

Expressing modality with nouns: a comparison of 4 Norwegian and Czech abstract nouns

1. Modality and nouns

Although there is no clear definition of modality that everyone would agree on (cf. Palmer 1986; Nuyts 2005; Nuyts 2006; and especially Boye 2006, 49 and 53 ff.),¹ nouns are hardly ever mentioned as participants in this field.² There are both logical, grammatical and semantic approaches to modality, but the phenomenon generally seems to point also into the field of pragmatics, since modality operates above the level of pure proposition.³ A wide definition of modality has been given by Rescher as a qualification⁴ of a (subjected) proposition, which becomes itself a new proposition (Palmer 1986, 12). However, tense and aspect are usually excluded from this wide field as their own categories (Nuyts 2006, 1; Nuyts 2005, 5; Palmer 1986, 12). De Haan, taking a typological approach to modality, considers an element to be modal if it has modal meanings (de Haan 2006, 28). But there is no consensus as regards the delimitation of modal meanings either. Most scholars, however, accept the main modal meanings covered by the traditional categories of dynamic, deontic and epistemic modality, sometimes excluding some of their subcategories or delimiting their domains in different ways.⁵ Modality is then only being defined as a cover term for (or a listing of) more specific semantic categories (Nuyts 2005, 7).⁶ Lately, Kasper Boye (2006) tried to describe a conceptual structure common to all the commonly accepted modal categories, which offers a more unified method for description of the semantic principles behind modality. His approach is similar to the one used here.

Nouns themselves cannot operate on the level of the whole proposition they take part in. But they can denote the abstract concepts behind modality and their different elements. In constructions with verbs (usually verbs with more or less auxiliary function), such nouns can even replace modal verbs. As part of a prepositional phrase (syntactically free, adverbial adjunct), they can replace modal adverbs. An important feature of such “modal nouns” is the ability to take infinitive constructions or even embedded clauses as complements. In such a case these nouns usually play two roles: 1) they refer to the proposition as whole (in an anaphoric manner similar to pronouns), and 2) they project modality (the type denoted by their meaning) into the proposition, at the same time. If the proposition is given only in the form of an infinitive construction, the subject of it is also being controlled by the noun. These nouns make it also possible to embed the given proposition (which becomes a modal proposition with their assistance) one level deeper, into another proposition. Even when they stand alone and without an explicit complement, there is still some implicit proposition they refer to. It may stay underspecified, though. Underspecification of the participants in the embedded proposition (concept) is in fact a quite common feature of such nouns as well, unlike their verbal counterparts that usually require their complements to be explicitly specified. On the other hand, the nouns usually specify very exactly the type of modality they refer to.

Here, we will have a look at the four most general nouns denoting the concepts of necessity,

1 “One result of this is that the term has lost its value as a tool for linguistic research. Whenever you want to use it, you have to define it anew.” (Boye 2006, 53)

2 Nuyts (2005, 15) mentions also adjectives in predicative use, but not nouns which can play a very similar role in such context.

3 Sometimes modality is almost identified with grammatical categories like mood, sometimes such categories are more or less excluded from modality because of their grammatical nature. (cf. Nuyts 2006, 8; Palmer 1986, 21-23)

4 Or “modification”, hence the term “modality. (Boye 2006, 50)

5 Questionable is e.g. the status of “volition” (Nuyts 2006, 9) or the situational type of dynamic modality (Nuyts 2006, 4).

6 Terminology used in this text to refer to different modal subcategories and domains is based mainly on the general overview given by Nuyts (2006).

obligation, possibility and permission in Norwegian (*nødvendighet, plikt, mulighet, lov*) and compare their behaviour to their Czech counterparts (*nutnost, povinnost, možnost, dovolení/svolení*). According to monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, these nouns seem to be basically monosemous⁷ and straight equivalents of each other in both languages. In real use, however, their behaviour is actually more complicated.

