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## **ON THE GENERAL APPROACHES TO THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF MODALITY**

Modality is one of the highly debated categories in linguistics. In spite of the fact that modality has been studied by the linguists for a long time, since the middle of the last century, it has a rich research potential, especially from the perspective of the classification problem as it gives a new set of problems for further analysis and description. There are a lot of contradictions in the classification related to finding a precise distinction between the objective and subjective modality and our purpose is give a new interpretation to both notions within the frame of our article.

**Key words:** modality, grammatical category, meaning, attitude to reality, objective, subjective.

### **Introduction**

Modality can be broadly defined as a category which shows the relation of the speaker to the proposition of the text. It reflects attitudes, beliefs or expresses the state of affairs towards the state of things, affairs or actions. Nowadays, the semantic field of modality has gradually widened and has become an interdisciplinary notion that is studied not only in linguistics, but also in the field of logic, philosophy, and psychology.

Despite the extensive research, there is still no general opinion in linguistics about this category, which has led to various contradictions. The problem is that modality as a linguistic category is multifaceted and manifold; therefore, it has been studied from different models and points of view. (Stolz.T, 2012, p. 14-17),

(Skorasińska. M, 2019, p.1-7).

In linguistics, perhaps, it is considered to be one of the most disputed categories that has been widely studied and described by many scholars like Palmer (1986, 1990, 2001), Lyons (1977), Nuyts, Portner (2009), Bybee and Fleischman (1995), Warner (2009), Wright (1956) etc.

The latter is most likely the reason why this linguistic category has not lost its relevance and has continued to remain in the scope of linguists' interest until now. As a result, its definition is one of the primary issues of modern linguistics. The reality that modality is a linguistic category is not denied by anyone (Werner. A, 2012, p. 1), and the fact that it is the very essence of communication and the sentence in general, and it is widely accepted by many linguists (Narrog. H, 2009, p. 29).

### **Theoretical Background**

The study has been conducted by using linguistic-analytical, as well as other scientific-research methods. It also includes a historical overview regarding the topic. The theoretical part of the work is based on the work of foreign linguists, mainly the work of Western European, Soviet and American linguists such as Palmer, Bally, Plungian, Lyons, Vinogradov, Van der Auwera and others.

In the first part of this paper titled "*On General Approaches of Modality and the Issues of Objective and Subjective Modality*", we have explored many of the most notable and well-known approaches of various linguists on modality, revealed the problems of its definition and other issues derived from it. By analysing these problems, we were able to give a more profound explanation of such kind of issues like the epistemology of modality, its definition, the exact distinction between objective and subjective modality, etc. In the second part, we have discussed the problem of which category modality specifically belongs to as there are different opinions about this which contradict each other and our aim here is to specify it. In the conclusion, a new definition for modality is given which will clearly express the distinction of subjective and objective modality, as well as which category it belongs to, and other conclusions derived from the general analyses of modality.

### **On the General Approaches of Modality and the Issues of Objective and Subjective Modality**

Modality was born in ancient times and the roots of this reality need to be taken from classical Greek philosophy. The name originated from the Latin word "*modus*", later "*modalitas*" which means "*measure*", "*means*". (Jan Nuyts, 2016:10-11).

Chronologically, it was studied for the first time in the fourth century B.C by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who referring to the theory of modality in his book called "*Prior Analytics*" mentioned the notions called "premiss" and

"syllogism". He saw 'premiss' to be a sentence affirming or denying one or another thing and "syllogism" to be the discourse in which "certain things that are stated are based on necessity". The author also affirms that the two main parts of modality are possibility and necessity (Aristotle, 350 B.C.).

In another work called, "*Metaphysics*" Aristotle observes the world in the scope of cognitive and ontological concepts and distinguishes three main concepts: opportunity, necessity, and reality. He emphasizes the notion of opportunity by explaining that the possibility of existence comes from the reality of existence through the reality of existence, such as a human being comes from a human being, or education comes from education, and adds that there is always movement and that movement already exists in reality before its realization (Aristotle, 1976, p. 245).

