

MODALITY AND VERBS OF MENTAL ACTIVITY IN ENGLISH

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În articol se explorează una dintre problemele stringente, precum este modalitatea și mijloacele ei de exprimare în limba engleză, o categorie complexă și controversată în lingvistica modernă. Un deosebit interes prezintă faptul că în lucrare este reflectată legătura dintre modalitate și activitatea intelectuală a omului, care, la rândul ei, este un aspect esențial al studiului efectuat asupra verbelor de activitate mentală. De asemenea, se reflectă sumarul interdisciplinar al definițiilor existente și abordările utilizate, subliniind aspectele diverse ale modalității epistemice, evidențialității, subiectivității, precum și funcțiile interacționare ale modalității.

Research in verbs of mental activity has a strong link to the notion of *modality*. Discussions regarding *modality* and modal concepts date back to Aristotle and Greek classic philosophy. According to Hoye [1], these notions come from the fact that people often categorize their experience and attitude in terms of how the state of affairs would be or should be versus what is in reality. As a complex and manifold, multiform category, the term “modality” is used to denote a wide range of phenomena that are different by sense volume, grammatical structure, etc. However, all those phenomena are united by common feature, i.e. to express in this or that way the attitude of the speaker to what he/she states/communicates. Given the fact that *modality* and means of its expression present one of the most important and actual problems of modern linguistics, and special interest for the given paper, various sources were analyzed (based on interdisciplinary approach) regarding the existing definitions of *modality*, its main types, as well as approaches to this phenomenon study/classification.

There exist completely different opinions on the subject, including *modality* definition (-s) and approaches to its classification, which can be explained by the multidisciplinary character of the category, its complexity and controversy. *Modality* capacity usually includes various meanings like: reality, unreality, emotionality, expressiveness, assertion, negation, doubt, probability, presupposition, truth/validity, possibility, actuality, necessity, wish, intention, indirectness, question, etc. Vinogradov states that the category of *modality* “belongs to the central basic language categories that are revealed in different forms in languages of different systems mentioning that” ... the category of modality is language universal, presented in all languages of the world.” [2]. Examining *modality* and its characteristics is also of significance for the given paper due to the fact that it is inseparably connected with human thinking activity, which in turn is an essential aspect of verbs of mental activity study. Connection between such notions as *human thinking* and *modality* of lexical units is treated differently by different scholars. Some of them connect those two, while others divide them, opposing as logical (thinking) and emotional (modal characteristics of lexical units), *rational* and *sensory*. One can, nevertheless, track the interconnection of *thinking* and *modality*, considering the expression of modality as a result of certain thinking process. Bally characterizes *modality* as “the soul of the sentence...”, and “that like a thought, it is formed mainly as a result of active operation of the speaking subject” [3].

Modality characteristics in this or that version are studied in different ways in modern modal logic. The main types of logical modality include the following: alethic, e.g. “necessary”, possibly/probably”, “by chance/accidentally”, deontic, or normative (“forbidden”, “allowed”, etc.), epistemic, i.e. knowledge, suppositions/propositions, presuppositions, beliefs, doubts, etc. *Modality*, however, is viewed differently in logic and linguistics. In the Logic Dictionary it is explained as “difference between judgments in dependence on the degree of truth of the reflected fact, fixed in them [judgments], phenomenon – from probability to necessity of existence of the reflected”. In contrast to logical modality, *modality* in linguistics is defined as “grammatical-semantic notion, reflecting the attitude of the speaker making this or that statement to the object of this statement, and is manifested with the help of different intonation, forms of mood of verbs, introduction words, etc. According to Wikipedia, in linguistics the semantic category of *modality* relates the attitude of the speaker to the contents of his/her statement, target arrangement/ flow of the speech, the relation of the statement contents to reality. *Modality* can have the meaning of the assertion, order, wish, assumption, certainty, (ir-) reality. It can be expressed by different grammatical and lexical means. Language

