

A Pragmatic Analysis of Modality in English Academic Texts in Nigeria and Iraq

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Abstract

Despite scholars' attention on the typology of modality as a linguistic phenomenon, yet the use of modality across varieties of English is not well visible in communication-based researches that take semantics, pragmatics and discourse issues as the objects for their investigation. The paper generates its data from six M. A. dissertations from Nigerian University and equal number of the M. A. dissertations from Iraqi University to qualitatively and quantitatively investigate the contextual use of modality within the pragmatic perspective. The data analysis reveals that modality such as usuality, potentiality, necessity, probability and obligation in the dissertations encapsulates interpersonal and authorial voice in which the meaning of a clause is qualified to reflect the writer's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true. The study findings also show the divergent use of modality to indicate certainty, possibility, probability and evidence and the nature of their illocutionary forces in the academic writings through verb modals and lexically modalized presentations in the MA. Dissertations that form the data of the study.

Keywords: pragmatics, discourse, context, epistemic modality, deontic modality, verb modal, non-verb modal modality

1. Introduction

It is a known fact that global spread of English and English Language Teaching (ELT) elevate English to assume the status as the sole medium for instruction in many countries where non-native students of English are discouraging to use their first language at all costs in the classroom activities (Canagarajah, 2002 cited in Bedu, 2017). This, in many instances, necessitates the non-native students of English to utilize their non-native varieties of English in the ELT activities (Phillipson, 1992). Regardless of form and nature of their Englishes, modality is an important category in the interpersonal metafunction of language which presents language user's attitudes towards the propositional information about the world. It also provides alternative view for the users of the language to achieve the notion of objectivity, factuality, and impartiality, among others, in their communication (Bedu, 2017).

Modality, as linguistic phenomenon, has for many decades, been in the spotlight of quite numbers of semantic, pragmatic and grammar researches (Palmer, 1986; Hodge and Kress, 1988; and Halliday, 1994). The concept of modality covers linguistic features in the texts that 'express speakers'/writers' attitude and belief towards themselves, towards interlocutors, and towards their subject-matters, (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler et al., 1979). Modality as the linguistic feature still remains one of the biggest problems of linguistic analysis because it behaves more polypragmatics (complex pragmatic phenomenon) across different genres and across Englishes (Hyland, 1998; Palmer, 2003).

From stylistic features of Indian English, for instance, modal verb are logical extensions of the British English strategies as the modality words such as 'could' and 'would' are used in Indian English whereas British English uses 'can' and 'will' as exemplified in (1) below provided by Trudgill & Hannah (2008:136).

1. 'We hope that you **could** join us' or 'We hope that the Vice-Chancellor **would** investigate this matter'.

In these two cases, the ‘could’ and ‘would’ are used because the Indian English speaker felt the two modal verbs are more tentative and therefore more useful for achieving politeness. The same strategy is regularly employed in British English. For example, in an instruction to a non-intimate, if the speaker wishes to appear more polite, he or she is likely to say ‘Could you open the door’ rather than ‘Can you open the door’. In this regard, linguistic phenomenon such as modality is characterized by variation across varieties of language and genres and it is likely to be problematic for L2 learners of English (Adel, 2020).

From scholarly observations, the use of modality across varieties of English is not well visible in communication-based researches that take semantics, pragmatics and discourse issues as basis for their investigations. This study therefore is set to investigate the operation of modality across varieties of English within the pragmatic framework to provide their taxonomical distribution in the language.

1.1 About Nigerian and Iraqi Englishes in the Three-Circle Model of World Englishes

According ‘Three-circle Model of World Englishes’ developed by Kachru (1985), English has been indigenized in Nigeria as Outer Circle; while in Iraq and other Middle East countries, it is the language of choice, especially for international organizations and companies as well as academic world activities and as such Iraq falls within the Expanding Circle (Mollin, 2006, p.41).

The **Outer Circle** represents the countries that include Nigeria and India where they speak official non-native varieties of English because of their *colonial history with the British*. The **Expanding Circle**, on one hand, is made up by *EFL* speakers like Iraq where English is not usually spoken. In the Expanding Circle, the speakers of English have to *follow the rules* established by the **Inner Circle** where English is a native language unlike a situation in which new forms of English are developed or challenged like what is obtained in the Outer Circle e.g. India, Ghana among others (Jenkins, 2015).

More so, there are some degrees or levels on which the two Englishes in the diasporas differ from the English of the Inner Circle which Chinua Achebe described as “ancestral home of English” where the discourse style of some of the linguistic features of English including modality differs in the English of non-native speakers of the language.

