

# International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



## The Role of Intended Audience in Determining Modality Type: A Study in Relation to the Iranian Constitution

[PP: 87-93]

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### ABSTRACT

Language, as a means of communication, offers its speakers some tools by which they can convey the meanings they intend to. One of these tools is the use of modals. Modals help the speakers to express their attitudes and opinions, regarding what is going on in a sentence. Epistemic modality deals with possibility and prediction and deontic modality concerns permission and obligation. This study aims to figure out whether Iranian constitution, as a sample of the laws set by the governments, seems likely more to convey the sense of obligation and permission to the audience (applying deontic modality), or the writers of these laws are just narrating a piece of information. For this purpose, the frequency of each modal type within Iranian constitution is evaluated and considered as an indicator of the writers' attitudes. Modal verbs, auxiliary modals and adverbs in the text of Iranian constitution are analyzed and different types and subtypes of modals are distinguished. The results have shown that in 83% of the applied modals, the spirit of permission and obligation for implementing these laws is very crucially and fully presented by the tool of deontic modality which is used for such purposes. Most of these obligations target the government and the permissions are mostly dedicated to people.

**Keywords:** Iran, Constitution, Modality, Epistemic modals, Deontic modals

### ARTICLE INFO

The paper received on: **22/07/2015**, Reviewed on: **22/08/2015**, Accepted after revisions on: **31/12/2015**

### Suggested citation:

Naghizadeh, M. & Deriss, F. (2015). The Role of Intended Audience in Determining Modality Type: A Study in Relation to the Iranian Constitution. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 3(4), 87-93. Retrieved from <http://www.eltjournal.org>



## 1. Introduction

Modality, as a cross-language grammatical category, to use Palmer's terminology (2007, P: 01), gives the speakers a room to express what is, what would be, what may be and what should be (Bonyadi, 2011:02). It is the grammatical expression of the subjective attitudes and opinions of the speaker including possibility, probability, necessity, obligation, permissibility, ability, desire, and contingency. Epistemic modals such as "may" allow speakers to express various degrees of certainty (Hacquard and Wellwood, 2012: 04). Under speaker's comment approaches, on the other hand, epistemics are taken not to contribute to the truth conditions of the sentence they appear in. They are not modals per se, but rather illocutionary markers which express a speaker's comment about, or commitment to, the proposition expressed by the prejacent (cf. Bybee & Fleischman 1995). Deontic modality means that the speaker "intervenes in the speech event by laying obligations or giving permissions" (Downing and Locke, 1992: 382).

Legislative discourses usually choose their word forms freely since they enjoy a sense of power coming from the government support. The features of every chosen word reflect the speaker's attitude and also his/her aim of choosing that word. In the process of meaning discovery, being familiar with the techniques which help us to detect the right path is a very important point. Since we, as modern citizens living in social colonies, should obey the rule stated by the legislators, being aware of these techniques can be very helpful. Modality as a powerful tool of revealing the speaker's intention seems to be the indicator light in detecting the path. For this purpose in this study, modality has been focused on for reaching this analysis.

The aim of this study is to investigate Iranian constitution regarding the uses it makes of modals. Whether the majority of modals are epistemic or deontic is the main question of this study. This study tries to figure out whether Iranian constitution as a sample of the laws set by the governments, conveys the sense of obligation and permission (deontic modality) more to the audience or the writers of these laws are just narrating a piece of information. The other question to which this study aims to answer is that which subtypes of these taxonomies is used more in the text of Iran constitution. Then the last question emerged. In case the permission and the obligation modals are frequently used, towards whom they are targeted; the people, the legislator, the government or other parties. As such, this study seeks to provide answers to the following questions.

Research Q1: Which type of modality is mostly used in Iranian constitution text?

Research Q2: Which subtypes of modals are mostly used in Iranian constitution?

Research Q3: In modals stating obligation and permission, towards which groups these obligations and permissions are mostly targeted?

