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## L1 VS L2 SPOKEN MODALITY USE: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS – PART 1

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### Abstract

This article discusses the place of modality as a pragmalinguistic phenomenon in communication and the implications of such an investigation for contrastive discourse analysis. It proposes an alternative three-dimensional model of modality, the construction of which is possible through the addition of the affective load of an utterance as a separate variable related to speech modalisation and the assumption that dynamic modality is, in fact, correlated with deontic modality, at least on a prepositional level. The article also discusses the problems when contrastively analysing modality realisation. It highlights that the large number of cross-cultural nuances found in modal devices reflects the enormity of analytic difficulties with which a researcher is likely to be faced.

### 1. Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language to advanced learners has its apparent advantages. The teacher is no longer restricted to just initiating the learner into the world of L2 communication through, for example, introducing a narrow and predictable patch of systemic knowledge. The teacher can finally help the students explore the vast territories of language use and instruct them on the authentic application of the acquired knowledge in genuinely communicative contexts. There is, however, a downside to these new opportunities. Orienting the learner within the intricacies of authentic communication places an obligation upon the teacher to clearly comprehend the numerous pragmalinguistic phenomena, so as to appropriately (which

in classroom contexts translates into: automatically) respond to a communicative predicament. These problematic complexities include the nuances of language use as well as a wide range of discourse making, together with speech modalisation, which this article investigates. It shows that to coherently understand this complex communicative phenomenon, it may be necessary to abandon the abstraction of many theories on the use of modality and instead view modality from a new, multidimensional perspective.

Definitions of modality are aplenty. And this is unsurprising since the phenomenon encroaches on the territory of both philosophy (including modal logic) and linguistics (including pragmatics). In philosophy it is often broadly viewed as “consisting in the relativization of the validity of sentence meanings to a set of possible worlds” (Keifer 1994: 2515a). In linguistics it is considered to refer to “a speaker’s attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence” (Simpson 2005: 43), although its meaning can and should be extended onto “their attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence” (Simpson 2005: 43). The two areas naturally intertwine, which results in many researchers attempting to either refine their own, or other’s models, or to put forward new classifications. Consequently, today’s linguistics has to grapple with numerous, yet often inconclusive, theories on modality use.

The literature is teeming with voices of dissent. Researchers do not even agree as to the actual bounds of modality in communication. For instance, some differentiate between a speaker’s stance and modality or modality and evidentiality, whereas others argue that every utterance through which a speaker expresses their stance on the conveyed message falls within the immense realm of modality. In fact, the latter approach is close to the spirit of this article in which I will nevertheless attempt to propose certain modifications within such a broad perception of modality.

It is not occasional that contrastive analyses, difficult to verify especially in spoken contexts, pose serious difficulties to the researcher. In addition, the nuances and variability of spoken L2 production, whether containing linguistic inappropriacies or marked idiosyncratically, constitute a challenge of great magnitude, sometimes even skirting the edge of infeasibility. This problem is outlined in the second section of the article, after my proposition of a coherent multidimensional model of modality has been presented.

## 2. Models of modality

There is a problem facing linguistics regarding modality as a communicative phenomenon. On the one hand, numerous attempts to objectify the phenomenon result in much research and many classifications, and consequently do provide insight into how speakers really express their stance on a certain matter. Some stick to the traditional deontism-epistemism dichotomy, whereas others attempt to give these phenomena new labels that are easily understood, such as “extrinsic” for “epistemic” or “intrinsic” for “deontic” (Biber 1999 et al.) or “root” for “deontic”

and “dynamic” modalities (Facchinetti 1998: 61). Some refer to the realm of modality more philosophically as “possible worlds” (Keifer 1994: 2515a, Chrzanowska-Kluczevska 2009), whereas others single out as many as 12 (Coates 1983) or even 17 modalities (Mindt 1998: 45). On the other hand, these intricate analyses move the discussion of what remains a pragmatic and meaningful element of communication onto a level of severe abstraction and may paradoxically be detrimental to a constructive understanding of modality, for instance, from the perspective of applied linguistics.

It is not possible to discuss all the research into modality in one article, yet it is possible to illustrate the difficulties in such studies. Such an attempt will be undertaken in this section, drawing on the models of modality proposed by Simpson (2005) and Palmer (2003).