2. Literature Review

Various scholars in numerous literatures present discussion on the typology of modality as a linguistic element which allows speakers or writers to indicate their point of view on the events or states in which both the speaker/writer and hearer/reader are participants (Chafe, 1994; Palmer, 2001; Halliday, 2004). For instance, Halliday (2004) explains that modality as linguistic feature allows for what he terms as scale of probability and usuality as modalization. The scholar has particularly explained that, at times, addressers in written or oral discourse involve modality in their propositions to achieve two kinds of immediate possibilities that include a) degree of possibility as in *possibly/probably/certainly*, and b) degree of usuality like *sometimes/usually/ always*.

In this regard, all propositions, that contain modality, have elements of the personal attribution of its author and also connected to the point of view of the subject matter (Bedu, 2017). These modal elements always encapsulate “the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified to reflect the writer’s judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true” (Quirk, et al., 1985:219).

As stated earlier in this section, many scholars define and categorize modality differently. For instance, Jespersen (1924:313) was among the early modern linguists that divides English modality into twenty subcategories as they involved “certain attitudes of the mind of the speaker towards the content of the sentence”. Jespersen’s subcategorization of modality is in two broad forms as you can see in table (1) below:

Table 1. Jespersen’s categorization of modality (Jespersen, 1924:320)

Containing an element of will	Containing no element of will
1. Jussive: go (command).	1. Apodictive: twice two must be (is necessarily) four.
2. Compulsive: he has to go.	2. Necessitative: he must be rich (or he could not spend so much).
3. Obligative: he ought to go / we should go.	3. Assertive: he is rich.
4. Advisory: you should go.	
5. Precative: go, please.	
6. Hortative: let us go.	

7. Permissive: you may go if you like.	4. Presumptive: he is probably rich; he would (will) know.
8. Promissive: I will go / it shall be done.	5. Dubitative: he may be (is perhaps) rich.
9. Optative (realizable): may he be still alive!	6. Potential: he can speak.
10. Desiderative (unrealizable): would he/ were still alive!	7. Conditional: if he is rich.
11. Intentional: in order that he may go.	8. Hypothetical: if he were rich.
	9. Concessional: though he is rich.

This kind of classification has a significant influence to the modern research on modality and its classification though it has too many subcategories with many overlapping.

From systemic functional linguistic perspective, modality is considered as a feature of discourse that encodes semiotic features for realizing the interpersonal function and expressing social roles between the text producer and the text consumers (Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Fairclough, 1995). Modality means the speaker's judgment in what he is saying as regards to the degree of certitude, probabilities, obligation, authority, ability and usuality, which, for instance in English, are indicated by number of modal verbs (*will, may, might*), temporal adverb (*sometimes, often*), quantifier (*most, some*), modal adjective (*possible*) etc (Halliday and Hasan, 1985).

Traditionally, modality is classified into epistemic and deontic. Epistemic modality has to do with belief and knowledge, as in (2a) below, while deontic modality has to do with issues such as permission and obligation, as in (2b):

- 2) (a) John **must** be sick.
(b) John **must** apologize

Epistemic modality as in (2a) above has to do with linguistic expression of what speaker knows, has evidence for, believe etc. while in (2b) the deontic modality encodes a statement of obligation.

As semantic phenomenon, modality expresses the speakers or writers' attitude and state of knowledge about a proposition and what the speaker is doing with the whole proposition (Bybee, 1985; Fawley and Charles, 1992). In this regard, Modality is one of the complex semantic categories whose "meaning depends on alternate possible worlds" (Portner, 2005: 154).

Palmer (1990) provides a typical example of an ambiguity in modality with regard to epistemic and deontic modal meanings on both descriptive and explanatory grounds, and subsequently takes each modal verb to encode a particular cluster of distinct modalities. Thus, *may* encodes epistemic and deontic possibility (i.e. permission) as shown in (3a-b) respectively:

- 3) a. My boss may find this file interesting.
b. You may enter.

At the level of semantic and pragmatic interface, Bally (1942) asserts that modality is achieved in the sentential construction in explaining speaker's evaluation of a state of affairs through what he terms as *modus* in a sentence construction that has dictum part as you can see below:

- 4) a. I think it is raining.
b. It is probably raining.
c. It must be raining.

The structure **It is raining** in (4a) above is the dictum part of the sentence while everything else in the structure is the *modus* that Bally considers as modality that indicates the speaker's cognitive emotive or volitive attitude toward a state of affairs. *Modus* in 4b appears as adverbial as in it is **probably** and modal verb in 4c as in it **must be** in expressing proposition attitude of the speaker.