## 2. Review of Literature

Most modality studies have investigated the modality as it is applied in communication and try to answer how modals are used as a tool for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of an utterance. Pique et al (2002) explore the reasons underlying the differences in the use of modal verbs in English research articles in three different academic disciplines: medicine, biology and literary criticism. They have hypothesized that different disciplines favor different types of modality. The results of their study indicated that scientific research articles (in medicine, biology) mostly use

epistemic modality, whereas literary criticism research articles combine the use of both epistemic and deontic modality. They have claimed that the selection of one specific type of modality is a matter of a deliberate stylistic choice of writers influenced by the pragmatic context of their specific and distinct academic discourse communities.

In another study, Kranich (2009) investigated the use of epistemic modal markers in English popular scientific texts and their German translations. The results have shown that when a not strictly equivalent modal element is chosen by the translator, one tends to find expressions in the German translations that refer to a greater certainty than the modal in the English source. Kranich believes that this point of difference originates from the differences in genre conventions between English and German popular scientific writing. In the English text, epistemic modals are used to make the statement more indirect and thus less potentially face-threatening, leaving the addressee more room for disagreement. But in German, strong claims and direct assertions are more conventionalized. The use of “cultural filter” by the translator is also discussed in this article.

Hacquard and Wellwood (2012) investigated the distribution of epistemic modals allowing speakers to indicate different degrees of certainty in naturalistic data. They have considered *might*, *can*, and *must* in antecedents of conditionals, questions, and complements of attitude predicates, as well as finite and infinitival *have to* within the last category. To examine distributions for these modals across these embedding contexts, they have chosen the New York Times section of the English Gigaword Corpus. After custom scripts tokenized, segmented, and excluded irrelevant material, and the data was parsed

using Huang & Harper’s (2009) parser, the resultant data set contained 15,691,859 sentences. Out of these, 149,219 contained *might*, 88,859 *must*, and 475,590 *can*. Their results indicate that epistemic modals do embed, supporting the view that they contribute semantic content. However, their distribution is limited, compared to that of other modals. This limited distribution seems to call for a nuanced account which is while epistemic modals are semantically contentful; they may require special licensing conditions.

Lian and Jiang (2014) analyzed the English translation of China’s legal document. Their research reveals the following results. Firstly, translators excessively use the median finite modal operator “shall” to represent the obligation of the law, whereas “shall” weakens the law’s power of enforcement and its degrees of non-consultation. Secondly, translators tend to misuse different value-assigned English modal operators to express the same value-assigned Chinese modal operators, and to overuse the synonymous words with the aim of pursuing language diversity. However, the translations violate the principle of consistency, accuracy and authority of the law. Thirdly, translators misuse “shall/should + predicate expansion form “which changes the assigned value of English translations. And then confusion in understanding is caused. Thus, the anomie phenomenon in English translation of modal operators in Chinese legislative discourses inevitably weakens unity, compulsoriness and authority of the law.

### **3. Theoretical Framework & Methodology**

#### **3.1 Modality**

Modality is a semantic domain which covers a broad range of semantic nuances jussive, desiderative, intentive, hypothetical potential, obligative, dubitative, hortatory, exclamative, etc. (Bybee and Fleischman,



1995:2). As Hacquard (2006: 193) states, modality seems to always be anchored not just to world, but to an individual and a time as well. When a speaker wants to produce an utterance, he may choose to use or not to use the modals according to his aim in the process of communication. In case no modals are used, the speaker, to use Saeed's words seems to carry an unspoken guarantee of 'to the best of my knowledge' (Saeed, 2009: 138). In sentences with modals, this guarantee is being put between a scale of doubt ranging from strong certainty to weak commitment to the factuality of statements. Adverbs such as certain, probable, likely and possible; verbs such as know, believe, think and doubt; modal auxiliaries such as must, should need to, ought to, can, could and might are examples of agents by which a speaker could modulate this guarantee.

Generally, the studies whose concern is modality, assume that there are three types of modality: epistemic, deontic and dynamic. Palmer (2001: 7-10) in another taxonomy, distinguishes between propositional modality and event modality. Propositional modality deals with the speaker's attitude to the status of a proposition. Hence epistemic modality is a subcategory of propositional modality. Event modality 'refers to events that are not actualized' (Palmer 2001: 8) and so both deontic and dynamic modality are subcategories of event modality.

