MODALITY REALIZATIONS IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CASUAL CONVERSATION: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper aims at construing the ways two spakers of a casual conversation who are culturally different realize their commitments towards the truth of their exchanges in the conversation. The corpus of data of this study was a stretch of approximately fifty-five-minute taped-English-conversation between a native speaker (an American female) and a non-native speaker (an Indonesian male). The data were analyzed by referring to Basic System of Modality as suggested by Matthiessen (1995) in systemic functional linguistics tradition. The study reveals that NNS was more unsure towards the truth of the propositions he exchanged in the conversation compared to NS. In modalizing his propositions, NNS preferred using subjective orientation compared to NS who preferred judging something on behalf of others.

Keywords: modality, modalization, modulation, systemic functional linguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

Dealing with language, Halliday (in Eggins, 1994: 78) says that of all the uses we make of language, which are limitless and changing, language is designed to fulfill three main functions: a function for relating experience, a function for creating interpersonal relationships, and a function for organizing information. Language is viewed as a resource for making not just one meaning at a time, but several strands of meaning simultaneously. Those three functions successively refer to the three types of meaning or metafunctions: experiential meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning.

Interpersonal meaning, that is meaning about our role relationships with other people and our attitudes to each other, is more dominantly expressed in a casual conversation (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 49). This is supported by the fact that the primary task of casual conversation is the negotiation of social identity and social relations. This casual conversation is driven by interpersonal, rather than ideational or textual meanings. At the clause level in the conversation, the major patterns which enact roles and roles relationships are those of mood and modality. Mood patterns have to do with the presence and configuration of certain negotiable elements of clause structure, while modality covers the range of options open to interactants to temper or qualify their contributions.

Through modality, a speaker in a conversation can express his/her commitment towards the truth of the propositions he/she contributes. Benveniste in (Cornillie and Pietrandrea, 2012: 1) states that the category of modality in the general sense of the speaker's attitude towards what he/she says, is one of those categories that establish a relationship between the speaker and his enunciation.

This paper explores the ways interactants who are culturally different realize their commitments towards the truth of their propositions and proposals in a casual conversation. This study employs systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in describing the lexico-grammatical patterns of modality.

2. MODALITY

Matthiessen (1995: 497) states that the interpersonal metafunction gives a value to the clause as a proposition or a proposal that is open to negotiation. The speaker can intrude with various modal assessments, assessing the proposition or proposals itself or further specifying its speech functional value. There is a resource concerned specifically with the domain of negotiation of the proposition and proposal between the categorial extremes of unqualified positive and negative. This is the scale of modality. Meanwhile, Eggins (1997: 98) states in a simpler way that modality refers to a range of different ways in which speakers can temper or qualify their messages. There are two types of modality: modalization and modulation.

The system of modality is schematized by Matthiessen (1995: 497) as in Figure 1.
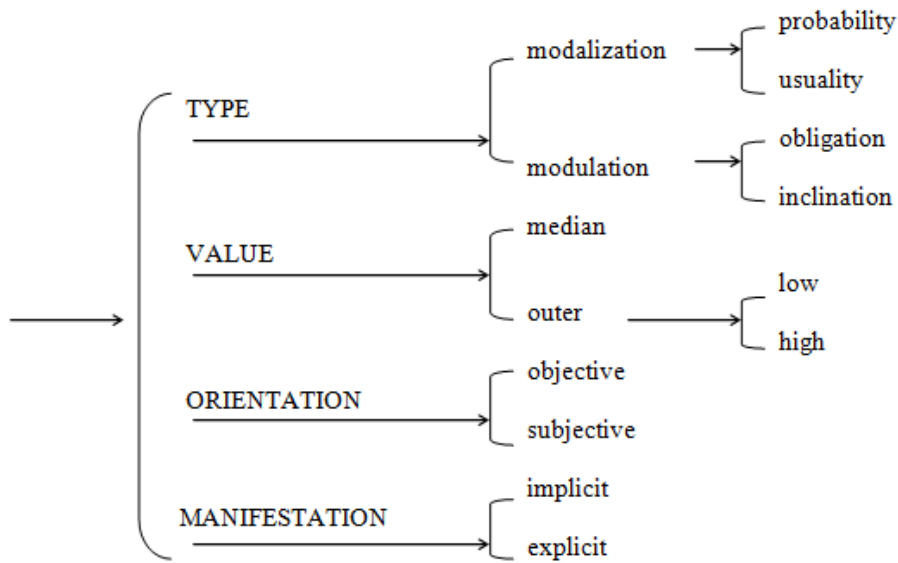
Figure 1: Basic Systems of Modality

A. Modalization

Matthiessen (1995: 504) defines modalization as a type of modality which is used to assess the probability or usuality of a proposition. When we exchange information we are arguing about whether something IS (positive polarity) or IS NOT (negative polarity). But these two poles of polarity are not the only possibilities. In between these two extremes there are a number of choices of degree of certainty, or of usuality.