Bedu (2017) explains that modality as the semantic category allows newspaper text producers to communicate their assessment of the validity or predictability of proposition especially in the language of 'opinionated' genres of journalism such as newspaper editorials or opinion articles. Bedu (2017) arguably states that modality markers most often are indicative and argumentative to influence the reader by giving a judgment and interpretation of

certain facts through evaluation and comment on the topical issues or events in the newspaper text. Consider the examples of modality in Nigerian English based on ‘truth modality’ and ‘obligation modality’ in table (2) below:

Table 2. Modality in Nigerian English (Bedu, 2017:131)

Truth Modality	Obligation Modality
The assurance given by President Muhammed Buhari recently that his administration will accord the highest priority to the completion of Mambila hydro-power plant	The driver must be caught and example made out of him to serve as deterrent to others
By complying with the law, NDLEA can still achieve its objective of ultimately taking Kashamu to the US to face his trial.	We need to state very clearly that we do not in any way support Buruji who must answer to the charges against him.
Though the rash of xenophobic upwelling in South Africa recently may have subsided, it seems the scourge is still latent, alive and well in parts of Africa	In a protest letter to the Equatorial Guinea authorities, against this crude and barbaric act, the Consulate-General of Nigeria in Bata has demanded that attacks of this nature should stop forthwith.

As highlighted in bold face in the table, truth modality in the Nigerian English which is achieved using modal verbs (i.e., *will/would, can/could, may/might, certainly*, etc.) appears authoritative and, at same time indicates the belief of the text’s author about the text. On the other hand, obligation modality indicates the degree to which the writer believes that a certain course of action or certain decision *ought* or *should* be taken (i.e., *have, need, must, necessarily*) as opinion in the editorial text.

Bybee (1994:4) explains that modality in English is expressed through the following:

- modal auxiliaries such as can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would,
- a number of lexical verbs such as believe, infer and know,
- adjectives such as definite, probably and unlikely,
- adverb such as arguably, certainly, possibly and
- multi word units and colligations involving lexis expressing degrees of certainty such as it seems plausible, it is doubtful, call into questions, you are sure to be right.

The various research works reviewed above show that the modality, as expression, linguistically encodes not only text author’s value judgment but a distinction between objectivity and subjectivity of the language user. In this paper, we intend to account for the pragmatic functions of modality in the data generated from six M. A. thesis from the University of Maiduguri and equal number of the postgraduate thesis from Baghdad University to adequately describe the function of modality within the pragmatic principles especially the way in which the postgraduate students utilize it in the two academic texts written in the two diaspora Englishes.

3. Modality from Pragmatic Perspective

The paper is set to interrogate modality across varieties of English within the theoretical framework of pragmatic. The Pragmatics as a linguistic theory accounts for utterance of natural language and usage within a certain context unlike how syntax accounts for abstract structures of expression or the semantics that deals with only the meaning and reference assigned to these expressions (Bedu and Ismail, 2022). Pragmatics is primarily concerned with systematic uses of language as opposed to structure; it sees language use as a particular type of social action (i.e., speech acts or illocutionary acts) through which it contributes to the theory of meaning for utterances (Moris, 1938).

The term ‘modality’ from pragmatic principles is a category of linguistic meaning that concerns with sense of a speaker’s utterance of a sentence especially the proposition of an expression that has to do with obligation, possibility and necessity which form part of the principles of the speech act theory i.e., commissives (assure, declare for, agree to), expositives (Admit, affirm, announce, inform, respond) and exercitives (command, demand, implore, desire) (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Modality is linguistic element that can help the hearer/reader to understand the speaker’s intention especially what is necessary, permissible or obligatory (Bedu, 2017). This suggests that the modality goes beyond semantic content of an utterance as it encapsulates speech act principles in

indicating the speaker's subjectivity, obligation, and judgment proposition in the information that tried to convey by his/her expressions (Palmer, 1986).

Pragmatically, English language is endowed with various kinds of modality which have to do with the linguistic expressions of what a speaker knows, or has evidence for, or believe etc. Some of these kinds of modality in the English language account for the speaker's assessment in term of probability and predictability as you can see in the data analysis section below. These pragmatic functions include hedges which functions as metadiscourse markers to indicate legitimacy, alternatives, and suggestion among others in the discourse (Bedu and Baba, 2017).

Since English language is endowed with various kinds of modality, the present study discusses the variations in the function of modality in the academic texts written by language user of English of the Outer Circle and that of the Expanding Circle to adequately explain and describe the functions of modality pragmatically in the two varieties of English language.

4. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

To support the intent of the paper, this research generates its small-scale data from six M. A. dissertations from University of Maiduguri, Nigeria and equal number of the M. A. dissertations from University of Baghdad, Iraq.

All of the twelve dissertations are linguistic based theses written by the citizens of the two countries who are the students of English or taught in English as L2. The study adopts mixed method of qualitative and quantitative descriptive research to investigate the extent in which aspect of modality is utilized in the selected dissertations. The paper adopts the mixed method to x-ray the extent in which modality contributes to the proposition of meaning is rendering the writers' communicative intentions to the readers. And through these qualitative and quantitative descriptive and the explanations of the data, the study will present its findings in measuring not only the language competence of English as Second Language (ESL) learners but the extent of the pragmatic competence of using modality as important linguistic element by the research population.

5. Data Analysis

Pragmatically, the use of modality in all academic writings is a typical lexical choice that forms the important building block for achieving meaningful text due to its wide range of its semantic and pragmatic functions. It is well established in many linguistic researches that modality in English is expressed through diverse grammatical, lexical and sentential means that include modal auxiliary verbs, quasi-modals or semi-modals, and sets of periphrastic and sentence expressions. The data exhibits three sorts disparity in using the modal verbs to achieve illocutionary force in the two varieties of English which we can elaborate in the qualitative discussion of the data.

- i. permission/possibility involves the modals *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might*;
- ii. obligation/necessity involves *must* and *should ought to*; and
- iii. volition/prediction involves *will*, *would* and *shall*, *use to*.

Apart from the modal verbs, the lexical and sentential modality expressions in the data, on one hand, exhibit the illocutionary force that shows disparity between the data of Nigerian and Iraqi academic research writings especially by:

- i. indicating uncertainty and imprecision where detailed information is not available (likely, probably, might be, seemed to be, doubtfully and hedges such as I think, I guess etc.)
- ii. mitigating indirect criticism or backing, or attack on the other scholars' views (in his view, not really our position, supposedly, arguably, clearly, we don't discard, it is not so cleared or sure etc.)
- iii. avoiding sender's commitment to the truth of the proposition (possibly, hopefully, necessarily, perhaps, his assumption, lexical verbs such think, wish, believe etc.)

5.1 Qualitative Discussion of the Data

The qualitative characterizations of the modality in the two English variations show that the different functions of the modality especially modal verbs are based on typical style that is common to the second language learner and native speaker's language experience especially in the use of non-modal verb modality.

Pragmatically, the use of modality in the academic texts that form the data of the present study exhibits two types of modality: epistemic and evidential modality since the authors are working to present their research findings. These two elements of modality are typical propositional modality and they are important building block to achieve meaningful text in the academic writing for both empirical and illustrative purposes as discussed in Palmer (1986:24).

Epistemic modality in the academic writings constitutes three type of judgment that include (un)certainty, inference from observable evidence and inference from what is generally known. On one hand, evidential modality elements that the academic text writers utilize to present their research findings are of two forms: reported and sensory in form of evidence to establish some of the empirical findings in the researches. Consider the following table (3):

Table 3. Epistemic and Evidential Modality

Modality		English Academic Text	
		Nigerian data	Iraqi data
Epistemic	(Un)certainty	It may enrich the discussion in the data analysis	This study may be of a great help to improve the awareness of the EFL students
	Inference from observable evidence	The discussions above may predict the unproductive nature of their outcomes	From a syntactic stand of view, Arabic and English show many important differences
	Inference from what is generally known	According to Chomskian principle of GB theory, such as these postulations would lay a foundation.....	A more procedural set of points could be the one mentioned by Ana B. Fernandez- Guerra
Evidential	Reported	The research findings highlight	The following examples (1) and (2) are illustrative
	Sensory	As you can see in the following	This investigation is hoped to be theoretically and practically significant to those who are interested in the study of pragmatic

From the illustrative examples in the above table, the functions of modality in academic text go beyond grammatical means to include illocutionary force as it concerns with propositions on the strengthen of the text author's conviction, conclusion or assumption presented in the research.

Furthermore, the academic text writers utilize the modality to overtly present their facts or opinions in their research either through deductive or assumptive means of modality as you can see below:

- 5) (a) For pedagogical implication, the L1 interference **must be** avoided in L2 learning (NGR5).
- (b) From the research findings, the intercultural translation difficulties and barriers **would be** addressed by the use of some procedures highlighted above (IRQ4).

