

The Grammar of Fate: How Modality Constructs the Illusion of Personalized Horoscope

Name: 潘陈盈 (Chenying Pan)

Email: pcy13372372@163.com

University: Hangzhou Normal University.

Name: Syed Ali Ashir

Email: syedashi13@gmail.com

University: Hangzhou Normal University

Abstract: This paper investigates the role of modality as a linguistic strategy for expressing vagueness in the daily horoscope, focusing on the distribution of the modal expressions and how process types interacted with the high-certainty modal *will* to balance specificity and ambiguity. Adopting a corpus-based methodology, the study pursues two objectives: (1) to identify, quantify, and categorize the modal items used in daily horoscopes, and (2) to describe the communicative functions, particularly through the lens of verb-process interactions. The findings reveal that epistemic modality predominates in the corpus, with *may* and *will* constituting the majority of modal expressions. Crucially, while *will* frequently collocates with material process verbs, this pattern is attributable to a diversity of lexical choices rather than reliance on a limited set of verbs. Notably, the verb *be* emerges as the most frequent collocate of *will*, underscoring the genre's pronounced focus on projecting future identities and emotional states. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the strategic prevalence of passive constructions within material processes, suggesting a mechanism for promising change while simultaneously deflecting direct agency or responsibility.

Key word: modality, horoscope, process types, vague language, corpus-based

1. *Introduction*

Horoscope discourse, a ubiquitous genre in popular media (Fichten and Sunerton 1983; Evans 1996; Kuo 2009; Tandoc and Ferrucci 2014), has long captivated audiences through its unique combination of prediction and guidance. In the digital age, this genre has become increasingly pervasive (Elisha 2021: 149), with horoscopes delivered through apps, websites, and social platforms. The enduring popularity of fortune telling has given new life to the industry, where online fortune telling platforms are now recognized as a “promising new business” (Kuo 2009: 288). Nevertheless, despite its popularity, astrology’s scientific credibility remains contested. Early studies demonstrated that readers’ acceptance of horoscopic predictions often stems not from accuracy but from the phrasing of generalized statements that appear personally meaningful: a phenomenon known as the Barnum effect (Snyder 1974; Fichten and Sunerton 1983; Rogers and Soule 2009; Tandoc and Ferrucci 2014). Extending this line of inquiry into educational contexts, Ragini (2019) investigated horoscopes’ predictive capacity concerning language learning styles and preferences, reporting a notably high correspondence: approximately 90% of results indicated alignment between students’ actual performances and horoscope-derived predictions.

Complementing studies on predictive validity, subsequent research has focused on audience-related variables such as personality, gender, race, and social class, exploring how demographics interpret astrological texts (Fichten and Sunerton 1983; Evans 1996; Tandoc and Ferrucci 2014). Critically, Evans (1996) revealed that while predictions may address similar topics across social groups, their underlying messages diverge significantly. For instance, middle-class readers are more likely to be advised to take risks or invest, whereas working-class audiences are counseled toward conservative actions (Evans 1996: 393). Similarly, in an analysis of women’s magazines, horoscopes were found to encourage women to conform to institutional authority and derive fulfillment from subservient positions, reinforcing patriarchal norms (Tandoc and Ferrucci 2014: 17-18).

Beyond content and reception, studies on discourse organization (Siriruttanaphon

2018; Surzhykova 2020) highlight consistent structure. Siriruttanaphon (2018: 160) proposes a five-move pattern that typically includes: (1) general context-setting, (2) discussion of love or relationships, (3) financial forecast, (4) career outlook, and (5) health commentary – a framework creating an illusion of comprehensive coverage. Expanding this cross-linguistically, Surzhykova (2020) contrasted English and Russian horoscopes, finding that English texts adhere to a fixed sequence (Moves 2–5) while omitting Move 1 (general context). Conversely, Russian horoscopes treat Move 1 as obligatory with flexible sequencing of subsequent moves (Surzhykova 2020: 93), reflecting culturally distinct rhetorical priorities.