category of *modality* is inseparably connected with the speaker (speaking subject) and characterizes the sentence as the main communicative unit of speech, as it is the sentence where the objective reality is reflected in its interpretation in people's public conscience. The speaker uses these or those language means to express not only the known logical contents, but also his/her own attitude to/towards it. Bally, commenting on the statement characteristics, defines dictum (its factual contents) and modus (individual assessment, evaluation) of the facts stated [3]. According to Heiko Narrog [4], among numerous definitions of modality one can distinguish at least the following three orientations: definitions of modality in terms of "speakers' attitudes" (e.g., Jespersen), the ones in terms of "actuality", "factuality", "validity", or "realis/irrealis", that is, if a proposition is presented as "actual", "factual", "valid"/"realis" or not, and definitions in terms of the expression of possibility and necessity [6]. Narrog himself suggests the definition of *modality* which highlights it as a linguistic category referring to the factual status of a state of affairs. The author posits that the expression of a state of affairs is modalized if it is marked for being undetermined with respect to its factual status, i.e., is neither positively nor negatively factual." *Modality* has proved a rather difficult area to delimit and conceptualize already at the level of semantics. Perkins [5] defines modality in a very broad way as "the qualification of the categorical and the absolute as realized [...] within the code of language. Lyons defines *modality* as "expression of necessity and possibility" [6]. What is of special/particular importance for this paper is that the notion *modality* allows making deeper analysis of peculiarities and rules/laws of human's cognitive activity [7].

The works of Palmer, Perkins, Lyons, Coates, Matthews and other scholars on the question of English *modality*, have been analyzed with the scope of outlining their respective approaches to *modality* treatment. Palmer, for example, differentiates three parameters of modal meaning: the epistemic, deontic and dynamic use of the so called modal auxiliaries taking data from the Survey of English Usage as a basis. We can trace the expressions 'epistemic', 'deontic' and 'dynamic' to the modal logic of von Wright, according to which he defined epistemic as having to do with the assessment of knowledge or verification, deontic with what is necessary, and dynamic with the inner dynamism of situations respectively. Palmer in his work 'Mood and Modality', at the same time, expresses his doubts concerning including dynamic modality in classification, i.e., excluding it, mentioning that "...it is doubtful whether this should be included within modality at all..." [8]. He also highlights that *modality* in language is concerned with subjective characteristics of an utterance, and "... it could even be further argued that subjectivity is an essential criterion as the grammaticization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions". [8]. Lyons approaches the issue through logical modality perspective, distinguishing between subjective and objective *modality*. Mathews, in turn, highlights: (i) modality as interaction between speech situation participants (illocution), (ii) modality or modification of predications and predicates, which are based on factors in the object world, claiming that the modification should be limited to non-temporal, non-locative and non-process-descriptive factors (modality in the broad sense); and (iii) modality as the subjective attitude of the speaker towards the reality, factuality, necessity, likelihood, desirability, etc. of the event/state-of-affairs denoted by the (modified) predication (modality in the narrow sense). In addition, he finds it important to consider a sub-division of *modality* in the narrow sense into reality and factuality judgments (roughly corresponding to grammatical 'mood') and into a subordinate and more different assessment of probability, necessity, desirability, etc. The traditional division between epistemic and deontic modality can be traced back to von Wright's [9] modal logic, according to which he suggests the so called four "modes": alethic (expressing modes of truth, e.g. necessary, possible), epistemic (referring to modes of knowing, e.g. verified, falsified), deontic (related to modes of obligation, e.g. obligatory, permitted), and existential (considering modes of existence, e.g. universal, existing) respectively. He also admits the possibility of dynamic modality. Rescher classifies *modality* as: alethic, epistemic, temporal, boulematic, deontic, estimating, evaluating, valuating, causal, and modality of similarity/resemblance.

In his work "Modality, mood, and change of modal meanings: A new perspective", Heiko Narrog makes a reference to the approaches in modality classification used by different scholars specializing in the field (Palmer, Lyons, Coates, Bybee, etc.). According to the traditional, bipartite classification that has been common in linguists' work on modality, one type of modality is generally labeled "epistemic", and the other one "deontic" (Palmer 1986) [8], or "root" [10], or "agent-oriented" [11]. Previously [before coming up with the two-term system], Palmer suggested a three-term system based on the meanings of the English modals. According to that system, *dynamic modality* would be added to *deontic* and *epistemic modality* [12]. Then

this, third, type of *modality* would cover notions like *volition* (sometimes also termed as “boulomaic modality”) and *ability*, (neutral) *possibility* and *necessity*. Turning to a two- term system, though, Palmer decided that part of these notions, namely *volition* and *ability* would not strictly fall into the scope of *modality*, and others (neutral possibility, necessity) would belong to *deontic modality* [8]. Bybee and Pagliuca introduced the term “agent-oriented” for modalities such as ability, obligation, desire, and intention which predicate internal or external conditions on a willful agent, to capture the generalization that is understood with non-epistemic modalities, whereby typically the agent (of the verb) is the location of the modal state expressed by the modal marker.

