* (‘to aim to’), etc. (RAE, 2005: 450).

Nevertheless, this paper focuses only on those Spanish verbs most directly and frequently associated with the expression of modality seen in the previous section, which are *deber* and *poder* (in present, past, future and conditional tenses in indicative or subjunctive moods) and their English counterparts, namely: *can, could, may, might, must, ought to* and *should*; because *shall, will* and *would* would mainly be expressed by future and conditional tenses of other verbs, and *need, dare* and *used to* by other verbs (*necesitar, atreverse, soler*, respectively).

It may be argued that more verbs, such as *haber que* (‘to have to’), *haber de* (‘to have to’) or *tener que* (‘to have to’), share the same meaning as *deber* and *poder* (Rabadán, 2006: 268), and could easily be equivalents of the English modal verbs. However, in the same way as *have to* is not considered a full modal verb in English, these Spanish verbs will not be taken into account in the analysis<sup>2</sup>.

**1.2.3. Evolution of meaning.** It is important to note the specific meaning of the modal verbs that will be analysed in order to clarify forthcoming discussion in section 4. Moreover, it has to be considered that the texts date from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, therefore some diachronic changes might be observed, as the languages spoken in that period were Modern English and Modern Spanish. Thus, the evolution of their meaning must be pointed out in spite of the fact that no comparison with current texts will be done.

<sup>2</sup> In case the reader may wonder about the occurrences of these verbs, there is only one occurrence in the Spanish texts, more specifically, *tener que* in the text written by Viscardo. Regarding the English texts, *have to* appears only once in each text.

Turner (1985: 131) provides a comprehensive table with the main meaning of modal verbs in English. The prototypical meanings are summarized in table 1. However, as she does not include *ought to* in her study, its meaning has been taken from the OED.

Can	Possibility Physical ability Certainty	Must	Possibility Physical ability Obligation
Could	Possibility Physical ability	Ought to	Possibility Obligation
May	Possibility Permission	Should	Possibility Obligation
Might	Possibility		

Table 1 - Modal meanings in Modern English.

Recent studies have noted some changes in the current use of modal English verbs in respect of meaning. Leech *et al.* (2009: 89), in their study of contemporary English, show that there is a tendency towards monosemy, that is, meaning seems to specialize (in this case to an epistemic sense), although it affects mainly to *may* and *should*. There are also differences in frequency of use: Millar (2009: 215) supports a previous research done by Leech (2003) and claims that *shall*, *must* and *ought* are less and less used, while the frequency of *may*, *can* and *could* increases; at the same time, the overall impression is that the use of core modals decreases in favour of semi-modals (*have to*, *be able to*, etc.) (Leech *et al.*, 2009).

No significant variations can be found in Spanish regarding the meaning of *deber* and *poder*, maybe due to the creation of the Royal Spanish Academy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which described the language and prescribed its appropriate use. Actually, the distinction between the meaning of *deber de* as conjecture and *deber* as obligation and induction was introduced in this century by the grammarians (Corominas, 2008: 429), although this distinction is blurred when these verbs are used in ordinary speech (RAE, 2009: 2143-2144)<sup>3</sup>. *Poder*, on the other hand, expresses possibility (as it is a reduced form of *puede ser que* ('it can be that')) (Corominas, 2008: 588), permission and capacity or ability.

## 2. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

The corpus of this study consists of four texts, two in English and two in Spanish, on the independence of the British colonies (in the case of the English ones) and the Spanish colonies in America (those texts in Spanish). The title, the year of publication, the author and the length of the texts are as follows:

- *Common Sense* (1776), by Thomas Paine (16,038 words)
- *Plain Truth* (1776), by James Chalmers (15,738 words)
- *Carta a los españoles americanos* ('Letter to the American Spaniards') (1791), by Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán (6,836 words)
- *Discurso cristiano declamatorio contra los rebeldes de la Nueva España* ('Christian declamatory discourse against the rebels of New Spain') (1815), by José Mariano Beristáin de Souza, (2,002 words)

<sup>3</sup> No case of *deber de* was found in the texts, neither as conjecture nor obligation. Therefore, all the analysed *deber* cases will make reference to *deber* with deontic meaning and without preposition.