Beyond sociocultural perspectives and structural organization, horoscopes also rely heavily on linguistic mechanisms that enable them to sound both authoritative and flexible. Central to this is modality (Roberts et al. 2010; Ling 2016; Rosa and Romero 2019; Hassan and Anjum 2024), which expresses degrees of certainty, obligation, and possibility. By employing modality, horoscope writers can soften predications while preserving persuasive force, a strategy aligning with Channell's (1994) view of vague language as an intentional tool to reduce precision and evade exact paraphrase. Furthermore, studies indicate that horoscope texts frequently utilize positive evaluative language alongside modal verbs expressing possibility, collectively constructing a hopeful and emotionally uplifting vision of the future (Hassan and Anjum 2024). In a corpus-based study of women's magazine horoscopes, Ling's (2016: 89) corpus analysis of women's magazine horoscopes found that the modal verb *will* appeared most frequently across all three sampled publications, significantly outnumbering the frequency of *may* or *should*.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to modality in horoscope discourse, existing research exhibit two key limitations: (1) a predominant focus on the frequency and general functions of modal verbs, often neglecting the interaction between modals and the verbs they govern; and (2) a lack of nuanced analysis of the modal verb *will*. Although conventionally associated with certainty, *will*'s functional complexity, particularly in relation to the process types it introduces, remains underexplored. Consequently, the specific discursive effects of *will* + verb combinations are poorly

understood. This study, therefore, addresses these gaps by investigating not only the distribution of modal expressions but also the semantic types of processes that follow *will*, with the aim of uncovering how grammatical choices shape the predictive and affective strategies inherent to horoscope texts.

To achieve this, the present study integrates modality analysis with process type classification within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). The integration of modality theory with SFL process typology is theoretically strategic: while modality regulates predictive certainty, process types construct the semantic content of predictions (e.g., material processes for actions, relational processes for identity claims). Their interaction reveals how horoscopes linguistically simulate empirical validity.

In the first stage, it identifies the dominant semantic categories of modal expressions in a corpus of daily horoscope texts, applying Nauze's (2008) simplified version of Van der Auwera and Plungian's typology of modality. The paper not only analyzes the expression realized by the nine central modal verbs *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*, and *must* but some semi-modals and relatively fixed expressions such as *need to*, *be able to* and *be likely to* (Biber and Quirk 2012), are also studied. Second, special attention is given to the modal *will*, which is categorized as epistemic necessity and typically associated with high predictability (Nauze 2008; Rosa and Romero 2019). Its co-occurrence with various process types is examined using the process type framework (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). This combined approach seeks to reveal how grammatical patterning shapes the projection of action, identity, and emotional states within horoscope discourse. By uncovering how grammatical patterns construct persuasive horoscope discourse, this study contributes to both linguistic theory and critical media literacy. It offers a replicable framework for analyzing pseudoscientific claims in popular genres.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 introduces the theoretical background, outlining key concepts related to modality and verb process types. Section 3 describes the methodology, including the corpus compilation and analytical approach. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings through both quantitative and qualitative

analysis. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main conclusions and implications of the study.

2. *Theoretical Framework*

Modality functions as a linguistic system encoding speakers' stances of probability, obligation, and desirability (McCarthy and Carter 1994: 102; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014: 172; Thompson, 2014: 70). Its theoretical significance stems from its dual nature: Semantically, it operates as a truth-value modulator, situating propositions on scales of actuality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014: 148; Thompson, 2014: 162); Pragmatically, it functions as a stance-management resource, constructing speaker-reader alignments in discourse (Roberts et al. 2010: 241). In horoscopes, a genre characterized by pseudo-prophetic persuasion, modality enables writers to perform a delicate rhetorical balancing act: projecting astrological authority through high-certainty markers (*will*, *must*) while retaining plausible deniability via hedging devices (*might*, *may*).

The theoretical taxonomy of modality has undergone significant evolution, progressing from binary frameworks toward increasingly nuanced multidimensional models. Palmer's (2001) seminal bifurcation established the foundational dichotomy between epistemic modality, concerned with the speaker's assessment of a proposition's likelihood, as evidenced by inferential markers like *must* in *It must be raining*, and deontic modality, which encodes social or moral obligations, exemplified by directive uses of *must* as in *You must leave*. While this binary model illuminated core functional distinctions, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) reconceptualized modality through systemic-functional linguistics, arguing that modal meanings operate within two distinct grammatical systems: modalization, which grades probability (*will* → *might*) or usuality (*always* → *sometimes*), and modulation, which calibrates levels of obligation (*must* → *should*) or inclination (*will* → *would*). This reframing emphasized how modality's grammatical realization varies across linguistic contexts, moving beyond semantic categorization to expose its meta-functional versatility.

