

# Modality Use and Its Reflection on Power Relation: A Case of Indonesian Editorials in New Order Era (Indonesia 1990s)

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**Abstract**—Modality is the judgment of the speaker or writer puts in his/her proposition. Such a judgment is common in the editorial, since editorial is about the stand of a media regarding a certain actual issue. The paper discusses the modality in terms of its potential reflection on the power distribution in the text. The texts, as the discourse, used in the paper are the editorials issued in 1992 by The Jakarta Post, an Indonesian English newspaper. The issues contained in them are the Indonesian general election of 1992 held by an authoritarian regime of New Order. Based on the analysis, it is concluded that the modality does reflect the power relation among the participants. The choice of modality used in the clauses in the editorials proved the power the media, compared to the implied addressee (ruler or public) there.

**Keywords**— editorial, Indonesia, modality, power relation

## I. INTRODUCTION

MODALITY refers to the judgment made by the writer/speaker toward a proposition he/she makes.

According to Gurbanov (2012:80), “modality is a semantic-grammatical category which expresses the attitude of the speaker to the discourse.” The attitude here represents uncertainty on the meaning. That is why then Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:147) put modality in contrast to polarity. Polarity is about “negative” and “positive”, meanwhile modality refers to “intermediate degrees, between the positive and negative poles” and the function of modality is “to construe the region of uncertainty that lies between ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:147).

Further they explain that modality has two potential meanings, modalization and modulation. Modalization is broken down into two subtypes of meaning of probability and usuality, and modulation is split into two possibilities of obligation and inclination. Modalization is typically realized in clauses of “indicative:declarative” mood. Meanwhile, the modulation meaning is typically represented by “modulated declarative” of which meaning is imperative of a certain type (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:147).

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Based on the subjectivity nature of the modality, it can be inferred that the meaning evoked in the use of modality is put in uncertainty. Like what Halliday exemplifies in his book, putting a certainty expression in a clause will only result in a doubt to the people. Thus, modality is used to construe the things in between the negative or positive fact. It means modality reflects the belief (or the doubt) of the speaker/writer to the proposition s/he makes. The belief (or the doubtfulness) is not only about how much a person knows the subject matter; it may have something to do with the ‘power’ or the authority a person has, in relation to other participants involved in the discourse (the verbal expression). Thus, modality in question is a part of the language conceptualized to be “communicative behavior” as an “enactment of a collective order” (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994:55). They believe that language constitutes and encodes the cultural and political ideologies. Such a situation can be seen in the way a media in a certain country proposes its position regarding an issue, especially the one relating to the ruler. An editor, regardless the hard evidences of the truth, still should consider whether or not the arguments made in his/her media will put a risk to the business.

The paper will only focus on two meaning of modality as the parameter to see the power relation in the editorial’s clauses; they are probability and obligation. This is due to the fact that both mainly represent the standing point of the speaker/writer in addressing the issue. As he/she believes that what is said is true, they will evoke a convincing statement using high probability modal (must), or this belief is sometimes realized in a high-obligation order (have to). Thus, the application of these aspects will reveal the fact of power relation between the participant in the texts. There are two editorials taken here, those are Better Election and A New Style of Election, both issued to comment on the phenomenon of general election of 1992.

## II. THEORIES

### A. Modality

Modality, as stated by Halliday, means the speaker's judgment of the probabilities as the obligation involved in what he is saying (Halliday & Matthiessen: 2004, 147). This indicates that modality is the value attached by the speaker on his utterances. It can be supporting, denying or standing in between. This will lead to the understanding of clause if a

clause is a proposition or proposal. These two types of a clause determine the two types of modality, whether it is modulation or modalization.

Modalization is the proposition modality employed in a clause exploring information. There are two kinds of modalization namely Probability: possibly/probably/ certainly, and Usuality: sometimes/usually/always. Modulation is the proposal modality used in a clause giving command or offer. In a proposal, the meaning of positive and negative poles is prescribing and proscribing: positive "do it" and negative "don't/do it". There are two types of modulation, i.e. in a command, the intermediates points indicate degrees of obligation: *allowed to/supposed to/required to* and in an offer, they relate to the degree of inclination: *willing to/anxious to/determine to*.

