

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF ENGLISH EPISTEMIC MODALITY WRITTEN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract : This is a pragmatic study of the use of the items of epistemic modality in a literary discourse with the main aims to identify, analyze and describe the ways the items of epistemic modality are used. Their contextual meanings, functions, and implication to the pedagogical attempts are also unfolded. The results of the interpretative and descriptive analysis reveal that the items of epistemic modality are found to be very dominant which also suggests that the genre of narrative fiction is linguistically characterized by the utterances that are established on the basis of knowledge and reasoning. The items of epistemic modality are found to be polysemous and polyfunctional which are reflected pragmatically in the forms of politeness, negotiative and constructive functions. All these lead to the acknowledgement that the use of the items of linguistic modality in literary discourse and their usage for language teaching in the applied linguistic contexts is worth conducting.

Keywords: pragmatics, Linguistic modality, Epistemic modality, Pedagogical implication

INTRODUCTION

Various definitions of modality have been put forward including the broad idea of “the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker’s judgment of the likelihood of the proposition of the sentence being true” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik, 1985: 219). The other definition of modality is put forward by Halliday (2000: 356) says “modality refers to the areas of meaning that lies between yes and no—the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity” as well as “the speaker’s assessment of the probability of what he is saying.” In the context of this current paper, the most common one is that modality covers the idea of the writer’s attitude toward what he writes in his literary work.

From linguistic point of view, modality is considered to be the linguistic structure that evaluates the state of affair. In this case, modality refers to the “aspects of meaning which cause sentences to be about the non-factual, that is, about the alternative possibilities for how things

could be” (Fasold and Connor-Linton, 2006: 153). Meanwhile, as a semantic-grammatical category, modality is interpreted as the relativization of the meanings of a sentence to the set of possible worlds or ways in which people might think of the world to be different. In other words, modality allows language users to express *what is*, *what would be*, *what may be*, and *what should be* which can be expressed either through grammatical mood or modal systems or both to make modality a “valid cross-language grammatical category” (Palmer, 2001: 1).

Semantically, modality may cover an open-ended list of modal utterances, from the ‘core modals’ to the ‘peripheral modals’ (Bybee and Fleishman, 1995). This could range from the basic forms of modals such as *can*, *may*, *will*, *shall*, and *must* up to non-modal verbs such as *I think*, *I believe*, *I reckon*, and so on; adjectives such as *it is possible*, *it is probable*; adverbs such as *possibly*, *probably*; or nouns such as *certainty*, *possibility*, and so on. However, there is a closed set of verbs which are formally, semantically, and syntactically identifiable as the items of modality

which is often found to be so complex that “there is, perhaps, no area of English grammar that is both more important and more difficult than the system of modals” (Palmer, 1980: viii).

Pragmatically, modality is concerned with the speaker’s or writer’s assessment or attitude towards the potentiality of a state of affairs (Papafragou, 2000). Thus, the use of modals in a language expression may indicate modal attitudes that apply to the world of things and social interaction. Such a type of modality is known as root modality (Radden and Dirven, 2007) which comprises three subtypes: deontic modality, intrinsic modality and disposition modality. Deontic modality is concerned with the speaker’s directive attitude towards an action to be carried out. Intrinsic modality deals with the potentialities arising from intrinsic qualities of a thing or circumstance. Meanwhile, disposition modality is concerned with the intrinsic potential of a thing or person to be actualized.

Most studies on modality have been based on the linguistic perspective with non-literary texts being the objects. For example, to demonstrate the distinctive patterns of modality in media discourse, Iwamoto (1998) focused on newspaper articles. The results of the study indicated that newspaper articles used frequent high-value deontic modality such as *must*, *should*, *ought to*, *need to* without almost any emotive kinds of modality such as *I wish ...*, *I hope ...*, *I regret ...*. Moreover, to convey a lower degree of certainty and commitment on the writer’s part with regard to the propositional content, the writers are found to use the lower value of the items of epistemic modality such as *may*, *might*, *can*, *could*.