The comparison is based on a parallel corpus of Norwegian and Czech texts, built within the InterCorp project. The corpus has a size of approximately 1.3 million words on the Norwegian side (at the moment). It contains both Czech translations of Norwegian novels (mainly by Jostein Gaarder and Lars S. Christensen), Norwegian translations of Czech novels (mainly by Milan Kundera) and one text translated from a third language (by J.R.R. Tolkien). This is not supposed to be a study in translatology and the direction of translation will therefore be generally disregarded. However, in special cases the direction will be mentioned to explain some anomalies.

Because of the limited size of the parallel corpus,⁸ monolingual corpora have been used for reference about the general behaviour of the nouns. For Norwegian it was the *Leksikografisk Bokmålskorpus* (LBK) from the University of Oslo, and for Czech the *Syn2005* corpus from the Institute of the Czech National Corpus at the Charles University in Prague.

The quantitative comparison is based on five basic types of equivalent expressions corresponding to the analysed noun in the parallel text. The categories are: 1) use of the direct equivalent (noun), 2) use of another noun (usually a synonym or a more specific noun), 3) use of a verb (usually simple modal verbs, but sometimes verbal idioms as well), 4) use of an adjective or adverb (usually in predicative use, but not limited to it), including participles with their function, and 5) omissions or other paraphrases (this category includes also rare translational errors or completely omitted sentences). Such general classification has, of course, limits and brings on a few problematic cases, but those will be mentioned individually. The main emphasis is on the word or expression that carries the modal aspect of the noun in the parallel text.⁹

2. Necessity: *nødvendighet / nutnost*

The nouns *nødvendighet / nutnost* are the most infrequent of the four nouns discussed here and their meaning is mostly limited to the core abstraction of necessity as a natural phenomenon, a kind of abstract, inherent mental pressure on a person, which forces him or her to perform some action or behave in some way. The source of the force is usually abstract (e.g. existential) and/or not closely specified. The participant can also be a non-living object though, and then the source is usually the law of nature. The concept therefore refers mainly to the domains of participant-imposed dynamic modality, situational modality and deontic modality, partly blurring their borders by the underspecification of the source of the mental force, not specifying whether such abstract source is a natural, inherent part of the participant himself or an independent external entity.

In Norwegian, the noun most often appears in a copular construction with the forced action as predicative, or it appears alone with the preposition *med* as a free adverbial, equivalent to the adverb *necessarily*. It does not take a fixed syntactic complement. The Czech noun *možnost* is more open to a more general usage and can take complements in the form of a noun phrase in the genitive case, an infinitive construction or (rarely) an object clause connected by *že* (“that”). On the other hand, its use in prepositional phrases corresponding to a modal adverb seems to be rare.

equivalent	<i>nødvendighet</i> (32)	<i>nutnost</i> (34)
<i>nødvendighet / nutnost</i>	20 (62.5%)	20 (59%)

⁷ One exception is the Norwegian noun *lov*, but even here the secondary meaning is just a specification of the primary one, and also all its homonyms are very easy to distinguish.

⁸ The limited size offers the possibility to evaluate manually all the occurrences, though.

⁹ Although in rare cases, even the modal aspect can be shared by two separate words in the parallel text.

other noun	4 (12.5%)	5 (15%)
verb	1 (3%)	2 (6%)
adj. / adv.	2 (6%)	5 (15%)
omissions / paraphrases	5 (16%) ¹⁰	2 (6%)

The noun appears in both languages a little more than 30 times in the parallel corpus, but only in 20 cases the direct equivalent is used. Not surprisingly, in these cases the noun is really used in its most abstract philosophical meaning, i.e. denoting an existential force. As soon as the Czech noun has a complement, the Norwegian text uses another construction, preferably with an adjective. The only exception is one direct translation, where the complement is connected also to the Norwegian equivalent *nødvendighet* with the help of the generic preposition *av* (“of”),¹¹ but it does not seem that such constructions were much preferred in Norwegian. In two cases, translation by a separate clause with the modal verb *å måtte* (“to must / have to”) is used. Other nouns appearing as equivalents are: *nød* (“emergency, need”), *behov* (“need”), *tvang* (“pressure”) and *tanke* (“idea”). The last noun, *idea*, does not seem to include any modal meaning at the surface, but if we analyse its conceptual frame, we can find it: if someone has an *idea* to perform some action, he is expected to feel some necessity (or at least a strong personal desire) to do so.

