

An Analysis Of Modal Ability Used in At My Worst Song

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Abstract

The song At My Worst by Pink Sweats carries a deep emotional message about interpersonal relationships, and one of the key elements in the song's lyrics is the use of modal verbs to convey emotional and interpersonal abilities. This study aims to analyze the use of modal verbs can, could, and be able to in the song, as well as to explore the meanings contained within them. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach, analyzing the song's lyrics as the subject of research. The instrument used is a text analysis to identify modal verbs that indicate ability, and data collection was carried out through documentation of the song's lyrics taken from accessible online sources. The results of the study show that the use of modal ability in this song does not only refer to physical abilities or skills, but also encompasses emotional abilities such as empathy, emotional management, and navigating loving relationships in imperfect conditions. Modal verbs can and could are frequently used to express hope and requests in interpersonal relationships, while be able to is less commonly used but still indicates potential or ability in an emotional context. This study contributes to the understanding of the role of modal ability in song lyrics and how these modal verbs are used to depict emotional dynamics and interpersonal relationships in contemporary music.

Keywords: *Analysis; Modal Ability; At My Worst Song*

Introduction

To enhance the standard of education in Indonesia, it's essential to adopt innovative methods for comprehending subjects deeply and finding suitable learning models. The optimize comprehension across all subjects, it's crucial to pursue a thorough understanding of methodologies tailored to our needs (Harahap & Rangkuti, 2020). Regarding English proficiency, it serves as a tool for communication, necessitating not just comprehension of textual meaning but also mastery of sentence expression and language nuances, given the diverse ways meanings can be conveyed (Kholili, 2023).

English songs currently reign supreme on the global music charts, largely due to their widespread acceptance and enjoyment among music enthusiasts worldwide (Ross & Ma, 2021). The prevalence of English-language music has become ingrained in the habits of listeners, particularly the younger demographic, who are often influenced by social trends propagated through social media platforms (Ira, 2015). Listening to music has evolved into a habitual pastime and a cherished hobby among young individuals, who often find solace in songs that resonate with their emotions (Sabban, 2024).

Acquiring a new language can pose challenges and demand considerable time. Yet, employing appropriate strategies can make it both enjoyable and efficient (Jameson, 2023). One such approach is incorporating songs, which are known as engaging tools for language learning. The repetitive and catchy lyrics of songs facilitate the memorization of new vocabulary and phrases, making the process more effective. It's a common understanding that songs hold a significant place in human life, often intertwined with various activities (Triyono et al., 2022). People typically find solace in songs due to their compelling lyrics, enchanting melodies, and profound meanings that resonate with listeners' emotions. Essentially, a song is a musical composition comprising both lyrics and melody, crafted and performed by a singer (Risaldi et al., 2021).

The enjoyable approach to learning English is by listening to songs in the language. There are various genres of songs, such as jazz, reggae, and pop, each offering diverse functions and benefits, including fostering creativity (Cunandar, 2019). The songs can serve educational and informational purposes. Furthermore, songs entertain listeners and can effectively influence students' emotional responses. Students may perceive listening to music in class not as a learning activity but rather as a form of leisure or relaxation, thus positively impacting their emotional state (Apriyeni et al., 2023).

Studying English songs provides distinct benefits, notably in refining students' critical thinking abilities. Songs naturally carry messages crafted by their composers, thus demanding critical analysis for comprehension (Syafiqurrahman & Hosnan, 2019). The certain song meanings extend beyond literal lyrics, urging students to explore the deeper messages intended by the songwriter and encouraging them to think beyond the surface level of the written words (Arum & Desstya, 2021). The song is a basic song/melody, also meaning a piece of music to be sung or played with certain patterns and shapes (Hadi, 2019). Therefore, a song can also be interpreted as a musical composition adapted for songs that have verses rhythmic and has lyrics. The lyrics merge to express emotions, narrate tales, or convey thought. Songs encompass diverse styles, genres, and arrangements, serving as vital elements in numerous cultures for entertain, communication, and cultural representation (Pyrovolakis et al., 2022). The song is a part of music that contains words intended to be sung with a certain tone, pattern or form.

