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Modality in Pakistani and British Media Discourse: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Editorials in Dawn and the Guardian

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Abstract: Modal verbs are used to construe an important grammatical expression called modality, which has its various shades in almost every newspaper. Modality is considered of extreme importance in media discourse. This paper presents the comparative study of modal verbs in Dawn, an English Pakistani newspaper, and Guardian, a British English newspaper. For this investigation, a corpus was designed using an equal number of editorials from both the newspapers and the analysis was carried out using Antconc, a corpus tool. The analysis revealed that Guardian editorial writers use a greater number of predictive modal verbs like will and would. On the other hand, Dawn editorial writers use a greater number of obligatory modal verbs like must and should. Also, the editorial writers of Dawn use a higher number of modal verbs like may and might to express possibility and ability.

Key Words: Modality, Editorials, Corpus Assisted Study, Dawn, Guardian

Introduction

This paper examines and analyses the modal auxiliary verbs in the editorials of an English Pakistani newspaper and a British English newspaper. Newspaper editorials are of key importance for newspaper editors to shed light on current national and international issues. [Fowler \(1997\)](#) believes that not only do newspaper editorials offer values and beliefs, but also use certain linguistic and textual strategies in the best possible way to convey meanings. Modality indicates the mood of the writer or speaker towards the outside world. In their discourse, writers and

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speakers do have the choice to convey ability, certainty, obligation, and probability. [Simpson \(1993\)](#) sees modality as the writer's point of view, "angle of vision", "angle of telling", the perspective of the story, and the authorial attitude that determines the story's shape by which story provides its true "colour" and "feel". According to Kiefer's (1994), modality is the "relativization of the authenticity of statement meanings to a set of possible words", or it provides a mirror by which the public can see the diversity of the world. More precisely, modality offers the freedom to express *what is*, *what would be*, *what may be*, and *what should be*. With the help of syntactic modal patterns, not only the probability of the task is assessed, but the cross-linguistic requirements are also accomplished ([Palmer, 2007](#)). Modality is a term used to describe speakers' plans to demonstrate a mental inclination towards a situation. It is a linguistic tool that is used to express clearly the collective roles and the connection between the speaker and the listener and the writer and the reader. Modality deals with the speaker's ideology and world view. [Fowler \(1997\)](#) encourages the speaker to say something without attributing an outlook to that issue. It seems difficult to figure out some piece of writing that is absolutely objective, neutral, impartial or value-free. Every discourse or piece of writing is almost about the opinion of the writer, the way in which he tells something, the perception, and the interest of the author, which is linked to the style of the story, with its particular feel and colour ([Simpson, 1993](#)). With the help of the following examples, [Huddleston \(2002\)](#) gives an overview of the modality:

"He wrote it himself".

"He must have written it himself".

The first sentence is truly unmodalised, which is commonly used to express the action committed without qualification and stress, and it utters simply the reality. But the second sentence is purely modalised. The researchers, [Huddleston and Pullum \(2002\)](#), are strongly in favour of the view that the reality of proposition is inferred rather than it is visible and directly explicit.

Modal auxiliary verbs are the best-well-known source to convey and define modality ([Depraetere & Reed, 2006](#); de Haan, 2006). As a result, modality is considered to be one of the syntactic categories used by authors to communicate their opinion that a certain proposition is possibly or essentially true or false.

According to [Palmer \(2007\)](#), not only does modality have views on potential possibilities, but it also fulfils the need for a cross-linguistic explanation. There are two types of linguistic modalities: epistemological and deontic. The Epistemic Modality shall be based on the evaluation, assessment and judgment of the speaker and the degree of trust, which provides the basis for the proposal. Epistemic is procedural, while deontic provides a depiction of the techniques by which speakers/writers describe their decisions on the genuineness of the proposal. Deontic modality, however, expresses how the world can be portrayed in accordance with certain norms, expectations, and wishes of the speaker. [Palmer \(2007\)](#) is of the opinion that deontic modality is generally dependent on the power given to the speaker.

As far as the modality functions are concerned, the modality has different degrees of functionality, certainty and duty which have provided the names of the values and which have been defined as high, medium and low value. These values are shown in the table below:

Table 1. Three notions of modality: Halliday (1994, p.362)

High Value	Median Value	Low Value
Must, Should, Ought to, Need to, Has to, Is to	Will, Would, Shall	May, Might, Can, Could.

