

Investigating Modality in Policy Texts: Corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of Modals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the role of modal resources in policy discourse. To this end, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, issued by the United Nations member states in 2015 representing a global comprehensive plan for the transformation of the world, is critically analyzed with a particular focus on examining the frequency and strategic functions of modal verbs in conveying certain interpersonal meanings that contribute to the influential delivery of messages in the Agenda. The corpus of the study comprises the full transcript of the 2030 Agenda; a corpus-assisted critical discourse approach was adopted for data analysis. The theoretical framework relies upon Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (2015) in combination with the corpus linguistics tool AntConc 3.5.9. Both

quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for arriving at an objective interpretation of the policy text. Research findings reveal that modals with high intensity are more predominant than modals with low intensity and that the main categories of modal verbs that characterize the data are ability, possibility, obligation, necessity, volition and prediction. These modal resources are used to capture the intensity of the policymakers' views and attitudes with regard to the actions required for the world to adopt and implement the 2030 Agenda. The study concludes that modal markers are deployed for emphasizing the seriousness and urgency of the issues in the 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: policy documents, critical discourse analysis, modality, corpus-linguistics, 2030 agenda for sustainable development

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1. Introduction

Despite the fact that policy documents are considered one of the most significant outlets for the presentation of social issues, insufficient attention has been paid to analyzing the role of modals in framing and shaping policies (Fairclough, 2003). The present research aims at investigating the role of modality in policy discourse. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development representing a globally influential policy document is selected for critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a particular focus on the role of modal verbs in unveiling the ideologies of the discourse participants towards the issues related to the transformation of the world into a more just and successful world at all levels by 2030.

The research is grounded within the frameworks of CDA and corpus linguistics. CDA is an increasingly evolving field of study which underscores the relationship between discourse and notions like power, power abuse and domination in text/ talk (Derakhshani et al., 2021). It is best viewed as a shared perspective which encompasses a variety of approaches rather than being viewed as a school which is characterized by a unitary methodology or theoretical framework. Influenced by Halliday (1978) and Critical Linguistics, CDA analysts adopt the view that grammatical and lexical choices made by the speakers are systematic and ideologically based; in this way, they reflect how we view ourselves, our identity, our views, beliefs and values. Such choices are normally politicized. CDA analysts assume that discourse involves power and ideologies. The aim of CDA is to investigate the relationship between texts, discursive

practices and events on the one hand and the wider social and cultural structures and relations on the other hand (Fairclough 1995). CDA assumes that discourse cannot be understood without examining the current and the historical context. Fairclough (1995) views CDA as a three-dimensional framework where the aim of the analysis is to integrate three levels into one: analysis of language texts (spoken or written), analysis of discourse practices (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practices. In using CDA as an approach in analyzing the policy text under investigation in the present study, we need to contextualize the production of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and analyze how this particular discourse is perceived as more impactful than other discourses. A corpus-assisted CDA is an approach that involves a combination of the tenets of both corpus linguistics and CDA (Baker, 2008). The underlying principle of this approach is that the blended aspects of the two approaches are reflected in the analysis of the inherent meanings in discourse. According to Partington (2003), the combination of CDA and corpus linguistics would clearly contribute to the identification of examples existing in a corpus or patterns that were not previously discovered. This process would help the researcher to support, revise or refute their assumption.

One aspect of Systemic Functional Linguistics which might be under scrutiny in CDA is Modality, being one of the CDA strategies. For the construction of interpersonal meanings, modality complements mood. Modality is essentially

concerned with a speaker/ writer's attitude or opinion with regard to a particular proposition in a clause (Palmer, 2001). For Martin and David (2003), modality functions as a resource for grading polarity and for setting up positivity and negativity in discourse; it is one way for adding attitudinal voice to discourse. An analysis of the literature reveals several manifestations of modality. Fowler (1985) provides a number of modal categories signified by a range of linguistic forms: modal auxiliary verbs (e.g., **may**, **must**, **shall**, etc.); sentence adverbs (e.g., **probably**, **certainly**, etc.); adjectives (e.g., **certain**, **necessary**, etc.) in addition to some verbs and nominalizations (e.g., **predict**, **permit**, **obligation**, **likelihood**, etc.). Similarly, Lilian (2008) points out that modality is a linguistic device that encompasses a variety of forms including modal auxiliaries, modal verbs, modal adverbs and modal adjectives. However, the present study concentrates on modal auxiliary verbs in terms of their frequency and functionality in policy texts in particular. A modal auxiliary is one type of auxiliary verbs used to express modality: ability, permission, likelihood, obligation, etc. Modal verbs provide the main verbs which accompany them with additional meanings. They have a variety of communicative functions ranging from possibility (e.g., **may**) to necessity (e.g., **must**). Modal verbs enable language users, orators and politicians to articulate their beliefs and ideologies. Fairclough (1989) maintains that modals are concerned with orators' authority and views modality from two perspectives: *relational modality* which is based upon the status of one person in relation to others and *expressive modality* which is related to a speaker's or a writer's authority with regard to the truth or possibility of a certain reality.

Another classification of modality is into Deontic and Epistemic modality. These are considered as two distinct types of

modalities (Nuyts, 2006). Deontic modality tends to share characteristics of performatives; it refers to the use of language in order to express desires, wants, commands, obligations, undertaking and permission. In deontic modality, the text producer intervenes in the speech event through giving permissions or laying obligations (Downing and Locke, 1992 as cited in Ademilokun, 2019). Therefore, deontic modals are used to influence actions and situations based on the morality of the text producer which could be influenced by societal or personal tendencies or attitudes (Huddelston and Pullum, 2002 as cited in Ademilokun, 2019). Deontic meanings are realized through **must** and **should**. On the other hand, Epistemic modality refers to the speaker/ writer's knowledge of the world. It indicates the way they assess the probability that a particular proposition is true in terms of modal certainty, probability or possibility (Downing and Locke 1992 as cited in Ademilokun, 2019). Epistemic meanings can be realized through modal auxiliary verbs such as **may**, **might**, **will**, **should**, **can**, **could** and **must**. However, most modals are polysemous since some of the modals which might always carry deontic interpretation, for example, can be used as epistemic modal auxiliaries.