Building on this, Hengeveld (2004) proposed a radical expansion by

introducing event-oriented modality—a category evaluating event-internal properties independently of speaker judgment, as in *This key can open the door*, where *can* denotes inherent capacity rather than permission or possibility. Though theoretically innovative in its distinction between speaker-dependent and speaker-independent modal forces, Hengeveld’s proliferation into 15 postulated subtypes faced empirical limitations; as Nauze (2008: 42) demonstrated through cross-linguistic analysis, only 10 of these subtypes exhibit consistent grammatical realization, revealing a gap between typological ambition and linguistic attestation. It is this tension between theoretical complexity and analytical practicality that motivated Nauze’s (2008) integrative tripartite model, a functionally oriented synthesis of Palmer’s semantic foundations, Halliday’s systemic approach, and Van der Auwera and Plungian’s (1998) semantic mapping, which categorizes modality according to the source of modal force (participant-internal, participant-external, epistemic) while maintaining operational feasibility for discourse analysis, as summarized in **Table 1**.

Table1. Fabrice Dominique Nauze’s typology of modality

Participant-internal	Participant-external		Epistemic
	Deontic	Goal-oriented	
Ability	Permission	Possibility	Possibility
Needs	Obligation	Necessity	Necessity

While Nauze’s framework presents these categories as distinct, they can often combine in discourse. For example, epistemic modals *may* combine with deontic modals to indicate both probability and obligation, as in *You will need to make a decision*. This combination allows horoscopes to project both predictive certainty and social guidance, which is characteristic of this genre. However, this aspect of modality was not addressed in the present study, which focuses primarily on the epistemic dimension. While the combination of epistemic and deontic modals could add depth to the analysis, particularly in understanding the fine line between suggestion and command, such a discussion would require a more detailed examination of the social and emotional functions of horoscope discourse.

The analysis of horoscope discourse necessitates complementing interpersonal

modality with Halliday's transitivity framework, which systematizes how language constructs experiential meaning through six process types (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 212-256). This system classifies verbs not by syntactic form but by their semantic role in representing Representative examples of each process type, as categorized within Halliday and Matthiessen's transitivity framework, are provided in **Table 2** to illustrate their functional contrasts. In horoscope texts, process type choices systematically construct the reader's astrological reality: Material processes depict celestial forces acting upon human lives, Mental processes foreground emotional responses, and Relational processes assert cosmic truths.

Table2. Examples of different process types

Process Type	Example [Process in bold]
Material	During the European scramble for Africa, Niggeria fell to the British. and the British ruled it until 1960
Behavioral	people are laughing .
Mental	The Ibos did not approve of kings.
Verbal	so we say that every fourth African is a Nigerian Can you tell us about the political and cultural make-up of Nigeria?
Relational	that every fourth African is a Nigerian.
Existential	so today there's Christianity in the south

The grammatical coupling between modality and process types underpins predictions' rhetorical potency. Specifically, epistemic *will* paired with material processes (*will* sign) generates empirically verifiable claims that are inherently falsifiable, whereas its collocation with mental/relational processes (*will* feel, *will* be) constructs an illusion of certainty onto unverifiable psychological domains. Consequently, linguistic analysis of horoscopes must account for rhetorical differences arising from modality-process type pairings. Building on Nauze's (2008) modality typology and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) process classification, this study addresses three research questions:

1. How do modal items distribute across horoscope discourse?
2. which verb processes does the specific modal *will* primarily govern?
3. What functions arise from the coupling of *will* with specific process types (e.g., Mental, Relational, Material), particularly in constructing subjectively verifiable predictions?

Guided by these questions, I propose the following hypotheses, acknowledging potential complexities in the data:

H1: Modal expressions in horoscopes will exhibit an asymmetric distribution, with epistemic and participant-external modalities predominating over participant-internal modalities, reflecting the genre's focus on probabilistic future states and external constraints.