The model proposed by Simpson (2005: 43) posits that modality comprises “the *deontic* system, along with the closely related *boulomaic* system”, as well as “the *epistemic* system with its subsystem of *perception* modality.” In this model deontic modality is seen as being “concerned with a speaker’s attitude to the degree of obligation attaching to the performance of certain actions” (Simpson 2005: 43), boulomaic with an expression of ‘desire’ (Simpson 2005: 43), which is often realised through the use of verbs such as *hope*, *wish* or *regret*. The other strand of the model, epistemic modality, is defined as being related to “the speaker’s confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed” (Simpson 2005: 44) with a subcategory, perception modality, considered to be “predicated on some reference to human perception, normally visual perception” (Simpson 2005: 46). The latter is thus realised through adjectives or adverbs, such as *clear/clearly*, *apparent/apparently* or *evident/evidently*. The following table illustrates the model:

Modalsystem	Non-linguistic concepts represented	Selected linguistic devices used
DEONTIC	obligation, duty, commitment	<i>obliged, permitted, forbidden</i>
BOULOMAIC	desire	<i>hope, wish, regret, regrettable, hopefully</i>
EPISTEMIC	knowledge, belief, cognition	<i>must, certain/certainly, necessarily, think, believe, suppose, supposedly</i>
PERCEPTION	perception	<i>obvious/obviously, clear/clearly, apparent/apparently, evident/evidently</i>

Table 1. Simpson’s (2005: 47) classification of modality

The above classification of modality is problematic. It differentiates between deontic and boulomaic modality, though in fact there is no clear-cut distinction, if any, between, for instance, the deontic commitment and the boulomaic desire. The various

non-linguistic concepts could be classified as belonging to deontic modality alone, but positioned on a gradeability scale according to their deontic power. The deontic power of a given device would be dependent upon its expectancy effect, that is the degree of likelihood that the desired act will actually be performed.

This approach could equally well apply to the epistemic *certainly* and the perceptive *evidently*, especially in analysing modality in spoken contexts. After all, speakers often use either device unconsciously and, therefore, placing them in two separate categories might be regarded as unjustified. The problem can also be seen in an analysis of the following modality marker:

This action was apparently successful.

It could be suggested that in the above sentence the perceptive *apparently* could be replaced with the epistemic *certainly*, with no detrimental effect to the semantics of the message. In fact, it would not be surprising if in spoken contexts speakers used these adverbs interchangeably, since in informal speech many words lose their original meaning as a result of “a semantic shift for the nonce” (Krzyszpień 2013).

Other models of modality are also based on the deontic-epistemic dichotomy, although some choose to add new categories or subcategories to those already existing. For example, Palmer (2003: 7) asserts that in the English language system one can distinguish three kinds of modality: epistemic, deontic and dynamic. In this model epistemic modality is “concerned solely with the speaker’s attitude to status of the proposition” (Palmer 2003: 7), whereas deontic and dynamic modality types “relate directly to the potentiality of the event” (Palmer 2003: 7), with deontic modality referring to permission or obligation as an external control and dynamic modality realising the internal ability or willingness of the person to perform a certain action as, for example, in the sentence *They can run very fast* (Palmer 2003: 7).

And indeed, dynamic modality is a separate modality world, which seems to have been ignored in Simpson’s model. And thanks to its covert relation to deontic modality, discussed in subsequent parts of this article, it is possible to refine the perception of modality as realised through the multidimensionality of its structure.

### 3. Model of modality: an alternative

The aforementioned models appear to have one problem in common. Sound as they are, they exclude from modality devices that realise a significant aspect of the speaker’s attitude, namely the affective load of an utterance, for instance in *afraid*, as contrasted with the non-affective *think*, or *suspect*, as opposed to the non-affective *suppose*. After all, there is a difference between *I think it is small* and *I’m afraid it is small*, and the difference lies not only in whether the devices belong to the world of deontic or epistemic modality, but also in the very affective load contained within the utterance. This phenomenon is not included in either of the above models of modality, and in general appears to be ignored in the discussion of modality as a whole.

### 3.1. Two-dimensional model

The most problematic aspect of the proposed models of modality most likely derives from the fact that it is sometimes impossible to assign a single non-linguistic concept, realised by a single linguistic device, to a specific modal category. There would, however, be no difficulty in one category overlapping with another if it did not obscure the picture of the whole classification and, consequently, the discussion of modality types, at times exposing it to a level of criticism. Such difficulties may result from the fact that the proposed classifications take a one-dimensional form. A proposal which could simplify and clarify the discussion would be to extend the model onto a second dimension, to treat modalities not through separate non-linguistic concepts, but through degrees of modality in relation to the affective load of the utterance, as illustrated below:

