

COURSE:

MULTIMODALITY IN LITERARY TEXT

# Committing and Evading: Truth, Modality, and Hedging

Lecture 11

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# Learning Objectives

1. Modality in language
2. Modals and authority
3. Hedging
4. Modality and certainty in visual communication



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Main Source:

“How to Do CDA” by Machin and Mayr (2012)



## Modality

In language, people may want to show their strong support for an idea or thing, but they also want to avoid making it sound like a definite promise or command.

This can include things like hedging by using phrases such as “I believe” or “I think”, modal verbs, modal adjectives, and their adverb versions. We use these language structures constantly when we talk and write. These help us express our perspective on how likely something is, our sense of obligation, and about its certainty and uncertainty (doubt).

Machin and Mayr, 2012

# Modals

Modals in Language (Hodge and Kress, 1979)

and

Visual Modals (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021)





## **Modality in language**

I **will** go grocery shopping today.

I **may** go grocery shopping today.



# 3 categories of modality:

Machin and Mayr, 2012

## Epistemic modality

it is about how sure the speaker or writer is about something.

"I **may** go grocery shopping today."

"I **will probably** go grocery shopping."

## Deontic modality

it deals with expressions related to influencing people and events through obligations, permission, and necessity.

"students **must** submit the assignment."

"students **may** submit the assignment."

## Dynamic modality

it is related to possibility, ability, and prediction but without the same level of subjectivity found in epistemic and deontic modality.

"I **can** do this quiz."

"I **will** go to the doctor tomorrow."



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Machin and Mayr (2012) also argue that modality can be associated with **hedging terms**, such as 'I think', 'seems', or 'kind of/ sort of.'

example:

This is the most updated regulation applied.

**I think** this might be the most updated regulation applied.

This **seems to be** the most updated regulation applied.



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example:

You **have to** implement this regulation.

The above sentence is the example of deontic modality in which the modal 'have to or must' is used to order someone to do something.



02

## **Modals and authority**

The choice to use certain modal verbs in text can reveal the author's identity and their authority and the power they have over the others. Therefore, modals in language can indicate the power relations that the speaker or writer and how it influences the others.

Examples:

All citizens **will** wear mask during the pandemic situation.

All citizens **should** wear mask during the pandemic situation.

**Government thinks that** all citizens should wear mask during the pandemic situation.

Examples:

You **will** go with me.

You **must** go with me.

**The officials order** you must go with me.

For example, **"We must take globalization as an opportunity."**

(Machin and Mayr, 2012, PP. 191)

This ambiguity can be interpreted in two different sentences with different perspectives:

1. The evidence strongly suggests that we should see globalization as an opportunity.
2. The politician tells us to see globalization as an opportunity.

Another example of political speech:

“We **cannot** avoid the fact that we are now part of a global economic order.”

Here, '**cannot**' suggests that it would not be reasonable to think otherwise rather than a legal impossibility. It conveys the idea that it is not practical to avoid the fact that national economies are now part of the global economic order. They are included and undeniable.

Modal verbs, such as 'must' can be ambiguous about when something will happen.

"We **must** adapt to changes in global markets through building a knowledge-based economy that is dynamic and versatile"

(Machin and Mayr, 2012, PP 191)

Hodge and Kress (1979) highlight the practical purpose of this ambiguity in language. They suggest that because language serves both to convey information and, at times, to deceive, grammar includes forms that help us avoid being too specific. **Modals express probabilities and certainties, but they often hide the exact timing of an action and the power dynamics involved.** In essence, modals can act as a shield for our statements, protecting them from potential criticism or challenge. They offer a degree of flexibility and ambiguity that can be quite useful in communication.



03

## Hedging

Hedging is a linguistic strategy used to express tentativeness or uncertainty in language (Ifga and Pratiwi, 2021).

As well as modal verbs, speakers and writers can use hedging, which is a way to show uncertainty and non-commitment in their statements. This helps to make the statements seem detailed and precise while actually avoiding directness (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

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For example:

1. His house is **almost** 150 meters wide; **I think**.
2. It **seems like** only few people will attend.
3. **I think** I have to go.
4. He **kind of** being ignorant to the current situation.
5. His writing is **more or less** the same with the other one.