H2: Regarding the modal *will*, while material processes may demonstrate overall frequency dominance in the corpus (consistent with preliminary observations), *will* itself is expected to show a relative concentration in relational processes. This clustering serves a critical rhetorical function: by coupling futurity/necessity markers (*will*) with non-material processes (Relational, Mental), horoscopes strategically anchor predictions within subjective, internal domains (emotions, states, identities) rather than externally falsifiable actions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus compilation

The horoscope texts analyzed in this study were drawn from the *Daily Horoscope Dataset* (Prasad, 2024), a publicly accessible corpus hosted on Kaggle (<https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/prasad22/daily-horoscope-dataset>). This dataset aggregates daily astrological predictions from an Indian English-language publication *Hindustan Times*. Collected through automated web scraping protocols, the corpus encompasses forecasts for all 12 zodiac signs published consecutively from January 1, 2024, with daily updates ensuring contemporary relevance.

For methodological precision, a focused 30-day subset (January 1–30, 2024) was extracted, comprising 360 individual horoscope entries (30 days × 12 zodiac signs). Following text preprocessing, including removal of non-linguistic metadata, source identifiers, and standardization of formatting, the curated sub-corpus yielded 32,342 analyzable tokens. This deliberate temporal delimitation balances breadth against analytical depth, capturing representative cyclical patterns in astrological discourse while minimizing longitudinal variability that might introduce noise. The dataset's provenance in mainstream media (*Hindustan Times*) ensures the texts reflect professionally crafted predictions targeting a broad audience, aligning with this study's focus on public horoscope discourse conventions.

3.2 Dataset analysis

The methodology for this study consists of two main phrases: identifying and quantifying modality types and analyzing the role of the modal verb *will* within horoscope discourse. The approach integrates both manual annotation and quantitative analysis, ensuring a comprehensive examination of modality's rhetorical function.

The first phase of analysis focused on identifying and quantifying modality types across the corpus. This process began with the extraction of modal verbs, semi-modals, and relatively fixed phrases. These were manually annotated according to their semantic function, following the framework proposed by Nauze (2008).

Due to the polysemy of certain modal expressions, such as *can* or *must*, which can encode both epistemic (certainty or possibility) and deontic (obligation or permission) meanings, context was crucial for accurate classification. For example, when *may* indicated possibility in a sentence like *You can find success*, it was classified epistemically, while in *You can have a try*, it was considered as deontic necessity. Contextual cues such as the surrounding verbs, the clause type (e.g., declarative, interrogative), and the co-text (the surrounding discourse) were used to resolve ambiguities.

Once the items were annotated, the frequency of each modality type was calculated. This allowed for the identification of distributional patterns within the corpus, highlighting the dominant rhetorical strategies employed in horoscope texts. The quantitative analysis also provided insight into how modality contributes to the emotional resonance and predictive certainty typical of horoscopes.

The second phase of analysis was specifically focused on examining the modal verb *will*, a key feature in horoscope discourse due to its strong predictive force. Every instance of *will* was extracted from the data, and the verb immediately following *will* was categorized according to Halliday's (2014) six process types. These include material processes (actions or events), mental processes (cognitive or emotional states), relational processes (identities or attributions), and others. Special attention was given to cases where *be* occurred as part of a passive construction (e.g., *You will be required...*). In these instances, the full verb phrase (including the past participle) was considered when assigning a process type. For example, *be required* was classified as

a material process based on the semantic contribution of the lexical verb required, indicating an action rather than a state or condition.

To enhance the reliability of the findings, a subsample of 30 entries (10 zodiac signs over 3 days) was re-analyzed two weeks after the initial annotation. This re-analysis allowed for consistency checks and ensured that the annotation process remained stable over time. Any discrepancies between the initial and re-annotated data were resolved through discussion, improving the overall robustness of the analysis.

After categorizing the verbs following *will*, quantitative frequencies were calculated for each process type co-occurring with *will*.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, representative examples from the corpus were selected for qualitative discussion. These examples illustrated key patterns in the use of modality and process types, showing how the combination of epistemic modality and material processes contributes to the genre's predictive authority and emotional engagement.

4. Findings

4.1. Frequency of distribution of the modality types

Table 3 presents the normalized frequencies (per thousand words) of modality types retrieved from the daily horoscope corpus. The categorization and frequency calculation are adapted from the methodology used by Rosa and Romero (2019), who applied a similar modality classification to analyze corpora.

The distribution of modal expressions in the horoscope corpus reveals a highly skewed pattern, reflecting the strategic use of modality to balance personalization with interpretive flexibility. Among the 32,342 tokens in the dataset, a total of 1,737 modal-related items were identified, representing approximately 5.37% of the total corpus and spanning 17 distinct modal types. These items were categorized according to Nauze's (2008) three-way semantic typology: epistemic, participant-external, and participant-internal. Across all categories, a total of 17 modal items were found.