The structure in 5 (a) presents deductive form of epistemic modality that involves judgment based on evidence while the 5 (b) is form of the assumptive modality that presents judgment based on what the researcher believes in it.

Like epistemic modality, evidential modality also plays role in Nigerian and Iraqi academic texts as it lies in the realms of interpersonal meanings and demonstrates how writer presents evidence about whether the facts or opinion in the text it is true, necessary, desirable or possible. Consider the following:

- 6) **In accordance with** Lakoff's (1972) main concern, a hedging device is defined by Brown and Levinson (1987: 145) as "a particle.....(IRQ 3)
- 7) From the few wordlists of 'Yan Langaɓu, we **believe** the language users manipulate Hausa words to suit the different meaning in the communication to subtly achieve their ideological goals (NGR 2)

From the pragmatic dimension that evidential modality marker ‘**in accordance with**’ in (6) is a clear case of reporting fact or opinion in the academic writings. While the boldface word ‘**believe**’ in the structure (7) is the case of sensory evidential modality in the academic writing text.

However, the use of modality as linguistic phenomenon is common in all discourse both written and oral texts (Bedu, 2017). The data in the qualitative analysis reveals not only that the modality is a prominent feature in the academic text but its appropriate use of modality reflects the individual mastering of English and pragmatic competence. And the descriptive analysis does not provide clear evidence to understand the differences in usage of modality across two varieties of English in the academic texts. In this regard, the paper engages quantitative analysis of the data to determines the level of mastering the complexity of modality in the Nigerian and Iraqi academic texts.

Apart from what we have clearly seen in the discussion of modal verb, the data also exhibit disparity in the operation of modality elements that are lexical verbs, adverbs, phrasal modal, nouns and adjectives in the Nigerian and Iraqi academic texts written in English as you can see in table (4) below:

Table 4. Non-verb Modal Modality

Modality	English Academic Text	
	Nigerian data	Iraqi data
Lexical verbs	Like many scholars, we believe that the issue of gender equality remains unheard in the Hausa literature and this renders Hausa literary to be less gender-sensitive in both prose, drama and poem.	From the features of English newspapers language, we think there are different styles beyond their news reports, headlines and ads as the opinion and commentary articles may exhibit different journalistic styles which also traced their origin to publicistic style.
Phrasal modal,	There is lack of uniformity in labeling the various modifiers/specifiers within Kanuri nominal expression as presented in the general descriptive analysis. We need therefore to harmonize these inconsistencies in this research before delving into.....	As we embrace qualitative approach of the CDA, our discussion and assumption ought to provide the detailed analytic technique and methodological explanation of research data
Adverbs	It has been widely acknowledged in literature that different newspaper texts perform different functions which include service information, opinion and news.	Intertextually, the writer swiftly moves his argument back with different text on new statistical figures on net population of long-term migration, then ties it to Cameron’s three-and-half-year-ago promises.....
Nouns	From the review, there are certainty that affixes that include prefix, infix and suffix operate in the morphology of affectionate nickname in Hausa.	From cognitive linguistic perspective, there are probability of metaphoric mappings in both structures (7) and (8) that involve source to target domain mapping.
Adjectives	Since the Marghi demonstrative also does not close off the projection, it probable that the Hausa demonstratives have different forms of definite and indefinite determiner elements.	So, it is impossible for humans to have control over the event as we understand from Foucault’s assumption....

It is worth acknowledging that the deployment of modality in the discourse reflects language user’s competence of the language since modality as linguistic element is essentially speaker-orientated that facilitates judgment about the truth of the proposition. Unlike what obtainable in Iraqi academic writings, the data show that Nigerian authors are highly engaged hedges such as adverbs (*probably/ possible, maybe and perhaps*), temporal adverb (*sometimes*,

often), quantifier (*most, some*), and epistemic expressions (*it is likely, it is usually*) while marking reluctance to the present or evaluative propositional information categorically. This suggests that such modality elements that the text-producers utilize to explicitly address readers either by selectively focusing their attention or by including themselves as participant in the text situation. Consider the following examples:

8. To **us**, the 'Broken Determiner' analysis is **probably** proposed in Amfani (1995) to capture the semantic unity displayed by the two determiners and, at the same time preserving the earlier assumption of x-bar theory of having single Spec position for every maximal projection.
9. When drawing the threads of these research findings that **we** put together, the investigation of representations of social realities in the selected Nigerian newspapers' editorial texts is **likely** to impact on **some** of implications highlighted in the previous critical discourse studies in Nigerian contexts.

