

Modal items are those which carry meanings referring to the degree of certainty (sometimes called epistemic modality) or necessity (deontic modality). The corpus statistics underscore this earlier work and provide compelling evidence of the ubiquity of modal items in everyday speech and writing. To argue that the domain of modality be expanded beyond the closed-class modal verbs is not a new idea; several linguists have advocated this, based on the frequent occurrence in written texts of a wider range of modal items (Holmes ???? ) or on sociolinguistic 'fieldwork' (Stubbs ???? ). Clearly the best candidates for such meanings in the ? , ??? -word list are the closed class of modal verbs (can, could, may, must, will, should, etc.