Apart from the above mentioned bipartite systems, a four way one has been also considered. Based on the data in 76 languages, Bybee and associates came up with a system that distinguishes *agent-oriented*, *epistemic*, and *speaker-oriented modalities*, as well as *subordinating moods*. It can be concluded though that the *agent-oriented modality* in this framework basically overlaps with traditional *deontic modality*, as *epistemic modality* does with *traditional epistemic modality*. The introduced in that system *speaker-oriented modality* is novel, mainly comprising non-epistemic sentence moods such as imperative, prohibitive, and optative, etc. In general, conclusion can be made that the two-way classification of modality into *epistemic* vs. *non-epistemic* has been considered the most common, and we will also base on it in this paper. It should be mentioned also that the “dominant two-way classification” is applicable not only to English modal, as modals in other Indo-European languages follow this system, as well as, for example, Modern Chinese. According to Schneider, *modality* consists of : (i) speech acts (orders, wishes, i.e. *deontic modality*) and (ii) of attitudes to the truth, verity of proposition (*epistemic modality*). The author also posits that *non-epistemic* modality refers to facts and events, while *epistemic* one is related to propositions. Karkkainen [13] highlights *low* and *high modality*, providing interesting examples of students’ and university counselors’ use of high and low modality respectively. According to her research, students use low *modality* values to make requests, to state personal preferences and desires, and to propose solutions to their own academic problems. Counselors on the other hand tend to use low value elements to suggest means, methods, and options to the students, as well as to give advice. She claims that when high-value modal elements are used by the counselors to give advice, these are often preceded by *low-value* modal adjuncts like *I think*, or *might*, to mitigate the force of the advice, as in “Uh *I think* you should late-drop these classes”. *Low modality* is expressed by modals like *can*, *may*, *don’t have to* and adjuncts like *I don’t know*, *I think*, *I don’t think* and perhaps, while *high modality* is conveyed by modals like *must*, *should* and *have to* and adjuncts like *I’m sure*, *certainly*, *of course* and *never*.

Epistemology, or theory of knowledge, is defined in Wikipedia as a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge. It is explained as the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity in the entry on answers.com. It is believed that the term *epistemicity* was introduced into English by the Scottish philosopher James Frederick Ferrier, who in his “Institutes of Metaphysic” (1854), denied the absolute existence of matter and maintained instead that mind and matter necessarily coexist in all experience. The main constituents of *epistemic modality* are considered to include the subject matter of uncertainty, ambiguity, etc. *Epistemic modality* is more oriented towards logic, dealing with statements related to universe, and constraints of likelihood of their truth and falsehood. It includes ‘practical possibility’ (may) and ‘logical necessity’ (must, have to) [14]. *Epistemic modality* is expressed by the language which carries the information with different attitudes to knowledge, epistemic expressions, thereby pointing to the attitude of the speaker to the communicated information and degree of his/her responsibility for the propositional contents of his/her assurance, certainty, confidence or doubt [10]. Many researchers note that the movement (in meanings) from concrete to abstract is in general characteristic for the process of formation and development of lexical meanings, observing that epistemic meaning develops later than all the others. This can be explained by peculiarities of the human’s thinking, which is first aimed at cognition of the surrounding world, and then at cognition of him/herself. Alongside with the term *epistemic modality*, other terms are also used in linguistics, like, for example, *persuasive modality*, *modalization*, *modality of truth*, etc. In American linguistics a special category, *evidentiality*, stands out, which unites different lexical means, indicating to the source of information about the fact stated, or the way of getting this source. The term *epistemic modality* is, though, most popular, probably due to its covering the diverse sphere of modal means of expression, where the plan of expression becomes the

determinant factor. Aijmer considers that *epistemic modality*, being a universal, conceptual, notional category, is becoming thereby the language category, and that it, therefore, can be viewed as the category through which the speaker expresses his /her attitude to the certainty, reliability, truth of the statement of what is communicated) [15].