### B. Modality and Ideology

Halliday's idea on the modality above is seen as modality as subjectivity by Badran (2002:128). Citing Palmer, he suggests that "modality is "concerned with subjective characteristics of an utterance" and could thus be defined as "the grammaticalization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions" [emphasis mine]." He believes that subjectivity in this case is "the essential feature of ideology" since it represents a certain point of view.

The subjectivity in modality anchors its position as the keystone to represent the ideology of a discourse. Ideology indeed permeates in the discourse's elements. Ideas and facts are adopted, sorted and filtered through it. Yet, the modality with its subjective nature accentuates its salience as the representment of ideology. Badran explains that the point of view of text "producer" is the filter as means to "organize" and to "present" ideology. Thus, "modality can potentially represent one fundamental linguistic feature through which the speaker's point of view can be detected in an utterance" (2002:128). In other words, modality is linguistic evidence which can be used to judge the ideology working in a discourse or text.

## III. FINDING

### A. Text 1 : Better Election

Medium probability and low obligation dominate the modality employed. It can be seen through the usage of modals *would, could and will*. There is also one high probability seen in the clause 16.

*Many people must have rejoiced*

In addition there is also the use of high obligation.

*But it must be to support the government ideal of fair, credible election.(24b)*

The public that complains about the manipulation in counting ballot and other violations committed addresses this high obligation to the Golkar's cadres (the ruling party). The editor sent a warning to the public that whatever the public demanded, they had to support the government.

The modality variation used in here should be looked at in every case separately to establish the network and finally to draw the general conclusion of their part in building the text. The medium probability representing future events that is realized in modal 'would' which is attached in the quotation of

government officials tells the manipulation of the vote count would be impossible. Such statement shows the strong determination of the Golkar to win fairly. And this is followed or agreed by the writer; in other words, the writer believed that Golkar could make it. This is proved earlier in the last of second paragraph.

*Soeharto said that yesterday's election was fair (4).*

The clause number 22 that says...

*Perhaps in its effort to achieve the noble goals stated [the credible poll], the government should pay attention to the role of the authorities on the lower levels to instill in them a little bit more courage to face the reality that some other political contestant could win the election under their jurisdiction. (Clause 22)*

This statement is the opinion of the editor in viewing the controversial judgment between the public and the ruler about the election. The low obligation shows the suggestion of the editor to the ruler that the other contestants have a chance to win the election, even in their jurisdiction. It also says that the ruling party is very dominant that it can restrict the voter region of the other parties. The usages of low obligation *should*, and medium inclination, *could*, tend to show the weak position of the editor and the public before the government. These modulations and modalization in clause 22 which is realized in modal adjunct *perhaps* shows that the editor is not so sure about the point he expresses. This fact tends to reveal the weak position of the writer before the ruler.

Another evidence of the weak position of the editor is the citation of the linking verb *seem*, like that in clause 10.

*Rudini seemed to have understood that quite well (clause 10)*

The positioning of the verb *seem* is the proof that the writer doesnot believe absolutely to the promise of the fair poll as it is frequently convinced by the government officials in their campaign to win the voters. However, this floating statement is strengthened by the adjunct of manner *quite well*. Hence the clause has a sort of high certainty. The probability here shows something ambivalent; it, in one side, tells doubtfulness, but in other side, it promises something convincingly, on the sincerity of Rudini. The modality meaning here shows the writer's doubt in realizing his opinion about Rudini's promises. Because, in fact, the officials in giving the promises, are merely to promote the ruling Golkar to win the poll; they forgot their own promises as the election is over. Rudini is the part of the ruler who of course will do anything to make the Golkar successfully gain the votes mostly in the election. However, the editor does not have any courage to criticize directly to the promises of the government's officials, and even he behave as if he shows the support to the officials. The positioning of *seem* also reduce the partiality or the involvement in taking the opinion. This fact is another evidence of the lower status of editor.