Halliday (in Eggins, 1994: 179) presents that modalization involves the expression of two kinds of meaning:

a. probability: where the speaker expresses judgements as to the likelihood or probability of something happening or being; and

b. usuality: where the speaker expresses judgements as to the frequency with which something happens or is.

There are two strategies for expressing modalization in a clause:

a. through the use of modal Finites: e.g. *must, should, will, can, could, may, might*.

b. through the use of Mood Adjuncts of either probability: e.g. *certainly, surely, probably, maybe, perhaps*, or usuality: e.g. *always, often, usually, typically, sometimes*.

Both modal Finites and Mood Adjuncts can be classified according to the value of certainty or usuality they express: i.e. high (*must, certainly, always*), median (*may, probably, usually*) or low (*might, possible, sometimes*).

Modalization can be expressed implicitly as an integral part of the clause, or explicitly by involving the use of grammatical (clause) choices to make meanings that could otherwise be made through single lexical terms. The orientation of the modalization can be stated subjectively by the speaker (e.g. *I think*) or objectively in an impersonal clause with *it* as Subject and the verb *to be + adjective of modality* (e.g. *It is probable*). Modalization can be exemplified in the following clauses:

1. *He is in London*   positive polarity

   He must be in London   modalized: high probability

   He will be in London   modalized: median probability

   He may be in London   modalized: low probability

   He is not in London   Negative polarity

2. *He is at home on Sundays*   positive polarity

   He is always at home on Sundays   modalized: high usuality

   He is usually at home on Sundays   modalized: median usuality

   He is sometimes at home on Sundays   modalized: low usuality

   He is not at home on Sundays   Negative polarity

B. Modulation

Matthiessen (1995: 504) defines modulation as a type of modality which is concerned with the expression of a proposal, either of obligation or readiness. Eggins (1994: 189) elaborates modulation as a way for speakers to express their judgements or attitudes about actions and events. When we are acting on or for other people, we do not only have the dogmatic choices of *DO* or *DON'T*, *I WILL GIVE YOU THIS* or *I WON'T GIVE YOU THIS*. But between

these two poles of compliance and refusal we can express degrees of obligation, inclination and ability.

Modulation of obligation can be expressed in clause through:

a. the use of modal Finites expressing obligation: e.g. *must, will, may, have to*.

b. a *be + -ed* clause with personal Subject: e.g. *You are allowed to get a degree*.

c. an impersonal *it + -ed* clause: e.g. *It is permitted that you get a degree*.

Modulation of inclination can be expressed in clause through:

a. a personal Subject + attitudinal adjective structure: e.g. *I'm willing/I'm keen*.

b. an impersonal structure with a dummy *it* as Subject and a nominalized mental process as head: e.g. *It's a commitment*.

Modulation of ability can be expressed in clause through:

a. the modal finite *can* when used to indicate ability and not probability.

b. a personal Subject + adjective of capability structure (*He is capable*).

Modality of modulation can be exemplified in the following:

Get a degree.	unmodulated: positive
You must get a degree.	modulated: high obligation
You will get a degree.	modulated: median obligation
You may get a degree.	modulated: low obligation
Don't get a degree.	unmodulated: negative

3. METHOD

The corpus of data of this study was a stretch of approximately fifty-five-minute taped-English-conversation between a native speaker (an American female) and a non-native speaker (an Indonesian male). The subjects of the conversation under study were a native speaker and a non-native speaker. The names of the subjects remained confidential and for referring to them in this study the initials were used respectively as NS and NNS.

The NS was an adult American female who has been living in some cities in Indonesia for about ten years teaching and being a baptist counselor at a theological college in Semarang

when this conversation was carried out, while the NNS was a twenty-two-year-old Indonesian male student who has been studying English for seven semesters at an English department of a university in Semarang.

Data analysis was done by transcribing the conversation by referring to the transcription symbols as suggested by Eggins and Slade (1997). The transcribed utterances were then divided into clauses from which the realizations of modality were identified and classified based on the Basic System of Modality as suggested by Matthiessen (1995).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As stated in previous chapter, modality refers to a range of different ways in which speakers can temper or qualify their messages, expressing attitudes and judgements of various kinds.. There are two types of modality enacted by NNS and NS in the conversation: modalization and modulation. The number of modalizations and modulations made by NNS and NS can be presented in Table 1.