The area of *epistemicity*, a subcategory of *modality*, forms a comparatively consistent semantic domain, which comprises linguistic forms that show the speaker's commitment to the status of the information that they are providing, most commonly it being their assessment of its reliability. As with other multidimensional categories, it is not easy to "find" one definition of *epistemic modality*, which would be accepted by all scholars. In general, it is defined in relation to knowledge, truth, its variability, belief, etc. The categories of certainty, reliability, truth are the instrumental means of *epistemic modality* study. The domain of *epistemic modality* ranges in principle from total uncertainty to absolute certainty [16]. Although epistemic expressions became the subject of study long ago, they were first examined, as a rule, in philosophy and logical semantics. It is then not surprising to face the modality related terms "similarity" in logic, philosophy, and linguistics, which can be explained, among other issues, by the fact that *epistemic modality* in semantics has been influenced heavily by modal logic and the notion of possible worlds, in which propositions or events may be seen as 'real' or 'true' [5; 8]. According to von Wright, *epistemic modality* has to do with knowledge via variability [16]. The first attempt to establish the relation between logical and language semantics was undertaken by Palmer [12], who, based on the modal logic of von Wright, singled out the *epistemic modality* as the sphere of subjective truth, mentioning that from the general theoretical standpoint, *epistemic modality* characterizes the attitude of a person to reality. He also mentions that *epistemic modality* "is concerned with language as information, with the expression of the degree or nature of the speaker's commitment to the truth of what he says", while *deontic modality* "is concerned with language as action, mostly with the expression by the speaker of his attitude towards possible actions by himself or others" [8]. Halliday posits that *epistemic modality* ". . . is the speaker's assessment of probability and predictability", adding that it is external to the content, being a part of the attitude taken up by the speaker: his attitude, in this case, towards his own speech role as 'declarer'. Palmer states that *epistemic modality* indicates ". . . the status of the proposition in terms of the speaker's commitment to it" [8]. For Lyons and most linguists, *epistemic modality* is understood as a probability parameter presupposing 'unknown' or 'undetermined' [17]. Lyons defines *epistemic modality* as related to the notions of knowledge and belief [6]. James highlights that it is involved in building the representation which corresponds to the world (through the use of feelings and intellect).

As mentioned above, *epistemic modality*, as other related complex categories, is defined differently by scholars. Thus, one can encounter some "partially conflicting definitions" of *epistemic modality*. Besides the most commonly accepted notions for defining it, i.e. relation to *knowledge* and *belief*, many researchers involve the notion of *truth* in the definition of *epistemic modality*. So, Lyons [6] states: "Any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the *truth* of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters, whether this qualification is made explicit in the verbal component [...] or in the prosodic or paralinguistic component, is an epistemically modal, or modalized, utterance. "Palmer diversely refers to *epistemic modality* as an "indication by the speaker of his (lack of) commitment to the *truth* of the proposition expressed" and "as the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he says" [8]. Bybee and associates have been the principal proponents of this terminology. They also contrast this with *epistemic modality*, including notions such as *possibility*, *probability*, *prediction*, and *future*. They note that *epistemic modality* has the whole proposition in its scope and expresses speakers' evaluations of the truth of the proposition (6). At the background of standard semantic treatments of modality, when *epistemic modality* is seen as regularly contributing to *truth* conditions, i.e. is typically characterized as concerning the "degree of speaker commitment to truth" [17; 18], others, however, would doubt approach, like, for example, Goddard, saying "... but it is debatable whether such categories necessarily contain any specification about "truth", in the literal sense". In Palmer's words, *epistemic modality* "is concerned with language as information, with the expression of the degree or nature of the speaker's commitment to the truth of what he says" [4]. With the dynamic development of the interactive approach in *modality* treatment, however, the definitions limited to strictly deciding whether the statement is true or false, etc., have been debated. As observed by Willett [19], such definitions are set in a context of a formal logician's view that propositions are either necessarily true, necessarily false or contingently/depending on circumstances true. The notion of truth of propositions, which used to be an

essential condition (a sine qua non) in semantic research on *modality* previously, has turned out to be “not necessarily helpful for a more interactionally based studies” [19].