The overwhelming majority of modal items fall into the category of epistemic

modality, with 1,517 instances, accounting for 87.33% of all modal expressions. Within this group, the most frequent single item is *may*, appearing 539 times, a normalized frequency of 31.03 occurrences per thousand words. This prevalence of *may* underscores horoscope discourse's reliance on probabilistic framing, allowing the text to suggest outcomes without asserting them. Closely following *may* is *will*, with 512 instances (29.48%). As an epistemic necessity modal, *will* indicates a higher degree of certainty. Although it is significant, its frequency in this dataset is lower than that of *may*. This finding contrasts with previous research by Ling (2016, 89), which identified *will* as the most dominant modal in horoscope columns across three women's magazines. This contrast may suggest either a genre-specific stylistic difference or a shift in readership, with a broader audience. This broader readership may have different expectations, perhaps favoring less deterministic and more "open-ended" prediction doormats, reflecting a shift in how horoscopes engage with readers. Other epistemic expressions include *can* (148 tokens), *might* (15), and *be likely to* (303), which suggests that while horoscope texts often project a sense of future certainty, they also rely heavily on modalized possibility, with *might* and *likely to* softening the predictive force and allowing room for interpretive flexibility.

The second most frequent category is participant-external modality, which appears 179 times (10.31%). This group encompasses deontic and goal-oriented expressions that communicate social or circumstantial obligation. The dominant items in this category include modals such as *need to* (both deontic and goal-oriented uses, totaling 102 tokens), *should* (15), *have to* (33), *must* (5), and *can* (permission or goal-oriented, 24). These expressions typically convey advisory or motivational content, aligning with the horoscope genre's function of gently guiding readers' behavior without asserting hard directives.

To summarize, the distribution of modal expressions reveals three key patterns:

1. Epistemic modality is dominant, particularly *may* and *will*, which jointly account for more than 60% of all modal items.
2. Probability markers (*may*, *be likely to*) outweigh strong futurity markers (*will*), suggesting a rhetorical shift toward softer, interpretive predictions.

3. Internal agency is downplayed, with participant-internal modals playing a negligible role in the discourse.

This distribution demonstrates that horoscope texts manage their rhetorical effect not by asserting absolute claims, but by carefully controlling the degree of certainty and direction of agency. The choice between *may* and *will* reflects deliberate linguistic strategies aimed at preserving the genre's key appeal: guidance that feels personal but remains safely vague.

Table 3: Modality types. Raw frequency and normalized frequency or ratio per thousand words.

TOTAL (32,342 tokens)				
PARTICIPANT INTERNAL		N	%	R
Participant-internal/ability(possibility)	can	5	0.29	0.155
	be able to	36	2.07	1.113
Participant-internal/needs(necessity)				
Total participant internal		41	2.36	1.268
PARTICIPANT-EXTERNAL				
Deontic (Permission) (possibility)	can	21	1.21	0.649
Deontic (Obligation) (necessity)	need to	58	3.34	1.793
	should	12	0.69	0.371
	have to	7	0.4	0.216
	must	1	0.06	0.031
Total Deontic (Obligation)		78	4.49	2.412
Total Deontic (permission + obligation)		99	5.7	3.061
Goal-oriented (possibility)	can	3	0.17	0.093
Goal-oriented (necessity)	need to	44	2.53	1.36
	should	3	0.17	0.093
	have to	26	1.5	0.804
	must	4	0.23	0.124
Total Goal-oriented (necessity)		77	4.43	2.381
Total Goal-oriented		80	4.61	2.474
Total Participant External		179	10.31	5.535
Epistemic				
possibility	may	539	31.03	16.666
	might	15	0.86	0.464
	can	148	8.52	4.576
	likely to	303	17.44	9.369
Total Epistemic Possibility		1005	57.86	31.074
Necessity(prediction)	will	512	29.48	15.831
Total Epistemic		1517	87.33	46.905
TOTAL		1737	100	53.707

4.2. *Process type combination*

A quantitative analysis of *will* + verb constructions reveals that horoscopes strategically deploy different process types to construct a discourse that balances certainty with suggestion. As illustrated in Figure 1, verb choice and process type collectively generate the characteristically vague yet persuasive tone of predictive texts.