Prediction is used as a modal auxiliary and represents an approximation of an occurrence, a circumstance, an event, and an act. It's used to make an indefinite guess. [Halliday \(1994\)](#) put the modal of prediction into the modals of median meaning, which takes editorial writers to the midway point of view of what is happening.

An obligation is depicted by *should*. By using the word, "should" the speaker or the writer considers the action to be a compulsory obligation. It predicts expediency, obligation, and puts forward a condition that produces a statement that is less direct. In addition, it makes a formal request or a proposal.

Possibility or ability is almost the same in meanings, and the modal *can* is used to express strong possibility. According to Leech (1969), the meaning of possibility and ability is more common than permission. Modal auxiliary *could* deal with the meaning of the possibility of someone's performance. It is also used to refer to the ability of the past. The word *may* is used to express the meaning of possibility both in the present and future time. *Might* is used as an agent of uncertainty about the truth of an argument and presents the possibility which reflects probability or possibility in the past.

Research Objectives

The research study attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To find out the most used modal verbs in Pakistani and British newspaper editorials.
2. To see how native and non-native English writers use modal verbs in their editorials.

Research Questions

- Q.1. what is the frequency of modal verbs used in the Newspaper editorials of Pakistani and British writers?
- Q. 2. How do the British Editorial writers differ from Pakistani Editorial in the use of modal verbs?

Delimitation

Due to time constraints, this study was delimited to two newspapers: Guardian (British

newspaper and Dawn (Pakistani newspaper). To compile a corpus for this study, an equal number of editorials from both newspapers were collected, cleaned, and used in the corpus.

Literature Review

The importance of the modality is evident from the fact that many researchers have made it their primary research concern and have conducted several studies to shed light on the occurrence and use of modality in written discourse. Fowler (1986) conducted an analysis of mood and modality as a grammar of explicit mood in which people communicate their degree of commitment to the reality of a proposition. In this sense, a peep can be obtained from the author's ideological point of view. Therefore, the modal auxiliary verbs, which are the source of modality, provide enough room to the writers of editorials to express their approaches and principles about the text.

[Iwamoto \(1998\)](#) while explaining the shades of modality in media discourse, informed about the articles, and the conclusion of his work reveals the employment of very high value of deontic modality, i.e. *need to*, *ought to*, *should*, *must* while the articles are almost deprived of the emotive type of modality for instance *I hope*, *I wish*, *I regret*. Additionally, the authors employed less important value of epistemic modality like *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* to convey an inferior level of confidence and assurance.

[Sadia.S & Ghani.M \(2018\)](#) conducted a study on the modality in the editorials of Pakistani newspapers. It was a corpus-based study in which they analysed the modal auxiliary verbs, and their study sheds light on the significance of the modality by which editorial writers convey the prediction, obligation, possibility, and ability. The study reports that The News International outpaced Dawn in the use of modal auxiliary verbs of *will* and *would* by which the editorial writers construe the comprehensibility of their readers about any event which is propounded in the editorial section.

[Smith \(2003\)](#) studied the diachronic of *having to* and found out that the use of *having to* “was mostly focused on the literature and mass media, with evolution being most substantial in the mass media reportage unit”. Such research studies conclude that modality has almost the shared attributes of the same category.

[Palmer \(2007\)](#) has explored mood and modality in a typological pattern. He concentrated on lexical modality structures and a variety of modal representation across languages. He found that the modality could be categorized into two parts: the modality of the idea and the modality of the event. The use of epistemic modality indicates the likelihood and inevitability of the problem. On the other hand, the deontic modality has to do with "duty or permission," power from the outside world, where dynamic modality delivers the "ability of readiness, one of inner feeling."