Songs can also be an effective learning method for student development. The learning method through songs has become a material research for some people who have tried it in the activity study mainly to learn the language (Cheng & Lam, 2021). "Like a study that examines loving children music and who can sing with regular rhymes tends to have an easier time learning to speak and they also become more creative and confident" (Harahap et al., 2023). Singing can provide happiness and emotional satisfaction for children, which in turn can boost their motivation to be more enthusiastic in learning (Joyful Learning). Through this activity, children can also quickly master songs as well as the material taught by educators. Additionally, this activity helps in developing children's listening skills, singing, and creativity (Aisyah, 2019). This matter, it should be a concern for educators that, music or songs in general in particular, it has a very good impact for educators to use in teaching their students.

Based on much research conducted, it is known that songs can touch 3 domains of students' education, namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor children. If the impact resulting from this method very good, educators should not hesitate to do so use this method as one of the methods in activities learning. The stated that "Music learning at an early age will help to form a strong foundation at an early age child." Learning children's songs created by combining elements of entertainment and education, so can be used as a teaching medium in the classroom. Music is not only important in cognitive education, music is too very important in affective education. Through participation in music, not only the attitude of the song is reflected, but the attitude, the feelings and emotions of the participants also change or in other words. Songs can influence a person's attitudes, feelings and emotions listen to songs.

Modal verbs are linguistic tools used to evaluate the likelihood or necessity of human actions. They indicate the necessity, possibility, or certainty of these actions. The feasibility of an action depends on a range of subjective and objective factors. Merely having the desire or intention to act is not always sufficient for the action to be possible. The auxiliary verb could be modals auxiliary verbs and primary verbs or sometimes called as semi auxiliary that verbs is one of class of the world. Modal verbs (modals) are verbs that convey logical possibilities, abilities, necessities, and permissions, with varying degrees of strength. They precede infinitive verbs and typically do not require "to" before the verb. Unlike regular verbs, modals do not change based on the subject's number, so there is no need for an "-s" or "-es" ending. They commonly appear in sentences predicting future possibilities, describing abilities, offering advice, making requests, or seeking permission. English makes use of modal verbs (a type of auxiliary verb) to express attitude or perspective. Modal verbs are used in a number of ways: (1) Modal verbs for **ability** - *can, could*, (2) Modal verbs for **possibility** - *may, could, can, might*, (3) Modal verbs for **obligation** - *should, must, have to, cannot*, and (4) Modal verbs for **necessity** - *need, must*

Modal verbs of ability describe a person's ability to perform an action. These verbs are used in various tenses, including present, past, and future, with meanings that can differ depending on their form. These modal verbs are used to express the potential or possibility someone has to carry out an activity. Some examples of these modal verbs are can, could, and be able to. For instance, in terms of ability: Pigeons have an extraordinary ability; they can recognize themselves in mirrors. The editor was able to edit 70 pages in two days. In the first sentence, the modal "can" is used, followed by the verb "recognize," indicating that the writer believes pigeons can recognize themselves in mirrors. In the second sentence, "could" is used before the verb "edit," indicating a lower level of certainty that the editor has the ability to edit "70 pages in two days."

Modal verbs of ability are expressions used to indicate the capacity or possibility of completing something. These modal verbs are typically followed by the main verb in a sentence and provide more detailed information than regular adjectives. Some commonly used modal verbs of ability include can, could, be able to, may, and might. Can is commonly used to show present abilities or to ask for permission, while could serves as the past tense form of can.

The contrary, be able to can indicate both current and past abilities depending on the context. These modal verbs of ability enrich our communication by conveying nuances beyond literal meanings, enabling us to subtly emphasize specific ideas during conversations. This study offers a new approach in analyzing the use of modal verbs for ability in English songs, specifically through the lyrics of “At My Worst” by Pink Sweat\$. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on analyzing modal verbs in academic or everyday conversational contexts, this research links the use of modal verbs in song lyrics with the emotional impact and deeper interpretation generated from the musical context.