The Norwegian noun *nødvendighet* appears two times as part of the compound *livsnødvendigheter* (“necessities of life”), where it is translated correctly as *životní potřeby*. It can be expected that a Czech translation by the noun *potřeby* (“needs”) would be quite appropriate in most cases where the plural form *nødvendigheter* is used, but unfortunately we do not have any more examples available to confirm such a general statement at the moment. Other nouns used as equivalents in Czech are *povinnost* (“obligation”) and *nezbytnost* (“exigence, necessity”). In one case, the Norwegian construction *nødvendighet av* is used with a direct complement in translation again, where there is an impersonal (reflexive) verb construction used in the Czech original: *má se* (“it should / has to be”). This unusual nominal construction could be in this case motivated by ironical distance of the narrator hidden in the context of the sentence: ...*mi kladl na srdce, že se pneumatiky mají propíchnovat v přísně dodržovaném pořadí...* (“[he] **was most emphatic** that the tyres **should** be pricked in a **strictly** followed order”) > ...*hadde ... inntrengende forklart meg nødvendigheten av å følge en streng orden når man skulle punktere bildekk...* (“[he] had **urgently explained** to me the **necessity** to follow a **strict** order when one should prick car tyres”).

The equivalence types are relatively balanced, since the use of the noun is mostly limited to the very core abstraction of necessity as a phenomenon. Only a few extra cases of the Czech noun having an explicit complement make a minor addition to the category of Norwegian adverbial and adjectival equivalents.

3. Obligation: *plikt* / *povinnost*

The concept of obligation (or duty) includes an additional active participant (being the source of the mental force, which can also be underspecified or abstract) who lays an obligation on the main participant (agent) to perform some action or behave in some way. Unlike necessity, where it is typically an existential or natural kind of force, obligation refers to a moral or institutional force and therefore only affects human beings. The main domain of this concept belongs therefore to the category of deontic (participant-external) modality.

In Norwegian, the noun *plikt* can have a complement expressing the required action (both a noun phrase or an infinitive construction are common) connected by the preposition *til*. It is often used in

¹⁰ 4 of the 5 cases refer to a direct quotation of a German sentence “es muss sein!”, which is not being translated in the Czech original text but only used as a noun. These occurrences can therefore be disregarded from further discussion.

¹¹ Though by far not as general as its English equivalent *of*.

constructions with the verb *å ha* (“to have”). The noun can also have the source of the obligation (source of the mental force) as complement: then the preposition *overfor* or *mot* can be used. The Czech noun *povinnost* can connect directly to an infinitive construction. A nominal complement in the genitive case is also possible and it usually takes the form of a verbal derivative or another noun denoting an action. The source of the obligation can occur as a complement connected by the preposition *vůči* or *k* (+DAT).¹²

equivalent	plikt (58)	povinnost (59)
nødvendighet / nutnost	38 (65.5%)	38 (64.5%)
other noun	12 (21%)	13 (22%)
verb	1 (2%)	3 (5%)
adj. / adv.	4 (7%)	3 (5%)
omissions / paraphrases	3 (5%)	2 (3%)

A special problem with the Norwegian noun *plikt* is the fact that it appears frequently in compounds and in the derived verb *å forplikte* (“to pledge / bind oneself”) and the derived noun *forpliktelse*, which is closely semantically connected to *plikt* itself: *forpliktelse* is a kind of obligation or responsibility which a person has accepted voluntarily,¹³ and corresponds to the Czech noun *závazek*.¹⁴ The overview in the table also includes compounds with *plikt* as the last component, and two exceptional occurrences of the compound *pliktetikk* (Kant’s “ethics of obligation”), translated as *etika povinnosti*,¹⁵ but all other compounds with *plikt* as a first component were disregarded.