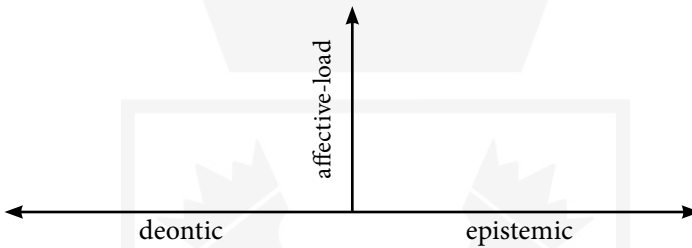


Figure 1. 2-D model of modality

This gradable perception of modality could translate into treating, for instance, the non-linguistic *obligation* as the strongest and *hope* as the weakest degree of deontic modality, due to their expectancy effect, as well as *must/evidently* as the strongest and *may/perhaps* as the weakest degree of epistemic modality. Determining the precise position of a given non-linguistic concept on a gradable scale of modality is open to interpretation, yet the general idea of modal gradeability seems reasonable.

Another significant feature of the proposed model is its two-dimensionality, which is achieved through extending the model of modality by the addition of a further variable: the affective load of the utterance. Thanks to this it is possible to place a given device not only in any position along the scale of the two main categories, namely epistemic or deontic, but also in any proximity to the second dimension of modality, that is the affective load of a modal device. An example is given below:

- a) (non-modal) It's good.
- b) (modal) It's really good.

The adverb *really* may be interpreted as only conveying epistemic content through referring to one's reality (1). Yet, it can also be seen as an emphatic device (2), especially in spoken output. It will still be interpreted as being epistemic, although

it will be placed in a lower position on the scale, still with a greater affective load. Its proposed position in the 2-D model might be as follows:

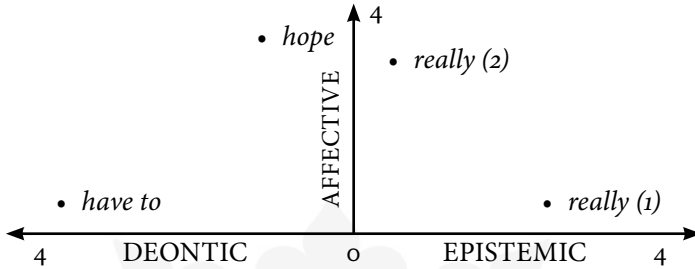


Figure 2. Position of modal devices in 2-D model of modality

The same applies to the following deontic markers:

- a) You have to do it. (deontic: 3.7; affect: 0.8)
- b) I hope you do it. (deontic: 0.9; affect: 3.8)

The deontic *have to* is classified as a strong obligation and, therefore, is positioned on the deontic scale towards the extreme 4. At the same time, if, for instance, the speaker was in a managerial role giving instruction to their employees, the affective load would be low, hence the position of *have to* on the affective scale towards zero. Simpson's boulogmaic *hope*, classified as having lower deontic power, is positioned on the deontic scale toward zero and on the affective scale towards the extreme four.

### 3.2. Three-dimensional alternative

Despite this, the 2-D model fails to include dynamic modality, which would rightly expose it to criticism. And again, as a simple remedial procedure another variable can be added, this time under the heading of modality type (Palmer's dynamic modality), which could constitute a third dimension. This can be accomplished providing that the dynamic modality can "interact" with either of the other two modalities. Although at a level this is not the case, as the following example demonstrates, deontic modality can assumptively or prepositionally include dynamic modality.

You have to run faster.

The sentence could no doubt be interpreted as carrying a deontically modal value, since it expresses an obligation imposed on the subject. Yet, at the same time, it carries the logical assumption that the subject is capable of running faster, which represents dynamic modality. Therefore, in the 3D model the position of *have to* would be as follows:

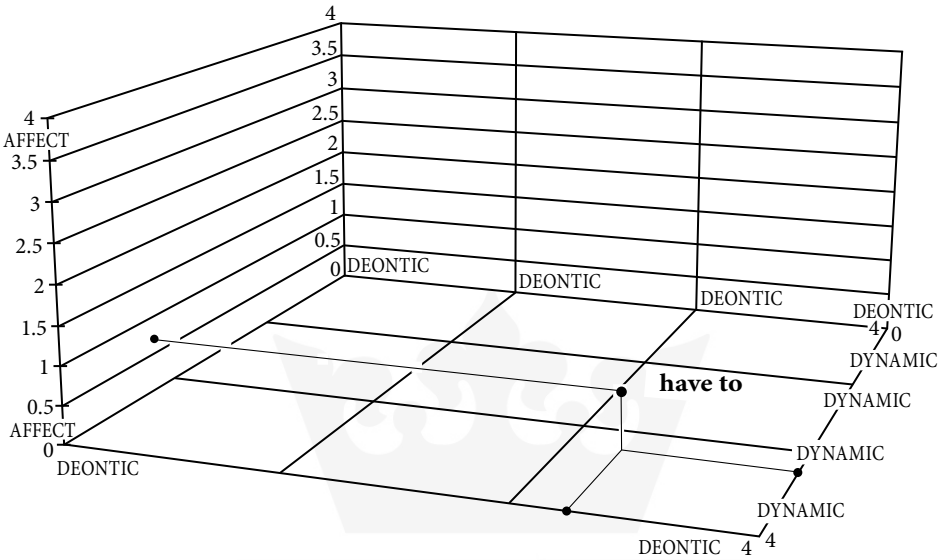


Figure 3. 3-D model of modality

The modal values of *have to*, then, could be specified as 3.7 for its deontic obligation, 3.5 for its dynamic capability and 0.8 for its affective load.

### 3.3. Modality multidimensionality: final remarks

The above proposition to include the affective load of an utterance at least as a specific value of a given modality type is based on the assumption that the affective load of the utterance automatically determines that it falls into the realm of modality, although modality is not excluded without it. In the sentence *It's beautiful*, the speaker expresses their stance on the aesthetics of a given object and the affective “beautiful” represents the modal value of the utterance, dependant upon the interpretation: deontic as a subcategory of “wish” (I wish it wasn't less beautiful) or epistemic as an expression of the speaker's opinion. Similarly, if a person says *It's red* it is interpreted as specifying the colour alone, and thus is viewed as being non-modal, unless the speaker is asked about the colour in specific circumstances as, for instance, when it is difficult to determine. However, the addition of *I'm afraid* affectively marks the message and thus determines the modal value of the utterance. On the other hand, the speaker's addition of *I think*, instead of *I'm afraid* carries no affective load but still determines its epistemically modal value. This suggests that an affective load is a determinant of modality value, though it is not a necessary condition of modality.

The proposed three-dimensional model appears to offer an alternative to traditional perceptions of modality systems. On the one hand, it simplifies the interpretation of modalisation only to three categories, yet on the other hand it moves the

discussion to a higher level of abstraction, which should nonetheless help in a successful conceptualisation of the phenomenon. It should still be realised, however, that modality as a pragmalinguistic or paralinguistic phenomenon, will always pose difficulties to the researcher, especially if analysed cross-culturally.

#### 4. Other modality-related problems

Understanding modality poses problems other than those regarding the inclusion of the affective load of the message in a modality system, addressed in the previous section. Another question which needs to be answered is whether modality and evidentiality should be seen as separate phenomena or whether evidentiality should be treated as a subcategory or an extension of modality. According to Wiemer (2006: 10), for instance, evidentiality is a reference to the source of the speaker's knowledge, and consequently, the phrase *people say* would not be classified as modality but as evidentiality. A similar view is held by Rytel (1982: 18), who asserts that reporting other people's judgements is additional non-modal information. That proposition, however, differs from Koseska-Tosze's (1993: 157) stance, who argues that reporting hearsay is linked to imperceptiveness, which is included in modality, and in Polish is realised through modal devices such as *mówią, że; powiadają, że* or *podobno, ponoć* as well as *rzekomo* or *jakoby* (Wiemer 2006: 15).

Another problem related to the ongoing discussion is the relation between hedges and modality in communication. Coates (1983: 49), for instance, asserts that "epistemic modality is always a hedge", a claim which might be easily challenged if a hedge is defined not as a stance-marker or a down-toner, but as a gap-filler having no content value, used exclusively in instances of communication breakdown. After all, the use of a hedge as an element of strategic competence will not necessarily materialise in modalising the utterance, but in simply maintaining the fluency of the communication.

A question regarding the essence of modality and, consequently, whether separate modality devices can indeed be singled out must also be addressed. Although linguistics does specify "a variety of grammatical means for conveying modal commitment, amongst which are included modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs (or sentence adverbs), evaluative adjectives and adverbs, generic sentences and verbs of knowledge, prediction and evaluation" (Simpson 2005: 43), modality without doubt exceeds the bounds of grammatical representations and encroaches upon prosody or phonology, where it might be at least difficult to determine and consequently categorise possible modalisations.

#### 5. Difficulties with Polish v. English modality realisation analyses

Contrastive analyses usually inject an additional element into an investigation of language use. Yet, they may prove challenging especially when the analysis concerns language subtleties and nuances, often bound culturally and paralinguistically.