Modals have different degrees of certainty, i.e., modal force. For instance, with regard to obligation, **must** reflects the highest level of intensity whereas **should** is reflective of the lowest level of intensity. Concerning permission, **can** is marked by the highest level of intensity followed by **could**, **may** and **might** in that order. Regarding epistemic modals, **will** expresses highest intensity, **should** expresses high intensity, **may**, **could** and **might** express low intensity. Thus, modality characterizes speakers' attitudes and judgements and informs us of the speaker's commitment towards their claim (Winiharti, 2012 as cited in Ademilokun, 2019).

Linguistic studies of modalities include a variety of linguistic sub-disciplines: morphology, syntax and semantics. However, this paper adopts a critical discourse analytic approach exploring the concept of modality in terms of modal auxiliaries in order to characterize the orientation of the discourse participants in the text under analysis. Within the framework of CDA, modality is viewed as encompassing more than the occurrence of overt modal auxiliaries; modality is concerned with the speaker-writer's attitude towards and/or confidence in the proposition put forward. Fowler (1985) proposes five categories of modality in relation to the speaker/ writer's attitude towards a certain proposition: **validity** which refers to the degree of confidence the speaker expresses towards the truth of a proposition; **predictability** which refers to the likelihood of the occurrence of some future events; **desirability** indicating moral, practical or aesthetic judgements; **obligation** referring to the speaker's judgement that somebody else is obliged to perform a certain action; and finally, **permission** which means that the addressee is allowed by the speaker to perform a certain action. It can be claimed that these categories correspond to epistemic and deontic modalities. For example, epistemic modality corresponds to validity and predictability whereas deontic modality corresponds to desirability, obligation and permission. However, classifying modals is, to a great extent, problematic since an individual modal may function in more than one category. Therefore, it is important to understand the context in which a modal auxiliary occurs in order to interpret its potential meaning (Olaniyan & Adeniji, 2015).

From a political science perspective, a policy can be defined as a form of communication by any level of the government declaring what it intends to do in relation to public concerns. A policy includes

lexical and grammatical features that denote regulatory measures taken for achieving certain actions by authorities towards particular issues (Torres, 2021). According to Lian (2009), adopting a corpus-assisted approach to the analysis of the language of lawmakers in the form of policies can provide us with an idea about the ideologies of the lawmakers and the politicians who create the legislation. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) maintain that in analyzing policy, policy is not only understood as a specific policy document or text, but as a process and a product, it encompasses the production of a particular text, the text itself, and all the subsequent processes of amendments and, finally, the implementation of the policy into action.

A thorough review of the literature has shown that several recent studies on a critical discourse analysis of modality (Ademilokun, 2019; Yunisda & Firmansyah, 2019; Aning, 2020; Torres, 2021) have been conducted. However, the present research is an attempt to fill in the gap in the literature with regard to the dearth of research on analyzing the role of modality in policy texts. Motivated by the need for further research on investigating the frequency and the discourse functions of modal resources in policy texts, the aim of this research is to conduct a corpus-assisted critical discourse study of modality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a view to revealing the prominent attitudes and stances of the discourse participants towards the real situation of the world and the ways of changing it. The study purports to give answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the distribution and frequency of modal auxiliaries in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a policy text?

2. What interpersonal meanings and strategic functions do these modal markers communicate?

A corpus-based critical discourse analysis was adopted for the analysis of the 2030 Agenda employing Fairclough's dialectical relational approach (2015) in parallel with the corpus linguistics software tool AntConc 3.5.9. Since the focus in this study is on modal auxiliary verbs as one way for expressing modality, a quantitative analysis involved all the occurrences of the modal auxiliary verbs in addition to a qualitative analysis of selected examples of these occurrences in context to point out their semantic implications and discourse functions in the policy text under investigation. It is widely acknowledged that modal markers index the attitudes and commitment levels by the discourse participants to propositions; thus, a focus on modal resources in the 2030 Agenda is expected to reveal significant aspects of meaning in relation to the real world and the implementation of change in all aspects of life.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Corpus

The policy document under investigation in the present study is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development issued by the United Nations member states in 2015. The 2030 Agenda is based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that ended in 2015. It includes 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 sub-targets and represents a global reference point for the transformation of the world towards a more peaceful future. The 2030 Agenda calls upon member states of the United Nations not only to implement the 17 SDGs and the associated sub-targets in their own country but also to support the implementation of these goals in all other

parts of the world by 2030. It is assumed that different issues related to poverty, hunger, gender equality, education, health, climate change, environmental degradation, etc. are interlinked. For this reason, the SDGs form an integrated system where social, economic and environmental aspects are balanced for achieving sustainable development. Whereas MDGs focused on development goals which basically target developing countries, with more advanced countries providing financial and technological assistance, the SDGs are more comprehensive and apply to all countries. For achieving them, collective global effort from multiple sectors (governments, businesses and civil society) is needed for the wellbeing of the current and the following generations (Brisset & Mitter 2021; Weiland 2021).

Corpus for the present study comprises the full transcript of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda belongs to the genre of policy texts in the form of written discourse which is critically analyzed by the researcher with a particular focus on the forms and functions of modal auxiliaries in an attempt to identify the stance and the attitudes of the discourse participants towards the global critical issues and views raised in the 2030 Agenda. The corpus contains 2048word types and 15133word tokens.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present study combines components of corpus linguistics and CDA in order to fulfil the aim of the study which is conducting a critical analysis of modals in policy documents. For analyzing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the researcher employed some corpus-based components including concordance, key word in context and collocation. Through these aspects of corpus-linguistic analysis, the researcher attempted to arrive at an objective verifiable

interpretation of the usage of modal auxiliaries in the policy text under investigation. The CDA component of the present study relies on Fairclough's (2015) dialectical-relational approach to CDA due to the fact that it embraces a dimension of social analysis which relates to the nature of the discourse under study. Fairclough (1995) views CDA as a three-dimensional framework where the aim of the analysis is to integrate three levels into one: analysis of language texts, analysis of discourse practices, and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practices. Accordingly, the three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis herein involves some linguistic description of the formal properties of the text, an interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes/ interaction and the text, and an explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality. Fairclough (1998) argues that "the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology" (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). From this perspective, the data analysis covered the three stages of analysis which are identified as description, explanation and interpretation (Fairclough, 2015).