With the help of corpus methodology, [Qun \(2010\)](#) analyzed the characteristics of modality in education-related papers and newspaper editorials. According to this review, the scientific research papers resist the use of epistemic modality like *I think* and *surely*, because the scientific papers lay emphasis on an independent analysis of the news happenings. Despite being objective, the assessment of the results of the scientific papers are manifested in a more reliable, emphatic

and reasonable way; thus, the frequency of *often* was higher than the use of *usually* and *sometimes*. According to [Qun \(2010\)](#), *should* and *could* are the remarkable features of newspapers editorials. A possible rationale for such prioritized use of *should* and *could* is that that the editorials construe their opinions on the past events and happenings; hence the past participles are prioritized.

Moreover, news-editorial writers frequently use *perhaps* while scientific papers use the word *may* instead of *perhaps*. The use of words like *perhaps* saved the editorial writers from expected criticism because the use of such words gives an uncertain colour to their writings. On the contrary, the regular use of words like *perhaps* in scientific papers make the genuineness and objectivity of their findings questionable.

With reference to the importance of modality in the functioning of shared reality, the present study presents the comparative study of modals in specific editorials of two English daily newspapers, i.e., the Guardian and Dawn.

Research Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to carry out this analysis. Corpus linguistics is an evolving area of linguistic study that lets researchers carry out a thorough analysis of the lexical elements used in the text and how these lexical elements can shape different linguistic and thematic patterns in the text. We can easily identify and classify the number and form of words, such as adjectives, verbs, and modal verbs, etc., using a corpus tool. Since human beings use language to express their emotions, feelings, and responses, the choice of words in every text plays a very crucial part. Different shades of modality depict various attitudinal stance of the speaker or the writer. Boulomaic modality is the subsection of the Deontic modality by which a speaker or a writer can express a desire for instance “I wish”, “I desire” etc. Perception modality describes the commitment to the validity of a proposition which is based on some reference to human perception ([Perkins & Simpson, 1983-1993](#)).

Table 2. Shades of Modality and their functions

Modal System	Non-Linguistic Concepts Presented
Deontic	Obligation, Duty and Commitment
Boulomaic	Desire
Epistemic	Knowledge, Belief and Cognition
Perception	Preception

Data Collection

Editorials from the British-based "Guardian" English newspaper and editorials from the Pakistani-based "Dawn" English newspaper make up the population of this study. Ten editorials

from each newspaper of the same dates have been collected from their respective official websites.

Data Analysis Tool

The data was analyzed using AntConc ([Anthony, 2005](#)). The concordance function of the software was used to separate modal verbs from the newspaper editorials selected for this study. Researchers use the various functions of Antconc software to examine the frequency, type, collocation, and linguistic context of the words used in the text.

Data Analysis

The use of modal verbs was categorized using a concordance tool. Different modal verbs used in “Guardian” and “Dawn” were found out, and their cumulative percentage was calculated.