The comparison shows a surprising balance in all types of equivalence. The nominal equivalents include a number of more specific expressions: e.g. the above mentioned *závazek* (4) as well as its Norwegian equivalent *forpliktelse* (6) – the former mostly as a regular equivalent of the compound *taushetsplikt* (“professional secrecy”), the latter always in the plural form(!); the Czech noun *úkol* (3) (“task”) and its Norwegian equivalent *oppgave* (1); the Czech noun *práce* (1) (“job”) and its Norwegian equivalent *jobb* (2); or the Norwegian noun *forretning* (2) (“business”). The Norwegian idiom *hjemlige sysler* (“household chores”) is also interesting, lacking the strong attribute of obligation (as a strong mental force), which is added in the Czech translation *domáci povinnosti*, fitting better than the neutral expression *domáci práce* into the context of the predicate *to break free*. The category of adjectival and adverbial translations of the Czech *povinnost* actually include three verbal past participles showing the attributes of pressure: *presset* (“pressed”), *tvunget* (“forced”), *nødt* (“obliged”).

4. Possibility: *mulighet* / *možnost*

Both the high frequency and the rich syntactic possibilities of the nouns *mulighet* / *možnost* show that they play a much more important role in the language than the other nouns mentioned in this study. The Norwegian noun *mulighet* is derived from the corresponding adjective *mulig* (“possible”) and appears most frequently in connection with the verbs *å ha* (“to have”), *å få* (“to get”) and *å gi* (“to give”). These verbo-nominal constructions adopt the function of modal verbs (or other modal verbal constructions) like *can*, *to be able to* or *to allow*. Their further connectivity with a complement depends on finer semantic distinctions, however.

The conceptual frame of possibility again includes the following three elements: 1) a participant (can also be abstract, generalized or impersonal), who is expected to perform an action and change

¹² The former one having probably a higher stylistic value or being preferred with abstract entities or institutions.

¹³ Therefore it does *not* any more refer so clearly to the domain of participant-external modality.

¹⁴ This noun is derived from the verb *zavázat se* (“to bind oneself (to an obligation)”).

¹⁵ This equivalence would otherwise be difficult to classify within the currently used five categories.

some state of affairs, 2) the (un)desired action / change, 3) circumstances or conditions that allow the action (change) to be performed or to happen (can also be abilities or will of the participant, seldom external permission). The noun can also be used to refer to the whole situation (a possible world), where the action is performed and/or the new state of affairs is already realized (with the help of favourable circumstances and including all the consequences of such a new state of affairs), as opposed to other possible worlds where this is not the case.

In Norwegian, relation to the elements of this conceptual structure affects the syntactic realization of the utterance, including the selection of a preposition connecting the complement (defining the (un)desired action or changed state of affairs) to the noun *mulighet*: 1) when denoting the favourable **circumstances** which can allow some participant to perform the action, the prepositions *til* or *for* are used; a) the preposition *til* is used in an active meaning when the participant is known and/or the speaker believes that there is such a participant and that he or she wants to perform the action or change the state of affairs – usually the participant is the subject of the sentence or the speaker himself; b) the preposition *for* is used in a more hypothetical situation, when the speaker wants to stay neutral and does not want to imply that there is necessarily any particular participant willing to perform the action – the speaker just wants to passively address circumstances favourable for such action; 2) when denoting the whole possible **situation** (the particular possible world), where the circumstances are favourable for the action and the (un)desired state of affairs is realized (usually in order to *discuss / imagine / evaluate / be afraid of* it and its consequences), the noun *mulighet* takes a definite form and the complement is connected by the preposition *for* or *av*;¹⁶ 3) when denoting one of the possible **actions** (or states of affairs) that can be realized under the current (or otherwise given) circumstances, it is possible to use a plain apposition or copular construction – the referred action is not a syntactic complement of the noun in this case and therefore no preposition is used. However, the use of the preposition *av* and the use of apposition or a copular construction are rather exceptional. In the spoken language, the prepositions *for* and *til* are sometimes also omitted. In all cases, the complement can be either an infinitive construction, an object clause (connected by *at* “that”) or a noun phrase.