*It seems that credibility is required from bottom up (clause 21)*

The editor utilizes *seem* in here to float the message evoked. This statement is some kind of suggestion to the readers--particularly those who have an authority in handling the poll. The writer wants to give an advice to the authority politely. This is also an evidence of the editor's weak position, as that in the clause 24.

*Golkar* functionaries **seem** to work by axiom that PPP and PDI can always win the election, but not in their regions.

This verb, *seem*, realizes the obvious hesitancy of the editor in stating the fact which actually occurs. Actually what the writer states in clause 24 is the fact in the field; the Golkar cadres are greedy to win the vote and they will do anything to be the winner.

*Many people must have rejoiced after hearing the statements about the official determination to make this election better than the one in 1987.* (17)

The high probability here shows the assurance of the writer in telling the fact in public side. This method is in contrast with that used by the editor when he informs the fact of the ruler side-- the writer employs the medium probability in stating everything of the ruler. In the former, the writer, firmly suggests the rejoicing people after hearing the government's promises which actually are always heard in every election campaign as since, and never come into being. This promise, of course, will only give pessimistic response of the people who are bored with such promises. This evidence obviously indicates that the writer positions himself stronger than the public.

*Some would say, however, this (a fair election) is highly unlikely in this country within the foreseeable future* (19).

The medium probability in the clause emphasizes the lower status of the editor. Furthermore, the subject *some* even more clearly tells the hesitancy of the writer. This is some kind of prediction of the writer as he sees the phenomenon in Indonesia. In other words, the writer wants to say that the society would not believe what the official promises. The writer packs his opinion in euphemism. The usage of adjunct, *highly unlikely*, in the subordinate clause is purposely selected; it sharpens the politeness of the statement. The fact it informs is nothing but the actual feeling of the public. This evidence more obviously evokes the lower status of the writer and the public before the ruler.

*Changing this attitude will require a strong political will but it must be to support the government's ideal of fair, credible election.*

The medium probability, *will*, informs that the editor has no bravery to say directly. The positioning of *will* here is to avoid the sense of "dictating"-- as if the writer asks the readers, especially the public to agree with the idea. This fact does say the equality of the editor before the public. While the high obligation, which is realized in the modal **must**, is addressed to the people who demand the fairness of the poll, particularly the other participants in the contest, PDI and PPP. The editor asks them to believe the government's intention to hold fair election. In fact, the government does not agree with the demand urged by the people, represented by two contesting parties, to hold fair and just election. The high obligation that is addressed to the public expresses the higher status of the writer, in this case the editor, to the addressee, the public.

#### *B. Text 1 : A New Style of Election*

There are six modals employed by the writer; four of them are modalization meaning medium probability by using *will*, *could* and *can*. For example '*can*' in clause 7 and '*will*' in clause 12b.

*It can be said* (7)

*Result will not change much.*(12b)

And there is one single modal realizing an obligation in low degree by adopting *should*, which is one in clause 13 b: *Golkar should pay...*

In addition, the writer also puts up the high probability, by employing adjunct *surely* alongside the medium probability, *will*. Moreover, the writer expresses such kind of certainty by emphasizing the predicator in the clause 8,

*The voters do want to see the changes seen in the country.* (8)

The modality of the text is dominantly modalization, particularly in medium probability. This evidence shows the doubt argument. This is realized in some clauses, like those in clause 7 and 12b

*It can be said that PDI ...has a significant increase* (7)

*Results will not change much* (12b)

The modality in these clauses brings to our mind that the writer is not so sure about what he talks about; this can be seen especially in clause 7, *it can be said*. This fact tells the lower status of the editor.

But in the next lines, it reveals something different; the modality shifted in the degree, from medium to high, as in the following clauses.