In the encyclopaedia of philosophy, modality is explained as a notion by which, the relation of the object, is clarified from this or that position. Clarification of modality is done through concepts like "possible", "necessary", "provable" "rejected", "mandatory", "permissible", "good", "bad", and through other concepts (National Encyclopedia of Philosophy) which are considered as main concepts of language modality.

Another work where we can find modality is that of Kant. Speaking about judging modality, he separates three main categories as follows: probability/improbability, existence/non-existence, necessity/opportunity; moreover, the author distinguishes three main types: problematic, assertive, and apodotic.

The first is the type of judgment modality where confirmation or refutation is accepted as a possible option; the second type is when negation or confirmation is accepted as a reality, and in the third type, negation or confirmation is a necessity. (Kant, 1994, p. 104–105).

If we deeply analyse Kant's theory on modality, we will see its direct connection with language and thought, while the judgment is the result of the thoughts of a thinking subject expressed by language. Perhaps, therefore, in the 1930s this idea began to penetrate and take root in linguistics with its various manifestations after that so did some fundamental issues like the definition of modality, its precise distinction of subjective and objective modality, and what category it belonged to. The first thing that we face while studying modality is that there is no common and fully comprehensive definition or interpretation for it which means that at this moment in time the concept of modality related to its definition is uncertain. And this, in its turn, has raised several questions which despite many attempts to explain or to define, still pose questions about this category. As Palmer mentions the "concept of modality is vague and gives a reason to a number of comments". (Palmer, 1986, p. 2) which again confirms the complexity of modality.

Auwera points out that 'modality is a big intrigue and the questions erstwhile considered solved became open questions again' (Auwera, Salkie, Busuttil, 2009, p. 7) which means that those problems which have been studied before are now

in the spotlight of linguists again as issues that need further investigation.

Plungian and Auwera mention that "modality and its types can be defined and named in different ways, but none of them is the correct one and the only requirement is that one makes clear how one uses one's terms" (Plungian, 1998, p. 79-124). As we will see later, there are many approaches offered by various linguists on modality and its forms. However, we cannot clearly state that they can be considered as definitive versions because modality has different ways of interpretation from various points of view; thus, on this hand it might be correct, yet in the other hand it might be wrong.

In order to understand the contradictions of the definition as it relates to this category, it is first necessary to reveal the theories and statements we have in the linguistics field. The first substantial work in Western-European linguistics and in linguistics in general, is Bally's *General linguistics and French language issues* where the author makes the following statement, "The logical function of modality is in the response of the thinking subject; modal signs are a link between the subject of dictum and modus" (Bally, 1955, p. 234-235), which means that the subject's (speaker's) response is the main idea of modality expressed by modal signs. According to Bally, every sentence consists of "*modus*" and "*dictum*" where "*dictum*" "is a representation corresponding to the propositional context of utterance and modus refers to the attitude of the modal subject towards the dictum". (Graffi, 2001, p. 248), (Adeline, 2011, p. 293) .

To put it another way, "*dictum*" is the action and 'modus' is the speaker's reaction or attitude towards the situation. Based on this, we can confirm that the author additionally asserts that the concept of attitude is the reaction of the subject (modus), how the thinking subject reacts to the factuality or reality of the actions (dictum). This is to say that the author strongly emphasizes the relation between object (reality of actions) and subject (the speaker or the writer).

The claim that modality expresses the attitude of the speaker to his/her reality or factuality and that it is an inseparable part of a language is confirmed in Soviet linguistics as well. One of the most prominent linguists of Soviet era, Vinogradov, notes that "modality of the sentence belongs to the basic and central category of linguistics" (Отечественные лингвисты XX века, 2017, p. 39) whereas Galperin underlines that it is a language-specific category, therefore it has become the very entity of the communication process (Galperin, 1981, p. 112), which means that the latter, as a linguistic phenomenon, is an inseparable part of language.

According to Vinogradov, "each utterance or sentence contains modality in it, namely indicates attitude to actions" (Vinogradov, 1950, p. 10). The famous Swedish linguist, Kiefer proposed a theory of modality which also deems the attitude referring to modality as the speaker's cognitive, emotive, or volitive attitude towards the state of affairs (Mello, 2012, p. 84). It means that the speakers express their attitudes based on their knowledge of the world around them and its components combined with emotions and volition.