Material processes dominate the dataset, constituting the majority (273 tokens) of all *will* + verb combinations. These verbs construct future actions, events, or

consequences, enabling readers to imagine themselves in motion. Verbs such as *get*, *make*, *find*, *manage*, *do*, and *help* simulate activity and transformation. This dominance is partially attributable to the inherently wider variety of material verbs compared to other process types. While many material verbs are used infrequently (43 distinct material verbs occur only once, e.g., *act*, *allow*, *bear*, *overcome*), their collective number and diversity ensure that material processes form the bulk of the constructions. This broad lexical spectrum underscores the genre's reliance on depicting diverse actions and outcomes, fostering a sense of dynamic movement and change that resonates with readers.

In contrast, mental (95 tokens) and relational (143 tokens) processes, though less frequent than material, still occur significantly with will. This indicates that, despite will's strong association with projecting concrete future actions, horoscopes frequently employ mental and relational processes to convey internal shifts and states. Constructions involving verbs like *need*, *be* (*appreciated*), *have*, *be*, *prove*, and *remain* allow horoscopes to focus on emotional states and identity changes, rather than solely on external actions and outcomes. By emphasizing these internal dimensions, horoscopes create psychological resonance and a sense of personal transformation, offering possibilities that feel subjective and interpretive. This strategy inherently mitigates the risk of failed predictions, as internal changes are less objectively measurable or verifiable as successes or failures.

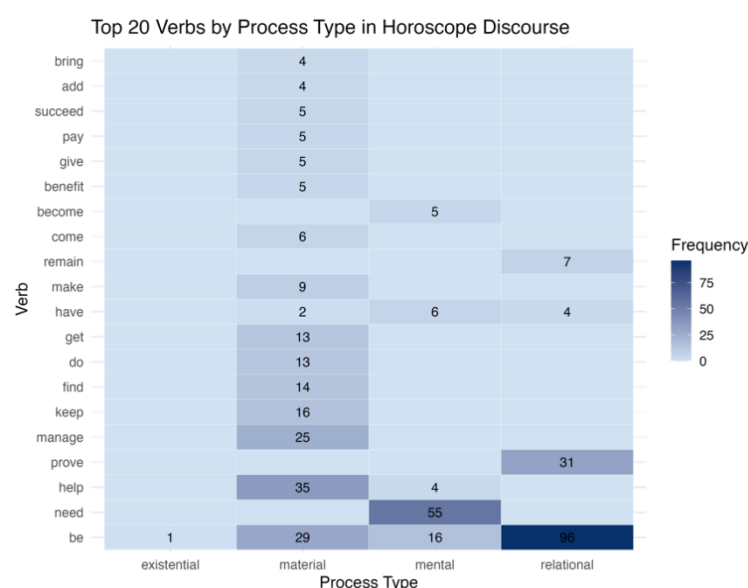


Figure 1. Heatmap showing the process types associated with the 20 most frequent verbs following *will*. Material processes are most prominent.

Thus, while *will* overwhelmingly pairs with material processes for concrete projections, its significant co-occurrence with mental and relational processes shows horoscopes balancing predictive certainty with the flexibility of internal states. This allows them to offer guidance that feels both predictive and emotionally engaging. The focus on internal changes provides a buffer against potential failure due to their lower verifiability and greater interpretability, making predictions feel adaptable and universally relatable. This interplay between modality and process type generates texts that are simultaneously universal and intimate: the certainty of *will* lends grammatical weight, while mental and relational processes ensure personal and psychological resonance. Quantitatively, these findings diverge from the initial hypothesis anticipating *will* to co-occur most frequently with mental or relational processes for “soft” predictions. While these combinations are central to the genre's affective function, the prevalence of material processes (whose passive forms will be explored qualitatively later) suggests a parallel strategy: constructing movement and transformation without direct personal accountability. This dual approach is key to horoscope discourse, maintaining specificity without exclusion and personalization without pressure.