All these figures and texts were important in their context regarding the independence of the colonies<sup>4</sup>. All of them lived in America; however, only the Spanish authors were born there. Secondly, neither the writers in English nor those in Spanish share their point of view in relation to the topic: Paine defends independence, while Chalmers is a Loyalist, that is, loyal to the English crown; similarly, Viscardo fights for independence, whereas Beristáin criticizes those whom he regards as traitors. Actually, *Plain Truth* was written as a direct response to *Common Sense*, though the texts in Spanish are unrelated.

The writers use different approaches to deal with independence, the titles of which themselves exemplify: Paine appeals to ‘common sense’ and Chalmers classifies his words as ‘plain truth’ because, as Fairclough (2001: 27) claims, “ideological power, the power to project one’s practices as universal and ‘common sense’, is a significant complement to economic and political power, and of particular significance here because it is exercised in discourse”. Viscardo presents independence, according to Vargas Ugarte (1971: 80), as “un movimiento exigido por la naturaleza misma de las cosas”, which means that their independence is intrinsically justified. The text by Beristáin differs slightly from the others in that the genre is not the same: in this case it is a sermon, and consequently it appeals to religious beliefs to justify loyalty, whereas the others are pamphlets, though they all can be considered persuasive texts. O’Keefe (1990) and Hoeken (1997: 140) define persuasive texts as “efforts at influencing a reader’s attitude through communication”, in which advertisements, propaganda and also sermons could be included.

In order to analyse the texts, they were firstly tagged manually according to the modal categories seen in 1.1. All occurrences of the modal verbs chosen were highlighted and their meaning in context was assigned. Given that this is a quantitative study, the results are presented in raw numbers and in ratio per hundred words.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is twofold: the first section will show the results regarding the use of modal verbs in the texts, both their frequency and types of modality; the second section will present the subjects associated to those types, in order to find the roles of the participants in the texts.

**3.1. Modal verbs and types of modality.** Two parameters have been selected in order to count the modal verbs: firstly, how many times they appeared in relation to the total number of words in each text. These results are shown in figures 1 and 2. And secondly, only taking into account the modal verbs found, how the types of modality were distributed, which is presented in figure 3.

The following graph (figure 1) shows the occurrence frequency of the selected group of modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, should, must* and *ought to*) in the texts written by Paine and Chalmers in respect of their number of words.

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<sup>4</sup> For further information about them and their texts in context, see Palacios Rodríguez (1972), Foner (1976), Zayas de Lille (1992), New (1996).

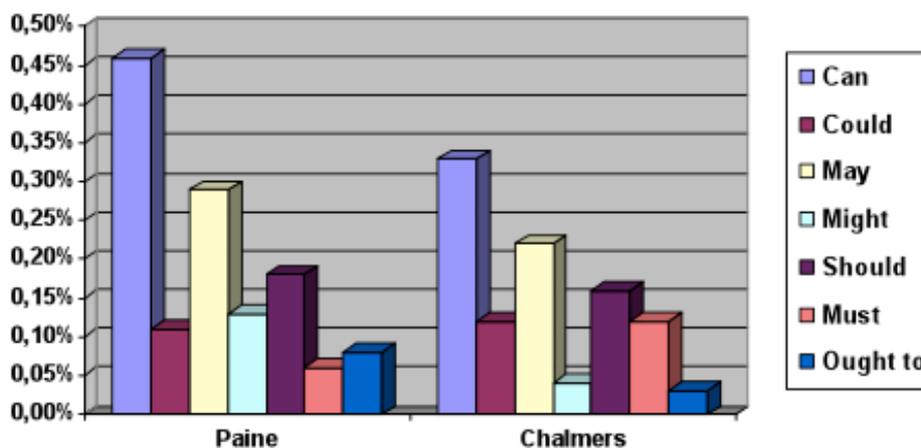


Figure 1 - Occurrence frequency of modal verbs in Paine's and Chalmers'.

There are some obvious similarities, but some differences as well. In general, these modal verbs appear more frequently in Paine's: there are 215 occurrences, that is, 1.34% of the whole text. On the other hand, 166 occurrences are found in Chalmers' text, which constitutes the 1.05% of the total.

*Can*, *may* and *should* are the most used modals in both cases, and in the same order. Nevertheless, the order of those least used is quite altered: *must* is more frequently employed in Chalmers' than in Paine's, and *might* and *ought to* are more disregarded in the former than in the latter. *Could*, conversely, is used similarly in the two texts.

It may be deduced that *can*, *may* and *should* function as prototypical modal verbs for each of the most common types of modality, which are shown in figure 3 later on: *can* stands mainly for participant-internal modality, whereas *may* is associated to epistemic modality, and *should*, in turn, represents deontic modality. Thus, *could*, *might*, *must* and *ought to* are secondary choices for the expression of modality.