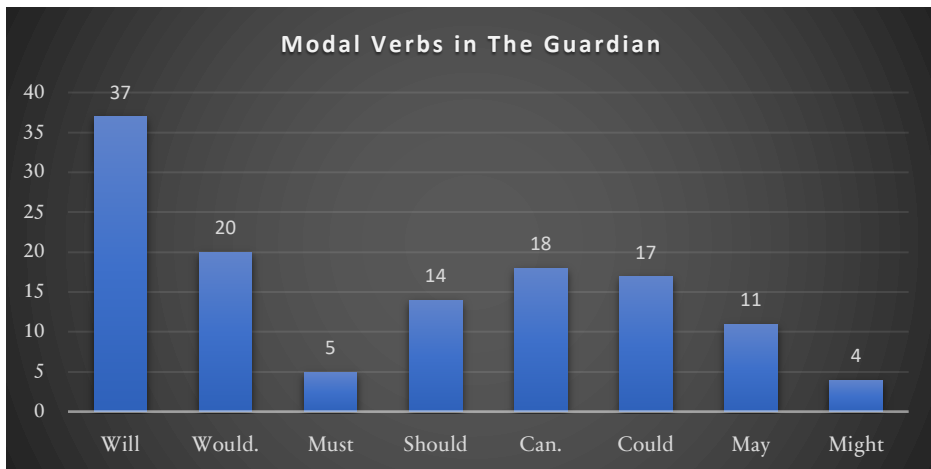


Figure 1: Most Frequently used Modal Verbs in The Guardian

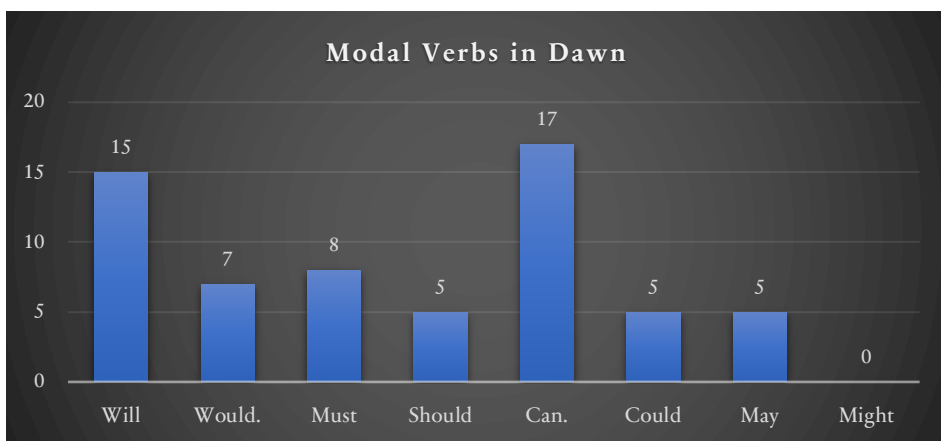


Figure 2: Most Frequently used Modal Verbs in Dawn

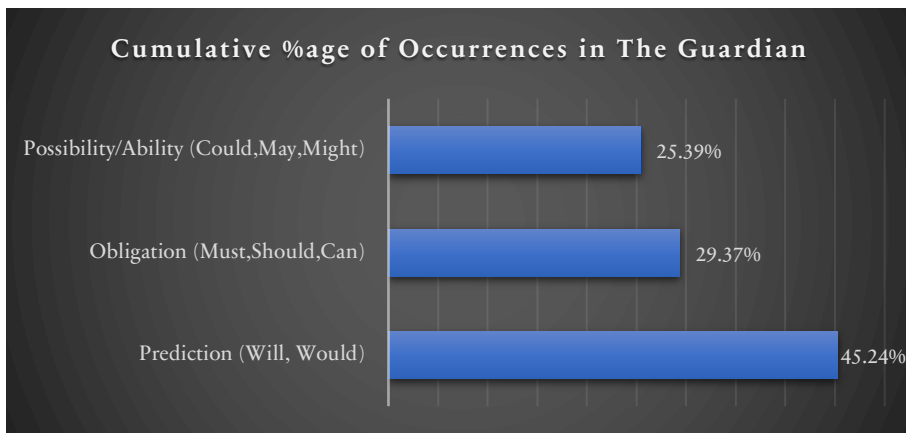


Figure 3: Cumulative Percentage of Occurrences of Modal verbs in The Guardian

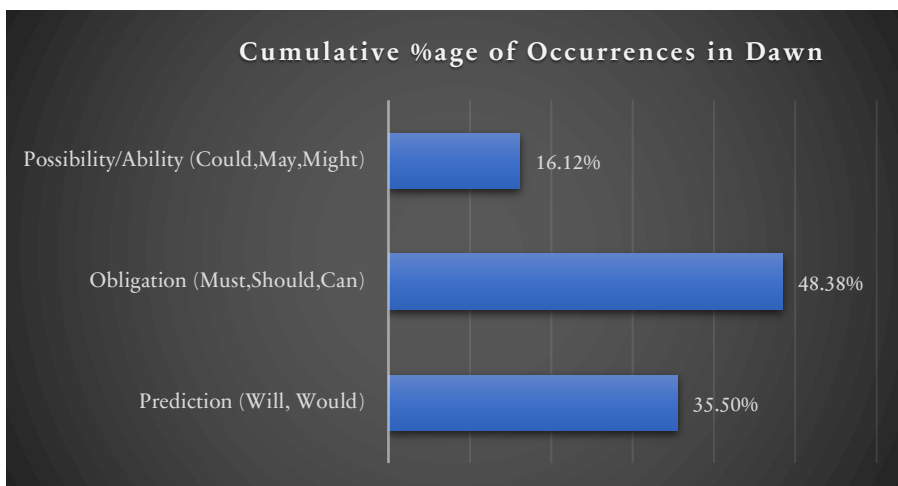


Figure 4: Cumulative Percentage of Occurrences of Modal verbs in Dawn

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of modal verbs in both Newspapers