A study by Mentari (2018) showed a pattern in the use of hedges in the presidential debate:

1. **Modal auxiliary verbs**, which express the uncertainty, especially about future predictions in the events and outcomes.
2. **Modal lexical verbs**, which serve dual purposes: mitigating claims indicating uncertainty and a lack of complete commitment.
3. **Modal phrases** which consist of adjectival, adverbial, and nominal, are used to show uncertainty.
4. **Approximators** in which the words are related to degree, quantity, frequency, and time, indicate uncertainty.
5. **Introductory phrases** have multiple functions, such as showing a lack of full commitment, seeking acceptance, being polite, and involving the listeners.
6. **'If' clauses** are used to avoid direct criticism, especially in predicting future events.
7. **Compound hedges** are used to express a lack of full commitment while seeking acceptance and politeness.

For example:

**Trump:**

“It’s **probably** \$5 trillion that we can’t bring into our country, Lester. And with a little leadership, you’d get it in here very quickly, and it could be put to use on the inner cities and lots of other things, and it would be beautiful.”

**Clinton:**

“And I have -- well, not quite that long. **I think** my husband did a pretty good job in the 1990s. I think a lot about what worked and how we can make it work again...”

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A study by **Fraser** (2010) about **Hedging in Political Discourse** found in the documents of **Bush's responses to the reporters' questions**. Fraser's research found few cases of hedging used by Bush for purposes of avoidance when the questions seem challenging. Then Bush avoided a direct, outspoken answering to the point. Instead, the research found Bush skillfully avoided addressing the issue by employing outright lying technique, as recommended by Partington (2003).



**Reporter:** “Mr. President, thank you. Since General Pace made his comments that got a lot of attention about homosexuality, we haven’t heard from you on that issue. Do you, sir, believe that homosexuality is immoral?”

**President Bush:** “**I will not be rendering judgment about individual orientation.** I do believe the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy is good policy.”

**Reporter:** "You weren't this circumspect when you were talking to reporters yesterday about the economy."

**President Bush:** "I think I pretty much said the same thing yesterday, in all due respect."

**Reporter:** "Was it on your order, sir?"

**President Bush:** "As I said, **this program is a necessary program that was constantly reviewed...**"



## **Modality and certainty in visual communication**

Machin and Mayr (2012) divide the markers of visual modality into seven categories:

1. **Detail Level:** From simple line drawings to highly detailed photographs.
2. **Background Clarity:** From a blank background to a detailed and sharp one.
3. **Depth Perception:** Ranging from no depth to a highly deep perspective.
4. **Light and Shadow:** Varies from no articulation to the maximum.
5. **Tonal Gradation:** From just black and white to a full spectrum of colors.
6. **Color Modulation:** From flat, unmodulated color to finely nuanced representations.
7. **Color Saturation:** Ranges from black and white to highly saturated colors.





1. Background clarity
2. Light and shadow
3. Color modulation
4. Color saturation

Figure 1 (Enniful, E., 2018)



1. Detail level
2. Background clarity
3. Depth perception

Figure 2 (Tempo., 2020)



1. Background clarity
2. Light and shadow
3. Tonal gradation
4. Color modulation
5. Color saturation

Figure 3 (Riana, F., 2019)



1. Detail level
2. Dept perception
3. Light and shadow
4. Color modulation

Figure 4 (Bartolo, L., 2020)

## Summary

In this last chapter of CDA, we have delved in the features of both language and images that helps us to assess the commitment of truth. In language, the use of modality allows speakers to express strong commitment to certain ideas while hedging on other parts, revealing a sense of relationship between power and authority. Hedging, seemingly precise, can actually obscure the information. Similarly, in images, we explored the diver characteristics from their naturalistic representations. Analyzing these divergences, much like examining modals in language, which enables us to uncover the identities, values, and narratives being communicated through the visuals images.



**Thank you**



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