How the items of linguistic modality, especially those which are categorized as epistemic modality, are used in literary discourse is important to be studied. Such a study may suggest that analyzing modality in a literary work that uncovers human relations is important to conduct. In so doing, this paper employs a cognitive pragmatic approach (Radden and Dirven, 2007; Bara, 2010) because the meanings, functions, and utilization of the items of linguistic modality in the verbal language expressions involve cognitive pragmatic processes (Patard and Brisard, 2011). This implies that cognition should be very dominant in the selection of a certain item of verbal linguistic modality which is pragmatically used in the linguistic expressions of the discourse.

The term cognitive here is interpreted to concern the observation that language is actually one of the essential elements of human mental activity. In this case, language is understood as something that must be established on a high-level cognitive infrastructure that makes it possible to produce and interpret it in the brain (Dirven and Verspoor, 2004). Meanwhile, the term pragmatic is often related to the observation that language has a specific role to play (Kecskes and Horn, 2007). In this context, language is not the only type of human behavior which serves this purpose, but it is considered to be the most sophisticated one, at least in terms of the possibilities it offers for transmitting complex patterns of information. Hence, investigating the linguistic manifestation of modality here also unavoidably means accounting for how this system fulfills the communicative function of language expressions (Daalder and Musolff, 2011).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Linguistic modality

The term ‘modality’ has the basic meanings in philosophy (Melia, 2003) which is later so-called modal logics. In a different perspective, Lyons (1977) noted that the notion of modality can actually be extended beyond the classical types of modal in which this extension then starts to embrace such categories as deontic modality (obligation, consent, prohibition), epistemic modality (cognitive acts such as: knowing, believing, acknowledging, understanding), as well as existential modality and temporal modality (never, always, someday). In much of current linguistic concepts two other broad notions of modality are more common (Nuyts, 2006). The first is modality as the set of elements of the sentence outside the proposition. Structurally, non-propositionality may be defined on the basis of hierarchical relations between categories in the sentence, or semantically, as expression which is not being subject to truth conditions, or pragmatically, as the expression of the speaker’s subjectivity. The second is modality as a grammatical category which is in line with the other grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, or voice (Coates, 1983).

In this paper the concept of modality as a grammatical category is considered to be generally common in cross-linguistically oriented research. However, when modality is

conceptualized as a grammatical category, there are still three major possibilities that have some theoretical currency. These are (i) modality in terms of modal logic, that is, as an expression of necessity and possibility, (ii) modality as an expression of subjectivity or ‘attitude of the speaker’ in language, and (iii) modality as an expression of relativized factuality or realis/irrealis distinctions (Papafragou, 2000). Another tendency in the field of linguistic modality is currently led to its relation to literary discourse. As a part of the media to express the

‘real’ condition of the society being fictionalized in a literary discourse, modality is related to modal logics. In this circumstance, the concept of modal logics is often introduced under the name of the philosophy of possible worlds (Melia, 2003: 18). Therefore, the investigation towards this tendency leads to the investigation of the use of the items of modality in relation to the metaphysical issues (ontology), logic and logical semantics, general knowledge theory, and literature theory such as fiction theory.

Table 1: Categories of linguistic modality

Epistemic	Root necessity	Root possibility	Ability	Obligation	Permissi on	Willingness or Volition	
Epistemic	Root modality						Coates (1983)
Extrinsic				Intrinsic			Quirk et al. (1985)
Epistemic	n/a	Agent-oriented					Bybee and Fleisman (1995)
Propositional modality		n/a	n/a	Event modality			Palmer (2001)
Evidential	Epistemic			dynamic	deontic	dynamic	
Epistemic		Dynamic			deontic	dynamic	Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002)
Epistemic		Non-epistemic				n/a	Van der Auwera and Plungian (1998)
		Participant internal	Particip external	Participant internal	Participant external		
			Non-deontic		deontic		

2. Modality in literary works

Any literary discourse irrespective of its genre or trend represents a unique and aesthetic image of the world, created by the author in precisely the way his communicative intention and subjective modality have urged him to create (Simpson, 1997). Being the product of the

author's imagination, a literary work is always based upon objective reality, for there is no source that feeds one's imagination other than objective reality. A literary work is thus an image of referential fragment of extralinguistic reality, arranged in accordance with the author's subjective modus, that is, his vision of the world.