The Czech noun *možnost* is also derived from the adjective *možný* (“possible”) by the most common abstract suffix *-ost*, being itself a derivative of the modal verb *moci* (“can / be able to”). It appears as a complement of a much wider variety of verbs or in other constructions, and it is almost always connected with a complement in the genitive case (without any preposition) or with an infinitive construction or an object clause connected by *že* (“that”). The meaning is usually general and refers to the whole situation. In rare cases, the prepositions *k* or *pro* can be used to connect a nominal phrase and focus the meaning on the circumstances or conditions only (separately from the action expressed by the complement), and then the choice of preposition is very similar to the use of the Norwegian prepositions *til* and *for* respectively: *k* is used with active meaning, usually with perfective actions (punctual, but also iterative), while *pro* is used passively, rather with the imperfective and more abstract changes (durative) like *improvement, development, usage, etc.*¹⁷

Norwegian *mulighet* and Czech *možnost* are the most frequent nouns from the selected four. There are about 156 occurrences in the Norwegian part and 201 in the Czech part of the corpus. The distribution of equivalence types is the following:

equivalent	mulighet (156)	možnost (202)
mulighet / možnost	101 (64.7%)	101 (50%)
other noun	21 (13.5%)	45 (22%)

16 It seems that the choice of preposition depends on individual preferences in this case. Preposition *av* is very rare and for many speakers completely unacceptable though.

17 Aspect of the action is a much more obvious feature in Czech, because it is an inherent lexical quality of the verb and it is also being kept by the deverbal noun. The Norwegian infinitive does not tell us directly so much about the aspect itself. Otherwise, the semantic context determining the selection of preposition is basically the same.

verb	10 (6.4%)	30 (15%)
adj. / adv.	5 (3.2%)	4 (2%)
omissions / paraphrases	19 (12.2%)	22 (11%)

The direct equivalents appear in 101 cases, which is exactly 50% for Czech *možnost* and almost 65% for the Norwegian *mulighet*. Other nouns and verbs occur about twice as often for the Czech *možnost* than for its Norwegian counterpart. A closer look reveals as the most frequent equivalents the following Norwegian nouns: *sjanse* (19) (“chance”), *anledning* (6) (“opportunity”), *valg* (5) (“choice”) and *måte* (5) (“way [of doing st.]”). Among the verbal equivalents, the most prominent are the modal verbs *å kunne* (13) (“can / be able to”) and *å få* (6), which corresponds to English *to get* but extends to the meaning of “to get a chance / possibility to” or “to be allowed to”. A similar translation by the Czech verb *moci* (“can / be able to”) appears only in five cases, but even transitive verbs are used in 4 other cases: *umozňovat* (2) (“to enable”), *nechat* (“to let”) and *dopřát* (“to grant”). In Norwegian texts, the noun (and its modal aspect) are quite often completely missing (about 20 cases) – the sentence sometimes uses a conditional verb construction but mostly it approaches the possible action or state of affairs directly as if it were already realized.

The different distribution of modal verbs meaning “can” among the equivalents shows some difference between the Czech and the Norwegian verb.¹⁸ The Czech modal verb *moci* is more limited in meaning than the Norwegian *å kunne*: it implies a rather narrower kind of deontic modality, avoiding often the permissive meaning “to be allowed”, which belongs to the domain of the verb *smět* (like the Norwegian *å få*), but – compared to the Norwegian *å kunne* – it also avoids (even more so) the knowledge or ability of the participant himself (i.e. the core, participant-inherent dynamic modality), which is usually reserved for the verb *umět* (“to know / be able to”). (However, neither *smět* nor *umět* appears among the equivalents of the Norwegian noun *mulighet*.) The main domain of the Czech verb *moci* also seems to be the participant-imposed dynamic modality, the participant-external (situational dynamic) and partly the deontic modality, besides the epistemic modality. The Norwegian verb *å kunne* also covers in addition participant-inherent dynamic modality. An excellent example of this difference is a sentence from Jostein Gårders *Sophie's world*, where the Czech translator felt the need to support the participant-inherent aspect of the modal verb by adding supplemental subordinate clauses with the noun *možnost*, where they are not present in the original:¹⁹ *...Aristoteles... går ... ut fra tingenes egenskaper, nærmere bestemt hva de kan eller hva de gjør* “[Aristotle’s classification] ...is based on the properties of objects, ...what they **can** [do] and what they do” > *A. ...vychází z vlastností věcí, konkrétně z toho, co mohou, jaké mají možnosti, a co dělají, jak se tyto možnosti uskutečňují* “...what they **can** [do] – what are their **possibilities**, and what they do – how they realize those possibilities”. The verb *smět* cannot be used in the Czech translation either, because it is limited to human subjects²⁰ and the utterance requires therefore other ways of expression – it lies on the periphery of the meanings of different verbs and expressions.

