Modality Meanings in Student's Argumentative Writing

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Abstract: This paper presents some exploratory observations on the use of epistemic and deontic modality in a set of 30 undergraduate students' argumentative writing as classified by Nuyts (2006) and Bybee (1994). It is important to know the students' understanding about when to use these expressions through the use of these epistemic and deontic modality expressions because by acknowledging the students' understanding about them, we as a teacher will realize that our students do understand the use of them or they need better perception about modality meanings. Since the way they apply those expressions in their writing reflect their comprehension about the actual use of these expressions in the English language and culture and the indication that the area students need help with. The study finds that in terms of deontic modality, the students used modality auxiliaries more frequently than to the use of lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives or multi word units to show modality meanings in their writing while in terms of epistemic, they employed multi word units such as *I think*, to express modality meaning many more compared to other expressions. These findings show that the students do not know precisely the use and meanings of these expressions so that they continually use the similar expressions in their writings or in other words because of their lack information, they ignore the precise use of these expressions. Therefore, there must be more information about the perceptions of modality expressions and the different meanings that these expressions carry.

Keywords: modality meanings, mood and modality expressions, deontic, epistemic, argumentative.

1   INTRODUCTION

Modality is a semantic phenomenon; it is the content of an expression that reflects the speaker's attitude or state of knowledge about a preposition (Frawley, 1992: 388). It is the grammar of explicit comment, the means by which people express their degree of commitment to the truth of the propositions they utter, and their news on the desirability or otherwise of the states of affairs referred to (Nuyts, 2006: 216). Modality concerns the factual status of information; signals the relative actuality, validity or believability of the content of an expression. In this study, the term modality refers to epistemic and deontic modality which according to Lyons (1977: 797), epistemic modality is any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his comment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters. It is concerned with the expressions of the users' degree of certainty or commitment to the truth of their statements and the assessment of the like hood of something being or having been, the case (Biber, et al, 1999, Palmer, 1986). Unlike epistemic modality, deontic modality concerned with the necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents, for example; obligation and permission (Lyons, 1977, Kratzer, 1981a, Palmer, 1986, 1990 in Papafragou, 2000).

This term, modality, is not new anymore for the students because they have been introduced to these areas since they were in the first semester and these expressions have been applied in their academic writing. This academic writing leads to studies of modality as one of the characteristics of this writing genre is the frequent use of hedging (Thomson, 2002). Therefore, the ability to qualify statements appropriately is crucial to good academic writing. It is the skill that the students need to master. The examination of the degree of certainty or statement of obligation in the students' argumentative writing and the selection of linguistic devices in terms of types can provide useful information and indication if these students need help with which can then form the basis for support the next and higher level of academic writing before they begin working their thesis.

Some studies on the use of epistemic and deontic modality expressions were conducted for the purpose of academic instructions. Those studies concentrated on the use of epistemic modality on the written discourse produced by native and nonnative students so this studies focus on the use of epistemic modality by the students who have different language background (e.g; Gabrielatos and McEnery in 2005, Letica in 2009). It finds that participants used epistemic devices less frequently in their L2 than in their L1. Another studies concentrated on the use of epistemic modality in Venezuelan's children stories done in 2004 by M. Shiro. This research shows that

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Venezuelans children used a wide selection of lexical and grammatical resources to express epistemic modality compared to the use of modal verbs. However, this study is aimed at describing the type of resources to convey epistemic and deontic meanings by non-native English Department students of Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University (UWKS).

2 MOOD AND MODALITY

Modality is a semantic phenomenon; it is the content of an expression that reflects the speaker's attitude or state of knowledge about a preposition (Frawley, 1992: 388). Mood is a grammatical phenomenon, usually the inflectional expression of a subset of modal denotation (Palmer, 1986). However, traditional accounts of mood equate it with modality; for example, subjective mood, a grammatical device, is often defined as the way a language expresses hypothetically or uncertainty. But whereas there may be close connections between grammatical forms and semantic content in this regard, mood is a structural property of verbs in certain kinds of clauses (Frawley, 1992: 386).   Traditionally, Modality is divided into three common types of modal categories such as deontic, epistemic and dynamic modality (Nuyts, 2006: 2). Since the reasearch is related to two kinds of modality, which are epistemic and deontic modality, the following description is related to those two modality expressions.

