

Pragmatic Meanings of Modal Verbs in Religious Discourse

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Abstract

This study examines the pragmatic meanings for modal verbs used in Friday's Speech of one of the most renowned religious scholars in Egypt, Dr. Ali Gomaa in order to investigate the related mechanisms which help a speaker reveal his ideas and intentions when communicating with a particular addressee. This study examines their choices in order to urge and persuade. The pragmatic meanings of modal verbs are discussed through Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory in order to show how the linguistic and pragmatic choices of the religious scholars help them to achieve the optimal relevance by achieving the greatest possible cognitive effect for the smallest processing effort.

1. Introduction

In this study, the researcher investigates the pragmatic meanings of modal verbs and modal adjuncts that exist in religious speech. The researcher intends to investigate the related mechanisms which help a speaker reveal his ideas and intentions so as to reach his communicative objectives successfully when communicating with a particular addressee.

It investigates the pragmatic meanings of modality according to Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) used in one of the most renowned religious scholars in Egypt,

Dr. Ali Gomaa. In order to investigate the phenomenon, I chose to examine and analyze (one) recordings of Friday's speeches delivered by Gomaa, focusing on the pragmatic meanings of modals. This study has been conducted within a quantitative framework. According to this, the researcher investigates the pragmatic meanings of modals that religious men use in their speeches to convey their ideas persuasively. On one hand, the pragmatic framework used in the study is the one invented and developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) named the Relevance Theory (RT).

2.About Dr. Ali Gomaa

Sheikh Ali Gomaa was born on March 3rd 1952 in Bani Suwaif, Upper Egypt. He was raised in a pious household that knowledge. His father, a lawyer specializing in personal status Shariah law, transferred his love of books to his son whose private library now boasts over 30,000 titles and is sought out by students and researchers from rare texts.

Sheikh Ali began memorizing the Quran at the age of ten and, although he did not go to religious schools, by the time he graduated from high school he had studied the six canonical collections of hadith as well as Maliki jurisprudence. When it came time for him to go to college he had the choice to enter either the faculty of commerce, he chose commerce since it was

a field that would allow him the spare time to continue his religious studies while he was in school.

After graduating from college Sheikh Ali enrolled in Al-Azhar University. During his first year in Al-Azhar he memorized many of the foundational texts that other students who had gone through the Al-Azhar high school system had already encountered. These included works in jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, Quranic recitation, and hadith methodology. After completing a second bachelor's degree from Al-Azhar in 1979, Sheikh Ali enrolled in a master's degree program at the same university's department of Shariah and law. He obtained his master's degree in 1985 followed by a Ph.D. from the same department in 1988.

In addition to his official studies, Sheikh Ali spent time with many sheikhs and masters of the Shariah sciences and the spiritual path outside of the university setting. The most influential of these Sheikhs was the Moroccan hadith scholar and Sufi sheikh Abdullah bin Siddiq al-Ghumari who considered Sheikh Ali to be one of his most accomplished students.

Before his appointment as Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali was professor of Juristic Methodologies at Al-Azhar University. In addition to teaching classes on the university campus, in the mid-1990's Sheikh Ali reestablished the tradition

of giving lessons in the Al-Azhar mosque. For a decade Sheikh Ali could be found in one of the side rooms of the mosque teaching jurisprudence, juristic, methodology, hadith and its sciences and spirituality from the early morning until noon Six days a week.

In 1988 Sheikh Ali began delivering the Friday sermon at Cairo's Sultan Hasan Mosque, and in 2003 Sheikh Ali was appointed Grand Mufti of Egypt. Sheikh Ali is a prolific author and writer on Islamic issues and he writes on a weekly column in the Egyptian al-Ahram newspaper in which he discusses matters of current interest and religion.

www.mailogislam.com/eng-bio-Shaykh-ali-gomaa-html.

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3. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the tools used by religious scholars to urge and persuade?
- 2- How religious scholars can achieve relevance?
- 3- What are the persuasive strategies used by scholars to urge and convince?

- 4- To what extent scholar's choice of modality systems is helpful to achieve relevance?
- 5- What are the mechanisms which help the speakers reveal their ideas and intentions when communicating with the addressees?