Verhaar mentions that modality is related to the approach of the person referred to by the subject of the verb and highlights notions such as desire, ability, necessity, permission, obligation and such which can be expressed in an utterance in a variety of ways (Verhaar, 1995, p. 311-312).

Halliday's theory on modality, notes that it is the speaker's opinion of probability and predictability (Halliday, 2009, p.188) and Radden thinks that modality refers to potentiality as well. (Radden, 2007, p. 233).

Portner highlights that 'modality is the linguistic phenomenon whereby grammar allows one to say things about, or on the basis of, situations which need not to be real' (Portner, 2009, p. 1)

Summarizing the above-mentioned theories and statements, it becomes quite clear that most of the linguists define modality as the speaker's or writer's attitude to reality.

From this point of view, the definition of the "*Cambridge grammatical vocabulary*" for modality is noteworthy yet it summarizes all these aspects when states:

"Modality is about a speaker's or a writer's attitude towards the world. A speaker or writer can express certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation, necessity and ability by using modal words and expressions. Speakers often have different opinions about the same thing".

To give an illustration to the problem connected to the definition of modality it is necessary to mention that the conflict is concealed in the word "**attitude**". To refer to the notion 'attitude' first, we need to mention that as a concept it is considered to be a sociological and psychological term. Hinkles defines it as a 'general notion to describe the tendency to perform actions of a describable and identifiable sort and it is always towards something (value or object)' (Hinkle, 1994, p. 259-260). The predominant interpretation or definition of attitude is that it is a 'person's general evaluation of an object' (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 6-7).

The problem is that, based on above-mentioned discussion of modality, and particularly if we accept the latter as the speaker's attitude to reality, we are questioning the objectiveness of modality. The traditional theory of modality goes in two directions: objective and subjective (Selezneva, 2013, p. 233; Cambridge Grammatical Vocabulary), where the objective modality is the reflection of reality and facts, and the subjective modality is the attitude of the speaker or writer towards the world and reality, which enables them to express not only their opinion to the facts, but also, what is not yet part of reality and which is in the mind of the subject. In other words, we can say that it is the expression of the speaker's imagination and desires. The semantic field of the latter is wide and limitless. In the case of subjective modality, Ayoun says that:

*"One of the peculiarities of modality is that besides presenting real facts, it enables one, that is, the speaker, to express his/her thoughts which are not real. Unlike the animal communication system, the human being is not limited to reality and has also an imaginary world, and modality allows us to express a large*

*chain of emotions, thoughts and desires*". (Ayoun, 2013, p. 21)

When we define modality generally as an attitude towards reality, the real essence of objective modality is barely noticeable here. A noteworthy opinion is Lyons' interpretation on objective and subjective modality in which the author explains objective modality by the components "it -is- -so" and subjective modality "I- say- so", which means that the first one is reality, a fact, and second one is the response or attitude of the speaker (Lyons, 1977, p. 799)

In this context of definition, the term "attitude" means an opinion which the subject can express, and which can be formed by various grammatical and syntactic means. For example, (1) *I think he is a good man*, (2) *He may come* (3) *He is supposed to be at home*<sup>1</sup>, all of these sentences reflect the attitude expressed by different grammatical forms where the objective modality is neutral.

Therefore, to define it only as an attitude to reality is also unrealistic because this does not express the idea of objectivity. As before-mentioned the Cambridge dictionary refers to this as "the attitude of the two speakers may be different about the same thing". In this case a question arises whether objective modality exists or not. From this perspective, the approach of Narrog is rather interesting.

Having examined the extensive work of Narrog on the definition of the latter, we can observe that the author cites the partially accepted conviction of modality as the expression of the speaker's attitude towards reality, however, he contradicts this provision in part. The author points out that there are two main approaches to the definition of modality in modern linguistics.

The first one is the "speaker's attitude" or "subjectivity" the other perspective is one of "factuality" or "reality". (Narrog, 2012, p. 5) .