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis, with a particular focus on modality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, involved both quantitative and qualitative readings of the policy text. The rationale for adopting both approaches is that this combination would lead to a more objective interpretation of the text devoid of subjective biases of the analyst. For the quantitative analysis of the data, both the frequency and the percentage of each of the nine modal auxiliaries: **can**, **could**, **will**, **would**, **shall**, **should**, **may**, **might** and **must** were calculated. The corpus linguistic tools of AntConc 3.5.9 developed

by Lawrence Anthony (<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/AntConc>) were employed for the entire corpus. The complete transcript of the 2030 Agenda was uploaded to the concordance analyzer. Employing the statistical tools of AntConc 3.5.9, the researcher focused on concordance analysis of the modals, taking into account the key words in context and collocation. A *concordance* is a list of words from the corpus that can be analyzed in their context. *Collocate* is a word that appears in the context of a given search item. The collocate tool in AntConc 3.5.9 helps the analyzer in setting the span of words where collocates are searched, for example, '6L' to '6R' in relation to the search item. Settings for the present research were as follows:

- Search Term: Words only
- Search Window Size: 50
- Show Every Nth Row: 1
- KWIC Sort Level1: 1L
- KWIC Sort Level2: 1R
- KWIC Sort Level3: 2R

This resulted in a complete representation of the modal auxiliaries in the entire policy text. For the qualitative analysis of selected parts of the data, the modal auxiliaries have been grouped by the researcher into three categories with each of the categories having a group of modals sharing the same epistemic or deontic interpretation:

- The first category includes the modals **can**, **could**, **may** and **might** which usually carry the deontic interpretation of ability or permission and the epistemic interpretation of possibility.
- The second category includes the modals **must** and **should** which typically denote the deontic interpretation of obligation or the epistemic interpretation of necessity.

- The third category includes the modals **will**, **shall** and **would** which usually carry the deontic interpretation of volition and the epistemic interpretation of prediction. (Torres, 2021, p. 2)

Certain parts of the data were purposively selected for the analysis of the occurrences of each of the modal auxiliaries in terms of the words in context and collocates.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Quantitative Analysis of Modals in the 2030 Agenda

Table 1 below shows the frequency and distribution of modal verbs in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They

Table 1

Frequency of Modal Verbs in the 2030 Agenda

Modal	Can	Could	Shall	Should	Will	Would	May	Might	Must	Total
Frequency	15	1	7	14	123	1	1	0	9	171
Percentage	8.77%	0.58%	4.09%	8.18%	71.92%	0.58%	0.58%	0%	5.26%	

The modal auxiliary **will** is predominantly used in the policy text under study. It represents the highest frequency in the 2030 Agenda whereas all the other modal auxiliary verbs represent much lower frequency. In the following section, the nine modal auxiliaries are grouped by the researcher into three categories in relation to their discourse functions (see section 3.3); a qualitative analysis for each of the modal auxiliaries is provided.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis of Modals in the 2030 Agenda

The first category of modal auxiliary verbs includes four modals: **can**, **could**, **may** and **might**. Generally speaking, these four modals can have either a deontic

have a total of 171 occurrences. It is noticeable that there is a predominant use of three modal auxiliaries in the discourse under study: **will**, **can** and **should**. The highest frequency is represented by the modal auxiliary **will** which occurs 123 times representing 71.92%. Next are the modals **can** and **should** which are similar in their frequency: 15 times and 14 times representing 8.77% and 8.18% respectively. Third is the modal **must** which occurs 9 times representing 5.26%. Next is the modal **shall** which occurs 7 times representing 4.09%. Last are the modals **could**, **would** and **may** with each occurring only once representing 0.58%. The modal **might** has a zero occurrence in the policy text under investigation.

interpretation of ability/ permission or an epistemic interpretation of possibility. The total number of occurrences of these four modals is 17 times representing 9.94% only of the total percentage of the modal auxiliaries in the policy text under analysis.

The modal **can** occurs 15 times in the policy document representing 88.23% of the four modals in this category. Following are some illustrative examples:

- 1) We are determined to . . . ensure that all human beings **can** fulfil their potential in dignity and in a healthy environment (UN, 2015, p. 5)
- 2) We . . . recognize that all cultures and civilizations **can** contribute to . . .

sustainable development (UN, 2015, p. 13)

- 3) We **can** be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty (UN, 2015, p. 16).

In Excerpt 1, the nominal group that collocates with **can** is ‘all human beings’ and the verbal expression that collocates with the modal is ‘fulfil their potential in dignity and in a healthy environment’. In Excerpt 2, the nominal expression that collocates with **can** is ‘all cultures and civilizations’ and the verbal group that collocates with the modal is ‘contribute to . . . sustainable development’. In Excerpt 3, the nominal expression that collocates with **can** is the first-person plural

pronoun ‘we’ and the verbal group that collocates with the modal is ‘be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty’. The modal **can** carries a deontic meaning of ability in Excerpts 1, and 2 and an epistemic meaning of possibility in Excerpt 3 where it denotes a lesser degree of confidence by the text producers with regard to the capability of the current generation towards ending poverty than the degree expressed by the modal **will** or **shall**.

In order to identify the different contexts for the modal **can** in the discourse under study and the concepts they refer to, a concordance analysis has been conducted:

Figure 1

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal can

Concordance Hits 15	
Hit	KWIC
1	determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that
2	, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality
3	and recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of,
4	development. Regional and subregional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainab
5	nda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, can be met within the framework of a
6	nda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, can be met within the framework of a
7	ational parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes. Regional level 80
8	action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and
9	review at the regional and subregional levels can, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for
10	, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world free of
11	time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined b
12	are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and
13	the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Develop
14	to achieve their full human potential. We can be the first generation to succeed in
15	and of \x93winJwin\x94 cooperation which can bring huge gains to all countries and

The above screenshot shows the various contexts of the modal **can** in the discourse. Among the prominent nominal lexemes that represent concepts or participants to whom ability/ capacity is ascribed so that the world would be transformed are: ‘all human beings’, ‘life’, ‘regional and subregional frameworks’, ‘cultures and civilizations’, and ‘the Agenda including Sustainable Development Goals’. The concordance shows verbal expressions that reflect actions with positive effects for transforming our world. Some of these examples are ‘fulfil

their potential in dignity and equality’, ‘support the needs of the present and future generations’, ‘enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives’, ‘thrive’, ‘bring huge gains to all countries’, ‘facilitate . . . policies into concrete action’, ‘contribute to . . . sustainable development’ and ‘be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty’.