Table 1.   The Occurrences of Modality Made by NNS and NS

| Speaker | Modalization | | | | | Modulation | | Total |
| | Probability | | Usuality | | | Obligation | Capability | |
	Low	Median	Low	Median	High	High		
NNS	17	30	16	2	13	2	41	**121**
NS	8	6	9	7	5	6	14	**55**
Total	**25**	**36**	**25**	**9**	**18**	**8**	**45**	176

A. Modalization

Modalization is modality which is used to argue about a proposition. It is an argumentation of a proposition in between two poles of polarity: positive (yes) and negative (no). A proposition is not always positive (something is) or negative (something is not). Between these two polarities there are a number of choices of degree of certainty, or of usuality.

In qualifying their propositions, NNS and NS refer to the probability or usuality of the propositions. Each type of modalizations can be classified according to the degree into high, median, and low. Table 1 shows that NNS produced 78 modalizations much more than NS with only 35 modalizations. Because modalization expresses speaker's judgement of certainty and usuality, the striking difference in the amount of modalizations produced by NNS and NS indicates that NS is more sure of something she exchanges, compared to NNS who is concerned with uncertainty. This idea is relevant to the one stated by Eggins (1994: 182) that the more we say something is certain, the less certain it is. If we are sure of something, we do not use any modality.

The fact that NS is more sure with her propositions rather than NNS is supported by the number of probability modalizations produced by NNS and NS in the conversation. NNS makes 47 probabilities from his total clauses which consist of 17 low probabilities and 30 median probabilities. On the other hand, NS makes 14 probabilities from her total clauses which consist of 8 low probabilities and 6 median probabilities.

The different number of usuality modalizations produced by NNS and NS also supports that NS is more certain rather than NNS in qualifying the events in her propositions. This is indicated by her low uses of usuality modalizations in 21 clauses which consist of 9 low usualities, 7 median usualities and 5 high usualities. On the other hand, NNS makes more usualities in 31 clauses which express 16 low usualities, 2 median usualities and 13 high usualities.

The modalizations of probability and usuality made by NNS and NS are expressed in to ways: by using modal finites (e.g. *must, will*) or by using mood adjuncts (e.g. *certainly, always*). They can also be oriented subjectively as the speaker's judgement (e.g. *I think that's really interesting*) or objectively to make them distant from the speaker (e.g. *This is maybe a little bit stereotype of Indonesian people.*). Modalizations may be manifested implicitly as an integral part of the clause (e.g. *It is maybe about dating.*) or explicitly by means of a clause (e.g. *I think it is about dating*). The orientation and manifestation of the modalizations made by NNS and NS in the conversation can be summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The Orientation and Manifestation of Modalizations Made by NNS and NS

Speaker	Probability				Usuality			
	Subject.	Object.	Impl.	Expl.	Subject.	Object.	Impl.	Expl.
NNS	30	17	20	29	1	30	31	0
NS	6	9	9	6	4	16	20	0
Total	36	26	29	35	5	46	51	0

The above table, particularly the different number of the orientation of the modalizations, reveals the social identities of NNS and NS in the casual conversation. NNS makes more subjective orientations in each type of modalizations, while NS makes more objective orientations in probability and usuality. This is another evidence of NNS's egocentricity in the conversation, in contrast with NS's preference in judging something on behalf of others.

The realizations of modalization made by NNS and NS can be exemplified among others as follows:

| 3.1.1.1.1.1 | Speaker | Type:degree | Realization | Clause |
Turn				
40	NS	Probability:low	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(ii) Or <u>maybe</u> it was just because you are very new
84	NS	Usuality:low	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(i) But <u>sometimes</u> they can't come home.
98	NS	Usuality:median	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(iv) So in our campus <u>usually</u> people discuss that
113	NNS	Probabilty:median	Subjective, explicit, clause	(ii) <u>I think</u> it's nice
119	NNS	Probability:low	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(iv) This is <u>maybe</u> a little bit stereotype of Indonesian people
182	NS	Probability:median	Subjective, explicit, clause	(ii) <u>I think</u> that God will honor that, yeah.

206	NS	Usuality:high	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(iii) cause I <u>always</u> call her Ibu Susilowati's daughter.
231	NNS	Usuality:high	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(i) I <u>always</u> got five in my grade.
241	NNS	Probability:median	Subjective, explicit, clause	(i) <u>I think</u> it's a little bit harder rather than English,
419	NNS	Probability:median	Subjective, implicit, modal finite	(xviii) and she <u>would</u> go to hell.
429	NNS	Probability:low	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(viii) But unfortunately <u>maybe</u> this is the God's process.
437	NNS	Usuality:high	Objective, implicit, mood adjunct	(ix) Christian music is <u>always</u> slowly and nice.
453	NNS	Probability:median	Subjective, explicit, clause	(iii) <u>I think</u> I have record so many.