He does not support the idea that it reflects the attitude of the subject to reality. He particularly outlines this when he states:

*"The first approach is not meaningful because speaker attitude, especially in spoken language, are expressed throughout the sentence through a great variety of grammatical and lexical categories. If a definition of 'speaker's attitude' or 'subjectivity' were taken seriously, it would be impossible to identify a single grammatical category or even a definite set of categories associated with it"* (Narrog, 2012, p. 5).

With this in mind, it can be supposed that under the word 'attitude' the author understands constantly changing situation because one's attitude can change over the time or can be different from the other person's attitude. Therefore, he does not agree with the view that modality denotes the subject's attitude about the objective world; hence to define it only as the subject's attitude inefficient. The problem is that, from this point of view, the notion of objective modality would be questionable as the latter only exhibits facts. If we rely solely on the fact that modality expresses attitude, then the meaning of objective modality is devalued. In the following example (4) *I think he is a good person*, the opinion, assumption, or probability of the speaker is obvious. The words "I think" and

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<sup>1</sup> Examples are researcher's own

"good" already remind us that this is the speaker's attitude towards a person, yet in the following example, (5) *Washington is the capital of America*<sup>2</sup> reflects only a reality, a fact. We do not notice that there is any attitude towards a person or phenomenon here. That is why Narrog's counterargument about attitude is justified.

If we emphasize the objective and subjective modality, which is also the main approach of Soviet linguistics, since according to this school each sentence contains objective modality which denotes the relation of the subject to reality, (Krasnova, 2002, p. 123–131), it is necessary to outline that Palmer offers the notions "*realis*" and "*irrealis*". Having considered the definition of the latter on *realis* and *irrealis* modality it becomes obvious that both have almost the same meaning and semantic fields.

Thus, Palmer posits that *realis* portrays real situations, as having occurred or actually occurring, and known about through direct perception and *irrealis* points out situations within the realm of thought, which are only known through imagination. (Palmer, 2001, p. 1).

In these two approaches, we see a slight difference. According to the Russian school of linguistics objective modality is the relation of the subject to the objective world, Palmer says *realis* refers to an occurred or occurring reality or situation that is accepted through direct perception. From this point of view, it seems that the definition of Palmer on "*realis*" is more reasonable, since the word 'objective' already reminds us that it is something separated from the attitude of the speaker. As for subjective modality or "*irrealis*" in a language express the same meaning; that is both are a person's response to his/her imaginary world. Defining objective modality as the relation of the communicator of the action to the objective world is also reasonable, but, on the other hand, it does not express the pure meaning of the objective/ *realis* modality. Thereby it is necessary to be clearly distinguished between *realis/objective* and *irrealis/subjective* modality.

### The Epistemology of Modality

There are lot of debates on the epistemology of the modality. Various linguists have different interpretations for where it should be. In order to understand this, it is necessary to consider other linguists' certain opinions on where it should be placed. According to Bally, Vinogradov and other linguists' modality is a syntactic category. (Bally, 2001, p. 416; see also Vinogradov, 1975, p. 53–87; Arregui, 2017, p. 1–3). They believe that modality is fixed since the syntactic order makes it comprehensible in the sentence.

However, some linguists have another opinion connected to the category of modality and consider it to be a semantic area. (Fletcher, 1986, p. 375; see also Krasnova, 2002, p. 127; Abramov, 2004, p. 242; Frawley, 2008, p.1–2, Hoye, 2014, p. 37; Rocci, 2017, p. 3–4).

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<sup>2</sup> Examples are researcher's own

When discussing the notion of modality Shahdarov divides it into central and peripheral fields. He believes that the linguistic means of the central field belong to morphology and the peripheral one refers to syntactic, lexical-grammatical, and lexical fields. Shahdarov refers to modality as a field of the functional-semantic group (Shahdarov, 2013, p. 179).

Bybee and Fleischman point out that modality is a semantic domain containing semantic elements that a language expresses (Bybee, 1995, p. 396). More remarkable is the theory put forward by Swan and Westick which combines those two opinions. In their book *The Modality in Germanic Languages*, they note that it is both semantic and syntactic category (Swan, 2011, see in the preface).

