# MODALITY OF LEXICOGRAPHIC DISCOURSE IN DICTIONARIES OF USAGE

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**Abstract.** Dictionaries are increasingly making use of corpus data or, at least, of secondary sources based on them. This has brought about a revision of the concept of the standard of usage and changes in modality of lexicographic discourse, first in general-purpose explanatory dictionaries and later in dictionaries of usage. The paper analyses *Oxford Fowler's Modern English Usage*, registering the markers of frequency in its entries expressing modal meanings other than "statement of fact" for epistemic modality and modal markers expressing deontic modal meanings, taking into account high and low modality in both types. The findings have revealed that the balance is decidedly in favour of epistemic modality, while in both types of modality it is in favour of low modality markers. The data show that some epistemic markers of frequency referring to high probability or likelihood of occurrence have functions opposite to those in academic discourse beyond lexicography, where they are used primarily as hedges. This allows us to conclude that genre (or type of discourse) and context are the decisive factors in establishing the meanings and functions of modality markers.

**Key words:** lexicographic discourse, epistemic modality, deontic modality, high and low modality, modal meanings, modality markers

## INTRODUCTION

The term *modality* was used in metalexicography at least since the 1970s, first in the French tradition where attention was drawn to explanatory mono-lingual dictionaries as samples of "discours didactique" (didactic discourse) – metalinguistic texts of didactic nature (e.g., Dubois, 1970; Rey and Delesalle, 1979: 14).

Dictionaries of usage, traditionally focusing on difficult or debatable issues, rather than on comprehensive coverage of the word-stock, had always been even more overtly prescriptive. However, in recent decades, largely due to the use of corpora, first beyond lexicography and later within it, the prescriptive stance of explanatory dictionaries became less prominent: both the selection of headwords and recommendations on language use were increasingly based on corpus data rather than on the compilers' personal preferences or well-entrenched views of the general public. In our view, the current state of affairs involves two related kinds of changes. One concerns the nature of the author-reader relationship, the other – the very concept of the standard of usage.

Firstly, new dictionaries of usage are in a dubious position. On the one hand, they have to respond to the needs of the users who turn to them when feeling insecure about their language and, having no desire or qualifications to go into details of academic debate on language standards, expect clear, simple and explicit advice on "grey" areas of language use. The authoritative nature of dictionaries was habitually seen as natural by both their readers and writers: 'Old-time lexicographers [...] knew what was good for their public' (Bejoint, 2000: 140).

On the other hand, dictionaries of usage slowly followed the trend set by explanatory monolingual dictionaries and, having claimed that their recommendations are now partly based at least on secondary sources, e.g., grammars using corpus data, or even on corpus data directly (the first usage book based on data from large corpora of American and British English as primary sources was *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* by P. Peters published in 2004), they found themselves in the domain of academic discourse with its own established conventions and aversion to "prescriptivism" seen as an inevitable though lamentable feature of dictionaries of usage. The habitual patronizingly dismissive attitude of linguists gave way to debate on more equal footing. Academic conventions involve a different kind of relationship between the author (in this case the compilers of a dictionary) and the reader. They cannot any longer be entirely authoritative "law-givers". Their claim to truth is restricted by possible refutations of colleagues who might hold other views on a particular problem. Academic writers address the community of peers who are, at least theoretically, their equals in terms of background knowledge and qualifications. The writer has to convince the reader that the findings of the research (in this case – recommendations) based on the interpretation of the data analysed are valid and reliable. Thus, both strong assertions and modulated statements will be found in academic texts. Many propositions are formulated provisionally or tentatively rather than categorically: 'Writers will highly consider the amount of certainty they should put in a particular statement according to the amount of reliable data backing this statement' (Vazquez and Giner, 2008: 175). Thus hedging is a usual feature of scholarly communication: 'Academic discourse is a world of uncertainties, indirectness, and non-finality – in brief, a world where it is natural to cultivate hedges' (Mauranen, 1887: 115 in Vazquez and Giner, 2008: 172).