The researcher used a quantitative analysis in order to answer the above questions:

4.Selection criteria

The data for the present study are gathered from one Friday's speech delivered Dr. Ali Gomaa, addressing all Muslims in Mosques and everywhere. The speeches are chosen carefully to guarantee the diversity necessary for the generalization of the results. Concerning the pragmatic analysis, the researcher chooses scholars' own linguistic choices; the researcher chooses the utterances delivered with them with the exception of the Holy Quran. Hadiths of the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) or any religious testimonies.

Speech (1) entitled "prayers after Ramadan" delivered by Dr. Ali Gomaa

5.Definition of pragmatics

In Wilson & Sperber (1991), pragmatics is defined as “a theory of the cognitive principles and abilities involved in utterance interpretation, and their cognitive effects, (p.584). In

their view, the notion of relevance is rooted in human cognition. They state: “humans tend to pay attention to the most relevant phenomena available; that they tend to construct the most relevant representations of these phenomena and to process them in a context that maximizes their relevance” (p. 586)

6.The central Claim of Relevance theory

Wilson and Sperber, (2004; 607) showed that the central claim of RT is that an utterance raises certain specific and predictable expectations of relevance. These expectations guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning. W&S, (2004: 610) also claim that humans do have an automatic tendency to maximize relevance, because of the way our cognitive systems have evolved. Sperber& Wilson, (2012: 62) explained that "Efficiency in cognition is largely a matter of allocating our processing resources so as to maximize cognitive benefits. This involves processing inputs that offer the best expected cost/benefit ratio at the time".

Sperber, D et al., (1995: 50) state that this means that RT does not claim that communicators always try to be relevant to their hearer, let alone succeed, nor that addressees always trust the communicator to be relevant to them. The crucial claim is this: whether or not the presumption of relevance is warranted,

whether or not it is accepted, the very fact that it accompanies an utterance helps determine the utterance's intended interpretation. The intended interpretation has to be such that the speaker could think that it would satisfy the expectation of relevance that she /he herself /himself encouraged in the hearer by means of her/his utterance.

7. The Goal of Relevance Theory

Wilson & Sperber, (1998: 2) argued that the goal of relevance theory is to say “what makes information worth attending to, but without appealing to notions such as topic or interest”.

W&S, (2004: 608) Also it aims to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations amount to, and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension.

8. The Main Assumptions of the current version of the theory

This theory is based on several assumptions: First that every utterance has a variety of possible interpretations, all compatible with the information that is linguistically encoded. Second, that not all these interpretations occur to the hearer simultaneously; some of them take more effort to think up ... The third assumption is that hearers are equipped with a single, very general criterion for

evaluating interpretations as they occur to them ...
And the fourth, and final, assumption is that this criterion is powerful enough to exclude all but at most a single interpretation, so that having found an interpretation that satisfies it, the hearer need look no further. (Wilson, 1994, p. 44 – 45)

9.Modality

Halliday & Matthiessen, (2014:176-7 & 2004:147) mention that the modality is another essential element of the interpersonal aspects of text. The modality enriches ‘yes/no’... categorization with many intermediate shades to have a productive dialogue describe two variations of modality, modalization (propositions) and that is of modulation (proposals). Modalization means the distance between the positive and negative poles and its asserting / denying nature. It encompasses degrees of probability and usuality. These degrees are articulated with the help of a modal verb (Modal Finite Operators) or a modal adjunct. Modulation measures the distance between the yes – No poles through “prescribing and proscribing”.

Halliday&Matthiessen, (2014: 176-177) state that

"polarity is thus a choice between yes and no. But these are not the only possibilities; there are intermediate degrees, various kinds of

indeterminacy that fall in between like 'sometimes' or 'may be'. These intermediate degrees, between the positive and negative poles, are known collectively as modality. What the modality system does is to construe the region of uncertainty that lies between 'yes' and 'no'. But there is more one route between the two (1) one for propositions, and (2) one for proposals. (1) in between the certainties of 'it is and' it isn't lie the relative probabilities of 'it must be', 'it will be', 'it may be', 'it will be', 'it may be'. (2) likewise, in between the definitive 'do' and 'don't' lie the discretionary options 'you must do', 'you should do', 'you may do'.