In contrast, the occurrence of **could** and **may** is much lower than **can**; each of these modal verbs occurs only once in the policy document as follows:

- 4) The high-level political forum. . . **could** provide a strong evidence-based instrument to support policymakers in promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development (UN, 2015, p. 39).
- 5) We **may** be the last one to have a chance in ending poverty” (UN, 2015, p.16).

In Excerpt 4, the modal **could** collocates with the nominal expression ‘the high-level political forum’ and the verbal collocate is ‘provide’ which is a transitive verb attracting the object ‘evidence-based instrument’. In Excerpt 5, the modal **may** collocates with the nominal expression first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ and the verbal expression ‘be the last one’. The two modals similarly carry an epistemic meaning of low possibility. Finally, the modal **might** has a zero occurrence in the policy text.

The close analysis of the first category of modals in the policy document reveals that the modal **can** has the highest frequency among the three modals included in this category. Depending on the surrounding context, the modal is interpreted as being either deontic denoting ability or epistemic denoting possibility. On the other hand, the frequency of **could** and **may** is much lower denoting an epistemic meaning of low possibility.

The second category of modal auxiliary verbs includes **must** and **should**. In general, these two modals can have either a deontic interpretation of obligation or an epistemic interpretation of necessity. The total number of occurrences of the modals **must** and **should** expressing necessity or obligations towards the achievement of certain actions for the transformation of the world is 23 times representing 13.45 % of the total percentage of the modal auxiliaries in the policy text under analysis. The modal **must** occurs 9 times representing 39.13% of the total number of modals in the second

category. Following are some illustrative examples:

- 6) Women and girls **must** enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys . . . at all levels (UN, 2015, p. 10).
- 7) . . . we **must** achieve universal health coverage and access to quality health care (UN, 2015, p. 11).
- 8) Governments, international organizations, the business sector and other non-State actors and individuals **must** contribute to changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns (UN, 2015, p. 12).

In Excerpt 6, the text producers use the modal auxiliary **must** in order to call the world for providing women and girls with the right for having quality education, financial resources and political participation in addition to opportunities for employment and leadership equally with men and boys. The nominal group that collocates with the modal is ‘women and girls’ and the verbal expression that collocates with the modal is ‘enjoy’ which is a transitive verb followed by a sequence of two noun phrases, each expressing all the rights and opportunities that must be provided to women and girls. The noun heads of these noun phrases are ‘access’ and ‘opportunities’ with each having the premodifier ‘equal’ as an adjective, and prepositional phrases as postmodifiers: ‘to quality education . . . political participation’ and ‘with men and women . . . at all levels’. This shows the use of deontic modality in the corpus since the modal **must** carries a deontic meaning of obligation. The text producers call for some collective action which is considered beneficial to the transformation agenda of women and girls in particular. The text producers expect that the agents would have access to a variety of opportunities and resources in addition to equal opportunities

with men in employment, leadership and decision-making. In Excerpt 7, the nominal collocate with the modal is the subject pronoun ‘we’ which denotes the inclusive meaning of the pronoun indicating reference to all member states and the verbal group that collocates with the modal is ‘achieve universal health coverage and access to quality health care’. The head of the verb phrase is ‘achieve’ which is a transitive verb attracting two objects: ‘universal health coverage’ and ‘access to quality health care’. The focus here is on providing health care to all society members. The modal **must** here carries an epistemic meaning of necessity. In Excerpt 8, the nominal group that collocates with **must** includes different agents: ‘governments’, ‘international organizations’, ‘the business sector’, ‘non-State actors and

individuals’ and the verbal collocate is ‘contribute to’ which is followed by a gerund form ‘changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns’. This target can be achieved through dedicating financial resources and technical assistance in order to improve the scientific and technological resources of developing countries and thus manage to obtain more sustainable consumption and production patterns. In general, the above excerpts highlight actions that the text producers consider essential for transforming the world.

In order to identify the different contexts for the modal **must** in the discourse under study and the concepts they refer to, a concordance analysis has been attempted:

Figure 2

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal **must**

Concordance Hits 9	
Hit	KWIC
1	ountries. We reiterate that debtors and creditors must work together to prevent and resolve unsustainabl
2	human rights and opportunities. Women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic
3	sector and other nonJState actors and individuals must contribute to changing unsustainable consumption
4	access to quality health care. No one must be left behind. We commit to accelerating
5	y eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. All people must enjoy a basic standard of living, including
6	country of citizenship, and recall that States must ensure that their returning nationals are duly
7	eJincome countries. 23. People who are vulnerable must be empowered . Those whose needs are reflected
8	to extend life expectancy for all, we must achieve universal health coverage and access to
9	flows, are addressed in the Agenda. We must redouble our efforts to resolve or prevent

The above screenshot reveals the contexts of the different instances of the modal **must** in the discourse. Among the prominent nominal lexemes that represent concepts or actors that are expected to behave in certain ways in order for the world to be transformed are: ‘women and girls’, ‘all people’, ‘we’, ‘governments’, ‘international organizations’, ‘the business sector’, ‘non-State actors and individuals’ which denote that collective effort is required for the positive transformation of the world. The concordance shows that the verbal collocates are transitive verbs: ‘enjoy’ occurring twice

followed by the objects ‘equal access’ and ‘a basic standard of living’, ‘redouble’ followed by the direct object ‘our efforts’, ‘achieve’ followed by the direct object ‘universal health coverage’. In addition, other verbal collocates are ‘ensure’ followed by a that-clause, ‘be empowered’ which is an intransitive verb and ‘left behind’ which is another intransitive verb. The verbal expressions reflect actions with positive effects for transforming our world.