Gisborne (2007) states that dynamic senses should not be treated as subtypes of modality. The tendency to analyze these meanings as 'modal' is a practice which follows from the fact that they are meanings found in modal verbs. However, instead of analyzing them as modal meanings, we should treat them as part of the propositional content of the historical antecedents of CAN and WILL, which have not yet been lost

through the processes of semantic change associated with grammaticalization.

In this article, the binary taxonomy is preferred. The speaker's degree of knowledge and his judgment about the way the real world is, builds the concern of epistemic modality. In deontic modality the modal agent marks the speaker's attitude to social factors of obligation, responsibility and permission and how people should behave in the world (Saeed, 2009: 140)

After elaborating the key terms of this study, the original text of Iranian constitution is analyzed and the modal agents including adverbs, modal verbs and modal auxiliaries are distinguished. Depending on the sentence encompassing the modal agent and the neighboring guides in the context, the type of modal agent is diagnosed.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran sets forth the cultural, social, political and economic institutions of Iranian people based on Islamic principles and rules. Actually, it reflects the fundamental desires of Muslims in Iran. Iranian constitution was first adopted on 24 October 1979, affected on 3 December 1979 and amended on 28 July 1989. It is organized under 14 chapters including 177 articles. The chapters are categorized under the following subjects: 1) general principles 2) official language, script, calendar and flag of the country 3) rights of people 4) environmental, economic and financial affairs 5) rights of national sovereignty 6) legislative powers 7) councils 8) leader 9) presidency, ministers, army and Islamic revolutionary guards corps 10) foreign policy 11) judiciary 12) radio and television 13) supreme council for national security 14) revision of constitution.

### *3.2 Methodology*

To conduct this research, the original text of Iranian constitution is analyzed and the modal agents including adverbs, modal

verbs and modal auxiliaries are distinguished. Depending on the sentence encompassing the modal agent and the other contextual cues, the type of modal agent is identified.

#### 4. Analysis, Results and Discussion

While conducting this study, all the modals in the text of constitution were distinguished and analyzed. After deciding to which category of modals, each one belongs, the frequency of occurrence for each type was noted. Before dealing with the results, some examples of used modals in the constitution text are stated and analyzed as follows:

##### Article 18:

اسناد و مکاتبات و متون رسمی باید به زبان فارسی باشد.

All the documents, letters and official texts must be in Persian.

As it is clear, the modal verb (باید - bayad) meaning "must", is used in order to show the obligation which the speaker puts towards the audience. So the deontic modal is used in this sentence.

##### Article 23:

تفتیش عقاید ممنوع است و هیچکس را نمی توان به صرف داشتن عقیده ای مورد تعرض و مؤاخذه قرار داد.

The investigation of individuals' belief is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.

Again in this sentence, we can see that (نمی توان - nemitavan) which means "we can (may) not", is taken from "can" modal. Originally, the modal "can" is the subtype of dynamic modals which in this sentence has the meaning load of "permission" not "ability. So it moves from "dynamic" to "deontic" category of modals. Since the "permission" is one of deontic modality concerns.

##### Article 145:

هیچ فرد خارجی به عضویت در ارتش و نیروی انتظامی کشور پذیرفته نمی شود.

No foreigner will be accepted into the army or security forces of the country.

##### Article 160:

... که در این صورت وزیر دادگستری دارای همان اختیارات و وظایفی خواهد بود که ر قوانین برای وزرا به عنوان عالی ترین مقام اجرایی پیش بینی می شود.

...in which case the Minister of Justice shall have the same authority and responsibility as those possessed by the other ministers in their capacity as the highest ranking government executives.

In these examples, the speaker is making a kind of prediction out of her/his certainty and is talking about a status in real world. So she/he is using the epistemic subtype to show his attitudes towards something in the sentence.