Secondly, the increasing use of corpora by grammars and general explanatory dictionaries has brought about a change in the concept of the standard of usage. This new concept accepts variation as a legitimate and acceptable feature of Standard English. The most important parameters of variation are, according to the register theory developed by M. Halliday's school of systemic functional linguistics, the three register variables: mode (written and spoken, now also electronic, combining the features of the former two in various degrees), tenor (degrees of formality stemming from the roles of participants of communication and interpersonal distance between them) and field (what is discussed) (Eggins, 2004: 52 – 67). The *Longman Guide to English Usage* proclaimed as early as 1988

that 'standards are different in different periods of time; in different places; and on different occasions' and that 'there cannot be a single standard' (1988: v). In other words, it was acknowledged that the standard of usage is 'a dynamic system capable of responding to the situation by introducing changes into the balance of parameters' (Doroshenko, 2005: 346).

These two changes allow us to hypothesize that the modality of recommendations in dictionaries of usage could have developed some features of academic discourse and that this can be traced in certain features of the texts of their entries.

Traditionally the default modality of lexicographic texts was a statement of fact. Even though '…the absence of the grammatical predicate linking the word defined and the definition […] and preference for non-finite verbal forms make the texts of definitions devoid of modality in the narrowly grammatical sense of the term, they possess modality in a broader sense' (Doroshenko, 2006: 369), e.g., in terms of the claim to reliability or truth-value of a text.

Changes in modality had certainly taken place in general-purpose explanatory dictionaries. Definitions formulated as complete sentences (the tendency steadily gaining ground since the first edition of the ground-breaking *Cobuild* (1987) made some other famous dictionary brands adopt the practice at least partly) retained the default modality in predicates (A is/means/refers to/is used to denote, etc., B). But the claim to the absolute truth-value of these statements was often moderated by certain qualifiers, making them no longer universally applicable to all levels of usage or to all communicative situations. To mention just two kinds of such qualifiers out of many:

– labels relating to one or several of the three variables (in the *Cobuild* series at first given within definitions): formal, literary, informal, spoken, written, British/American English, disapproving, derogatory, legal use, etc.;

– hedges which had formerly been exceptionally rare in dictionary definitions, but were now used not only for meanings, but also for grammar and pronunciation: "usually", "often", "some", "sometimes", "especially", etc. Both kinds of qualifiers can be used within the same entry.

Examples (with qualifiers underlined):

**Honey**… You call someone **honey** as a sign of affection [mainly AM]

**Afterglow**… is the glow that remains after a light has gone… [LITERARY].

**Beatnik**…people sometimes use the word to refer to anyone who lives in an unconventional way.

If an attack or an attempt **is beaten off**… it is stopped, often temporarily (*Cobuild*, 2009).

To investigate modality in the usually more conservative modern dictionaries of usage, a brief review of relevant theoretical problems is necessary.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1. TYPES OF MODALITY AND MODAL MEANINGS, STRONG/HIGH AND WEAK/LOW MODALITY

The discussion of modality in contemporary lexicographic discourse requires considering both modal meanings and ways of expressing them. Research on modality cannot boast of either commonly established terminology or of clarity about the hierarchy of some key terms, e.g., *types of modality* and *modal meanings* are either interchangeable, or the latter is reserved for particular meanings within a single type of modality. Distinctions of types of modality are numerous: epistemic/extrinsic, deontic/intrinsic, dynamic (included or not in epistemic), existential, root/intrinsic (covering both deontic and dynamic), agent-oriented and speaker-oriented as two super-categories in some sources, but the latter is part of deontic modality in others, etc. (Online 1).Apart from some admittedly unresolved issues and overlaps between the types, the question of the list of modal meanings even within a single type remains open. Sources differ on their scope, number and subdivisions. The *Brief Glossary of Modality* (Online 1) lists, e.g., Coate's 12 'modalities', Leech's 11 modal meanings, Mindt's 17 'modalities', Palmer's 8 modal meanings, Quirk's 3 modal meanings, etc., to mention only some classifications.