At the same time, some researchers prefer less categoric, rigorous definitions of *epistemic modality*. For example, Perkins states that in their epistemic meanings the modals (the English modal auxiliaries) express the speaker’s state of knowledge or belief or opinion about the proposition. Holmes refers to *epistemic modality* as degrees of certainty. In Lyon’s words, “[any] utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters . . . is an epistemically modal, or modalized utterance” [6]. Eva Thue Vold defines *epistemic modality markers* (for example, *perhaps*, *probably*) as linguistic expressions that qualify the truth value of a propositional content [16]. *Epistemic modality markers* thus mark to what extent one can rely on the information which is being conveyed by the proposition. In the given paper we will adhere to following a rather ‘balanced’, non-categoric approach in defining *epistemic modality*, and will not put emphasis on the truth of what, for example, the conversation participants are saying, but rather highlight that they assess something as more or less reliable, or express their belief that such and such is the case. *Epistemic modality* can be expressed by a variety of linguistic forms, such as epistemic phrases, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, lexical verbs and participial forms. It can even be claimed that the notion of (epistemic) modality is not restricted to any specific formal category, but that modal expressions form an open-ended class, as is claimed by Simon-Vandenberg [20]. She argues that *modality* can be expressed by a combination of means such as verbs, adverbs, intonation, etc., and a modal meaning may even be conveyed in a preceding or following sentence. The most frequently used epistemic verbs in English include: think, believe, suppose, guess, seem, consider, etc. The most frequent elements in speech are modal words (e.g. modal adverbs: really, perhaps, of course, maybe etc.). Then follow modal phrases (epistemic phrases: I think, I suppose, I don’t think, I know etc.), and modal auxiliaries (might, will, should, may etc.). In conversational interaction epistemic modality is predominately expressed through explicitly subjective forms (i.e. involving the first person pronoun). Sometimes the “epistemic qualifiers” is used as a cover term for various linguistic devices, including adverbs, adverbial phrases, and particles, for qualifying one’s statements, the purpose being to hedge one’s assertions, and to differentiate the strength of one’s assent to a proposition. Cinque mentions “speaker-oriented” epistemic adverbs (e.g. probably, possibly, conceivably, apparently, presumably, supposedly, reportedly, allegedly, and arguably) which abound in English, and presumably serve the same communicative priority as the large number of English epistemic verbs [21]. THINK-related meanings can also be expressed as discourse particles and conversational formulas, though compared with adverbs these tend to be more “interactional” in meaning, in the sense of referring to the addressee’s speech or reactions. Some of English examples would be conversational formulas like *That’s right!* and *Good thinking!* [22], but on close examination other discourse particles may also disclose “cognitive” meaning components. For example, it can be argued that English *wows*, and even *well*, contain “mental state” components such as “I didn’t **think** this would happen” or “I want to **think** about this well” [23]. Taking into consideration broad approach to the problem of *epistemic modality*, it can be thereby subdivided in accordance with a) judgments of the speaker re:/about the necessity and possibility and 2) evidential basis of what is told, and consequently contains the following types: a) modality of judgment/argument and b) evidentiality. The latter should not be overlooked while considering the aspects associated with *epistemic modality*. Palmer [8], for instance, includes *evidential* under *epistemic modality*, suggesting that linguistic means like it are just one way of coding commitment or lack of commitment towards the truth of the proposition expressed. Biber et al. also include under *epistemic stance markers*, not just *certainty*, *actuality*, *precision* and *limitation*, but also source of knowledge or the perspective from which the information is given. Thus, meanings related to the sphere of *evidentiality*, express an indication to the source of the speaker’s information concerning the communicated situation. The notion of *evidentiality* is examined in narrow and broad senses. As regards the narrow sense, *evidentiality* means the source of knowledge and provides the evidence for what it narrates [24]. In the wide sense- *evidentiality* includes any expression of attitude to the transmitted knowledge.