Functions of Modal-verbs.	Modal-Verb	Number of Occurrences in Guardian.	Percentage of Occurrences.	No. of Occurrences in Dawn.	Cumulative %age of Occurrences.
Prediction.	Will.	37	45.24%	15	35.5%
	Would.	20		7	
	Must	5		8	
Obligation.	Should	14	29.37%	5	48.38%
	Can.	18		17	
Possibility/ Ability.	Could	17	25.39%	5	16.12%
	May	11		5	

Functions of Modal-verbs.	Modal-Verb	Number of Occurrences in Guardian.	Percentage of Occurrences.	No. of Occurrences in Dawn.	Cumulative %age of Occurrences.
	Might	4		0	
Total.		126	100	62	100

The graphs and the table above show that in their editorials, Guardian editorial writers make more use of modal verbs than Dawn editorials writers do. In the selected ten Guardian editorials, the total number of modal verbs used is 126. On the other hand, in the same number of editorials, the "Dawn" editorial writers used only 62 modal verbs. This demonstrates that native writers in English have a sound understanding of modal verbs and therefore tend to use more modal verbs in their writings.

The use of the modal verbs like *will* and *would* by the editorial writers of Guardian outperformed the editorial writers of Dawn in the use of these two choices of modal verbs since *will* and *would* are most widely used by the editors of Guardian, thus construing the comprehensibility of their readers about the events proposed in the editorial section of the newspaper. In this way, they build their readers' tendency to conjecture or predict events through which the view of certainty or uncertainty of the reader can be constructed.

(A) Examples of Predictions

- (i) English Heritage and some archaeologists have welcomed the plans, pointing to an improved experience for visitors, who **will** be able to access the environs of the stones without their being bifurcated by a noisy highway. (The Guardian: 22/11/2020)
- (ii) What form of redress the survivors of the disastrous 2017 fire, and those bereaved by it, can expect **will** depend in part on the conclusions of the inquiry. (The Guardian: 24/11/2020)
- (iii) In any case, it is to be hoped that the mandate of each agency **will** be well defined in the new set-up and that none **will** be used to encroach on civil liberties. (Dawn: 25/11/2020)
- (iv) If we continue down this dark path, Pakistan, too, **will** have no choice but to shut down. (Dawn: 26/11/2020)
- (v) At any other period of the year, the second lockdown **would** be given more time to have an effect. (The Guardian: 26/11/2020)
- (vi) Moreover, Mr Khan was informed that 6,000 apartments were being built in the sprawling metropolis and that anti-encroachment operations in Karachi **would** not go ahead unless alternative accommodation was arranged for the affected people. (Dawn: 28/11/2020)

In the above extracts of the editorials, the writers not only convey the information but also show a clue about their outlook towards the happening and events by using certain specific modal verbs. For instance, in (ii), the editor of the Guardian shows a strong prediction that only the findings of the inquiry would inform about how the redressal of the victims of the disastrous fire of 2017 will be done. In (iii), Dawn's editor suggests a prediction of the mandate of each agency

in a new establishment, as well as a prediction of the guarantee of civil liberties. In (v) with the use of modal verb *would*, Guardian explicitly shows the prediction of a long lockdown at any time of year that would be more effective.

(B) Examples of Obligation.

- (vii) If the federal government is serious about resolving these multiple issues, it ***must***, along with the Sindh administration, deliver a workable plan that can rehabilitate and develop Karachi as a 21st-century city. (Dawn: 28/11/2020)
- (viii) All ***must*** pay deference to the dream of a “clean break”, which is an old Eurosceptic metaphor for what is, in truth, the messiest and least rational method of detaching the UK from its current high level of integration with its biggest trading partner. (The Guardian: 27/11/2020)
- (ix) The fact that he, the Sindh chief minister and prominent PPP leader Qamar Zaman Kaira all tested positive despite taking precautions ***should*** be a wake-up call. (Dawn: 28/11/2020)
- (x) They ***should*** now be accompanied by encouragement to have a safe and low-key Christmas. (The Guardian: 26/11/2020)

In (vii), Dawn makes it mandatory and obligatory for the Federal Government to work out an improvement plan and transform Karachi into a 21st-century city. Likewise, in (x) Guardian editor-writer shows the low level of obligation by using *should* and in this COVID-19 scenario, it sets out an obligation to encourage a safe and low-key Christmas.