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary analysis between linguistics and music, examining how the emotional nuances and meanings embedded in the song can influence the understanding of modal verbs within it. Through the lyrics of “At My Worst”, this study identifies how modal verbs such as “can”, “could”, and “be able to” function not only to convey ability but also to depict emotional vulnerability, hope, and dependency in interpersonal relationships. This research places greater emphasis on the emotional impact of modal verbs in songs, an aspect often overlooked in conventional linguistic studies.

The combining linguistic analysis of modal verbs with musical analysis, this study aims to provide new insights into how musical elements and lyrics work together to convey more complex messages to listeners. This research introduces a deeper understanding of how modal verbs in songs can influence listeners' perceptions of human ability and limitations within the context of personal and social relationships, an approach that has not been extensively explored in previous research. This study also offers an analysis method based on semiotic studies, linking linguistic understanding with cultural interpretation, providing a new contribution to how we understand the role of modal verbs in shaping emotional communication in English songs.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the use of modal verbs of ability in the song At My Worst by Pink Sweats. This approach was chosen as it aligns with the research objectives, which aim to describe in detail the use of modal verbs in the context of the song lyrics and explore the meanings contained within them. This type of research is categorized as descriptive qualitative, where the data obtained is in the form of song lyrics that are analyzed to identify and examine the function and meaning of modal ability expressed in the lyrics. The descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to present deeper findings regarding how modal verbs are used in a broader context, such as the expression of emotions and relationship dynamics in the song lyrics.

The subject of this study is the lyrics of At My Worst, chosen by the researcher because the lyrics contain many expressions that use modal verbs to describe ability and vulnerability in interpersonal relationships. This song is viewed as a representation of a relationship filled with love and openness, where modal verbs such as can, could, and be able to are used to express various possibilities, hopes, and dependencies between two individuals. The

researcher focuses on how these modal verbs not only convey meaning related to ability but also create deep emotional nuances about vulnerability and the desire for mutual acceptance in a relationship.

The primary instrument used in this study is text analysis of the song lyrics. The researcher analyzes words and phrases that contain modal verbs, paying attention to the sentence context to understand the deeper meaning. This analysis involves identifying modal verbs that function to convey ability or possibility, and how the choice of these words influences the portrayal of characters and mood in the song. The study also examines how the use of modal verbs relates to the emotional elements expressed in the song's lyrics, which play a key role in establishing an emotional connection with the listeners.

Data collection techniques were carried out through several systematic steps. The first step is identifying the lyrics of At My Worst that contain modal verbs of ability. These song lyrics were obtained from online sources accessible through social networks and websites that provide the text of the song. The researcher analyzes the use of modal verbs by examining the sentence context and the intended meaning conveyed, both in lexical and contextual aspects. This step allows the researcher to identify how modal verbs are used to enrich the meaning of the lyrics and how this connects with the overarching theme of the song, which is love and unconditional acceptance.

The documentary method was employed in this study to gather and record the lyrics data, which was then analyzed in depth. Through this approach, the researcher can delve deeper into the influence of modal verbs on the understanding of emotions and relationship dynamics portrayed in the song. This study aims to provide new insights into the role of modal verbs in emotional communication within music works, as well as how this affects listeners' perceptions of the themes presented in the song by linking linguistic analysis and the emotional context of the song.

Results

Songs are often seen as a way for the songwriter to express their life experiences. "At My Worst" is a song about love, specifically loving someone even when we are at our worst. Imperfections are something everyone has, including ourselves. We found that the message of this song is relevant not only in romantic relationships but also in family and friendship contexts, which makes its meaning more versatile. Pink Sweat\$ is an American singer and songwriter known for his R&B music genre. He debuted in the music industry in 2018 and continues to be active today. His song "Honesty," released in 2018, received a platinum certification from the RIAA. Songs like "17" and "At My Worst" have gained more than 100 million fans who have downloaded them on the Spotify US digital platform. This research aims to explore how the simplicity of the lyrics carries multiple meanings and attracts music fans to listen. The song at my worst by Pink Sweat\$ is an interesting song to analyze in terms of the use of modal "ability". The modal "ability" in English is used to express someone's ability or expertise in doing something. In the lyrics of this song, the use of the modal "ability" does not