Evidentiality is normally characterized as a set of categories that indicate the speaker’s “source of information” or “the nature of the evidence” for the speaker’s belief. Goddard adds that many evidential categories do not involve *think*, such as visual, auditory, and “hearsay” categories (based on *see*, *hear*, and *say*, respectively), and many so-called “inferential” evidentials seem to be concerned with indicating that new

knowledge is based on other or prior knowledge, e.g., “**I know** this now because **I know** something else”. However, he noted that when an evidential category is said to indicate “conjecture”, “speculation”, or the like, one may well conclude that the component *I think* is involved. The relationship between the notions of *epistemic modality* and *evidentiality* turn out to be somewhat problematic. *Evidentiality* has commonly been understood to refer mostly (only) to the source of knowledge and the type of evidence that a speaker has for making a claim or assertion. The opinion on where *evidentiality* fits in with *epistemicity* and which one is considered the superordinate category varies from one researcher to another. Chafe, for example, considers *evidentiality* in a broad sense as attitudes toward knowledge, coding both speakers’ attitude towards the reliability of knowledge and his/her source of knowledge or mode of knowing [25]. Many authors observe that it is conversation which is the most involved style in its marking of *evidentiality*. *Evidentiality*, as a marked source of transferred knowledge/ information, can be viewed as mental inference or transmission of the heard or read. This is a cognitively singled out linguistic category, which has its own independent lexico-grammatical execution in language. Within the framework of legal discourse, for example, it would represent a hierarchical system of evidential/testimonial meanings, which reflects the fact that the speaker claims his statements/propositions with the most achievable evidence. Thus, during the legal process/ legal procedure verification of the defendant or witnesses is often built upon the factors of understanding, belief and assessment of the information presented/communicated. Important issues that are taken into consideration include epistemic base of the information transmitted by means of language, its modality, i.e. belief, doubt, assertion, proposition. It is clear that *epistemic modality* and *evidentiality* are related, and that the dividing-line between the two is often unclear. According to Traugott [26], they also share a great number of similarities in their semantic development, and that the choice of one as a superordinate category over the other is then almost a matter of terminological convenience. Some authors (e.g. Elise Karkkainen) adhere to a more widely held view and consider evidential distinctions as part of the marking of *epistemic modality*. This is motivated by her definition of *epistemicity*, as different ways of showing commitment towards what one is saying, or, specifying somewhat, as different attitudes toward knowledge.

It is the notion of *subjectivity* that has been seen as the common property of both *epistemic modality* and *evidential* [6; 8]. The study of modality in language is also complex due to the thing that linguists make the division also within the *epistemic modality* as such: between *subjective* and *objective modality*. John Lyons in his introduction to “Subjecthood and subjectivity”, refers to the interest in linguistic *subjectivity* as “... currently fashionable” [27]. There have been many studies highlighting ways in which speakers use language to express their perceptions, feelings, and opinions in discourse (i.e., *subjectivity*) and how such expressive motivation and strategies conventionalize and interact with linguistic structure (i.e. subjectification). A common characterization of *modality* has been that it is associated with the subjective characteristics of an utterance, i.e., a speaker’s subjective attitudes and beliefs, as opposed to an objective statement of a proposition. *Subjectivity* has been argued to be an essential criterion for *modality*. Benveniste [28], for example, writes: “Language is marked so deeply by the expression of *subjectivity* that one might ask if it could still function and be called language if it were constructed otherwise”. The author characterizes *subjectivity* as the ability of speakers to view themselves as subjects and discusses how common grammatical categories, in particular, person (in the form of personal pronouns), contribute to this expressive capacity of speakers. The distinction between subjective and objective *epistemic modality* is formally captured in some terms in Lyons’ system, where it is assumed that *subjective* epistemic interpretations are illocutionary force indicators and have higher scope than *objective* epistemic interpretations [29]. Lyons also comments that the majority of epistemic interpretations of modal expressions in natural language are subjective and that these interpretations are more ‘basic’ than objective ones, which are closer to the logicians’ ‘alethic’ modality.