A key quantitative insight is that the relational process verb *be* is the single most frequent verb in all *will* + verb constructions, surpassing even high-frequency material verbs like *help* and *manage*. This numerical prominence highlights a distinctive discursive strategy: many predictions focus on future states of being, identity, and emotional positioning, rather than merely external events. Phrases like “*You will be confident*” or “*You will be part of...*” actively construct the reader's future self in affectively resonant terms. The high frequency of *be* in relational clauses reflects a linguistic technique that affirms future states without invoking obligation or effort. By presenting identity or condition as an assured outcome, horoscopes offer emotionally satisfying, low-cognitive-demand visions of the future with high psychological appeal, aligning with the genre's core function of making readers feel recognized, reassured,

and subtly empowered. This finding, alongside the quantitative dominance of material processes, points to the dual strategy embedded in *will* + verb constructions: material processes (involve passive, as will be discussed later) gesture towards transformation while diffusing agency, and relational processes with beaffirm internal states and future identities, fostering stability and inclusion. Together, they allow horoscopes to construct futures that feel both dynamic and secure, predictive and personalized.

Other process types are minimally represented: existential processes occur only once in the dataset, and behavioral and verbal processes are absent. This scarcity likely reflects both the inherent focus of predictive discourse (on actions, states, and cognition rather than existence, behavior per se, or verbal exchange) and the specific constraints of the *will* + verb construction within the horoscope genre.

In horoscope discourse, passive constructions within material processes also function as a core rhetorical strategy for constructing the illusion of personalized fate. By foregrounding the reader as the recipient of actions rather than their agent, these structures externalize control over outcomes, softening predictive certainty while alleviating reader pressure. These 29 passive tokens exemplify a deliberate depersonalization of agency. The subject (the reader) is positioned not as the initiator but as the beneficiary of actions (*put back, dealt with, resolved, respected*). The following corpus examples typify this mechanism:

1. *A pending project will be put back on the tracks through your endeavors.*
2. *Professional matters will be dealt with in an efficient manner.*
3. *A pressing domestic problem will be resolved to the satisfaction of all.*
4. *Your feelings will be respected by others on the home front.*

Parallel to passives, the sheer diversity of material process verbs (273 tokens) further sustains the illusion of fate. While material processes dominate quantitatively, their lexical variety, including 43 words (e.g., *act, allow, bear, overcome*) only exist for only once, creates an impression of hyper-personalization. Even low-frequency verbs contribute to this effect: each unique verb (e.g., “*You will overcome a hurdle*”) tailors predictions superficially, masking structural genericism.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has explored the role of modality and process types in horoscope discourse, revealing a highly strategic use of language that balances certainty with interpretive flexibility. Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis, it is evident that modality plays a crucial role in shaping the tone and function of horoscopes, enabling them to offer guidance that is both personal and non-compulsory.

First, the modal distribution within the corpus highlights that epistemic modality, particularly the frequent use of *may* and *will*, is dominant. This reliance on probability markers (such as *may* and *be likely to*) over stronger futurity markers (like *will*) aligns with the genre's characteristic focus on probabilistic outcomes and interpretive openness. The genre favors a softer, less deterministic predictive model, allowing readers to engage with the future in a way that feels both personalized and flexible.

Second, although the material processes dominate the *will* + *verb* combinations, these constructions still allow for a sense of movement and transformation without holding the reader directly accountable for action. The use of the passive voice, such as “*you will be required*” or “*it will be solved*”, reduces the cognitive demand on the reader while still conveying progress and positive change. In contrast, mental and relational processes serve a vital function in constructing an intimate, emotional connection with the reader. Relational processes involving *be* affirm the reader's future identity or state of being, such as “*you will be confident*.” or “*you will be part of something special*.” These constructions offer a sense of assured future identity, which enhances emotional appeal by providing visions of the future that are psychologically resonant, yet not demanding of action or responsibility.

Despite the findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis of process types was limited to verb phrases immediately following the modal *will*. While *will* represents a strong epistemic marker, focusing exclusively on this single modal item overlooks the broader interaction between other modal expressions and verb semantics. A more comprehensive study could examine how other modal items, such as *may*, *should*, or *be likely to*, govern different kinds of experiential

meaning.

Second, this study did not analyze declarative statements that lack overt modal markers. Such sentences, often constructed as simple present-tense assertions (e.g., *You are confident today*), may implicitly project high certainty without relying on modal verbs. In many cases, these non-modalized declaratives can carry even greater rhetorical authority, as they are not framed as possibilities but as unqualified truths. Because the present analysis focused solely on explicitly modalized language, this important dimension of horoscope discourse remains underexplored. Future research might benefit from incorporating these non-modalized structures into a broader investigation of predictive certainty, exploring how modality and certainty are constructed both through explicit modal items and through grammatical mood and aspect.

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