Halliday&Matthiessen, (2014:177-8) states that modality depends on the speech function, i. e. command or offer. Command ignites various degrees of obligation ('be allowed to', 'be supposed to', 'be required to').Offers represent degrees of inclination ('be willing to', 'be anxious to', 'be determined to').

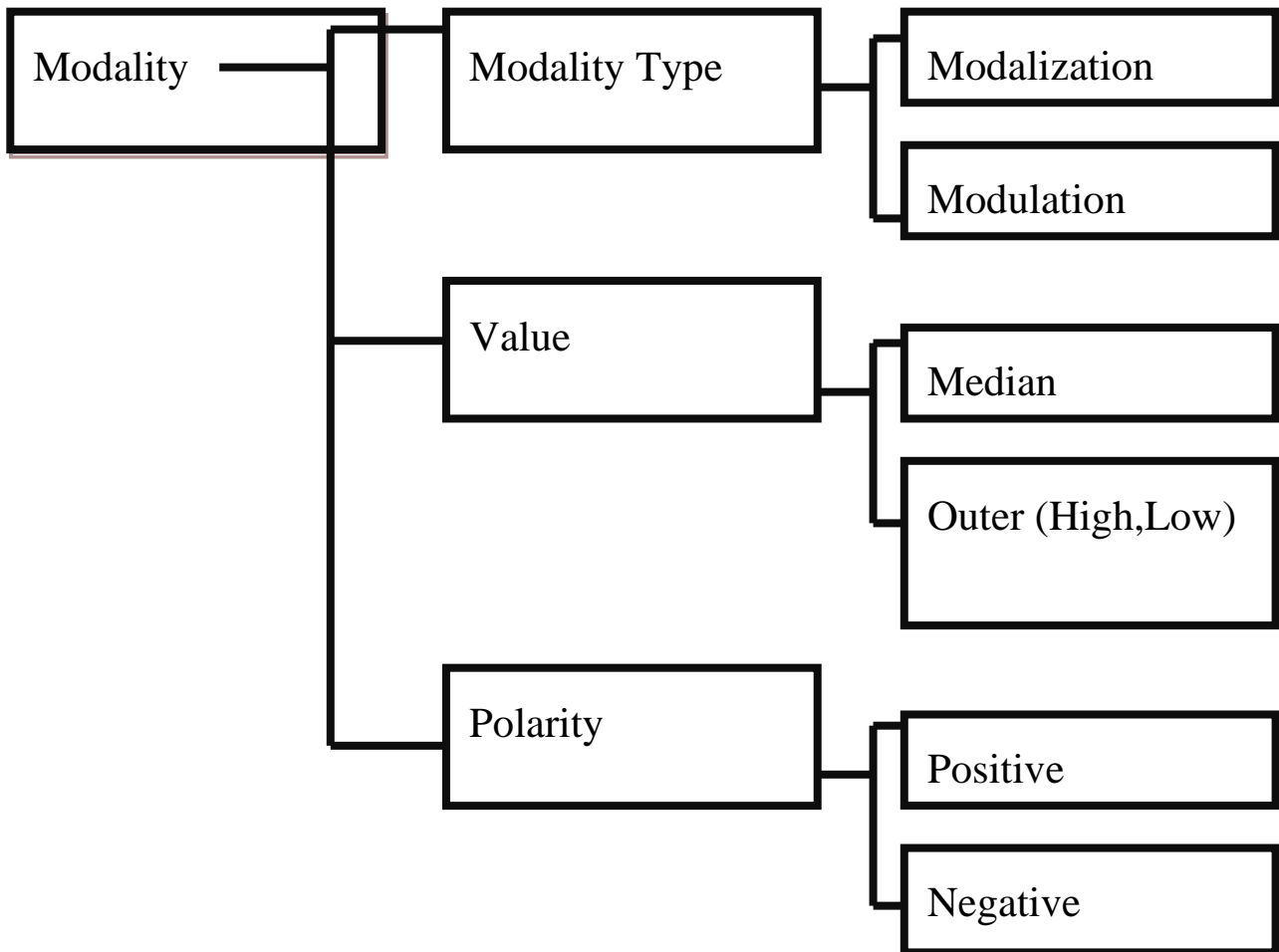
Table (1) types of modalization and modulation

Modalization:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Probability. - Usuality.
Modulation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obligation - Inclination.