In some cases where the meaning of the nouns refers more closely to some kind of external permission or possibility rather than the participant-inherent ability or decision, verbs (or verbal constructions) with an appropriate modal meaning are used as equivalents on both sides: *å få*, *hindre* (“to hinder”) and *stå fri til* (“be free to [choose]”) in Norwegian, and the above mentioned transitive verbs *umozňovat*, *nechat*, *dopřát* in Czech.

The frequent use of other nominal equivalents reveals a more limited usage of the Norwegian noun *mulighet* itself. The nouns *sjanse*, *anledning*, *valg* and *måte* are often preferred, and the noun

18 The Norwegian verb behaves more like the English one.

19 The possibility that a slightly different version of the original text was used for the translation than the one used in the corpus cannot be excluded, however. A few textual differences point to the possibility that there may exist more versions of the original text.

20 And possibly to machines as well, in colloquial language.

mulighet is limited rather to the core, most abstract meaning. In a few cases, even more specific Norwegian nouns are used in translations according to the context – e.g. where the general Czech *možnost* includes an explicit anaphoric function or the meaning can be more closely specified by other means:²¹ *teori* (“theory”), *fortelling* (“story”), *fare* (“danger”), *vei* (“way”), *tilgang* (2) (“access”), *løsning* (“solution”). The single unexpectedly frequent Czech noun appearing among the equivalents is *naděje* “hope” (5), but it is specific mostly to one text only and always used (for stylistic reasons) in a negative context (“there was no possibility” > “there was no hope”). The equivalent *příležitost* (“opportunity”) appears in 4 cases. More specific Czech translations include e.g.: *náhoda* (2) (here in the meaning “accident”), *prostředky* (“means, resources”), *postavení* (“rank, situation”), *tah* (“move [in chess]”).

The ability of the nouns to refer not only to another syntactic participant but also to some external state of affairs is clearly shown in the translation of the Czech sentence *Zbývá jim nějaká lepší možnost?* (“Is there any better possibility left for them?”) by the Norwegian sentence *Har de noe bedre igjen å gjøre?* (“Is there **anything** better left for them?”). Here the noun is translated by an indefinite pronoun. Another example shows how the modal and the anaphoric aspects are merged in the noun where it is used simultaneously as a translational equivalent of a demonstrative pronoun and a modal verb: *...musí muž počítat s tím, že z lásky může vzejít plod...* (“...the man must take [**that**] into account that his love **can** bear fruit...”) > *...må mannen regne med muligheten for at hans kjærlighet skal bære frukt...* (“...man must take into account the **possibility** that his love shall bear fruit”).

The comparison shows a slightly more general use of the Czech noun *možnost* compared to Norwegian, where other more specific nouns or modal verbs are preferred in many situations. The nouns (and especially the Czech one) seem to be more active in constructions used to express modality than the previously analysed nouns. The main domain of the meaning of those nouns belongs obviously to the category of participant-imposed dynamic modality and situational modality, with a possibility to extend partially into the field of participant-inherent and deontic (participant-external) modality. The domain of epistemic modality is being explicitly referred to when there is a complement with a full object clause (independent proposition), having its own subject. This wide coverage probably explains the high frequency and wide usage of the words.