The first kind of modality is deontic modality (Nuyts, 2006: 2). It is the modal system of duty, as it is concerned with a speaker's attitude to the degree of obligation attaching to the performance of certain actions (Simpson, 1993: 43). Quirk, et al (1985: 219) used intrinsic modality term to mention deontic modality which are used by Lyon (1977) and Palmer (1986). It may be defined as an indication of the degree of moral desirability of the state of affairs expressed in the utterance, typically, but not necessarily, on behalf of the speaker (speakers can report on others' deontic assessments) (Nuyts, 2006:4-5). In other words, the meaning of some kind of intrinsic human control over events would signify "permission and obligation", therefore, deontic modal auxiliaries realize a continuum of commitment from permission, through obligation and to requirement (Simpson, 1994: 43). This semantic category is rendered in the most direct or straightforward way by expressions such as

1. the modal auxiliaries, expressing respectively moral desirability and necessity, for example: *You should go to the library before twelve, therefore, you must prepare the cards immediately*.

2. the predicative adjective, expressing moral desirability, for example; *It is not wise to treat your son like that.*

Deontic modality is also represented in a more complex way by expressions of permission and obligation for the first-argument participant in the clause, as involved in modal auxiliary and the speech act (2006: 4), for example; *you may go home* and *I demand* that you complete your assignment today. The second form of permission and obligation expression through speech act can be realized through the combination of adjectives and participles in "Be……that" and "be…..to" constructions representing a comparable continuum of commitment. The examples below show different degrees of obligation and possibility (Simpson, 1994: 44):

1. You are permitted to smoke
2. It is possible for you to buy that car
3. You are obliged to stay
4. It is necessary that you stay
5. You are forbidden to stay here

The second common type of modality is epistemic modality or extrinsic modality (quirk, et al: 1985: 219). This type of modality is concerns an indication of the estimation, typically, but not necessarily, by the speaker, of the chances that the state of affairs expressed in the clause applies in the world, in other words, it expresses the degree of probability of the state of affairs as indicated by the modal auxiliary such as *will, can, could, may, might, most, shall, should,* and *would*, such as in *some students come late, they will be trapped in traffic jam, or the modal adverb maybe, such as in his score in the exam is not good, maybe he did not study* (Nuyts, 2006: 6, Huddleston, 1984: 164) or it concerns with the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed, so the common expressed epistemic modalities are possibility, probability and inferred certainty (Bybee, 1994: 179). Possibility indicates that the proposition may possibly be true, as in *she may have drink the tea, the glass is empty*, and should be kept distinct from root possibility, as in *I actually couldn't finish reading it because the chap whose shoulder I was reading the book over got out at Leicester Square* (Coates, 1983: 114). Probability indicates a greater like hood that the proposition is true than possibility does, as in *the storm should clear by tomorrow* (Bybee, 1994: 180).

In short, epistemic modality is expressed through 1) modal auxiliaries such as can could, may, might, most, shall, should, will, would, 2) a number

of lexical verbs such as believe, infer and know, 3) adjectives such as definite, probably and unlikely, 4) adverb such as arguably, certainly, possibly and 4) 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 (Bybee, 1994: 45).

3 RESEARCH METHODS

The research done was descriptive qualitative research because the researcher only described the data which content epistemic and deontic modality meanings (EpM and DeM) which were expressed in modal auxiliaries, adverbs, lexical verbs and multi-word units and then interpreted them to find the meaning of them. Total data collected were 160 in which 72 belong to DeMs and 88 belong to EpMs (EpM). The data were collected from 31 argumentative writing of the English Department Students of UWKS.

The data firstly were reduced and then classified based on the kinds of meanings: epistemic meaning (EpM) and deontic meaning (DeM) . Then from those two big classifications, they were classified based on their class whether the expressions belong to modal auxiliary, adverbs, lexical verbs or multi word units etc. The analysis was done based on the types of epistemic and deontic modality meanings as proposed by Nuyt (2006) and Bybee (1994).

4 Findings and Discussion
4.1 Findings

The results obtained are summarized in Table 1, 2 and 3 in which the all the data about DeM and EpM are shown along with the total of DeM and EpM employed by the students. From the topic given, mostly the students express their opinion, likehood or obligation in their writing using modal auxiliaries compared to the use of lexical verbs or multi word units and the most popular modal auxiliary among them is *must*. In their argumentative writing, it is interesting that the students use similar modal expressions both deontically and epistemically.

The illustration in table 1 for example, shows that the total number of the DeM expressed by the students is 61 while the total of EpM is 49. The same modal auxiliaries carry different meanings, such as modal auxiliary *must, should, can or will.* The students employed these modal auxiliaries to express either deontic meaning or epistemic meaning, as illustrated in the following data:

(1) There must be facilities that are able to increase all of the plans for example maybe we need to make an English classroom discussion outside the class (EpM).

(2) As a university student, we must have good characters because it can influence our achievement (EpM).

(3) The quality of the lecturer must be considered because a lecturer is a person who can make the students success or fail (EpM).

(4) The students must have good personality because most of them are cheating during the test (DeM).