The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines modality as follows "*In syntactic and semantic analysis, a term chiefly used to refer to the way in which the meaning of a sentence or clause may be modified through the use of a modal verb*". (Tom McArthur, 1998, p. 382)

It is necessary to understand the logical meaning of the semantic, syntactic, and grammatical notions, which are very important in order to perceive the idea of the latter. Thus, as we mentioned above according to some linguists, modality is a syntactic category. Due to syntax order we can understand the modality in the meaning of the sentence. To give an illustration the examples below, will help us to understand it properly.

For instance

(4) **He must go and talk about it.**

(5) **Must he go and talk about it?**

Or,

(6) **He must go.**

(7) **He probably will go.**<sup>3</sup>

We observe two sentences in which the modality is expressed by the "must" modal verb. The syntactic structure functions to emphasize the modal verb in the sentence. The syntax has been changed and the personal pronoun 'he' is used after the modal verb 'must'. In this way the word "he" is emphasized; therefore, the shade of the meaning of the sentence has changed. As we read the sentences, we see that in both cases the sentences express obligation, but here the semantic nuances are different, and the second sentence is more emphatic.

In the second sentence we see that with the change of modal verb, the meaning of the sentences has also changed, that is, it has shifted from obligation to probability.

The second example particularly derives from the Oxford dictionary explanation about the syntactic and semantic order of the modality's category. Logical modality stems from the sense of the harmonious relation between subject and object. From this point of view, the definition of Swan and Westwick seems to offer a more comprehensive approach, since in modality the syntactic and semantic fields are inseparable and do not exist independently from each other.

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<sup>3</sup> Examples are researcher's own



To illustrate this, it is necessary to bring an example of a sentence which is devoid of syntax, and it will help us understand whether it can have meaning or not.

For example, (8) *"In the north, lake, is probably, there"*. Thus, we have an example of a sentence. But as it is noticeable, it is devoid of meaning and is just a compilation of words. We read certain words that make no sense to us. On the other hand, if there is no proper syntactic structure there will also be no meaning similarly, hence, in order to get the meaning we must have a syntactically correct sentence like (9) *"The lake is probably in the north"*<sup>4</sup>. Here we see that the sentence makes sense because syntactically it has been constructed correctly, and yet in the first sentence we see that there can also be a sentence without any meaning. In both cases, we can see that modality cannot exist without syntactic order which decides the meaning of the sentence. Based on this, we can state that syntactic order is inseparable part of modality. On the other hand, it should be noted that modality cannot be understood without its subtext; thus, it is only in the text or in the complete sentence that it becomes understandable. This means that without proper grammatical structures a sentence will not convey its true meaning. Therefore, in this case, the grammatical part is also important. For example, if the speaker wants to express his attitude or just mention something already happened, without the past tense verb, the sentence would not have that meaning.

**Lyons** notes that probability and necessity are central concepts of traditional modality logic (Lyons, 1977, p. 787). Moreover, other linguists agree with this opinion (Brisard.F, 2009:79) (Comrie, 2005:310). The category of modality also has various interpretative approaches, particularly the functional-semantic, the cognitive and the narrow approach. From this perspective it is also necessary to discuss the functional-semantic features of modality.

The Russian linguistic dictionary defines it as follows:

*"Modality is a functional-semantic category, expressed in morphology, constructive syntax, tonal, word hierarchical system regardless of the correspondence of the reality with the consciousness of the speaker"* (Ярцева, 1998, p. 658)

Keeping this definition in mind, we see that modality is not only expressed by circumstance, but also by in one way or another the whole essence of the sentence in the context. Hence, modality cannot be expressed only by modal or conjugated verbs; from this point of view, it means that all the components of a sentence show modality all together. Palmer mentions that in recent years it has been recognized as a valid cross-language grammatical category, but one that is grammatically closed to tense and aspect. According Palmer "modality is concerned with the status of the preposition that describes the event" (Palmer, 2001:1). In this case, the approach that modality is a grammatical category is very important and valuable. Bondarkov notes that modality is a complex order with syntactic, morphological, and verbal expressions at its disposal (Alexandrovna, 20 08 2016).