Thus, there can be specified two sides of *modality*: subjective and objective. Within the subjective framework one can define the type of *modality* which expresses the established by speaker attitude of the contents of statement to reality from the point of view of its being true or false. Such type of *modality* serves as the expression of epistemic possibility and demonstrates the degree of understanding of the connections and relations of reality on part of the speaker. Research is beginning to show that not just “traditional” categories of stance, such as mood and modality, are indices of speaker’s attitude, but that our everyday language use is inherently subjective at many levels. Therefore, the general subjectivity of everyday language use can be illustrated by the fact that speakers seldom report “bare” facts, events or actions in an unmediated manner,

but consistently convey their points of view, evaluations, opinions, and attitudes while doing so. Expression of epistemic stance is highly persistent in everyday spoken interaction as in fact speakers show more concern for marking their epistemic stance than marking attitudes or evaluations, or expressing personal feelings and emotions. In her “Japanese and German ‘I think-constructions’” article, Christiane Hohenstein reflects on the matrix constructions with verbs of thinking and feeling (*verba sentiendi*) researched within a range of theoretical frameworks. In functional semantics they are interpreted as expressions of *epistemic modality* denoting mental states and/or activities which systematically express *subjectivity* and are, at the same time, related to *evidentiality* and *hedging*. The constructions have also been understood as a means of propositional attitude, speaker’s stance or subjectivity towards the subordinated proposition [30]. As a distinctive characteristic of *epistemic modality*, a lot of scholars refer to its *subjectivity*, relating it mainly to the definition of *epistemic modality*, as expressing the attitude of the speaker to the statement. Such definition highlights that, according to their opinion, while constructing the statement with epistemic assessment, the conclusion/judgment made by the speaker plays an important role, and not only the objectivity from the point of view of the facts in case. One of the sources of *subjectivity* in language is represented by the 1st person singular pronouns, which as Benveniste notes, is a rich source of *subjectivity* in language in that it explicitly refers to the speaker. For instance, *I* with verbs such as *feel*, *believe*, *suppose* typically express the speaker’s attitude regarding the following piece of discourse or an event in the current contexts. When the same verbs occur with the 3rd person singular subjects (she/he), however, what is conveyed may sound descriptive or informative.

Diachronically, as Traugott [29; 31] claims, *subjectivity* meaning represents the last stage in semantic change, i.e. meanings tend to become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief or attitude towards the proposition. She also concludes that the English *I think* is becoming more *subjective* both in function towards a fixed phrase indicating speaker’s epistemic attitude) and in the overwhelming selection of the first person subject form. From a synchronic perspective, *subjectivity* is beginning to be seen as a major principle in much of language use and is becoming a crucial area in functionalist research [32]. Iwasaki observes that conversation is characterized by a focus on interpersonal interaction and by the conveying *subjective* information. One of the most frequent *stance markers* in conversational cases is *I thought* used as a frame for reporting the speaker’s own thoughts, either actual or imaginary, in some earlier interaction or situation. Thus, even though the actual judgment is thereby shifted into the past, this *epistemic phrase* still lends a subjective shade/ “flavor” towards what is being told in the present situation. It allows the narrator’s “personal self” to be highlighted at crucial moments. Scheibman’s study shows that most common interactive AE discourse are those subject-predicate combinations that permit speakers to personalize their contributions, emphasize attitude and situation, evaluate, and negotiate with certainty with other participants. Thus, even though *epistemic modality* by definition is an important manifestation of *subjectivity* in language, displays of subjectivity extend beyond the category of modality in a narrow sense. In her concept of subjectification, Traugott [33] defines the latter as a process whereby “meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude toward the proposition”, highlighting the subjective forms (i.e. involving the first person pronoun) in conversational interaction, like *I think*, *I believe*, etc. In the Nuyts’ concept of *subjectivity* within *epistemic modality*, *subjectivity* has two poles of *subjectivity* and *intersubjectivity*, and is essentially based on the notion of *evidentiality*. Epistemic expressions are considered to be more subjective if the evidence on which the epistemic judgment is based is only accessible to the speaker and more intersubjective if the evidence is known to, or accessible to, a larger group of people. Nuyts, however, also offers another concept: “performative” vs. “descriptive” use of modal expressions. In the former type of use, the speaker is giving his or her personal opinion at the time of speech, while in the latter “no direct indication about the speaker’s present point of view” is given.