(5) Some toilets are not clean enough; there are still much litters which are scattered around. The cleaning service must be advised to be more diligent to clean it (DeM).

(6) Before they are accepted to teach in this department, the lecturers must have high education and competence (DeM).

Data 1, 2 and 3 above show the use of *must* to express epistemic meanings. In this case the students assess their like hood about some points which will be able to improve the quality of the English Department. They have the meanings that it is necessary assumption that the facilities are built, the students and the lecturer are good. Meanwhile, data 4, 5 and 6 give some descriptions of the use of *must* to express deontic meanings which can be interpreted as the students are required to be good, the toilets are required to be clean and the lecturers are required to be competent. Therefore modal, *must* can both express deontic and epistemic meanings. The similar case is found in the following data;

(7) The faculty should prepare good facilities for the students because there are some important things that are needed by the students (EpM).

(8) English Department students should speak English in class because it will make students can speak English well (EpM).

(9) We should have many activities like a seminar, not just a national but also international seminar to expand (DeM).

(10) We should work together with some company or schools because after some students graduate, they are easy to find some job as a teacher or private teacher (DeM).

The modal auxiliaries, *should*, both represent deontic and epistemic meaning as it is found in the previous illustrations. Data 7 and 8 say that based on the evidence, the students are sure that good facilities and activities are done to improve and support the English Department. It is based on the assumption that the facilities are necessary to be built and also the students are necessary to be active. In other data (9 and 10), the students stress on the actions that should be done to increase the quality of the

department. They are not just on the level of the students' certainty but these modal meanings carry the meaning that there should be some actions for the improvement of the English Department.

(11) *The library provides some books so we can read and borrow the books whenever we do our assignments (EpM).*

(12) *The classroom is so dirty, it makes the students can't concentrate while they are studying (DeM).*

(13) *We should have good facilities because good facility in our department will attract students in Senior High School to continue their study in our department (EpM).*

(14) *There will be punishment for the students who do not come to class for five times in stretch (DeM).*

Normally *can* is used for deontic modality, however, data 11, says that it is possible for the students to read some books because the library provides some books for the students while data 12 implicitly describes an intrinsic ability however this is the students' inability to concentrate because of something. Both *can* in data 11 and 13 express ability but convey different meanings of ability. The next modal that is in data 14 conveys the meaning of future modality but it signals the modal operator's volitions sense at the present moment.

Table 1 DeM and EpM expressed in Modal Auxiliaries in Argumentative Writing by the English Department Students of UWKS

Modal Auxilaries	DeM	EpM
Must	34	18
Should	17	8
Can	8	15
Could	-	1
Will	1	6
Total	61	49

Lexical verbs are the linguistic devices the students use in their writing besides modal auxiliaries. Table 2 shows that most students employ the verb *have to* which refers to compelling modal. It conveys obligation. Compared to the use of other linguistic devices, mostly the students employ this verb, as seen in the following data:

(15) *To enhance the academic quality, we have to fix the infrastructures (DeM).*

(16) *All the students have to realize that all the subjects which are taken help them to increase the academic condition of themselves (DeM).*

(17) *The class is dirty because same students littering in the class, so the class is dirty and*

there are many mosquitoes, therefore the students have to keep clean the class (DeM).

Data 15 says that in order to build the academic quality, it is necessary to build the infrastructures in UWKS. Modality, *Have to,* conveys deontic meaning, as it focuses on the aspiration of improving the campus quality. It is not high degree of compelling compared to *must*, for example; when the students use *have to* just like in data 17, it implicitly conveys the meaning that it is a common sight that the class is dirty and some janitors have been assigned to clean and it does not influence much on the learning activities, so it is less compelling context that the modal operator uses *have to* suggest what the students do. *Have to* is also found in the students' writing to convey epistemic meaning, for example:

(18) *We have to be brave to take a big change, between the faculty and the students, do something good to increase our quality (EpM).*

(19) *English language lecturer have to work hard as a team because the success will come true if there is enthusiasm to learn without being depressed (EpM).*

Those examples say that something is true because of the students' knowledge that working as a team will give positive result on the students' motivation and willingness to learn.

Moving to the way the students express deontic meaning, it is interesting to find that mostly the epistemic meanings are represented by using the lexical verb *think*. Among 37 data, 21 data shows the popular lexical verb used by the students in their writing is *I think* compared the use of *wish* or *perhabs*, as illustrated in the following data:

(20) *I think the wi-fi connection is not wide enough (EpM.)*

(21) *I think the university has to hold a conference about how to teach well (EpM).*

(22) *Perhaps, they are going to college because they do not know what to do (EpM)*

Table 2. DeM and EpM expressed in Lexical Verbs in Argumentative Writing by the English Department Students of UWKS

Lexical Verbs	DeM	EpM
Think	-	21
Have to	12	2
Perhaps	-	1
Total	12	25

Now moves to the use of multi word units. Table 3 shows the various attributes found in the source of data. However to express deontic meanings, the attributions are used show the students' expectation about the issue discussed, as illustrated below:

(23) The lecturers attend the class but they don't give us the subject, they tell about their study and don't discuss the lesson so we hope they can teach us better than before (DeM).