Another modal that is significantly used in the discourse under study is **should**

which occurs 14 times representing 60.86% of the total percentage of modals in this category. Below are some instances:

- 9) All people . . . **should** have access to lifelong learning opportunities that help them to . . . participate fully in society (UN, 2015, p. 11).
- 10) Each government will also decide how aspirational goals and targets **should be** incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies (UN, 2015, p. 16).
- 11) The report **should** include a proposal on the organizational arrangements for State-led reviews at the high-level political forum (UN, 2015, p. 40)

In Excerpt 9, the nominal group that collocates with **should** is ‘all people’. Here, the text producers elaborate on the agent by incorporating people with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, children and youth for ensuring full participation in society. The verbal group that collocates with

the modal is ‘have access to lifelong learning opportunities’ that would help the agents previously mentioned to gain knowledge and acquire skills required for obtaining better opportunities. In Excerpt 10, the nominal expression that collocates with **should** is ‘aspirational goals and targets’ and the verbal group that collocates with the modal is ‘be incorporated’ followed by the prepositional phrase ‘into national planning processes, policies and strategies’. In Excerpt 11, the nominal group that collocates with **should** is ‘The report’ and the verbal expression that collocates with the modal is ‘include a proposal . . . forum’. In all the above occurrences, the modal **should** carries a deontic meaning of obligation as all the nominal expressions refer to extrinsic entities.

A concordance analysis has been attempted by the researcher in order to identify the various contexts for the modal **should** in the policy text under study and the concepts they refer:

Figure 3

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal should

Concordance Hits 14	
Hit	KWIC
1	the Agenda remains relevant and ambitious and should focus on the assessment of progress, achievements
2	sustained system. The relevant governing bodies should take action to review such support to
3	sustained, efforts to address ongoing challenges should be strengthened through the exchange of experienc
4	fugees and of displaced persons. Such cooperation should also strengthen the resilience of communities hos
5	ment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World
6	ions on voluntary common reporting guidelines. It should clarify institutional responsibilities and provid
7	rdination of sustainable development policies. It should ensure that the Agenda remains relevant and
8	nd information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible. We agree to
9	review at the global level. The report should include a proposal on the organizational arrangem
10	are country)led and country)driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, ci
11	youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life)long learning opportunities t
12	decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national 1 Contained in the
13	the progress report, the outcome of which should be reflected in the ministerial declaration of
14	d other intergovernmental bodies and forums which should reflect the integrated nature of the Goals

The above screenshot reveals the various contexts of the modal **should** in the discourse. Among the prominent nominal lexemes that represent concepts or actors that

are expected to behave in certain ways in order for the world to be transformed are: ‘the agenda’, ‘governing bodies’, ‘challenges’, ‘corporation’, ‘countries’, ‘mechanisms’,

‘reviews’, ‘report’, ‘situations’, ‘intergovernmental bodies and forums’. Among the verbal lexemes that collocate with the modal are ‘focus on’, ‘take action’, ‘strengthen’, ‘draw on’ and ‘be incorporated’, which denote that collective effort is needed for the positive transformation of the world.

The close analysis of the occurrences of the two modals has shown that the modal **should** carrying a deontic meaning of obligation is more frequent than the modal **must** which carries either a deontic meaning of obligation or an epistemic meaning of necessity.

The third category of modal auxiliary verbs includes **will**, **shall** and **would**. In general, these three modals can have either a deontic interpretation of volition or an epistemic interpretation of prediction. The total number of occurrences of these three modals is 131 times representing 76.61 % of the total percentage of modal auxiliaries in the text under analysis.

The text shows a marked and significant use of the modal **will**. This modal not only represents the highest frequency of occurrence not only in the 2030 Agenda (n=123) but also in this category (93.89%). Following are instances of the modal **will**:

- 12) All of us **will** work to implement the Agenda within our own countries and at the regional and global levels ... (UN, 2015, p.10).
- 13) Our journey **will** involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United

Nations . . . and all people (UN, 2015, p.16).

- 14) The goals and targets **will** be followed up and reviewed (UN, 2015, p. 37).

In Excerpt 12, the nominal group that collocates with **will** is ‘all of us’ and the verbal collocate is ‘work to implement the Agenda’. In Excerpt 13, the nominal expression that collocates with **will** is ‘governments and public institutions’ and the verbal group that collocates with the modal is ‘work closely on implementation’. In Excerpt 13, the nominal group that collocates with **will** is ‘our journey’ and the verb that collocates with the modal is the transitive verb ‘involve’ followed by a sequence of noun phrases which function as objects for the transitive verb: ‘governments as well as parliaments’, ‘the United Nations system and other international Institutions’, ‘local authorities’, ‘indigenous peoples’, ‘civil society’, ‘business and the private sector’, ‘the scientific and academic community’ and ‘all people’. In Excerpt 14, the nominal group that collocates with **will** is the noun phrase ‘the goals and targets’ and the verbal expression that collocates with the modal is ‘be followed and reviewed’. All the above occurrences in Excerpts 12 -14 carry a deontic meaning of volition.

In order to identify the different contexts for the modal **will** in the policy document under study and the concepts they refer to, a concordance analysis has been conducted:

Figure 4a

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

Concordance Hits 123	
Hit	KWIC
1	of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will
2	nited Nations entities and other stakeholders and will be composed of a United Nations inter)
3	men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform
4	will come into effect on 1 January 2016 and will guide the decisions we take over the
5	make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximize and track progress
6	and the development of new methodologies, and will minimize the reporting burden on national adminis
7	people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda
8	alities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities. As national
9	be cochaired by two Member States and will result in a summary of discussions elaborated
10	participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.
11	team will draw on existing resources and will work with 10 representatives from civil society,
12	under the auspices of the General Assembly will be held in 2019, with the cycle of
13	the people \x97 and this, we believe, will ensure its success. 53. The future of humanity
14	Assembly and the Economic and Social Council will have the central role in overseeing followJup
15	(a) They will be voluntary and countryJled, will take into account different national realities, c
16	ccessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement
17	Social Council forum on financing for development will be fed into the overall followJup and
18	he regional level. The highJlevel political forum will also be informed by the Global Sustainable
19	or conferences. The meetings of the forum will be coJchaired by two Member States and
20	Development Goals. The meetings of the forum will be convened by the President of the