Figure 2 illustrates how frequently *deber* and *poder* appear in the Spanish texts, and the different tenses in which they are expressed. The category 'others' stands for all occurrences which cannot be included in the previous classes, such as non-finite uses.

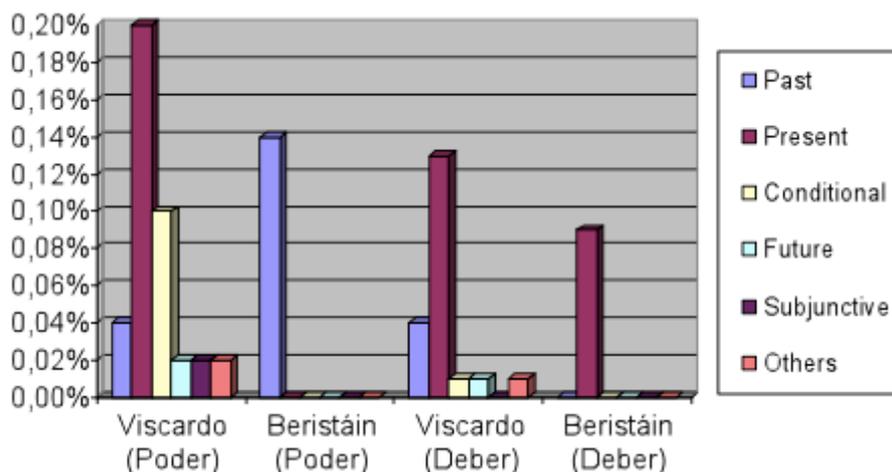


Figure 2 - Occurrence frequency of *deber* and *poder* in Viscardo's and Beristain's.

One of the clearest characteristics of the use of these two verbs in these texts is their low frequency. With only 39 occurrences, *deber* and *poder*, in all their forms, conform the 0.57% of Viscardo's text. But it is even more striking in Beristain's: these verbs are used only five times,

which represents the 0.24% of his text. This points to an apparent difference between English and Spanish regarding the use of these particular verbs as modality markers.

Regarding tenses, present is the most common one, though *poder* in Beristáin's is used exclusively in past tense. The use of conditional is also significant. It may be likened to the modals *could*, *might*, *should* and *ought to* in the case of the English texts, most of which were described as secondary choices. The use of past tense, though frequent, is probably mainly related to the topic and arrangement of the text, that is, co-textual factors.

Therefore, some parallels may be established between the English and the Spanish texts: firstly, *can* and *may* are the most common modal verbs in English, in the same way that *deber* and *poder* are used most frequently in present tense in Spanish; and secondly, the usage frequency of forms such as *could*, *might* and *ought to* can be compared to the use of conditional forms in Spanish. Finally, it must be noted that the use of past tense in Spanish may formally but not functionally overlap with conditional regarding English modals such as *could*. That explains its high frequency, although it should be taken warily, as it may be related simply to information arrangement.

After the analysis of the frequency of each modal verb, displayed in figures 1 and 2, figure 3 shows the distribution of the modal verbs in modality types.

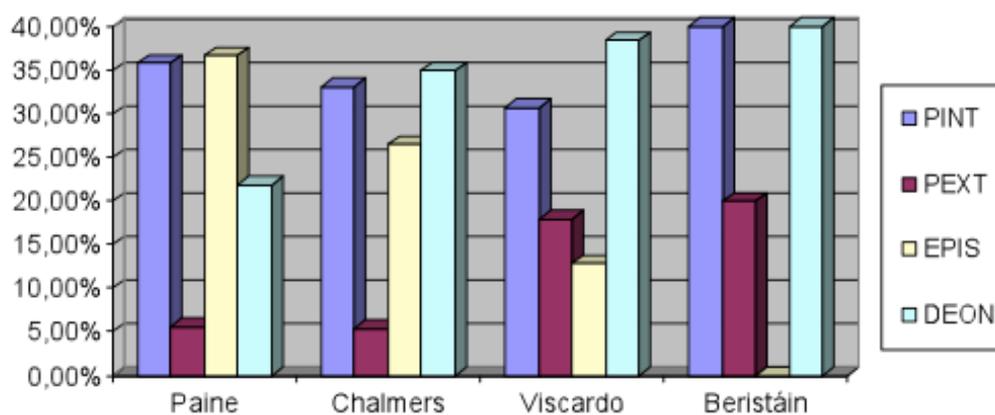


Figure 3 - Frequency of types of modality in the four texts.