From the above excerpts, the study discovers that considerable number of Nigerian students utilize modality that are non-verb modals to indicate usuality, potentiality, necessity, probability and obligation in the dissertations. These non-verb modals also help the Nigerian authors to encapsulate interpersonal and authorial voice in which the meaning of a clause is qualified to reflect the writer's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true.

In the Iraqi data, there are minimal variations with the Nigerian data as the Iraqi M. A. students do not utilize self-reflexive pronouns like their Nigerian counterparts as seen in example (8-9) above in which such modality categories clarify the interpersonal dimensions in expressing the viewpoint of the writer about the event that she or he is explaining. However, another variation that the data Iraqi student M.A. dissertations exhibit is the operation of **serial modality** (occurrence of more than one modality) within a structure. Consider the following operation of serial modality in examples (10-11):

10. Yet, the most serious challenge a translator **may possibly** face among the aforementioned ones **might be probably** "the intercultural problem", i. e., the difficulty which results from the cultural components of a certain speech community.
11. A question like this: "أكانت عمامته خضراء أم سوداء؟" Was his turban green or black?" **may certainly** seem, for the first glance to be a question about the colour of the turban of the person referred to. This possibility **may be outrightly** true in a certain context.

From the interpersonal dimension, the above structures in (10) and (11) do not reflect author's presence in their proposition as seen in Nigerian data using self-reflexive pronouns such as 'us' and 'we'. However, the authors utilize serial modality such as **may possibly**, **might be probably**, **may certainly** and **may be outrightly** to avoid responsibility of the proposition since they may not be certain whether these are true. The deployment of the serial modality is pragmatically form part of the interpersonal metafunction of language as the authors attempt by adding clarifying information to distinguish small possibility and strong probability as indicated in (10) while in (11) the serial modality denotes amplification of conviction to the truthfulness of the proposition.

5.2 Quantitative Analysis of the Data

For the quantitative analysis, the corpora are made up of 12 M. A. dissertations written in English in which the elicited portions of the research dissertations are selected through purposive sample. 6 of the 12 M. A. dissertations were written by the postgraduate students of linguistics of University of Maiduguri, Nigeria (NGR) and other 6 M. A. dissertations were written by the postgraduate students of English from University of Baghdad, Iraq (IRQ). The analysis is carried out by combining concordance software (Wordsmith Tool 4.0) and manual analysis of the examples elicited from the data. The level of education of the research writers from the two countries justifies that they are all acquainted with the academic writings. The total words of the corpus are 390, 468 with NGR data have 197, 922 words while IRQ data stand with 192, 546 total words. Emphasis is focused on the propositional modality that is made of epistemic and evidential modality in the data.

From the result of the frequency of occurrence of the propositional modality, the presence of epistemic and evidential modality in IRQ data is of 5.3 per thousand words while NGR data is of 7.0 modality per thousand words as the percent of each of the modal element in the overall distribution of the modality in the each data as given in figure 1 and 2 below:

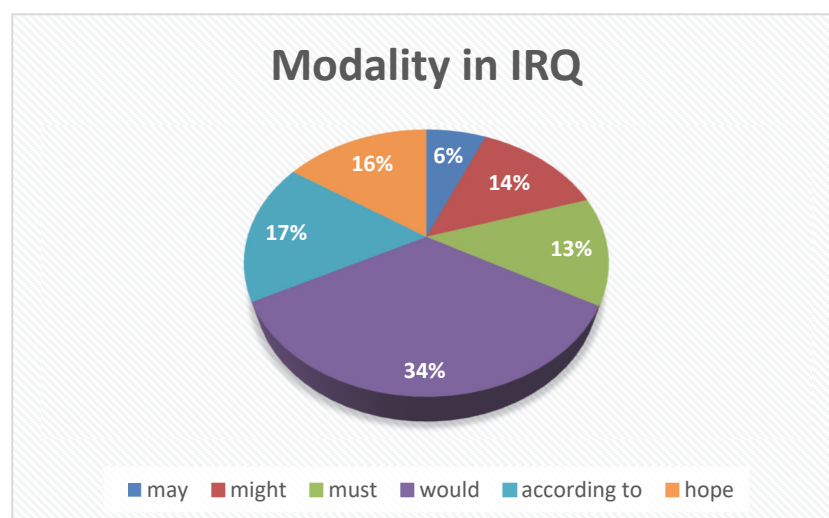


Figure 1. Percentage of Modality in IRQ Data

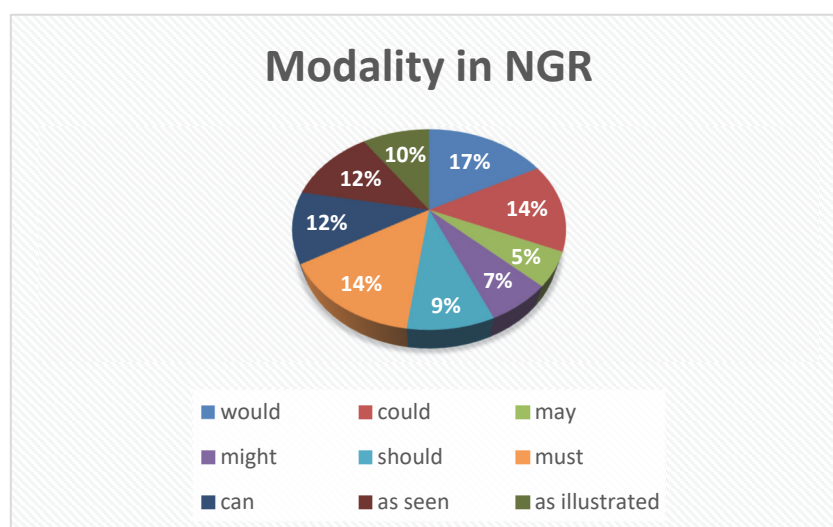


Figure 2. Percentage of Modality in NGR Data

In the pie chart in figure 1, the IRQ data which emerged from Extending Circle exhibit that might, may must and would of epistemic modality and evidential modality that includes reported 'according' and sensory form 'hope' are less frequent in the data to achieve the trichotomy of the epistemic and evidential propositions that include (un)certainity, probability and possibility. The NRG data as Outer Circle reveal high frequent of propositional modality in figure 2 with wide ranging elements of modality to express deductive, assumptive and speculative propositions of epistemic modality as well as evidential modality that includes reported and sensory evidence unlike what IRQ data exhibited.

Even 'would' as assumptive epistemic modality is most frequently used by both Iraqis and Nigerian postgraduate students in their dissertations written in English, modality that reflects speculative proposition such 'may' and 'might' is the lest frequent used in the NGR data when compared to the IRQ data.

On the other hand, the frequency count of the non-modal verb modality in the two sets of corpora present an over 10% gap between the dissertation of the Nigerian M.A. students and of the Iraqi M. A. students as you can see in the following table (5):

Table 5. Frequency of Non-verb Modality in the data

Modality	Nigerian data (N)	Iraqi data (N)
Lexical Verbs i.e. wish, think, believe, confirm, reject	170	20
Adverbs i.e., possibly, perhaps, clearly, swiftly, strongly, outrightly	76	53
Adjectives i.e., impossible, possible, probable, certainty	157	89
Phrasal modals i.e. <i>ought to, have to, need to, used to,</i>	82	34
Quantifiers i.e., <i>most, some, many, all</i>)	120	60
Epistemic Expressions i.e., <i>it is likely, it is more likely, it usually</i>	16	5
Serial modality	-	10
Total	621	271

The frequency of the non-verb modal and their utilization presents substantial differences between Nigerian students and that of the Iraq as the frequency shows that Nigerian students tend to extensively utilize more expressions in lexical verb modality, adjective modality and quantifiers far above Iraqi students do. The high frequency in the Nigerian data is not unconnected with what Ajami, (2016) dubbed as certainty-oriented where author's beliefs are considered certainties as the result of their language competence and performance. The variation of the frequency of non-verb modality is captured diagrammatically in figure (3) below:

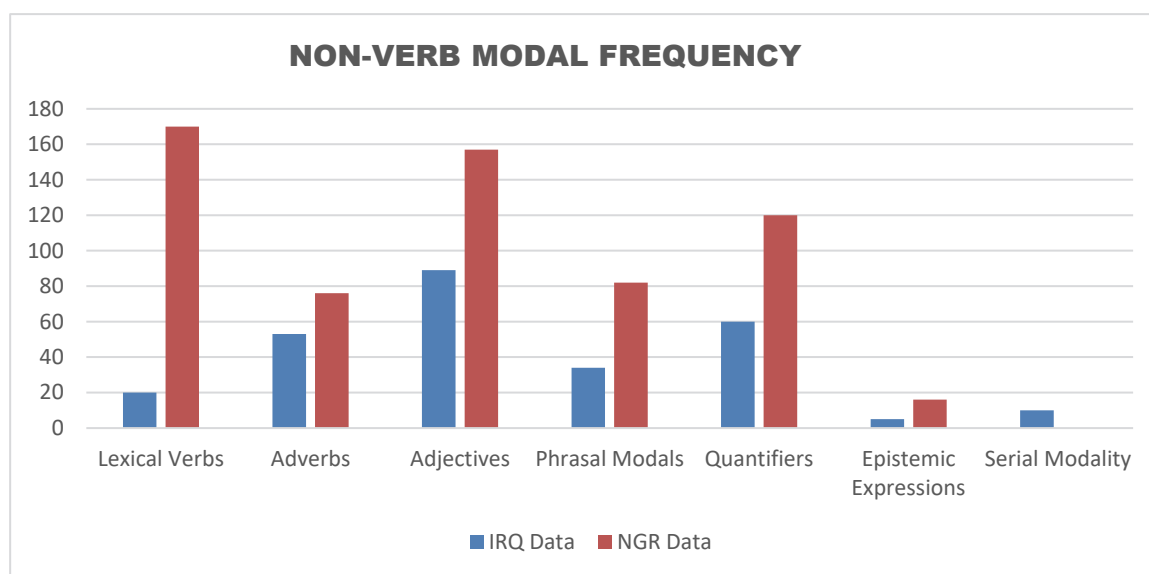


Figure 3. Percentage of Frequency of Non-verb Modal Modality

5.2.1 Discussion of the Quantitative Results

This paper examines the uses of modal verbs in MA Dissertations by Iraqi writers by comparing the modal usage with Nigerian postgraduate students who, in their country, English is the official language. The key findings show that by comparison Iraqi writers tend to underutilize the category of modal verbs in general. Some modal verbs and epistemic expressions were found to be significantly underused.

From the quantitative analysis, one will understand that there is disparity that forms the variation in the use of modality in the two sets of the corpora. The study attributes the disparity between the two corpora in terms of the use of both verb modals and non-verb modal elements of modality to language competence and performance since Nigerians fall within Outer Circle and utilize English as official language more than Iraqis in their communication, a circumstance that places Iraq under Extended Circle where English is only used for special purposes such as education and diplomacy etc. in such countries.

The quantitative findings of the study reveals that the Iraqi students' low proficiency level in using modal verbs as their performance from the quantitative statistic shows that only in 20 places that the Iraqi postgraduate students properly utilized the English lexical verb modal in nonverbal sentence in their dissertations against the Nigerian postgraduate students that the frequency shows 170 in their dissertations.

In the same Iraqi data, the postgraduate students show a deviant in using the modality resources of English through serial modality may be due to interlanguage influence when compared to the frequency of their usage in the NGR data. This may not be unconnected to the mismatch in the expression of epistemic meaning between verb modal modality such as 'may' and 'can' and non-verb modal to express possibility, usuality, necessity among others by the Iraqi students.

Another instance of epistemic mismatch in the IRQ may be the overuse of 'would' even in the context where the modality 'could' be appropriately deployed due to efficacy of the following propositions, that modality of certainty, possibilities, and politeness led to overwhelming percentage of the 'would' in both IRQ and NGR data.

Though the quantitative analysis shows an extensive presence of epistemic modality unlike the evidential modality in the IRQ data, the NGR data that show the significant high rate of occurrence of lexically modalized presentations of the research findings in their dissertations exhibit the pragmatic roles of modality towards the flexibility of information in the MA dissertation researches. Based on these quantitative results, ELF curricular and mother tongue influence in EFL classroom are responsible for the poor English proficiency of Iraq students especially their low proficiency level in using English modality unlike their Nigerian counterpart.

6. Conclusion

In the paper, the discussion on propositional modality in the academic writing in English across Nigerian and Iraqi universities' MA dissertations reveals that the functions of the modality are beyond semantic issues to include pragmatics since modality in the language is not only expressing the attitude and state of knowledge about a proposition but encompassing what the language user is doing with the whole proposition from interpersonal dimension. The data analysis reveals that modality encapsulates interpersonal and authorial voice in which the meaning of a clause is qualified to reflect the writer's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true. It further justifies that there are instances of modality, that indicate certainty, possibility, probability and evidence which signal illocutionary forces to accomplish a speech act in the academic writings. For pedagogical implication, the study is therefore recommended that effective teaching of modality as grammatical component be introduced to all levels of EFL classrooms in a planned manner and with due consideration to their second language acquisition in relation to their mother tongue. The rationale behind this is that English language learners in Iraq even at the postgraduate studies tend to transfer learning strategies of their mother tongue to the acquisition target language. Hence, a planned and stepwise English curricular is likely to enhance their good grasp of the modality in the target language of learning.

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