(Adapted from L. Angus, 2012: 51)

The value and polarity categories will complete the paradigm of modality. Probabilities can range from ‘high’ (certain) to ‘low’ (possible).

Table (2) system network of modality



(Halliday&Matthiessen, 2014:182)

Gonzalez, (2008: 18-19) notes that this means that in between the polar opposites of ‘yes’ and ‘no’, there are varying degrees of probability, usuality, obligation and inclination (Eggins, 1994). The first two have to do with the exchange of information: how likely the information is to be true, and how frequently it is true, which can be expressed through modalization. The second two have to do with the exchange of goods – and – services: how obligated the other person is to perform the command and how willing the speaker is to fulfill an offer, which can be express through modulation. All these types of modality can be expressed in different way which can lean towards either the positive or negative end of the polarity continuum. This concept is the idea of modal commitment, which is the degree to which a speaker is committed to the validity of his or her utterance. Below are some examples of different levels of modal commitment in clauses concerning probability and obligation.

Table (3) modal values:

Modalization – probability	Modulation-	Obligation
High that must be Tim	You must wash the dishes.	
Medium I will probably attend	You should have lunch with her	

Low Cyndi might come with us	You can leave after the meeting.
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(Adapted from Gonzales, 2008:19)

Groefsema, (1995: 53) state that "the modal verbs can, may, must and should can express epistemic modality (the modality of knowledge and belief) and deontic modality (the modality of permission and obligation). Can differs from the other three modals in that ability, permission and dynamic (i.e., real – world') possibility are normally associated with it".

Groefsema, (1995: 61) also shows that "the basic meanings of can, may, must and should express relations between the proposition expressed by the rest of an utterance containing them and a set of 'background' assumptions, while putting constraints on what sets of assumptions are recovered during the interpretation process".

Groefsema, (1995: 62) mentions that "The basic meanings of these modals can be characterized as follows:

Can: P is compatible with the set of all propositions which have a bearing on P.

May: There is at least some set of propositions such that P is compatible with it.

Must: P is entailed by the set of all propositions which have a bearing on P.

Should: there is at least some set of propositions such that P is entailed by it.

(Where P is the proposition expressed by the rest of the utterance).

Groefsema, (1995: 62-3) said that

"In informal terms, what this notion of bearing does is to focus the addressee's attention on all the evidence (of whatever nature epistemic or otherwise) for the proposition expressed by the rest of the utterance. the difference between can and must lies in the relation between this evidence and the proposition expressed: must expresses that the proposition is entailed by the 'evidence', while 'can' expresses the weaker relation of compatibility, i.e. the 'evidence', while can expresses the weaker relation of compatibility, i.e. the 'evidence' does not entail the negation of the proposition expressed, 'should' and 'may' do not cause us to focus on all the 'evidence' for the proposition expressed, but rather communicate that there is at least some evidence which supports the proposition expressed.... may expresses that the proposition is compatible with the 'evidence', i.e, that the 'evidence' doesn't entail proposition".

Groefsema, (1995: 68), explained the difference between may and can when he said that "The different ways "can" and 'may' as expressing permission, show why may is often felt to be more formal, correct, or polite than can. With can the addressee is encouraged to consider all the evidence for the proposition; permission is only a part of that, which means that the truth of

the proposition is not solely dependent on the permission. With may, on the other hand, the addressee is guided to supply only one piece of evidence, and by virtue of permission being up to the communicator in declaratives, and up to the addressee in interrogatives, this means that the truth of the proposition is solely dependent on the permission".