Figure 4b

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

Concordance Hits 123	
Hit	KWIC
21	95 The meetings of the highJlevel political forum will be informed by the summary of the
22	and review at the highJlevel political forum will be informed by an annual progress report
23	Global level 82. The highJlevel political forum will have a central role in overseeing a
24	in their area of expertise. The forum will provide a venue for facilitating interaction, mat
25	General Assembly, the highJlevel political forum will provide highJlevel political guidance on the Agen
26	s appropriate. 89. The highJlevel political forum will support participation in followJup and review pro
27	, in line with existing mandates. This framework will be simple yet robust, address all Sustainable
28	ent and integrated followJup and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and
29	rted by integrated national financing frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts.
30	scrimination and violence against women and girls will be eliminated, including through the engagement o
31	and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across
32	innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will be considered by the highJlevel political forum
33	innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will be convened once a year, for a
34	innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will promote coordination, coherence and cooperation w
35	o account national circumstances. Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global
36	Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, will be agreed by the Statistical Commission by
37	commitments. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional
38	Public finance, both domestic and international, will play a vital role in providing essential
39	velopment Goals, including crossJ cutting issues, will also take place at the highJlevel political
40	mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure

Figure 4c

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

Concordance Hits 123	
Hit	KWIC
41	Nations, in order to ensure that it will complement, facilitate access to and provide adeq
42	and with people in vulnerable situations. It will facilitate an intensive global engagement in supp
43	forums, in accordance with existing mandates. It will facilitate sharing of experiences, including succ
44	the Economic and Social Council and it will initially be composed of the entities that
45	of best practices and mutual learning. It will mobilize support to overcome shared challenges an
46	the national, regional and global levels, it will promote accountability to our citizens, support e
47	, guidance and recommendations for followJ up. It will promote systemJwide coherence and coordination of
48	today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the
49	74. FollowJup and review processes at all levels will be guided by the following principles: (a)
50	as new and emerging issues. Effective linkages will be made with the followJup and review
51	ment Goals. The Technology Facilitation Mechanism will be based on a multiJstakeholder collaboration bet
52	mutual trust and understanding among all nations will be important. 74. FollowJup and review processes
53	collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. The 17 Sustainable Developme
54	collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity
55	plementation. The revitalized Global Partnership will facilitate an intensive global engagement in supp
56	takeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to
57	. We fully commit to this. This Partnership will work in a spirit of global solidarity,
58	ion initiatives and policies. The online platform will also facilitate the dissemination of relevant ope
59	ications generated worldwide. The online platform will be developed on the basis of an
60	the World Bank. \x95 The online platform will be used to establish a comprehensive mapping

Figure 4d

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

Concordance Hits 123	
Hit	KWIC
61	beyond the United Nations. The online platform will facilitate access to information, knowledge and e
62	ment, the outcome from nationalJ level processes will be the foundation for reviews at the
63	s and organizations. Inclusive regional processes will draw on nationalJlevel reviews and contribute to
64	iew institutions and mechanisms. National reports will allow assessments of progress and identify challe
65	m and the online platform. The 10 representatives will be appointed by the SecretaryJGeneral, for period
66	global levels, given that the global review will be primarily based on national official data
67	assembly resolution 67/290 of 9 July 2013. Reviews will be voluntary, while encouraging reporting, and in
68	peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development. The
69	tilateral institutions. 75. The Goals and targets will be followed up and reviewed using a
70	is crucial. 21. The new Goals and targets will come into effect on 1 January 2016 and will
71	ial and environmental. The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in
72	periods of two years. The task team will be open to the participation of all
73	nce capacityJ building initiatives. The task team will draw on existing resources and will work
74	using a set of global indicators. These will be complemented by indicators at the regional
75	place at the highJlevel political forum. These will be supported by reviews by the functional
76	Goals and targets. We recognize that these will include the mobilization of financial resources a
77	e international development system. (d) They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent
78	rting by all relevant stakeholders. (e) They will be peopleJcentred, genderJsensitive, respect huma
79	burden on national administrations. (g) They will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed
80	guided by the following principles: (a) They will be voluntary and countryJled. will take into

Figure 4e

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

Concordance Hits 123	
Hit	KWIC
81	ntries and middle-income countries. (i) They will benefit from the active support of the
82	nerable and those furthest behind. (f) They will build on existing platforms and processes, where
83	well as the interlinkages between them. They will engage all relevant stakeholders and, where possi
84	umstances, capacities, needs and priorities. They will evolve over time, taking into account emerging
85	countries in making informed policy choices. They will help to mobilize the necessary means of
86	with regional dialogues and global reviews, they will inform recommendations for follow-up at various l
87	ensions of sustainable development. (c) They will maintain a longer-term orientation, identify achi
88	tics relevant in national contexts. (h) They will require enhanced capacity-building support for de
89	on national official data sources. (b) They will track progress in implementing the universal Goal
90	economic growth is essential for prosperity. This will only be possible if wealth is shared
91	over the next 15 years. All of us will work to implement the Agenda within our
92	, including through structural transformation. We will adopt policies which increase productive capaci
93	97 in a balanced and integrated manner. We will also build upon the achievements of the
94	cities on the global climate system. We will also take account of population trends and
95	to the promotion of sustainable development. We will continue to promote a universal, rules-based, ope
96	requires coherent and comprehensive responses. We will cooperate internationally to ensure safe, orderly
97	Nutrition and the Framework for Action. We will devote resources to developing rural areas and
98	ational, national, regional and global levels. We will draw as far as possible on the
99	for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. 5.
100	or family planning, information and education. We will equally accelerate the pace of progress made

Figure 4f

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

Concordance Hits 123	
Hit	KWIC
101	particular, and decent work for all. We will eradicate forced labour and human trafficking and
102	to solving sustainable development challenges. We will foster a dynamic and well-functioning business se
103	alth, natural resources and economic activity. We will implement the Agenda for the full benefit
104	this new Agenda. We recognize that we will not be able to achieve our ambitious
105	lity, timely, reliable and disaggregated data. We will promote transparent and accountable scaling-up of
106	. To support accountability to our citizens, we will provide for systematic follow-up and review at
107	and to stimulate innovation and employment. We will reduce the negative impacts of urban activities
108	velopment strategies cannot be overemphasized. We will respect each country's policy space
109	d respecting national policies and priorities. We will respect national policy space for sustained, incl
110	major challenge for sustainable development. 27. We will seek to build strong economic foundations for
111	work and full participation in society. We will strengthen the productive capacities of least dev
112	and to participate fully in society. We will strive to provide children and youth with
113	integration and ambition contained therein. 76. We will support developing countries, particularly Africa
114	a country's debt sustainability. We will support the maintenance of debt sustainability of
115	leadership and decision-making at all levels. We will work for a significant increase in investments
116	shared and income inequality is addressed. We will work to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative an
117	use of water and energy. And we will work to minimize the impact of cities
118	quality of life of our people. We will work with local authorities and communities to
119	at the regional and national levels which will be developed by Member States, in addition
120	basis of an independent technical assessment which will take into account best practices and lessons