always have to mean literally expressing physical ability or skill, but can also refer to emotional or interpersonal abilities. We need to know that ability does not only focus on modal marked *can*, *could*, *be able to* which is based on real action but rather ability in all things. The recognizing, managing, understanding, empathizing with existing emotions, we can build or maintain our relationships or those of others. This includes emotional development as well as deepening academic knowledge, namely modal of ability, which we will discuss.

"Can I call you Baby?." the modal "*can*" is used here to ask for the ability or permission to call someone "*baby*". The expresses a request or desire to do something. "Can you be my friend?." The modal "*can*" is used to ask about the possibility or potential of someone becoming a friend. The expresses a hope or request for the possibility that the other person can become a friend. "Can you be my lover until the very end?." The modal "*can*" is used to ask about someone's ability or potential to be a true lover or partner until the end of life. The expresses a hope or request for a person's willingness to fulfill this role in his life. The context of these lyrics, the use of "*can*" expresses a request or hope for another person's ability or potential to do something (become a friend or lover). This suggests that the songwriter is seeking approval or willingness from the person he is talking to to fulfill a certain role in his life. "Let me show you love, oh, I don't pretend." The statement "*let me show you love*" uses the imperative form "*let me*", which does not directly use modal ability. However, it implies the ability or willingness to show love to someone. The "*oh, I don't pretend*" part shows firmness or honesty in actions to show love, without any pretension or pretense.

"Stick by my side even when the world is givin' in, yeah." The expression "*stick by my side*" uses the imperative form "*stick*", which also does not directly use modal ability. However, it implies a hope or request for someone to stay by your side. The phrase "*even when the world is giving in*" indicates a difficult or bad external situation or condition ("*when the world is giving in*"), where the ability or willingness to stay with someone by their side becomes important. The lyrics also use modal ability to express ability or willingness in different contexts. In the context of this lyric, although there is no direct use of modal ability such as "*can*" or "*could*", the essence of the ability or willingness to do or endure is expressed through the imperative form and the context of the sentence. This shows that the singer is expressing a hope or request towards an action or presence that remains by their side in a difficult situation

"I'll be there, whenever you want me." I'll be there This expression expresses a commitment or promise to attend or support someone. The use of "*I'll*" is a contraction of "*I will*", which directly implies the ability or willingness to do something in the future. *whenever you want me* This phrase adds a time dimension or condition when the action will be carried out. The use of "*whenever*" indicates flexibility of time, while "*you want me*" emphasizes that the action is carried out according to the wishes or requests of others. These lyrics describe a person's ability or willingness to support or be present when needed, without rigid conditions or time limits. "I need someone who can love me at my worst." The use of "*can*" here indicates that the songwriter is looking for someone who has the ability or willingness to love him even at my worst ("*at my worst*"). The describes the hope for support and acceptance

that is independent of difficult conditions or situations. "No, I'm not perfect, but I hope you see my worth." This expression does not use modal of ability directly, but expresses a hope or request for recognition of one's worth even though one is not perfect. This highlights the desire to be accepted for who you are.

"Cause it's only you, nobody new, I put you first." This statement does not use modal of ability, but shows a commitment to prioritize the person in question. This shows a willingness to put others before oneself. Cause its only you, This expression does not use modal ability directly, but shows exclusivity in feelings or relationships. This emphasizes that only certain , people (in this context, "you") are important or meaningful to the songwriter. Nobody new, Even though it does not use modal ability, this phrase emphasizes that there is no new or other person who will replace the position of the person being addressed. I put you first, This expression uses the modal "put" to express a deliberate action or decision to put the person in question first in life or in priority. Although it does not directly use modal ability such as "can" or "will", it implies a willingness or ability to give priority to the person one loves.