Table (4) Modalization and Modulation:

Commodity exchanged	Speech function		Type of intermediacy		Typical realization	Example
Information	Proposition	Statement, question	modalization	Probability (possible / probable / certain)	Finite modal operator	They must have known
					Modal Adjunct (both the above)	They certainly know They certainly must have known
				Usuality (sometimes / usually / always)	Finite modal operator Modal Adjunct (both the above)	It must happen It always happens It must always happen
Goods - & services	Proposal:	Command	Modulation:	Obligation (allowed / supposed / required)	Finite modal operator Passive verb	You must be patient!

					predicator	You're require to be patient!
		offer		Inclination (willing / keen / determined)	Finite modal operator	I must win!
					Adjective predicator	I'm determined to win!

(Eggins, 2004: 91)

10. Modality analysis of Dr.Gomaa's speech "prayers after Ramadan"

Table (5)

Modality system of speech (1)	
<p>١- هذا شهر الله وشهر القرآن قد ولي.</p> <p>1- This is the month of Allah, and the month of Quran might end.</p>	
<p>٢- فلا بد أن تتذكر حلاوة رمضان.</p> <p>2- You must remember sweet of Ramadan.</p>	
<p>٣- فلا بد عليك أيها المسلم أن تتمسك بها.</p> <p>3- Oh Muslim; you must hold them.</p>	

٤- فليعلم أن بها خلل ينبغي عليه أن يصلحه وأن يصلح من نفسه.

4- He/ she should know that there is a default, he should fix it and fix from herself.

٥- فلا بد وأن تنهاك صلاتك عن الفحشاء والمنكر.

5- Your prayer must end vulgarity and obscenity.

٦- ولكن لابد عليك أن تستمر في الصلاة.

6- But, you must keep praying.

٧- لعل صلاتك تنهاك يوماً فتتذكر.

7- Your prayers may one day end vulgarity and obscenity, so you remember.

٨- إذا فلا بد عليك أن تذكر الله سبحانه وتعالى كثيراً قبل الصلاة وفي الصلاة وبعد الصلاة.

8- So you must remember Allah a lot before, after, and during prayers.

٩- إذا يجب عليك أن تتمسك بالصلاة وأن تعود إلى الله في حياتك إليها.

9- So you must hold prayers and return to God in your life through them.

١٠- لأنه من الممكن أن تبدأ الشهر على غير وجه فيصير الوتر شفعا أو الشفع

وتر .

10- As it is possible that the month begins unsteady so the uneven becomes even and the even becomes uneven.

١١- فتكون قد جمعت بين الحسنين .

11- So, you might gather between the blessing of life and the end.

١٢- لا بد وأن تصدق ربك .

12- You must be honest with God.

١٣- التصديق لا بد عليك أن تصدق أن عملك هذا إنما لوجه الله .

13- Believing, you must believe that your work is for God only.

١٤- لعل أن تكون الآن ساعة الإجابة أن يغفر لنا ذنوبنا .

14- And it may be the hour of response now.

١٥- فأعلم أن الذى أمامك مهما كان هو الذى أمامك قد يكون محل نظر الله .

15-Know well that what is in front of you , may be in place of Allah's sight.

The speech has (7) instances of modality utterances (1) and 11) the speaker uses qad + past verb, as mentioned before qad + past verb indicates certainty, it has an emphasizing effect on the utterance, these utterances has to do with the exchange of information which is expressed through modalization by the use

of probability: how likely the information is to be true and how frequently is it true.

To develop a relevance theoretic interpretation for utterances (1) and (11), utterance (1) the speaker is certain that the month of Allah (Ramadan) ended, so he provides maximum evidence by using *qad* for the proposition expressed, he wants to attract hearer's attention by this evidence. So the speaker tries to make the hearers believe that the proposition expressed by the statement using *qad* + past verb is certain and true. In utterance (11) the speaker uses *qad* + past verb as he needs to emphasize the action in the certainty of its having taken place. As the speaker persuades Muslims to ask Allah if they got the destination night (ليلة القدر) to give them forgiving and health in life and then end, so he uses *qad* + past to provide maximum evidence for the proposition expressed and attracts reader's attention that they might gather between the blessings of life and end.

Utterances (2), (3), (5), (6), (8), (12), (13), Salah, (2012:81) the speaker here uses Arabic modal expression 'Laa budda' (must + ?an Clause), this modal form includes the assertion of obligation, the speaker obligates the other person to perform the action. This kind of modality has to do with the exchange of goods – and – services: how obligated the other

person (hearers) to perform the command which are expressed through modulation.