Literature is actually a medium for transmitting aesthetic information, implying an intersubjective approach to the study of a literary discourse (Maynard, 1993). Like any other kind of communication, it must involve not only the addresser (the author), but also the addressee (the reader). This means that a literary work is always written for an audience, whether the author admits it or not (Herman, 2009). Thus, the author himself will always write for a reader whom he expects to share his attitude, get it and adopt it as his (Maynard, 1993: 171). This is likely to happen because a literary work is actually reflecting an involved interrelation of the objective and the subjective, the real and the imagined, the direct and the implied. Therefore, a reader, who penetrates into the subtleties of a literary work, is sharing the author's aesthetic vision of the world.

One of the points in studying the use of modality in a literary discourse is via intersubjectivity as a communication of the author with the reader. Thus, when reading a literary discourse, the reader's thoughts do not run in just one, onward direction. Its movement is both progressive and recursive, moving onward with a return to what has been previously stated (Gaskin, 2013). This peculiar movement of the thought is conditioned by the fact that the literary discourse represents a coherence of two layers: verbal and implicational, appearing in the form of the perception which depends on the intellectual level of the reader (Gaskin, 2013: 16).

According to Carter and Nash (1990: 51) "many writers want to gain a reader's attention and to persuade him to action or to a particular view of things". Yet because this cannot be done without the risk of displacing the reader from a secure place in the normal scheme of things, writers resort to the more implicit methods in order to represent the world as "essentially unproblematic" (Carter and Nash, 1990: 51).

In his book *Mood and Modality*, Palmer (2001) tackles the issue of modality at the cross-linguistic level. Here, Palmer (2001) is forced to resort to more inclusive ones thus pointing out subjectivity as the first basic and common characteristic shared by all modals in all languages.

The other main pragmatically useful criterion, which also transcends cross-linguistic barriers, is that of indeterminacy. Initially suggested by Coates (1983) as part of a semantic approach to categorizing modals, indeterminacy is unfortunately not stretched out to its full potential. Coates (1983: 9) argues that

indeterminacy is of particular relevance to modal auxiliary verbs. Theoretically, various different types of indeterminacy have exemplified many ways through which modals seem to have more than one sense of meaning. Thus, indeterminacy lies at the heart of the meanings and interpretations of modal auxiliary verbs and is therefore an indispensable criterion for categorizing and sub-categorizing such auxiliaries, especially in the context of literary discourse.

METHODS

The main objective of this paper is to identify and analyze the usage of the items of epistemic modality that are found and used in literary discourse which is represented here by one of Henry James's classical narrative fiction *The Portrait of a Lady*. Since the presentation of the results of the analysis is in the form of the description of the data then the research for this paper belongs to the qualitative type. In the context of this paper qualitative research deals with the interpretation of the phenomenon and meaning of the events in the literary discourse in which the interpretation of the results of the analyses of the data refers to the linguistic, cultural and literary conventions. These conventions require that the qualitative data need to be supported by quantitative features which are obtained through counting the frequency of the occurrence of linguistic items categorized as the items of linguistic modality.

As one of the ways or perspectives of analyzing the use of the items of epistemic modality, cognitive pragmatic perspective takes this observation to heart in the sense that it assumes that an adequate account of language in general, and of linguistic phenomenon in particular, has to do with both dimensions simultaneously. In a more practical sense, this study was based on the principles of a content analysis as it is developed by Dornyei (2007) and Krippendorff (2014). In this case, the textual dialogues of the mentioned narrative fiction are scrutinized in detailed to identify the linguistic items that have been categorized as the items of epistemic modality. This means that the researcher tries to identify and analyze the types, meanings and functions of the items of epistemic modality as well as the possible pedagogical implications in the acquisition of linguistic modality.

The data of this research are collected by the use of close reading and quoting techniques. The use of these techniques necessitate that the researcher as the key instrument to read the literary discourse carefully and quoted the words, phrases and clauses which belong to the members of linguistic modality. It is these words, phrases and clauses which are then made up the primary data of this study.

In order to ensure the validity of the data and the trustworthiness of the results of the analysis of the data, the researcher tried to reduce the possible biases or deficiencies by applying triangulation procedure. This activity is performed because there is always a possibility that a certain item of epistemic modality may belong to the other categories of modality. This means that the data are grouped in a corpus-type format in accordance with the possible similarity and differences, so that the types, meanings, functions of the items of epistemic modality and the setting up possible pedagogical implications are visible.