Again, there are some similarities between languages and texts, but some differences as well. Participant-internal modality is the second most employed type in all the texts, except for Beristáin's, in which it is used as much as the most common one. As explained in section 1.1.1., participant-internal modality deals mainly with the meanings of 'ability' and 'capacity'. This points to the authors' interest of showing what participants are able to do. A detailed analysis of who these participants are will be presented in 3.2.

The use of participant-external modality, that is, the participant's relationship with the enabling circumstances, is clearly different across languages. In the English texts, it only covers about 5% of the modals. However, in the Spanish ones, it is nearly 20%. Thus, Spanish authors seem to be more concerned with how the surrounding conditions affect the participants than the English ones.

Epistemic modality undergoes the opposite phenomenon. It is significantly used more by Paine and Chalmers than by Viscardo and Beristáin. If epistemic modality was related to the speaker's certainty about the realization of an event, then, from this, one can draw the conclusion that Spanish authors are more interested in actual facts than in probability. Nevertheless, there are also differences inside languages: Paine and Viscardo are more prone to use epistemic modals than their counterparts.

The results of deontic modality can be compared to those of the previous type, though they show the reverse process. It is more frequently used in Spanish than in English, specially Chalmers and Beristáin more than Paine and Viscardo. As this type of modality expresses what participant's are obliged and allowed to do, Spanish authors show a higher tendency to say what participants can and must do. This would probably be supported by a detailed analysis of the use of the imperative mood, which has not been included in the present study.

**3.2. Subjects of modality.** In order to provide a more detailed examination of the results on the types of modality employed in the texts, the subjects of the modal verbs have been analysed and classified according to each author. The four tables (tables 2-5) are presented together, followed by a comparative discussion.

Person	Number	PINT		PEXT		EPIS		DEON	
		N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R
1 <sup>st</sup>	Sg (I)	1	0.46	1	0.46	0	0	2	0.93
	Pl (we)	9	4.18	4	1.86	18	8.37	19	8.83
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sg/pl (you)	8	3.72	0	0	1	0.46	0	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sg (s/he)	12	5.58	0	0	15	6.97	1	0.46
	Pl (they)	8	3.72	1	0.46	8	3.72	2	0.93
---	non-human	39	18.13	6	2.79	37	17.20	23	10.69

Table 2 - Subjects in Paine.

Person	Number	PINT		PEXT		EPIS		DEON	
		N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R
1 <sup>st</sup>	Sg (I)	5	3.01	0	0	0	0	8	4.81
	Pl (we)	12	7.22	1	0.60	6	3.61	17	10.24
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sg/pl (you)	1	0.60	1	0.60	1	0.60	0	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sg (s/he)	6	3.61	2	1.20	3	1.80	6	3.61
	Pl (they)	10	6.02	1	0.60	2	1.20	2	1.20
---	non-human	21	12.65	4	2.40	32	19.27	25	15.06

Table 3 - Subjects in Chalmers.

Person	Number	PINT		PEXT		EPIS		DEON	
		N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R
1 <sup>st</sup>	Sg (I)	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Pl (we)	2	5.1	2	5.1	1	2.5	6	15.38
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sg/pl (you)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sg (s/he)	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	2	5.1
	Pl (they)	2	5.1	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
---	non-human	6	15.38	4	10.25	4	10.25	7	17.94

Table 4 - Subjects in Viscardo.

Person	Number	PINT		PEXT		EPIS		DEON	
		N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R
1 <sup>st</sup>	Sg (I)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Pl (we)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sg/pl (you)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sg (s/he)	1	20	0	0	0	0	1	20
	Pl (they)	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0
---	non-human	1	20	0	0	0	0	1	20

Table 5 - Subjects in Beristáin.

It must be explained that the category “non-human” subjects includes samples such as abstract entities (7), governments (8), countries (9), qualities (10), etc.