Here the speaker by using this impersonal modal expression (la-budda) in all utterances, he uses modal commitment on the hearers to give maximum evidence for the proposition expressed. These utterances are relevant as they strengthen previous assumptions. In utterance (no. 2) the speaker persuade him not to forget the charity and prosperity (sweet) of Ramadan after speaking about forgetting in Adam's period. In utterance (3) the speaker spoke about the five prayers and then he committed the speaker by using la-budda to hold these prayers so by using this modal expression emphasize and strengthen the previous assumptions, in utterance (5) the speaker said that prayers end vulgarity and obscenity so he committed the speaker and provides evidence by the proposition expressed as our prayers must end vulgarity and obscenity. In utterance (6), the speaker here obliges us to keep praying so he provides maximum evidence for the proposition expressed.

In utterance (8), the speaker mentions in the verse of the Holy Koran, the beauty of mentioning God, so he imposes his authority by using this modal expression to persuade us to remember God in everywhere and in every time during praying so this utterance strengthens the previous assumption. Utterance

(12) the speaker provides maximum evidence to the proposition expressed and the speaker mentions in the previous utterance that the prophet is conditioned all the blessings in life and the end with a promised fact. So the speaker persuades the hearers to become honest with God in order to gain these blessings in life and the end, so this utterance reinforces the previous utterance. In utterance (13), the speaker by using this utterance provides a commitment on the part of the hearers as he explains by this utterance what is the meaning of believing as he said that believing indicates that your work is for God only so the utterance is made relevant as it strengthens and confirms the previous assumption.

Utterance no. (4) The speaker uses "should" *ينبغي* as a form as Arabic modality, Salah, (2012: 89) it is an action (deontic) modality which is connected with the idea of obligation. This kind of modality is an obligation but is less strong than (must). This kind of obligation is called recommendation. Here, the speaker has no authority to impose obligation on the hearer to the extent that the hearer can neglect this obligation. The speaker by using "Should *ينبغي*" denotes a degree of obligation which has to do with the exchange of goods – and – services: how obligated the hearer to perform the command which is expressed through modulation. The speaker

gives evidence to attract the addressee's attention for the proposition expressed by the rest of the utterance, the speaker recommends the hearers to fix their prayers. So this modal verb should in the original is translated into the Arabic verb *ينبغي*. Therefore, the proposition which states that Muslim should know that there is something wrong (default) in his prayers and he should fix from it and from herself is produced by a minimum evidence which is entailed by some propositions available to the hearers in the given context.

(Jarjour: 2006) mentions that this minimum evidence indicates that the statement, or proposition containing the modal, is made on the basis of the more neutral position of the speaker towards the idea. The speaker uses a weaker form of obligation because he wants to recommends them of the proposition expressed. The speaker here contradicts the previous assumption as he states that anyone whom his prayers don't eliminate vulgarity and obscenity, he should know that there is a default in his prayers. So he gives evidence through the proposition expressed by the rest of the utterance.

Utterances (7) and (14) the speaker uses *la'alla* *لعل*. According to Ibn Hisham (1999: 416) as qtd in Jarjour, (2006: 129) *la'alla* is used to express either hope for something positive or waiting for something that one is afraid of. In the context of

defining the meaning of la'alla. Arabic grammarians underline the importance of distinguishing between hoping for something and wishing it to happen: as this particle is used only to express the first but not the second. Hoping for something to take place goes only with things that can actually happen in reality as it were. The use of la'alla here in this speech comes closest to its classical meaning of expressing hope. So in utterance (7) your prayer may one day end vulgarity and obscenity, so you remember, the speaker expresses his hope and by this persuades hearers to continue praying so he gives them maximum evidence by the proposition expressed which persuade hearers to continue praying. Utterance (14) the speaker by using la'alla expresses his hope that it may be now the hour of response for all the hearers as he ordered them to invoke of God. So the speaker by this utterance urges and persuades hearers to invoke of God.