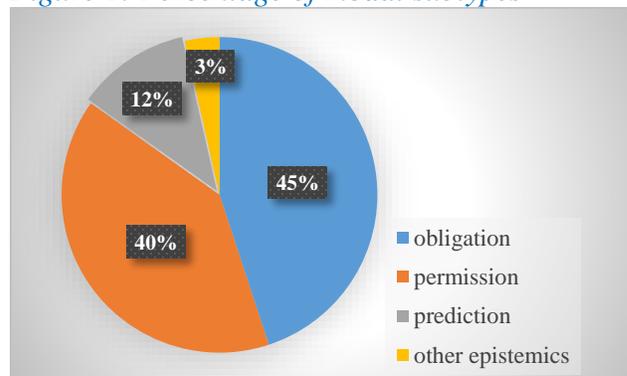
The total number of used modal agents in 177 articles of the Iranian constitution is 198 modals. As presented in the following table, the frequency of occurrence for each subtype is as follows:

Table 1: frequency of each type of modality is Iranian constitution

Type of modal	Subcategories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage	Total percentage
epistemic	prediction	23	11.5%	17%
	other purposes	7	3.5%	
deontic	permission	79	40%	83%
	obligation	89	45%	

Figure (1) depicts the frequency of each type and subtype of modality in Iran constitution. As it is apparent, the deontic modality subtypes are the major modals by which the speakers' attitudes and opinions are indicated in Iran constitution.

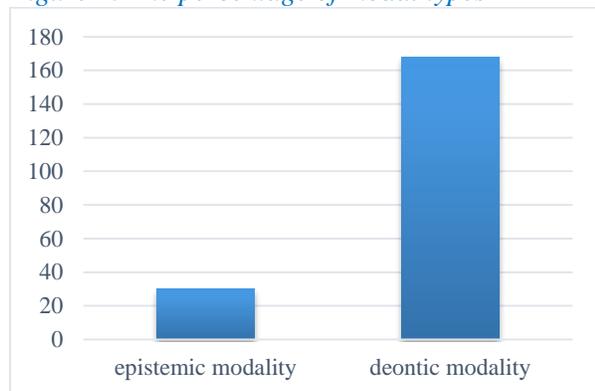
Figure 1: Percentage of modal subtypes





The epistemic modals are used less than the deontic ones. In figure (2) the percentage of epistemic and deontic type is shown.

Figure 2: The percentage of modal types



## 5. Conclusion

As the results have shown, like any other text which uses modality to express the speaker's attitudes, the modals which are used in Iranian constitution text, according to the aim which they follow, try to persuade someone to or some group to do some works and avoid doing some others. Now the research questions and their answers according to the findings are stated again.

Research Q1: Which type of modality is mostly used in Iran constitution text?

The deontic modality, which is divided to obligation and permission modals are used more in Iran constitution text.

Research Q2: Which subtypes of modals are mostly used in Iran constitution?

The results of this study show that the obligatory modals with 45% and the permissive modals with 40% are mostly used in Iran constitution.

Research Q3: In modals stating obligation and permission, towards which groups these obligations and permissions are mostly targeted?

Among the modals dealing with obligation, 26% are the obligations of the government, and 17.5% of the "to do" and "not to do" matters deal with the affairs that the government is allowed or is not allowed

doing. Other audiences of Iran constitution are the president, the ministers, the parliament members, the Guardian Council and the people. Some other audiences such as the supreme leader, legal contracts, and the media are addressed once or twice. So we will categorize modals according to the audience they address like government, president, people and GC separately and leave the other audiences among other subject under the term of "others" in our taxonomy.

The following table shows the ratio of obligatory and permissive modals used for each category of audiences in Iran constitution text.

Table 2: The ratio of used obligatory and permissive modals' audiences in Iranian constitution text

	Government	President	People	Guardian Council	Others
Obligation	26%	13.50%	3%	8%	45.50%
Permission	17.5%	6%	19%	2%	55.50%

Since the group which is targeted by obligation mostly is not the group of people, it is the government.

The membership of other audiences in this taxonomy indicates the groups on which the law puts more focus and tries to engage them more in the process of status management.

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