A contrastive analysis of modality is no exception, with problems revolving mainly around finding or comparing the equivalents of a given modality device, as in the following example:

*Marek podobno już przyjechał.*

**Reportedly/supposedly**, Marek has already come to town. (Wiemer 2006: 11)

Notwithstanding the questionable addition of *to town* in the English translation, the problem is in the use of *reportedly/supposedly* as equivalents of *podobno*. Not only do the sentence positions of these modal adverbs differ, but they also belong to a different register. *Podobno* is an informal modal adverb, whereas *reportedly/supposedly* seem to be used mainly in formal communicative contexts. In addition, *supposedly* implies that the assumption concerning Marek's arrival has been made on rather inconclusive grounds.

Another problem will be illustrated in the following example:

*Ponoć pałują naszych. Wchodzimy!*

**I hear** they're clubbing our people. We're going in! (Korytkowska, Roszko 1997: 221)

In the above sentence the Polish *ponoć* was translated into *I hear*, which actually has a perfect Polish equivalent *słyszałem*. The problem in finding English equivalents of modal adverbs such as *ponoć* or *podobno* may stem from the possibility that in the English language no such equivalents may actually exist. Thus, when translating these adverbs into English, other phrases, not necessarily structurally uniform, have to be used, as long as they fit into the formality/informality of the context. In the above sentences *I hear* does seem to be an appropriate proposition.

The problem of connotation is illustrated in the following example:

*Marek rzekomo już przyjechał.*

**Allegedly**, Marek has already come to town. (Wiemer 2006: 11)

Wiemer (2006: 11) asserts that *rzekomo* has a negative connotation, as it implies Marek may not yet have come. It is a valid comment, yet juxtaposing it with *allegedly* creates further difficulties. *Allegedly* is a specific modal device in English often used to guarantee the neutrality and objectivity of the statement, as in:

Samuel Jurgens is the Alabama student who was allegedly beaten and robbed by members of the Crimson Tide football team.

In fact, the modal adverb in the above example is not intended to express doubt regarding the guilt of the possible perpetrators of the crime, but appeals to a presumption of innocence. Interestingly, until recently in Polish journalistic discourse such cases were reported without any modality. Lately, journalistic discourse has corrected this problem in reporting arrests and consequently, a modal device *miał*

*zrobić* (was supposed to) has begun to be used. Still, no direct equivalent of *allegedly* is applied.

One faces a similar problem when translating *niby* into *supposedly* and *przecież* into *after all* (Wiemer 2006: 18). Interestingly, considerable research has indeed been undertaken into the use of the above evidential units, mainly by Wierzbicka, who as early as 1971 interpreted the semantics of *podobno*, *rzekomo*, *jakoby* (Wierzbicka 1971: 110) and in 2006 analysed a large group of epistemic devices. In the case of the hearsay adverb *allegedly*, analysed above, Wierzbicka (2006: 282) maintains that of the four hearsay adverbs (*apparently*, *supposedly*, *allegedly* and *reportedly*), “it is only in the case of *allegedly* that the speaker distances himself or herself totally from the statement that is being attributed to someone else,” which supports the above discussion. Besides, Wierzbicka (2006) offers an inspiring discussion of other pragmatic particles from a cross-cultural perspective, such as *certainly*, *possibly*, *likely*, or *evidently*, *clearly*, *obviously*, referring also to the paralinguistics of discourse particles including emotions, which were the basis of the proposed 3D model of modality.

## 6. Conclusions

This article discusses the place of modality as a pragmalinguistic phenomenon in communication and the implications of such an investigation for contrastive discourse analysis. Since the discussion addresses the issues from the perspective of an applied linguist, the review of the numerous modality models is kept to the absolute minimum needed to outline the difficulties posed by their single-dimensional structure, which generates a certain ambiguity in the scientific community.

As an alternative, I propose a three-dimensional model of modality. It is suggested that deontic modality be viewed as not just covering obligation, but also hopes or wishes on a gradeability scale. The deontic intensity of a given device would be dependent upon its so-called expectancy effect, that is the degree of likelihood that the desired act will actually be performed. Consequently, epistemic and deontic modalities, completely independent from each other, constitute the first dimension of the model. The second dimension is dynamic modality, which could interact with deontic modality on the prepositional level. The third dimension is represented by a new variable, the affective load, which seems to determine the actual realisation of the three modality types.

In the final section of the article the discussion focuses on the problems of contrastively analysing modality realisation. It is suggested that the wide range of cross-cultural nuances found in modal devices reflects the gravity of analytic intricacies with which a researcher is likely to be faced.

It is possible that a 3-D approach to modality realisation adds depth to a discussion of paralinguistic phenomena as such. Yet, a question certainly remains as to the reception this approach will have. And even if (maybe optimistically) it is accepted, another question arises, this time regarding a possible extension of this approach. After all, it is likely that three dimensions are not the conceptual peak of modeling in the world of pragmalinguistics.

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