B. Modulation

Modulation is modality which is used to argue about proposal (negotiation of goods and services). It is a way for speakers to express their judgements or attitudes about actions and events. When we are acting on or for other people, we do not only have the choices of *do* or *don't*. But between these two poles of compliance and refusal we can express degrees of obligation and inclination.

In the casual conversation under study, NNS and NS seek to act upon each other through the degrees of obligation and capability. There is no realization of inclination during the conversation. Unlike the amount of modalizations, fewer amount of modulations are used both by NNS and NS in the conversation. There are only 8 obligations which all belong to the high

degrees. From those high obligations, 2 are made by NNS and the other 6 are made by NS. The low use of modulation in this conversation shows that NNS and NS seldom negotiate goods and services each other. In other words, this conversation is not the one about arguing proposals. The lack of modulation in such a conversation is understandable, since it is in this conversation the interactants meet and have face-to-face interaction for the time. This kind of interaction between new friends are usually dominated by the exchange of personal information of the interactants.

The uses of obligation modulation can be exemplified in the following excerpts:

3.1.1.1.2 Turn**3.2**	**Speaker**	**Clause**
360	NS	(vii) So you <u>have to</u> … turn your worries to God.
366	NS	(iv) You <u>must not</u> be embarrassment to your father.
368	NS	(i) You <u>must</u> be good.
446	NS	(i) We <u>have to</u> be careful.
447	NNS	(i) Yes we <u>have to</u> be careful.
448	NS	(i) But we <u>have to</u> try.
449	NNS	(i) Yeah, we <u>have to</u> try.
450	NS	(i) We <u>have to</u> be different.

The modal finite (*have to* or *must*) used in the above excerpt expresses a directive implicating either that the obligation is imposed by some external source (*have to*) or that the obligation originates internally with the speaker (*must*).

Unlike the modulation of obligation, the modulation of capability is more frequently used particularly by NNS by producing 20 expressions of capability and 21 capabilities of negative polarity. NS produces less with 8 expressions of capability and 6 capabilities of negative polarity. The expressions of capability made by NNS and NS in the conversation can be exemplified among other as follows:

3.2.1.1.1 Turn **3.3** **Speaker** **Clause**

59	NNS	(i) So you <u>can't</u>.
60	NS	(i) So I <u>can't</u> understand
185	NNS	(ii) and they <u>can</u> be a couple of love,
228	NS	(ix) So she <u>can</u> just ask.
263	NNS	(vii) you <u>can</u> find Christ there.
307	NNS	(iv) They <u>can</u> live here.
360	NS	(i) But you <u>can</u> strive.
370	NS	(ii) So that you <u>can</u> grow up.
427	NNS	(iv) I <u>can</u> do nothing.

The fact that there are some clauses in the conversation which have modal finites expressing obligation, such as *have to, must, should* does not always mean that the speaker makes modulation of obligation. Such cases happen, for example, in the following contributions:

3.3.1 **Turn** **3.4** **Speaker** **Clause**

360	NS	(vii) So you <u>have to</u> … turn your worries to God.
119	NNS	(viii) I <u>have to</u> break the stereotype.
294	NS	(i) So he <u>has to</u> eat rice.

In turn 360, NS has clearly made a demand for goods and services of NNS, i.e. she is making a command, realized through the structure of a modulated declarative. So this contribution made by NNS is a modulation of obligation. In contrast, in turns 119 and 294 the speakers are not really doing the same actions like the one in turn 360. In turn 119, NNS is expressing the same meaning of obligation, but this time this obligation is not directed to the

addressee (NS). He is not getting NS to do the implicated obligation to him, but he is expressing the obligation to himself. Similarly, in turn 294 NS is also expressing an obligation which is not directed to the addressee (NNS) but to a third person. It is not up to NNS to comply with NS's command.

The contribution in turn 360 exchanges goods and services because response to it is "*yes*" or "*OK*" that means compliance. On the other hand, in turns 119 and 294 there are no goods and services exchanged but information. The appropriate response to the contributions in turns 119 and 294 is "*yes, I agree*" which means acknowledgement. This indicates that the exchange is about information. But the information exchanged is coloured by the speaker's attitudes of obligation. According to Eggins (1994: 191) in our culture we refer to information of that kind as opinion. So when we "borrow" the grammar of proposal to exchange information, we express opinion.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparison of NNS and NS's modality realizations infer the following linguistic behaviours:

1. In terms of modality of modalization, NNS's more modalizations reveal that his commitment to the truth of his propositions was more uncertain compared to the ones exchanged by NS.
2. In terms of modality of modulation, the fewer amount of modulations used by both NNS and NS reveal that the conversation was not the one about arguing proposals.
3. NNS's more subjective orientations in each type of modalizations show his egocentricity in the conversation, while NS's more objective orientations in probability and usuality show her preference in judging something on behalf of others.

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