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4 Examples are researcher's own

## Conclusion

Having discussed many of the most significant factors and features of modality, and summarized the problems that are regarding in its definition from many linguistical approaches, we think that the following definition of modality is much more comprehensive **modality is a syntactic-grammatical category expressing a semantic field of reality, which denotes factuality and the attitude of the speaker towards the real and imaginary worlds expressed by the use of syntactic, grammatical and other non-linguistic means.**

In the following definition, the sense of objective and subjective modality is clearly expressed, yet, by defining it as a notion denoting factuality we refer to objective modality and by defining it as the attitude of the speaker towards the real and imaginary worlds we mean subjective modality. In the above-mentioned definition we used also non-linguistic means to mean aspects like emotion or tone, that are also parts of modality. In our final summary on the notion of modality, we, thus, conclude:

Modality is the most important aspect of a language and it exists in each sentence or utterance since it is expressed in different ways depending on the features of the language. However, the expression of modality varies in different languages.

Grammatical, semantic, or syntactic fields of modality should not be divided and considered as separate factors, because the entity of the following notions expresses the complete meaning of modality.

Based on the our analysis it is necessary to mention that logically, in nature's mother tongue, the sentence and utterance made by human being are based on the syntax and grammatical rules of their language, hence, the modality belongs to the syntactic-functional category because it expresses a complete meaning. The semantic field of modality is fixed by the order of syntax and the correct use of grammatical rules.

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Անուշ Մարտիրոսյան

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## ԵՂԱՆԱԿՎՈՐՄԱՆ ԻՄԱՅԱԲԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԸՆԴՀԱՆՈՒՐ ՄՈՏԵՅՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ՄԱՍԻՆ

Եղանակավորումը համարվում է լեզվաբանության ամենաքննարկված թեմաներից մեկը: Չնայած այն սկսվել է ուսումնասիրվել անցյալ դարի կեսերից, այնուամենայնիվ այն ունի հարուստ հետազոտական ներուժ, հատկապես դասակարգման խնդրի տեսանկյունից, քանի որ առաջ է բերում մի շարք խնդիրներ հետագա վերլուծության և նկարագրության համար: Դասակարգման մեջ կան բազմաթիվ հակադրություններ, որոնք կապված են օբյեկտիվ և սուբյեկտիվ եղանակների ճշգրիտ տարբերակումը գտնելու հետ, ինչպես նաև եղանակավորման կարգի պատկանելիության և դրա սահմանման հետ կապված: Մեր նպատակն է այս խնդիրներին տալ նոր մեկնաբանություն մեր հոդվածի շրջանակներում:

**Հիմնաբառեր՝** եղանակավորում, քերականական կարգ, իմաստ, վերաբերմունք իրականությանը, օբյեկտիվ, սուբյեկտիվ:

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## ОБ ОБЩИХ ПОДХОДАХ К ИЗУЧЕНИЮ ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИИ МОДАЛЬНОСТИ

Модальность является одной из самых обсуждаемых категорий в лингвистике. Несмотря на то, что модальность изучается лингвистами в течение длительного времени, с середины прошлого века, она обладает богатым исследовательским потенциалом, особенно с точки зрения проблемы классификации, поскольку выдвигает ряд новых проблем для дальнейшего анализа и описания. В классификации существует множество противоречий, связанных с определением точного различия между объективной и субъективной модальностями. И наша цель – дать новую интерпретацию обоим понятиям в рамках нашей статьи.

**Ключевые слова:** модальность, грамматическая категория, значение, отношение к действительности, объективный, субъективный.

Հոդվածը խմբագրություն է ներկայացվել՝ 2021թ. փետրվարի 3-ին:

Հոդվածը հանձնվել է գրախոսման՝ 2021թ. մարտի 21-ին

Հոդվածն ընդունվել է տպագրության՝ 2021թ. ապրիլի 2-ին