In addition, the analysis and description of the meanings of epistemic modality was further based on the concepts of modality as serving to express the notions of agent-oriented and speaker-oriented modality, that is, the ones elaborated by de Haan (2006) and Radden and Dirven (2007). Meanwhile, the functions of the items of epistemic modality are identified and analyzed following the concept of cognitive and interactional function of modals (Choi, 1995) as well as by looking at the concept of macro-functions of language expressions developed Halliday (2004).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the general observation and analysis on the usage of the items of epistemic modality in *The Portrait of a Lady* could help identify Henry James's psychical complexes with those of his characters. These also help to understand that Henry James wants to de-emphasize his conscious management of his readers' inferences and he suggests the importance of the individual characters' points of view.

The use of the items of epistemic modality here also helps to understand that Henry James is often satirical. For example, many of his minor characters in the narrative fiction are found almost as summarily categorized as less powerful. However, satire is not James's chief end, and it seems that the characters are left themselves to develop their language expressions, including the use of the items of modality, through which James express his central themes. It can be described here that James gave the readers a sort of characters of "all-objective" (Meisner, 2004: 39), and that objectivity is a goal in James's hermeneutics.

In addition to the finding that linguistic modality in a literary work tends to be subjective and objective (Kirvalidze, 2006), one important finding of this current study is that Henry James used more subjective modality than the objective one to create a unique and aesthetic image of the world. The subjective modality has been made as the organizing angle by which Henry James represented reality in its most fitting paradigm. Here, epistemic, evidential and evaluative orientations are put forward.

Table 2: The total number and percentage of the items of Epistemic modality compared to Root modality

Items of modality	<i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>						
	Total modals	Root Modality				Epistemic Modality(EpM)	
		DyM		DeM			
		f	%	f	%	f	%
can	367	141	4.19	15	0.45	211	6.28
could	99	24	0.71	13	0.39	62	1.84
may	168	14	0.42	18	0.54	136	4.04
might	77	8	0.24	3	0.09	66	1.96
will	513	98	2.91	127	3.78	288	8.57
would	304	88	2.62	-	-	216	6.42
shall	356	17	0.51	198	5.89	141	4.19
should	443	-	-	352	10.48	91	2.71

must	243	-	-	188	5.60	55	1.63
ought to	71	-	-	60	1.78	11	0.33
have to/have got to	35	-	-	31	0.92	4	0.12
be going to	46	28	0.83	-	-	18	0.53
be supposed to	3	-	-	-	-	3	0.09
be obliged to	17	-	-	15	0.45	2	0.06
be bound to	13	-	-	-	-	13	0.39
need (to)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
I think	238	-	-	-	-	238	7.08
I believe	58	-	-	-	-	58	1.72
I suppose	86	-	-	-	-	86	2.56
I guess	12	-	-	-	-	12	0.36
I feel	5	-	-	-	-	5	0.15
I find	10	-	-	-	-	10	0.30
I expect	2	-	-	-	-	2	0.06
I know	43	-	-	-	-	43	1.28
I wonder	16	-	-	-	-	16	0.48
I hope	77	-	-	-	-	77	2.29
I dare	9	9	0.27	-	-	-	-
had better	35	-	-	28	0.83	7	0.21
would rather	16	-	-	-	-	16	0.48
Total	3,362	427	12.70	1,048	31.17	1,887	56.13

The results of the descriptive analysis of the use of the items of linguistic modality indicate that there are in total 3,362 items of verbal modality employed by the author in the dialogues of the characters of the narrative fiction. Of this number of modal items, 1,475 items or 43.87% are concerned with root modality and 1,887 items or 56.13% are concerned with epistemic modality. This means that *The Portrait of a Lady* is the narrative fiction which is developed (by the author) on the basis of the use of epistemic modality which comprises of the concepts of epistemicity, inferentiality and evaluative orientations.