5. Permission: *lov / svolení, dovolení, povolení*

The concept of permission is not any different from the other concepts referred to by the previously mentioned nouns – it differs from obligation only in the two facts that here it is the will of the main participant (agent) himself or herself to perform some action, while the external authority **allows** him or her to do it (i.e. it **removes** some moral pressure **hindering** the action). The main domain of this concept is therefore the deontic (participant-external) modality.

Nevertheless, the nominal semantic field covering the phenomenon is much more complicated in both languages. Both Norwegian and Czech separate the institutional or formal permission by giving it a special name: *povolení* in Czech and *tillatelse* in Norwegian. The general meaning of permission is then expressed in Czech by other two nouns derived from the corresponding transitive verbs: *dovolení* and *svolení*,²² while there is no deverbal noun derived (directly or indirectly) from the intransitive general verb *smět* (“to be allowed to”). Norwegian uses the noun *lov* which is special in many ways: 1) it is the only Norwegian noun mentioned here which is of Old Norse origin (and not a later import or influence of Low German vocabulary and word-formation), 2) it appears always in the indefinite form singular, 3) it is a homonym of three other nouns with the

21 All of them with single occurrence, if not specified otherwise.

22 The difference between the three nouns (like the original verbs) is a minor semantic nuance: while *povolení* evokes a more formal permission of an official authority (an institution), *dovolení* is more personal and refers to a local private authority like parents or the owner of some affected object, and *svolení* evokes an even more relaxed way of acceptance, where the involvement of the authority (can be both private and institutional!) is presented as being minor or even insignificant (from the speaker's point of view), but a formal permission is still required or desired.

meanings: *law*, *praise* and *promise*, 4) it appears in most cases as a complement of the verbs *å få* (“to get”), *å ha* (“to have”) or *å gi* (“to give”), obviating the need for a special modal verb.²³

equivalent	lov (154)	dovolení/svolení (17+2)
lov / dovolení, svolení	12 (8%)	11+1
other noun	10 (6.5%)	3 + 1
verb	105 (68%)	1 + 0
adj. / adv.	16 (10%)	0 + 0
omissions / paraphrases	11 (7%)	2 + 0

The noun *lov* appears only 6 times completely independently (4%) in the parallel corpus, otherwise it is always part of a construction with the verbs *å få* (62%), *å ha* (22%) and *å gi* (2.5%), or at least of a copular construction with the verb *to be* (10%). (However, there is generally no direct correspondence between the constructions and their equivalents in Czech texts.) The Czech nominal equivalents *dovolení* / *svolení* are used in only 12 cases. In 67 cases (43.5%), the construction is expressed by the Czech modal verb *smět* (“to be allowed to”), in 25 cases (16.2%) by the transitive verb *dovolit* (“to allow”) and in 7 cases by the modal verb *moci* (“can / to be able to”). The adverbial equivalents *dovolenø* (8) (“allowed”), *povolenø* (2) (“permitted”) / *zakázáno* (4) (“prohibited”) appear with the verbs *být* (“to be”) and *mít* (“to have”). Other nouns also always appear as parts of verbo-nominal constructions with the verbs *být*, *mít* and *dávat* (“to give”), and usually the nouns *právo* (7) (“entitlement / right”) or *možnost* (2) (“possibility”) are used. Still, the Norwegian verb *å få* (“to get”) is used even in cases where the Czech text uses the verb *mít* (“to have”) in those constructions.

The use of the Czech nouns is very rare due to the existence of the modal verb *smět*. But they also still appear mostly in constructions with the above mentioned verbs.

equivalent	tillatelse (17)	povolení (1)
tillatelse / povolení	1	1
other noun	3	0
verb	8	0
adj. / adv.	2	0
omissions / paraphrases	3	0

For completeness, an overview of the nouns *tillatelse* and *povolení* is also included. It shows that the Norwegian noun is much more frequent and its behaviour is actually very similar to the noun *lov*. (The possibility of influence can therefore be considered.) The only difference seems to be that the construction with the verb *å gi* (“to give”) is more frequent here. Simple statistics of collocations from the LBK corpus can confirm this claim, but the construction with the verb *å få* still seems to be almost twice as frequent as the construction with the verb *å gi*.

