

# Epistemic modality in research papers: Contrastive study between Humanities and Hard sciences

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In general terms, modality is a linguistic device that expresses interpersonal functions and social roles, according to functional linguistics. It is closely related to metadiscourse and the context in which the discourse is delivered. Several modal categorizations have been established, being two of the most common, epistemic and non-epistemic (Depraetere and Reed 2006), and deontic and dynamic (Huddleston and Pullum 2002) modality. Epistemic modality is always subjective (Verstraete 2001) and can fulfil different functions, namely, to reveal the speaker's knowledge, to express certainty or show tentativeness to the truth value of the proposition (cf. Alonso-Almeida 2015).

In considering the categorization to be employed we must also take into account the purpose of the research and the type of discourse analysed. Thus, the construction *I think* serves “not only to express uncertainty or lack of commitment, but also to indicate tentativeness and authoritative deliberation” in political discourses (Hardjanto & Mazia 2019). Epistemic modality, also, indicates the speaker's confidence or lack of it in the truth of the proposition expressed (Coates 1987), for instance.

Verbal items like auxiliary verbs, and lexical items like adverbs, adjectives, nouns, and verbs. But also Huddleston and Pullum (2002) add past tense, and clause types like imperatives and interrogatives, subordination and parentheticals. The purpose of this paper is to analyze 30 scientific articles, 15 belonging to Hard Sciences and 15 belonging to Humanities in order to conclude whether there are significant differences from an epistemic perspective. To do this, an analysis of the grammatical and lexical elements that constitute the data will be carried out in order to conclude whether there are significant differences between them or, on the contrary, not meaningful acknowledgments should be born in mind. Epistemic modality markers are here defined as “linguistic elements whose main function is the qualification of the writer's commitment (boosters) or lack of commitment (hedges) to the truth of the proposition” (Vázquez and Giner 2008). The research we present seems revealing as some compelling differences are shown, not so much in the lexical items analysed but in the use of modal verbs.

**Keywords:** *Epistemic, modality, research papers, contrastive study.*

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