(7) Time, the destroyer of human affairs, may indeed end her political life by a gentle decay (Chalmers)

(8) And a government which cannot preserve the peace, is no government at all (Paine)

(9) *todos los caminos por donde las otras naciones*  
 all the ways through where the other nations  
*pudieran darnos a precios moderados y por cambios*  
 could give-us for prices reasonable and for exchanges  
*equitativos* (Viscardo)  
 equitable

‘all the ways by which other nations could give us for a reasonable price and for an equitable exchange’

(10) The simplicity of their manners should be such as to prevent a multiplicity of affairs (Chalmers)

This category is the one with the highest quantity of results, due to the wide variety of subjects that it covers. It is, for that reason, more revealing to look at human subjects. ‘I’ always means the author of the text. The second person has been considered in singular and plural without distinction and it is directed to the reader/hearer of the text, that is, the population of the colonies. The third person singular usually refers to unspecified subjects (such as somebody, any man, etc.), but also specific persons (e.g. the king), while the plural forms usually include groups of people (farmers, soldiers, citizens, etc.). Although the pronominal forms have been written in the tables, it

has to be taken into account that any type of phrase functioning as subject has been part of the analysis.

With respect to participant-internal modality, Paine and Beristáin seem to be more concerned about what individuals can do, emphasising the role, mainly in Paine's, that every single citizen may play in the revolution. By contrast, Chalmers focuses on 'we', as united community and the strength that a group may have. Viscardo mentions equally 'we' and 'they', contrasting what the two opposing sides of the revolution can do.

Paine and Viscardo show similar results in participant-external modality: they both focus on the enabling circumstances of 'we', the citizens as a community. These authors defend independence, so their surroundings, the influence of the conditions in the colonies on the population, are more important for them. Chalmers, in this case, pays slightly more attention to unspecified third person singular subjects, and Beristáin to plural, which are the traitors to the king, or, as he calls them repeatedly throughout the text, 'escribas y fariseos'.

Epistemic modality is unanimously associated with 'we', except for Beristáin, who does not use *deber* and *poder* with this meaning. Especially Paine and Chalmers discuss their possibilities as a group in the colonies.

Finally, similar results are found for deontic modality. All authors except for Beristáin again, use this type of modality with first person plural subjects. They are not only concerned about what they can or may do, but also about what they must do.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed four influential texts of the independence of the English and Spanish colonies dated from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Two elements have been the basis of the study: a group of modal verbs (in the case of English: *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *ought to* and *should*; and in Spanish: *deber* and *poder* in present, past, future, conditional tenses in indicative and subjunctive mood) and their type of modality (participant-internal/external, epistemic and deontic modality), on the one hand; and the subjects of those modal verbs, on the other.

From this analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- a) English texts use modal verbs more frequently. This is probably due to the fact that English is a language based on a system of modal verbs, while Spanish is based on the system of mood. Further analysis in Spanish moods (indicative, subjunctive and imperative) could show a higher degree of equivalences.
- b) The texts defending independence (Paine's and Viscardo's) use more frequently the modal elements analysed than those against independence. Therefore, in general, the latter tend to present facts as categorical assertions.
- c) There is a division between what has been called in this paper primary and secondary choices in respect of modals and modality: *can*, *may* and *should* stand as prototypical modal markers in the English texts; similarly, present tense is the most used in Spanish. On the other hand, *could*, *might*, *must* and *ought to* are secondary choices, just like past and conditional tenses in Spanish.
- d) Participant-internal, epistemic and deontic modality are the most frequent categories in the English texts, while the Spanish ones are more focused only on participant-internal and deontic modality. Moreover, the Spanish texts have shown clearly higher results in participant-external modality than the English ones. As a conclusion, English authors

are concerned about what participants can, may and must do, whereas the Spanish ones focus only on what they can and must do, but not on possibilities and hypothetical facts.

- e) The results about the subjects associated with the modal verbs show similarities among the texts written by Paine, Chalmers and Viscardo. Beristáin's text presents different results, although the occurrences of *deber* and *poder* are so few that they may not be significant. Therefore, in general, similar strategies have been followed by the three authors with a highest use of modal verbs: they have mainly focused on the role that *we*, that is, the population as a community or their particular ideological group, play in the colonies.

However, other significant linguistic aspects of these texts could also be studied in order to provide a more complete overview of how their message is transmitted. Some future research lines could focus on the following topics: 1) the analysis of a higher quantity of texts, in order to provide a more significant sample; 2) the extension of the study to all type of mood realizations, not only modal verbs, nor even verbs, in both English and Spanish, especially in the latter, which is more prone to these types of realizations; 4) the inclusion of other types of modality: comissive and volitive; and 5) the study of evidentiality or the ways in which the speaker gives validity to the speech.

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