Figure 4g

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal will

121	of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations. We
122	chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we
123	will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better. Declaration Intr

The above screenshots reveal the various contexts of the modal will in the

discourse. Among the prominent nominal lexemes that collocate with the modal will is

the first-person pronoun ‘we’ which occurs 27 times representing a frequency of 32.53% of the nominal groups that collocate with the modal **will**; other similar expressions are ‘all of us’ and ‘all countries and all stakeholders’. The analysis further reveals other nominal expressions such as ‘goals and targets’, ‘online forum’, ‘journey’, etc. The concordance shows verbal expressions that reflect actions with positive effects for transforming our world: ‘strengthen’, ‘facilitate’, ‘work’, ‘mobilize’, ‘promote’, ‘continue’, ‘maintain’, ‘cooperate’ and ‘devote’. Some of the verbs in these verbal expressions are having passive forms (n=23) such as ‘**will** be developed’, ‘**will** be transformed’ and the majority are active ones (n=100); however, some instances of **will** are followed by verb to be + adjective; e.g., ‘**will** be open’. In all instances, the modal **will** has a positive verb form except in one instance where the form is negated to denote an action which the discourse participants believe it will not be achieved unless a certain condition occurs in “We **will not** be able to achieve our ambitious goals and targets without . . . Global partnership” (UN, 2015, p. 32). The modal auxiliary also expresses a strong sense of volition of certain future actions by the discourse participants. Illustrative examples are: ‘All countries and stakeholders **will** implement the Agenda’, ‘The goals and targets **will** stimulate action over the next 15 years’, ‘We **will** strive to build strong economic foundations for all countries’, and ‘We **will** foster a dynamic and well-functioning business sector’.

In other instances, the modal **will** conveys a sense of validity and predictability where the discourse participants express an extremely high degree of confidence in the propositions they put forward. Illustrative examples are: ‘No one **will** be left behind’, ‘The lives of all **will** be profoundly improved’, ‘The world **will** be a better place by 2030’, ‘All forms of discrimination and

violence **will** be eliminated’, and ‘Peace and security **will** be at risk without sustainable development’. In general, the high frequency of **will** compared to other modals is indexical of the high intensity of feelings by the discourse participants towards the transformation of the world through achieving the 2030 Agenda goals and targets. An examination of the various contexts of the modal auxiliary **will** reveals all the various directions where transformation of the world is expected to occur: finance, business, migration, resources, violence and discrimination, etc. The modal **will** with the highest level of intensity indexes a strong degree of certainty on the part of the text producers regarding the implementation of certain positive actions that would contribute to the transformation of societies and individuals. It denotes validity where the discourse participants express a great degree of confidence in the truth of a certain proposition in the ideational content and predictability on the part of the discourse producers regarding the future events that are likely to happen.

In contrast, the modal **shall** occurs 7 times only representing 5.34% of the percentage of modal auxiliaries in this category. Following are some illustrative examples:

- 15) We **shall** accord them equal priority in our implementation (UN, 2015, p.12)
- 16) The high-level political forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, **shall** carry out regular reviews . . . (UN, 2015, p. 30).

In Excerpt 15, the nominal group that collocates with **shall** is the first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ and the verbal expression that collocates with the modal is ‘accord them equal priority’. In Excerpt 16, the nominal expression that collocates with **shall** is ‘the high-level political forum’ and the verbal group that collocates with the modal is ‘carry

out regular review’. In these illustrative examples, the modal **shall** carries a deontic meaning of volition similarly expressed via the modal **will**.

A concordance analysis has been attempted in order to identify various contexts for the modal **shall** in the policy text under investigation and the concepts they refer to:

Figure 5

Keyword in Context (KWIC) for the modal shall

Concordance Hits 7	
Hit	KWIC
1	. We reaffirm that every State has, and shall freely exercise, full permanent sovereignty over
2	auspices of the Economic and Social Council, shall carry out regular reviews, in line with
3	under the Convention applicable to all parties shall address in a balanced manner, inter alia,
4	civil society and the private sector. They shall be State-led, involving ministerial and other rel
5	and other relevant high-level participants. They shall provide a platform for partnerships, including th
6	with the other Goals and targets. We shall accord them equal priority in our implementation
7	the Global Sustainable Development Report, which shall strengthen the science-policy interface and could

The above screenshot shows the various contexts of the modal **shall** in the discourse. The analysis of the concordance reveals a variety of nominal expressions that serve as collocates: ‘every state’, ‘the protocol’, ‘we’, ‘high-level political forum’ with each occurring once as a nominal collocate in addition to ‘they’ as a third-person plural pronoun referring to reviews. The verbal expressions that collocate with the modal shall are ‘exercise’, ‘carry out’, ‘address’, ‘be state-led’, ‘provide’, ‘accord’ and ‘strengthen’.

Finally, the modal **would** has the lowest frequency in the discourse under analysis since it occurs only once:

17) We intend that the Agenda and its implementation **would** support . . . other processes and the decisions taken therein (UN, 2015, p. 17).

The nominal expression that collocates with the modal **would** is the noun phrase ‘the Agenda and its implementation’ which acts as the subject for the that-clause and the verbal collocate is the verb ‘support’ which is a transitive verb attracting the object ‘those other processes and the decisions taken therein’. The modal **would**

carries a deontic interpretation of volition.

With regard to the third category of modal auxiliaries, the modal **will** represents the highest frequency. In total, the occurrences of the three modals, which amount to 76.60% of the total percentage of modals in the policy text, represent the highest category of modals among the three specified categories. The three of them invariably denote either a deontic meaning of volition or an epistemic interpretation of validity and predictability which indicates the strong conviction of the text producers of the issues included in the ideational content of the policy text. In terms of the scale of permissiveness, they are highly restrictive.

4. Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the distribution and frequency of modal auxiliaries in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a policy text?