The nouns denoting permission show a significant difference in use in the two languages. While the Czech nouns are limited to their abstract meaning only, the old Norwegian noun *lov* takes an active part in the verbo-nominal constructions supplying the role of a simple modal verb. The attachment of this noun to the verb *å få* (“to get”) seems to be so prevalent that it is used even in situations

²³ The verb *å få* can also be used to express a permission without the noun *lov*, but then it refers rather to the more general concept of possibility.

where there is no semantic reason to prefer the active aspect of this verb to the passive meaning of the verb *to have*. Possibly it also has influence on the use of the close synonym *tillatelse*.

6. Conclusion

The comparison shows strong parallels in the conceptual division of the analysed fields in the two languages, but also more or less significant differences in the actual use of the nouns. Generally, there might be a slight preference for verbal expressions in Norwegian, but this analysis cannot confirm such a generalization. The role of more or less fixed expressions and constructions seems to be much more important and independent of the traditional generalizations on the level of basic grammatical categories. The individual fixed expressions easily change the balances and can even obfuscate minor semantic nuances in the meaning. One example is the preference of the verb *å få* among the constructions with the Norwegian noun *lov*. Another example is the fact that both Norwegian and Czech have similar correspondences between the syntactic configurations of the nouns *mulighet* and *možnost*, but the prevalent use of a direct complement in the genitive case in Czech and the prevalent use of the prepositions *for* and *til* in Norwegian have the effect that the Czech noun refers mostly to the whole possible situation (the possible world), while the Norwegian noun mostly refers only to the circumstances allowing such a situation. Such a minor semantic difference usually has no effect on the meaning of the utterance as whole, and therefore the formal preferences enforce the choice of exact meaning or the perspective of describing it.

Also, one more particular peculiarity of Czech seems to be the more frequent use of transitive verbs in modal expressions, unlike Norwegian, which keeps to the intransitive and mainly plain modal verbs. The transitive verbs require explicit specification of all participants (in these cases the external source of the force allowing or hindering the action), while it remains underspecified or implicit when intransitive verbs are used. The Czech translators then have to resolve this external participant explicitly. A comparison of the use of such verbs could be an interesting subject of a further study.

The parallel corpus, even when small, proves to be both a useful source of contrastive inter-lingual knowledge and also a unique source of paraphrases to give hints about possible ways and limits of expressing things within the source language itself. It can bring to the forefront many peculiarities that would often remain hidden to the insider's view if not contrasted with other language. Even closely related languages can in contrast disclose deviations in otherwise seemingly regular patterns.

References

- Boye K., 2005, Modality and the concept of force-dynamic potential. In *Modality. Studies in Form and Function*. Eds. Alex Klinge and Henrik Høeg Müller, Equinox Publishing Ltd., London, 49-80.
- Czech National Corpus – Syn2005*, 2005. Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK, Praha. <http://www.korpus.cz>
- de Haan F., 2006, Typological approaches to modality. In *Expression of Cognitive Categories: The Expression of Modality*. Eds. William Frawley, Wolfgang Klein and Stephen Levinson, Walter de Gruyter & Co. KG Publishers, Berlin, 27-69
- Leksikografisk bokmålskorpus*. Institutt for lingvistiske og nordiske studier, Universitetet i Oslo. <http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/forskning/samlingene/bokmal/>
- Nuyts J., 2005, The modal confusion: on terminology and the concepts behind it. In *Modality. Studies in Form and Function*. Eds. Alex Klinge and Henrik Høeg Müller, Equinox Publishing Ltd., London, 5-38.
- Nuyts J., 2006, Modality: Overview and linguistic issues. In *Expression of Cognitive Categories: The Expression of Modality*. Eds. William Frawley, Wolfgang Klein and Stephen Levinson, Walter

de Gruyter & Co. KG Publishers, Berlin, 1-26.

Palmer F. R., 1986, *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.