Epistemicity is found to be closely related to the world of knowledge and reasoning. In this case, evidentiality – the initialization of evidence in any conversational exchange – is put forward. In the case of inferentiality, the items of epistemic modality are found to carry a powerful inferential dimension since the speakers draws a conclusion on the basis of the reality outside the speaker's realm. In addition, some items of epistemic modality like *may*, *might* and *could* carry with them the inferentiality which contain judgments about the likelihood of the state of affairs, situated in the speaker's subjective realm and correspond to the paraphrasing statement such as 'I think it is likely' (Traugott, 1989: 50). In this circumstance, the speakers use the items of epistemic modality to explicitly describe the reality in which the

evaluative comment on the relevant reality is clearly based on direct evidence and may stand for both likelihood and evaluation.

The principle of evaluative orientation in this study is concerned with the favorable view of the conclusion suggested in the utterances. Furthermore, evaluative orientation offers both useful and problematic elements for the analysis of the use of epistemic modality. This means that an inferential and an evaluative orientation implicitly suggest that the evaluation is based on inference and conversely. Thus, when the speakers evaluate the truth of the proposition of an utterance where the items of epistemic modality are used, evaluation is actually partly detached from inference based on direct evidence and the equivalents of the truth. That is, the speakers have more flexibility to assess the state of affairs in positive, negative or neutral terms, separately from inferential knowledge.

Finally, the general usage of epistemic modality indicates that the items of this category of modality are used in their context just in the parameter of discourse-oriented, agent-oriented, subject-oriented, and pragmatic-oriented (Narrog, 2005). In this current study, discourse-oriented is referred to as speaker-oriented modality, covering the items of modality that mark directives, such as imperatives, optatives or permissives, which represent speech acts through which a speaker attempts to move an addressee to

action. In their agent-oriented usage, epistemic modality includes the meanings and functions of expressing obligation, desire, ability, permission and root possibility. Meanwhile, subject-oriented modality is concerned with the ability or volition of the subject of the sentence, rather than the opinion or attitude. In relation to the data of this study, it is found that the items of epistemic modality are found to be used in their pragmatic-oriented, that is, the resurrecting of the speaking self and recognizing language as a self-expression negotiated in intricately complex multi-level human interactions.

In terms of the contextual and flexible meanings and functions of epistemic modality, this study found that most of the items of this type of modality are used for necessity, possibility and evidentiality. In relation to these meanings and functions, epistemic modality is interpreted on the basis of a body of information or evidence which is frequently referred to as the so-called what is known. The epistemic use of modals is interesting not only because the speaker has a body of knowledge that leads him to the conclusion, but the knowledge is not only sufficient to make it known to the speaker who may choose either a strong epistemic modal like *must* or a weak epistemic modal like *may*.

It is also found that the English epistemic modals under the category of ‘core modals’ are mostly used to express logics. Here, the choice of the epistemic interpretation is subjective, dependent on the speaker’s degree of knowledge. Furthermore, the English epistemic modality items which are grouped in the lexical verb category like *I think*, *I believe*, *I suppose* and so on are identified to incorporate an indirect evidential or more precisely an inferential evidential.

The incorporation of evidential meaning into the semantic analysis of the items of epistemic modality is found here to be possibly based upon what is known. As an evidential, modality items like *must* and *I think* function to play the role of encoding a source of information or evidence on which the speaker makes a statement. In addition, epistemic modals in this current study are found to involve not only epistemic but also evidential aspects. When it comes to the evidential aspect, epistemic modality is involved in inferential evidential which is one type of indirect evidence in the field of evidentiality. This suggests that the use of the epistemic modal appears to be involved in presuppositions (von Stechow and Iatridou, 2003).

The other important finding regarding the employment of the items of epistemic modality is that the presuppositions induced by epistemic modals are compatible with the speaker’s evidential judgment. This kind of inference is possible only if the evidence on which the speaker bases his/her statement is compatible with the speaker’s evidential judgment; if not, the observable evidence would crash.

It is worth emphasizing that the most frequent epistemic meaning of the modals in this current study is allocated to ‘possibility’ which has the implication of non-commitment toward the propositions expressed by the writer. In addition to being context-dependent and flexible, the functions served by the use of the items of epistemic modality identified to be cognitive and interactional functions covering politeness, negotiative and constructive functions. Meanwhile, the meanings of epistemic modality in this study are found to include necessity, possibility, likelihood, evidentiality, and certainty.