*PDI will surely get eight more seats* (9b)

*PDI could even take 50 seats* (10b)

The positioning of adjunct *surely* and *even* has increased its probability degree. It expresses such high probability. Another instance of high probability found in the text is that in clause 8.

*The voters do want to see changes* (clause 8).

This clause also emphasizes the firmness of the writer in the two clauses before. From the two contrast evidences, hesitancy and certainty, showing a very different implication, it can be said that the status among the writer and the readers tends to be equal. However, it is absolutely necessary to see the context restricting the modality in the clause. All of the clauses above are addressed to the government and those clauses talk about the reasons behind the winning of PDI. This is surely proved in the final of the sequence:

*The Golkar should pay more attention to aspiration of the little man.*

The modality in the preceding clauses is the premises to come into the conclusion as the final realizing in the recommendation to the addressee, the ruling Golkar. This evidence seems to evoke that the editor regards the ruler to be the one who needs the information or the government is the person who is necessary to know about the fact. It leads the ruler to follow his view. This points out that the status of the editor is higher than the ruler. It seems that the editor has a powerful bargaining position that make him deserves to dictate the government.

To disclose the actual phenomenon, it needs to closely examine another resource, that is the fact that there are many violations committed by the ruling Golkar; the party has broken many rules decided by the committee. The editor let the fact be concealed before the public, at least he does not mention about the wrongdoing of the cadres of Golkar party, who are, most of them, the officials of the government. And

what the editor did is just to support, to criticize the party, so in the next poll, it can regain the lost votes.

The editor, through the modality, also vaguely declares what the people want, the justice, the fairness in holding the poll, although it is not proclaimed in detail; this is just revealed in two clauses, i.e. clause 8 and 14.

*The voters, particularly the young ones, do want the change seen in this country. (Clause 8)*

*The less fortunate seem to have turned their heads toward PDI, which calls itself the party of little man.*

The comment and adjunct in the lines above are only to deepen the emotional charge realized in modality, and it makes the status more clearly exposed, like those in the following clauses:

*Golkar still hold the lion's share (Cl.6)*

*PPP achieving only a slight increase (cl.7)*

*PDI will surely get eight more seats (cl.9)*

*It is not unlikely that PDI could even take 50 seats.*

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the linguistic evidences above it is seen that the power of the state at the time was so strong. This is proved from the reflection of the status of power between the participants involved. This can be seen the use of "low" or "medium" obligation addressed to the ruler. In another, the editor puts high obligation in the statements directed to the public. The contrast is shown in the lines below.

*"The Golkar should pay more attention to the aspiration of the public" (NSE: 13b)*

Golkar, the ruling party, is suggested by the writer to pay more attention. Suggestion here means a medium obligation. The editor normally could say in "command" form, insisting that the righteousness and the fairness are essential elements to realize a democratic fair election. However, the editor has no power to send the real truth to the ruler. This is just a save way to stand before the authoritarian government. Otherwise, he/she will put his/her media in trouble.

Meanwhile, the editor applies high probability and high obligation in statements addressed to the public.

*Many people must have rejoiced after hearing the statements about the official determination to make this election better than on in 1987 (BE: 17)*

*But changed it must be to support the government's ideal (BE: 24)*

This high modality represents the belief of the media that the fact mentioned in the proposition is just true. In fact, it is questionable since the public had been used to the same promise, but the general election was always held in the same way. The high modality is also seen in the form of strong obligation the editor directed to the public. Though, the editor knew that the public was just true, he/she still could say otherwise, confirming the ruler's stand. This reflects the weakest power the public had at the time. The media with its full authority could dictate the public to do what they wanted, in accordance to what the government wanted.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Based on the evidences above, it can be concluded that the modality reflects the power relation between the participants in discourses. The media, due to the weaker power, can only use medium or even low modality (obligation) as it addresses the issue of the government. The media did avoid the risk to criticize the ruler. Meanwhile, it uses high obligation to address the public, reflecting that it has more powerful than the public. The media did not have any risk to dictate the public and even to betray the truth in the field.

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