"And for you, girl, I swear I'll do the worst." The phrase "I swear I'll do the worst" uses the modal "will" to express a strong promise or commitment to do difficult or bad things for the person he loves. This shows a willingness to act in difficult or uncomfortable ways for the sake of one's loved ones. "If you stay forever, let me hold your hand." This statement does not use modal of ability directly, but implicitly shows a hope or request for someone to stay by the author's side ("If you stay forever"). The phrase "let me hold your hand" indicates a willingness to provide support, comfort, and physical presence. In this context, although there is no direct use of modals such as "can" or "will", these lyrics express the hope or desire to get the opportunity to perform the action (holding hands) if the expressed terms or conditions (staying together forever) are met. The shows a willingness and desire to be on the other side of a long-term relationship, adding an emotional dimension to the expression of feelings of love and commitment.

"I can fill those places in your heart no one else can." The use of "can" here expresses the belief that the songwriter has the ability or potential to fill places in other people's hearts that no one else can fill ("no one else can"). The emphasizes the unique or special feeling of the relationship they share. "I'll be right here, you know I'll sink or swim." I'll be right here, This expression uses the contraction form of "I will" (I'll) to express a promise or commitment that someone will stay by the other side. You know I'll sink or swim, The expression "sink or swim" is an idiom used to express that a person will do whatever is necessary, whether they succeed or fail. In this context, the use of "I'll" (I will) indicates the ability or willingness to carry out the action without considering the outcome. Overall, although there is no direct use of modal abilities such as "can" or "could", the essence of the ability or willingness to act (whether for good or bad) is expressed through the promise to stay aside ("I'll be right here") and the idiom "sink or swim". This shows a strong commitment to support and stay in the relationship, no matter the challenges or possible outcomes.

Based on the analysis of the use of modal verbs *can*, *could*, and *be able to*, it was found that modal ability in this song does not only refer to physical ability or skill, but also implies emotional and interpersonal abilities that are crucial in the context of human relationships, as demonstrated in the hopes and requests for unconditional acceptance both in the best and worst of times. This indicates a connection between the use of modal ability and the deep emotional dynamics within relationships, which include vulnerability, hope, and commitment.

Previous research relevant to this discussion shows that modal ability in song lyrics is often used to express potential or ability in certain contexts. Research has indicated that the modal *can* in English is often used to show physical ability, while *could* serves to express abilities that are more hypothetical or related to the past (Indirawaty et al., 2018). This study expands this understanding by showing that in the song *At My Worst*, modal ability also refers to the ability to empathize, manage feelings, and sustain a loving relationship even in imperfect conditions. Other studies on the use of modals in song lyrics also mention that modals *can* and *could* are often used in songs to convey hopes or requests within interpersonal relationships (Muhlasin, 2019). This is relevant to our findings, where the use of modal *can* in sentences like "Can you be my lover until the very end?" reveals a hope for someone's willingness or ability to engage in a long-term relationship despite imperfect circumstances.

The use of modals *can* and other forms like *will* and *let me* provides a strong emotional nuance in depicting openness and the desire for unconditional acceptance. This is supported by previous findings that examine how modals in song lyrics can serve to express emotions and relationship dynamics (Lisnawati & Parmawati, 2023). This study aligns with previous findings, suggesting that the use of modal ability in song lyrics encompasses not only physical abilities but also emotional capabilities in building and maintaining human relationships.

This research enriches previous studies by delving deeper into how modal ability is used not just to describe practical abilities but also as a tool for expressing vulnerability, hope, and commitment in loving relationships. This opens up space for further research on the role of modals in song lyrics as a medium for emotional and social communication in broader contexts.

Can

"Can" is a modal verb that functions as an auxiliary verb. The use of "can" is generally to indicate possibility, someone's ability to do something (for example, Natasha can play the piano), or an opportunity that someone has (such as, She can go to the music room). Although "can" is often pronounced in a shortened form, in its negative form, we usually use "cannot" or the more contracted form, "can't." In general, "can" is used for various purposes, such as: *Structure of can*:

Table 1. Subject + Auxiliary Verb Can + Main Verb

	Subject	Auxiliary Verb Can	Main Verb	
+	I	Can	Play	Football
-	She	Cannot Can't	Play	Football
?	Can	You	Play	Football?