Utterance (9) the speaker uses the modal verb must (يجب) this kind of modality has to do with the exchange of goods – and – services: how obligated the other person (hearer) is to perform the commands which are expressed through modulation. This kind of modality is action deontic modality which is connected with the idea of obligation, the speaker used this modal verb to urge the hearer to do a specific action as he urge them to hold

prayers and return to God in your life through them. So the speaker has strong reasons to impose the obligation on the hearers.

Here in this utterance the speaker wishes that prayers entailed by the set of all the propositions which have a bearing on prayers. In other words, the speaker contradicts the previous assumption by this utterance. And this utterance provides maximum evidence and it is relevant as he stated in the previous assumption that prayers are heavy to the unbelievers so he uses this modal verb to express a desirable state of affairs which is the obligation on holding prayers and returning to God in our life through them. So the speaker attracts the addressee's attention of the proposition expressed.

Utterance (10), Salah, (2012: 48) the speaker uses a kind of Arabic modal impersonal expression, (min – al mumkin), it is possible, it is a kind of epistemic modality, it expresses the speaker's belief. This Arabic modal impersonal expression has to do with the exchange of information: how likely the information is to be true and how frequently it is true which is expressed through moralization by using a kind of probability.

The speaker provides maximum evidence by using this kind of Arabic modal expression; he expresses his belief about the proposition expressed as it is possible that the month begins

unsteady so the uneven becomes even and the even becomes uneven, the speaker is relevant as this utterance has a great cognitive effect as it strengthens the previous assumptions. So when we follow the path we notice that in the previous utterance the speaker says that the prophet once says that the destination night is in the last ten of the month and once says in the uneven of the last ten, so the speaker strengthens and confirms the previous assumptions, so it attracts the hearers to the speaker's message.

Utterance (15) the speaker here uses the particle *qad* + non past verb to express the epistemic sense of uncertainty El-Hassan (1990) as qtd in Salah, (2012: 83) states that '*qad*' casts doubt on the likelihood of existence of the state or occurrence of the event.

The utterance has to do with the exchange of information which is expressed through modalisation (probability). The speaker here provides maximum evidence by the proposition expressed as the speaker urges us not to underestimate anyone as what is in front of us may be in place of Allah's sight so the speaker provides maximum evidence which reinforces and strengthens the previous assumption as Allah disappears the prophet in all people so he attracts hearers, attention to the message expressed.

11. Findings and Conclusions

- This study reflects an important aspect of persuasive tactics used by religious scholars in their religious speech genre in order to convince the addressees with the intended messages, and change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of the addressees by communicative means. The strategy which is commonly used by religious scholars is the use of testimonies from Islamic laws and jurisprudence, the use of testimony simply informs the audience of some state of affair, and relies on the audience's trust in the communicator to lead to the desired effects.
- On the interpersonal features, this study focuses on modality system. The interpersonal meta-function is concerned with how language is used to establish, maintain, and negotiate relationships in discourse.
- The essential element of the interpersonal aspects of text is modality. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) describe two variations of modality: modalization and modulation. Modalization means the distance between the positive and negative poles and its asserting/ denying nature and it encompasses degrees of probability and usuality. These degrees are articulated with the help of modal verb or modal

adjuncts. Modulation measures the distance between the Yes – No poles and it encompasses degrees of obligation and inclination. Through the selected speech, Dr. Ali Gomaa use varied kinds of modal verb which indicate modalisation and modulation.

- In speech (1) "prayers after Ramadan" delivered by Dr. Ali Gomaa, the speaker uses seven different instances of modality, the speaker uses Qad + Past verb twice to indicate certainty, the Arabic modal expression (laa budd, "must" seven times, the Arabic modality (yanbaġi – should) is used once, the modal expression (laa ʔalla – may) is used twice, (yajib – must) is used once, the Arabic modal expression min – al mumkin – it is possible is used once, and qad + non past verb is used once, the speaker in this speech uses different kind of modalisation and modulation. It is worth mentioning that modal verbs that denote obligations which are expressed through modulation are used more than modal verbs that denote probability. The speakers here oblige hearers with the fulfillment of the actions. The use of different kinds of modal verbs or adjuncts help speakers to provide maximum evidence that tend to persuade hearers with his intended message, so he succeeds in achieving relevance.

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