Table 3: The meanings and functions of the items of epistemic modality

Category of modality	Meanings	Functions
Epistemic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Necessity 2. Possibility 3. Likelihood 4. Evidentiality 5. Certainty 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prediction (futuraity) 2. Epistemic necessity 3. Present epistemic logical conclusion (with must) 4. Past epistemic logical conclusion (with have + pp) 5. Present possibility 6. Future tentative possibility 7. Likelihood/diffidence 8. Evidentiality (reasonable inference) 9. General possibility 10. Possibility (some certainty) 11. Concessive epistemic meaning

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

The results of the analysis and examination of the use of the items of epistemic modality here should lead to the pedagogical implications. It is suggested that there are at least two focuses of practical teaching and learning activities on the use of the items of epistemic modality which need substantial attention.

The first teaching and learning activity is through the examination and analysis of the ways grammatical properties of the items of epistemic modality respond to the interactional needs of the participants of a conversation. This may be done and led to the grammatical or structural semantic description of the modality items by taking into account the interactional properties. The second teaching and learning activity that needs to be performed here is the focus on the acquisition of epistemic modality by the learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), especially at the tertiary level. This is important to do because the items of epistemic modality are mostly related to the world of knowledge and reasoning.

The acquisition of epistemic modality may be difficult for learners for several reasons. First, it has been claimed that EFL learners have problems with the notions of necessity and possibility, that is, they may not always identify alternative outcomes of a situation even if they are aware of them (Leech and Short, 2007). Second, although they have acquired the conceptual basis of possibility and necessity, the learners may find it hard to map them onto modal vocabulary. Hence, the learners will be able to associate the word with the action that may require them to perform. Third, EFL learners may face pragmatic problems when acquiring epistemic modals in the sense that they may find it difficult to compute conversational implicatures (Choi, 2006); in particular, they seem to treat statements with epistemic modal items logically and not pragmatically.

One of the ways of presenting the teaching of the items of epistemic modality through literary discourses is conducting workshops that may be designed to draw insights from linguistic models and incorporate activities of the same kind when developing any language session. In the case of the teaching materials derived from narrative fictions, special worksheets can be prepared where the use of modality items is foregrounded or where their use is compared when uttered by the characters. Further detailed and

focused discussion can be promoted on the writer's style and the way he/she manipulates language to convey various levels of meaning. In short, an integration of language and literary study can be of mutual benefit.

CONCLUSION

The finding on the use of the items of epistemic modality in literary discourse suggests that the sampled narrative fiction is compiled on the basis of knowledge and reasoning which also evoke the personal characteristics of Henry James as a philosophical and thoughtful writer (Haralson and Johnson, 2009; Miller, 2005). Most of the findings in the use epistemic modality indicated that the items of this type of modality are used subjectively. Epistemic modals are subjective in the sense that the essence of which is to express the writer's reservation about giving an unqualified to the factuality of the proposition. In other words, subjectively modalized statements are statements of opinion or inference rather than statements of fact.

In terms of the meanings of the items of modality, it is found that they are actually polysemous in which the polysemy of the items of epistemic modality is motivated by a metaphorical mapping from the concrete, external world of socio-physical experience to the abstract, internal world of reasoning and mental processes in general. In other words, the items of epistemic modality are used to display a real polysemous characteristic of literary language expressions, thus rejecting the view that such language expressions are ambiguous between the unrelated senses.

Various functions of the items of epistemic modality that are found in this study can be broadly grouped into cognitive, pragmatic and interactional. The polyfunctionality of the items of epistemic modality is motivated by the complex communicative strategies of the addressers and addressees. The pragmatic and interactional functions of the items of epistemic modality seem to be derived from pragmatic or functional variations of their usage as well as the specific dialogical and interactional contexts. Here, the items of epistemic modality have the interactional effects in the forms of specific 'shapes of language' (Roudiez, 2008), that is, the low frequency of either modal or propositional negation which then contributes to the creation of an impression of factuality. Equally interesting in the case of the dynamics of the items of epistemic

modality is the importance to teach this category of modality for the EFL learners because epistemic modality concerns with what is possible or necessary given what is known and what the available evidence is. Thus, semantically epistemic modal items encode modal force and get interpreted against a conversational background which includes the speaker's beliefs or the available evidence.

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