Moreover, some means of expressing modality, especially modal verbs, can denote different meanings, depending on the context, especially within either epistemic or deontic modality, but also across their boundaries, e.g., **must** can express necessity, certainty, and obligation: 'A characteristic feature of the modals… is their semantic vagueness' (Jacobsson, 1994:168 quoted in (Online 1). The observation is echoed in the statement that some modal elements 'have ambiguous modality values' in Hodge and Cress (1999: 134) and in numerous other sources. It might be for this reason that in some classifications modal meanings are grouped in pairs; e.g., Quirk's list comprises: permission-possibility/ ability; obligation – necessity; volition-prediction, seen as three domains of meaning. The first member of each pair represents intrinsic modality (subject to some human control), the second – extrinsic (resulting from human judgment), ability not quite fitting into this scheme (Quirk et al., 1985: 219). It is within these pairs that semantic ambiguity or indeterminacy of modal auxiliaries is particularly obvious, e.g. **shall** and **will** are used for both volition and prediction, **can** – for both permission and possibility, etc. (however, this can happen also across the three pairs: **must** – for obligation and necessity within a pair, but also for possibility or prediction, both beyond it).

Among the numerous distinctions of types of modality the most common and sufficient for our purposes is the one between epistemic and deontic modality, epistemic being concerned (summarily) with assessment of possibility, likelihood, necessity, and the truth-value of propositions; deontic – with obligation and permission. Epistemic and deontic modalities are, under a different guise,

also the core elements of the functional systemic approach to modality which distinguishes between modalization and modulation.

Modalization involves two kinds of meanings: (1) probability (the speaker expresses judgments as to the likelihood or probability of something happening or being) and (2) degrees of certainty, likelihood or usuality/frequency (the speaker expresses judgments as to the frequency with which something happens or is). Modulation involves the meanings of obligation or inclination (how willing I am to do something, want to, like to, am willing to, happy to do it) (Eggins, 2004:179-188, from Halliday, 1985a: 85-9 and 332-45).

Though *epistemic* and *deontic* will be used below as the terms for two modality types, all the three semantic domains listed under modalization and modulation are worth exploring as relevant for the analysis. Additionally, for the purposes of this paper the distinctions of modal meanings made in *The Communicative Grammar of English* by G. Leech (1994) were consulted for possibly relevant modal senses.

It should be noted that even the same modal meanings allow for indeterminacy in one more respect. Leech treats some modal meanings as different (i.e. uses different terms for them), but, at the same time, points out that the difference actually lies in the degrees of essentially the same meaning. For example, though **should** is listed by him under "advice" as in: *You should stay in bed until you start to recover* (Leech, 1994: 164), it is also listed under 'other ways of expressing obligation' together with **ought to, had better**, etc., and is said to 'express an obligation which may not be fulfilled' (Leech, 1994: 168) in contexts very similar to those of "advice". The use of terms like "weakened obligation', 'weakened prohibition" also shows that he views certain modal meanings as gradable. For our purposes, it is important that an obligation 'which may not be fulfilled' and advice both express a weakened obligation. Thus, we shall employ in the analysis the distinction between *high* (or strong) and *low* (or weak) modality used by Hodge and Kress. In their terms, modality is 'situated on a continuum between affirmation (high affinity, high modality) and negation (weak or zero affinity/modality)' (Hodge and Cress, 1999: 264). The distinction between high and low modality, formulated in the semiotic framework for both verbal and non-verbal texts, goes back to Ch. Peirce's semiotic theory. Iconic signs resembling what they signify have the highest modality, indexical signs based on inference have a high modality, but lower than icons, while symbols based on convention have the lowest modality (Hodge and Cress, 1999: 27). This view has a parallel also in many purely linguistic studies. Modality is discussed as a semantic scale or 'a gradable concept for which scalar analysis is appropriate', e.g., in Brewer, 1987; ii. In systemic functional linguistics both modalization and modulation have degrees, e.g., high – **must**, median – **should/supposed to**, low – **may, allowed to** (Eggins, 2004: 189). We shall consider modal meanings from the viewpoint of high and low modality only, leaving out the "median". We assumed that statements of fact for epistemic and obligation for deontic in lexicographic