Karkkainen, who studied *modality* in institutional discourse within the framework of interactive discourse analysis, argues that *modality* points to the social construction of knowledge systems and of the relative discourse statuses between the participants in interaction. Based on the thorough analysis of everyday American English, the author concludes that “language that conveys how things are from our perspective is prevalent in everyday AE and very likely in many languages of the world”. In this way, *epistemic modality* presents “... one routine way of conveying the speaker’s perspective, and it thereby becomes part of the overall social dimension of the utterance.” There have been various attempts in linguistic pragmatics and discourse analysis to examine the interactional functions of *epistemic modality*. These studies have often covered the whole

sub-system of *epistemic modality*, a consistent semantic domain, and have explored the potential interactional functions that could be established within it. The terms for this area of language use varied from “expressions of stance”, “hedging devices”, “boosters”, or “attenuators” to ‘pragmatic force modifiers’, etc. There is a growing body of research that shows that *epistemicity* in English is made use of by speakers in interaction with the scope to achieve rather diverse social functions, among them being: a politeness /face saving function, the function of constructing one’s authority or the relevant discourse statutes of participants, the function of achieving certain conversational actions within certain sequential environments, the function of regulating aspects of interaction (topic transition or the participation framework), or simply the function of displaying (true or “fake”) uncertainty. What is common to the more recent works in the field is that they focus not on the speaker’s expressed commitment or attitude towards knowledge as such (as a *cognitive phenomenon*), but on the interactional use that such expressions and attitudes may be applied to actual social contexts, and what kind of interactional effects and consequences they may have on the recipient(s) and on the interaction process.

As *epistemic* expressions are not part of the *proposition* but show attitudes towards it, they can take on “higher level” interactional functions and do other work in discourse, so, speakers seldom express “bare” propositions without coding their attitude to them or parts of them. Nikula views a number of linguistic expressions that she calls *pragmatic force modifiers* as having a modifying function, whereby they act as *hedges* or *emphatics*, and simultaneously serving an interpersonal function, either that of *politeness* or of *involvement*. Her group of *pragmatic force modifiers* consists largely (not exclusively) of expressions of *epistemic modality*. More recently, *stance styles* and *stances* have begun to be regarded, not as static phenomena residing within individual speakers, but responsive to interactional requirements and social contexts within which speakers and recipients interact. Thus, the focus has been moved from the individual speaker towards a more dialogical approach, and towards the social construction of meaning. Based on the extensive research material accumulated, Taionio highlighted the examples of cases where speakers may claim that they do not remember doing/saying something, when there is in fact some evidence that they do, and that presenting oneself as not possessing some information can be used to perform certain interactional functions in conversation.

One of the common approaches to *modality* study has been to regard *epistemic modality* as a strategy within the theory of linguistic politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson. Very often *epistemic markers* have been marked to act as *hedges* on illocutionary force. Thus, Holmes considers *epistemic modality* as part of a larger array of linguistic forms used for boosting or attenuating the illocutionary force of speech acts, for the purpose of orienting towards the hearer’s need to be liked and approved of (*positive face*). A commonly used definition is the one by Hyland, which states that *hedges* are “the means by which writers can present a proposition as an opinion rather than a fact”. *Epistemic modality markers* constitute a specific and frequent type of *hedge*. *Hedging*, or the mitigation of claims, is often seen as a rhetorical device used to convince and influence the reader. *Hedging* is also mentioned as an argumentative strategy considered to be crucial to, for example, the writer of scientific texts, based on the assumption that all statements conveying new knowledge are hedged, because they have not yet gained acceptance in the scientific community. Regarding the conversational functions of English *I think*, a number of scholars (e.g. Aijmer, Kärrkäinen, Scheibman) have observed that it serves a range of conventionalized conversational and illocutionary functions, for example, to make suggestions or to mitigate disagreement—not found in many other languages. Tsui describes an epistemic item *I don’t know* in terms of its chronological placement, as a marker used for avoiding assessment, pre-facing disagreements, avoiding explicit disagreements, avoiding commitment, minimizing impolite beliefs and indicating uncertainty. Following Tsui, it can be therefore concluded that, even though *I don’t know* is a “a declaration of insufficient knowledge” it acquires several interactional functions when the utterance occurs in different sequential environments. Schebman underlines that the negative auxiliary *don’t* consistently appears in a reduced form when it occurs in its most frequent context, i.e. in the collocation *I don’t know*, where it primarily functions as an *epistemic downtoner* or *politeness marker*.

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