The quantitative analysis of the 2030 Agenda identified the modal auxiliaries that helped to communicate certain interpersonal meanings by the text producers and, more particularly, reflecting their commitment towards the outputs displayed in the text. The

key finding is that the modal auxiliary **will** with its meaning of high intensity represents the most predominantly used type in the policy text under study; it occurs 123 times of out of a total of 171 occurrences of modals in the 2030 Agenda discourse representing 71.92%. Therefore, it has the highest frequency not only within the third category of modal auxiliaries including **will, shall** and **would** but also across all the nine modal auxiliaries. The modal auxiliaries **can** and **should** have similar frequencies of occurrences: 15 times and 14 times representing 8.77% and 8.18%; thus, they occupy the second position. Third is the modal **must** which occurs 9 times representing 5.26% and fourth is the modal **shall** which occurs 7 times representing 4.09%. Last are the modals **may, could** and **would** with each occurring only once representing 0.58% in the policy text under analysis. The modal **might** with its meaning of low intensity has a zero occurrence in the policy text.

Research Question 2: What interpersonal meanings and strategic functions do these modal markers communicate?

The critical analysis of modal auxiliaries in the 2030 Agenda was made with respect to the context in which the modal auxiliary verbs are used and the functions they are made to perform. The analysis was based on the grouping of the modal auxiliaries into three categories depending on the common characteristics they share. Findings of the study reveal a number of major functions of modal auxiliaries can be identified: ability and possibility expressed by the modal auxiliary **can, could** and **may**; obligation and necessity expressed by the modals **must** and **should**; and volition and prediction expressed by the modal auxiliary **will, shall** and **would**. The first category of modal auxiliary including **can, could, may** and **might**, which have either a deontic interpretation of ability/ permission or an

epistemic interpretation of possibility, represents 9.94% only of the total percentage of the modal auxiliaries in the policy text under analysis with the modal **can** having the highest frequency among the modals in this category and is interpreted as being either deontic denoting ability or epistemic denoting possibility. On the other hand, the frequency of **could** and **may** is much lower denoting an epistemic meaning of low possibility. The second category including the modals **must** and **should**, which typically denote the deontic interpretation of obligation or the epistemic interpretation of necessity or obligations towards the achievement of certain actions for the transformation of the world, represents 13.45 % of the total percentage of the modal auxiliaries in the policy text. The third category including the modals **will, shall** and **would**, which usually carry the deontic interpretation of volition and the epistemic interpretation of prediction, represents 76.61 % of the total percentage of modal auxiliaries in the text under analysis. The research findings have revealed that modal auxiliaries expressing necessity and obligation such as **should** or **must**, or modals expressing high intensity such as **will** are more commonly used than other modals like **may** and **could** with low intensity.

The research findings illuminate the polysemous nature of modal auxiliaries. For instance, though there is a marked use of the modal auxiliary **will** in the 2030 Agenda, there is variation in its discourse function. It is used with a deontic sense in expressing volition and it also carries an epistemic meaning of validity and predictability conveying strong convictions by the text producers. The striking use of the modal **will** with its high intensity reflects the strong commitment of the text producers towards the locutions and propositions included in the 2030 Agenda compared to modals with low intensity such as **may, might** and **could**

which rarely occur in the discourse under study.

A close examination of modal auxiliaries in the policy text under study contributes to providing new linguistic and political perspectives into our understanding of modal markers. The analysis reveals the unprecedented commitment and dynamism of the policy producers towards achieving a comprehensive plan including certain actions for transforming the world into more peaceful and fairer societies. The concordance analysis of the modal auxiliaries showed the different contexts for each of the modal auxiliaries and the concepts they refer to. The nominal and verbal collocates were identified. The nominal expressions showed a wide range of different stakeholders who the policy makers address: local authorities, national parliaments, major groups and indigenous people, etc. in order to support the actual implementation of the actions in the policy. The verbal expressions revealed a variety of positive actions that would help in transforming the world; for example, creating peaceful and just societies and tackling climate change that would lead to achieving more sustainable consumption and production patterns are among the cornerstones in the 2030.

Since language serves as a tool of communication and expression of thoughts and ideologies, modals as linguistic expressions and as CDA strategies are indexical of the attitudes of the text producers towards the ideas expressed in the policy text. Modal markers serve as instruments for the implementation of positive actions for the transformation of the world. The dominant use of modals expressing either obligation or strong beliefs and convictions reflect the power and authority of the policy producers who have certain future expectations regarding moving the whole world towards a more sustainable world at all levels by 2030. Adopting a CDA approach contributed

towards examining the context of the modal verbs and the relevant social practices which, in turn, helped the researcher to identify the discourse functions of the modals in this particular discourse. Additionally, adopting a corpus-assisted approach helped the researcher to unravel the linguistic expressions under investigation in the study in an unbiased manner and to identify collocates and words in context.

The present study might contribute to the small body of existing literature on the role of modality in policy texts. The findings of the study confirm those of related previous studies (Ademilokun, 2019; Yunisda & Firmansyah, 2019; Aning, 2020; Torres, 2021) with regard to the significant role modal resources play in conveying the ideologies of the text producers towards the gravity of the issues in the policy text. However, this study is different from previous studies since it focuses on written discourse and, specifically, on policy discourse adopting a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis approach.

5. Concluding Remarks

Motivated by the scanty research on analyzing the role of modals in policy documents, the researcher has investigated the frequency and the discourse functions of the modal resources deployed in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development representing an example of policy documents. The corpus comprised the full transcript of the 2030 Agenda where both quantitative and qualitative analysis were conducted. A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis approach was adopted: Fairclough's three-dimensional model in combination with the software AntConc 3.5.9 were used for a critical analysis of modals in the 2030 Agenda. An in-depth analysis of modal verbs in the policy text divulges that the discourse participants use the modal marks to highlight their commitment to the

various aspects and issues they are concerned with in relation to the transformation of the whole world into a sustainable world.

The current research provides readers and researchers with useful insights into the various roles and functions of modal resources in policy texts. To the researcher's own knowledge, the analysis probes a genre

that has not been thoroughly explored with regard to the discourse functions of modal verbs which might open the door for further research directed towards the usage of other modal markers in policy texts. Future research can further examine the interactive relationship between modal markers and concepts such as power, ideology and manipulation in policy documents.

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