(C) Examples of Possibility/Ability.

- (xi) A lack of synchronised intelligence ***can*** indeed compromise the readiness of security operations. (Dawn: 25/11/2020)
- (xii) The reversal of the policy stance in the near- to medium-term ***could*** easily shatter the current growth momentum. (Dawn: 26/11/2020)
- (xiii) However, while there ***may*** be sound arguments for the establishment of the NICC, it is worth noting that the National Counter Terrorism Authority will come under it. Established via executive order in 2009, Nacta was conceived as a body that would coordinate the counterterrorism efforts of civilian and military intelligence agencies — in short, the role that the NICC will now be playing. (Dawn: 25/11/2020)
- (xiv) It ***can*** also be deadly. (The Guardian: 22/11/2020)
- (xv) Set in Glasgow’s Sighthill, South Side and East End, the story ***could*** hardly be more specific to its time and place. (The Guardian: 27/11/2020)
- (xvi) You ***may*** not have been to this kind of party, at this kind of time, in this kind of place, but – particularly in this most joy-deprived of years – Lovers Rock is like a memory of all the best parties. (The Guardian: 27/11/2020)
- (xvii) “Everyman” ***might*** be a black teenage girl at a London party or a gay working-class Glaswegian kid. (The Guardian: 27/11/2020)

In (xi) Dawn shows a strong ability to hamper the alertness of timely security operations while in (xiv) Guardian, with the use of the same modal verb *can*, shows the possibility of being deadly. In (xii), Dawn points out the strong possibility of shattering the growth momentum with the change in the policy stance. With the same modal verb *could* in (xv), Guardian shows the shade of possibility of the story being more specific to time and space. In both (xiii) and (xvi) *may* is used to express the stance of possibility.

In the present study, the two leading English newspapers are taken: one from non-native and the other from a native English country. Analysis of editorials not only provides insight into the position of editorial writers but also shows how they invite readers to express their opinions, ideas, and observations using different modal verbs. Another interesting feature of the modal verbs is their semantic link to the information conveyed by these modal verbs in these editorials.

The analysis also shows that both newspapers are in favour of auxiliary verbs, *will*, and *would*, for showing a prediction. The use of a higher number of predictive modal verbs in Guardian and Dawn, i.e. 29 percent and 24 percent respectively, shows how editorial writers, together with the provision of information, show their predictions about the consequences of past events. There is a fractional difference in the use of predictive modal verbs, so the shades of predictive modality are almost the same in both newspapers. As far as the comparative analysis of obligatory modal verbs is concerned, Guardian appears to be more conservative in the use of modal verbs (29.37 percent) than Dawn (48.38 percent). Therefore, Dawn editorial writers are more straightforward in expressing the obligation with the use of 48.38% modal verbs. The analysis of modal verbs showing ability and possibility again reflects a sharp difference between these two newspapers, i.e. Dawn, Guardian. Guardian editorial writers used 25.39 percent modal verbs, showing possibility or ability. On the other hand, Dawn's editorial writers used only 16.12 percent of modal verbs, which shows that native language users use a higher number of modal verbs showing ability and possibility.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, it can be said that the newspaper editorials are not only used for disseminating information about different events and happenings but also used in opinion-making of the readers with the use of modal verbs. Although the primary aim of an editorial is to educate the masses on an event of extreme importance, the editorial writers can use modality to disseminate what they feel appropriate and suitable. As given and discussed above, the modal auxiliary verbs mirror the modality in the newspapers. The study predicts that Guardian editorial writers are more fluent in using the predictive modal verbs as compared to the editorial writers of Dawn. On the other hand, Dawn editorial writers stress obligations by using a higher number of obligatory modal verbs in their editorials than Guardian editorial writers. As far as the possibility and ability are concerned, The Guardian editorial writers are more likely to use a higher number of modal verbs expressing possibility and ability.

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