The main verb is always the bare infinitive (infinitive without to). We can't say:

I can to play tennis

Use of can:

1. Can is used to tal about present or general abilities and possibilities
 - Zahra can play the piano (this means she has the anility to do like skills)
 - I can call you later (this means I have ability and possible)
2. We can use to possible that we make present decisions about future ability
 - Can u help me with my homework
 - Sorry, I'm busy today. But I can help you tomorrow
3. Can for requesrs and orders
 - Can you make a cup of tea, please
 - Can you close the door?
4. We can use can for permission, offers like ask or give for something
 - Can I smoke in this room?
 - Tou can't smoke here, but you can smoke in the garden
 - Can we finish early today?

We can use could for past of can and it can do everything that can can do.

Be able to

Although "be able to" is discussed here, it is not actually a modal verb. It is a combination of the verb "be" followed by the adjective "able" and the infinitive form. The reason we discuss "be able to" is that sometimes we use it as a replacement for "can" and "could." "Be able to" functions as a verb phrase used to describe ability. The presence of the auxiliary verb "be" allows us to use this phrase in various tenses, such as the present, past, and future.

Structure

Table 2. *Subject + be + able + to-infinitive*

Subject	Auxiliary Verb be	Main Verb able	
+ I	am	able	to drive
- She	is not isn't	able	to drive
? Are	you	able	to drive?

- Present simple: "I'm able to swim." (This means I have the ability to swim. You can also just say "I can swim.")
- Present perfect: "I've been able to contact our client." (This means I have succeeded in contacting our client. I attempted the action and was successful.)
- Past simple: "We were able to clean up the house in 30 minutes." (This means we succeeded in cleaning up the house in 30 minutes. This is what our abilities allowed us to do.)
- Past perfect: "We had been able to find a cheap plane ticket." (This means we had succeeded in finding a cheap plane ticket.)
- Future simple: "After she finishes this program, she will be able to get a job as an accountant." (This means it will be possible for her to get a job as an accountant.)

- Future perfect: "By 12 o'clock, we will have been able to fix the problem." (This means the problem will be fixed by 12 o'clock. We will have succeeded in fixing it by that time.)
- The negative of be able to is be not able to (for present and past tenses) or not be able to (for future tenses). Here are some examples:
- "Sorry, but I won't be able to finish the project today." (It will not be possible for me to finish the project today. I will not have the ability to finish it.)
- "She is not able to attend the meeting." (It is not possible for her to attend the meeting. She does not have the ability to attend it.)

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the use of modal ability in the song At My Worst by Pink Sweats, this study successfully achieved its objective of describing and identifying how modal verbs such as can, could, and be able to are used in the context of song lyrics, and how they function to convey emotional and interpersonal abilities, rather than just physical abilities. This study shows that modal ability does not only refer to actual physical capabilities but also to the ability to manage feelings, empathize, and maintain loving relationships even in imperfect circumstances. The use of these modals enriches the meaning of the song lyrics and provides insight into the deep dynamics of relationships, including vulnerability, hope, and commitment. However, this study also has limitations, including focusing on only one song as the object of research, meaning the findings cannot be generalized to other songs in the same genre or in different music genres. The study focuses more on in-depth qualitative analysis without utilizing a quantitative approach that could reveal patterns in the use of modal ability in a larger data set.

The future research, it is recommended to expand the analysis by examining the use of modal ability in the lyrics of songs from various music genres and time periods, and comparing the results to observe variations in modal use in musical contexts. Research involving a quantitative approach could also provide a more comprehensive view of the patterns of modal verb usage in song lyrics on a larger scale. The further research could explore the relationship between the use of modal ability and other elements in songs, such as melody, harmony, and the cultural influence on how emotional messages are conveyed through music.

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