(24) We do need cleaning service to clean the room (DeM).

(25) If the lecturers have good personality, I am sure more than 50% students will finish the lesson well (EpM).

(26) I hope that there will be other activities such as competition, students exchange and many more (EpM).

(27) In my opinion, it is important to give motivation to the students (EpM).

(28) The most important thing is wi-fi because for me wi-fi is an important thing for the student to help them finish the assignment (EpM).

The students mostly write their certainty and possibility towards the issues by using the attribution *I hope* (e.g. 23) which is similar to express the compelling modalities *need*, in which this modal verb *need* relates to the noun *need* which carry the sense of 'lacking' which is then associated with a compelling force emanating from within the thing (see data 27).

Data 25, 27, 28 convey the meaning that there are strong volitions because they express the students' desires about prospective actions. While the data 27 shows lower degree of expectation because of the expression *I hope that*.

Table 3. DeM and EpM expressed in multi word units in Argumentative Writing by the English Department Students of UWKS.

Multi Word Units	DeM	EpM
We hope that	2	6
I'm sure that	-	2
In my opinion	-	1
We do need	1	-
The most important thing	-	1
I wish that	1	-
Total	4	10

4.2 Discussion

Two major distinctions of modality that is commonly made is epistemic and root modality which include deontic modality (Nuyts, 2006). From the findings elaborated above, it is therefore, confirmed that the nonnative English Department students of UWKS expressed both deontic and epistemic modal meanings in a number of ways and in equal frequency. There are no significant differences between the number of epistemic and deontic modality which of course contrary to the previous findings drawn by Shiro who says that the subjects of the research employed lexical and grammatical resources more frequently than other linguistic devices (2004). In this research, modal auxiliaries *must* and *should* were used more frequently by the students to express deontic modal meanings. While the epistemic modal meanings were expressed more frequently by using modal auxiliaries *must* and *can*. In terms of lexical resources, majority the students employed the modal verb *have to* express deontic meanings and the verb think to express epistemic meanings.

These findings open the facts that the students seems not to understand precisely the concept of compelling and enabling modality. For example, the same expressions or resources were used by the students although they tried to convey different context such as found in data 2 and 3, which say that to increase the quality of the English Department, more facilities must be built to give them a chance to learn outside the class. The use of *must* itself shows a high degree of compelling because it is prompted by the compelling context itself and this use is not recommended because those kind of facilities do not influence totally to the increasing quality of the students, so the recommended one is *have to*, however, if this modal is used to express their strong compelling to the quality of the lecturer, this modal auxiliary is recommended to be used. As Nuyts (2006) and Huddleston (1984) says that epistemic modality is expressed in a number of ways, it is concerned with the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence based on their knowledge of the world. The next high frequency of compelling modal used by the students is the verb *think*. There are 21 attributes out of 37 attributes found in the students' writing. To express their assumption, this verb of *think* seems to be used in every sentence they produce (see data 20 and 22). No significant meaning can be interpreted from the use of this verb and other resources.

Some possibilities are drawn from these findings that the students do not know and understand the implicit meaning in every resource in the modality expressions because of lack information they receive since they were in the first semester. So far they just know that the source of modality meanings is modal auxiliaries. They even do not have information that modality meanings are not only expressed through modal auxiliaries but also through lexical and grammatical resources, adverbs, or adjectives.

4   CONCLUSION

It is concluded that to express deontic modality meanings, the students used modal auxiliaries more frequently than any other forms of resources. The highest degree of compelling modality *must* become the main interest the students have and *should* become the next compelling modality the students chosen.   Meanwhile, epistemic modality in this research is represented by the lexical verbs, modal auxiliaries and multi word units. Unlike modal auxiliary *must* which become the central focus of the students, the lexical verb *think* seems to be used more frequently in their argumentative writing, then followed by modal auxiliaries *must* and *can*.

The possible reasons for these findings are that firstly, the students are lack of information to the use of modality and its meanings, and consequently, they use their epistemic and deontic modality meanings in similar ways as they copied from the questions given by the lecturer.

Therefore, it is suggested that from the first semester, the students must be introduced with the various ways to express modality meanings, either they are epistemic and deontic meanings.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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