descriptions are the default (or traditional) modalities used in dictionaries (which is not the same as "median" in Eggins' framework), contrary to the view that modalization and modulation refer only to the intermediate positions between the two extremes: 'stating that something IS or is NOT' (Eggins, 2004: 178-179). The assumption that all utterances are modalized (Hodge and Cress, 1999: 123), and not just some of them, is closer both to the approach of traditional grammar with, e.g., its indicative, imperative and subjunctive "moods" and to the distinction of three types of modality: actuality, necessity and possibility, in logic. The default modality is then seen as 'an overall modality value which acts as a base-line for the genre. This base-line can be different for different kinds of viewer/reader, and for different texts […], but these differences themselves acquire significance from their relationship in the genre's basic modality value' (Hodge and Cress, 1999: 142).

## 2. EXPRESSION OF MODALITY: MODALITY MARKERS, MODALITY CUES, HEDGES

When discussing modality of lexicographic texts not often viewed from this perspective, the question of elements expressing modality comes to the foreground. According to Hodge and Cress, modality is expressed and interpreted through 'modality cues, which include both specialized modality markers and also all the other bases for modality judgments' (Hodge and Cress, 1999: 128).

The most common term applied is *hedges* or *hedging*. However, 'Hedges are still very problematic to define precisely' (Vazquez and Giner, 2008: 172). In fact, their definitions depend largely on the goals of a particular research, and thus, ultimately, on the genre investigated, e.g., for studies in modality of academic writing hedges related to epistemic modality are of prime relevance: 'Hedges in academic writing are studied as the most common realization of two rhetorical strategies […]: the qualification of the writer's commitment (boosters) or lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition' (Vazquez and Giner, 2008: 172). Hedges are understood then as 'modifications of the commitment to the truth-value of propositions' (ibid.), which involves epistemic modality only, but examples for *hedge* in *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics* (Matthews, 2005: 161) relate hedging to both epistemic and deontic modality. Then **must** and **should**, used in deontic modal meanings, are also hedges. Since we suppose that for the entries of dictionaries of usage both epistemic and deontic modality might be relevant, it is preferable to view hedges as embracing both types.

However, this still leaves us with the term which is not sufficiently inclusive: in view of its commonly assumed functions, a *hedge* is not inclusive in terms of stronger/higher – weaker/lower modality. Namely, it is commonly reserved for elements playing modality down, both with the authors who differentiate hedges from boosters, and even with those who do not: 'A hedge is any linguistic device by which a speaker avoids being compromised by a statement that turns out to be wrong, a request that is not acceptable, and so on' (ibid.) (however, *booster*

is not in the list of entries of this dictionary). In other words, for signals of high modality the term *hedge* is not in wide currency. Given the tendency to discuss hedges mostly in terms of epistemic modality rather than deontic and the long-standing association of hedging with low modality, we shall use instead the term *modality markers* as more inclusive.

## GOALS OF ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The analysis focuses on one of the dictionaries of usage in the *Fowler* series: *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, edited by R. Allen and published by Oxford University Press (1999) 2004. The parent work is the famous H.W. Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, first published in 1926, revised by E. Gowers in 1965 and by R. Burchfield in 1996 and in 1998. The 2004 version is based primarily on Burchfield's version (the number of entries was reduced to over 4000 instead of the initial 8000, but 150 entries are new). However, its database has been updated and expanded. In *Acknowledgements* it is stated that The British National Corpus comprising about 100 million words was consulted, providing 'over 800 attributed examples out of a total of about 1600 examples that are new to this edition'. While dictionaries of usage are traditionally prescriptive in nature, each new revision aimed, in line with the descriptive bent of modern linguistics, at increasing the descriptive element and avoiding subjective value judgments.

The goals of the analysis were to find out:

– how different the modality of entries in *Fowler's* dictionary is from the traditional default modality of lexicographic entries (statement of fact for epistemic and strong obligation for deontic);

– which modality markers are used to express modal meanings;

– what is the balance between high and low modality statements in texts of dictionary entries;

– whether the functions of epistemic modality markers in dictionary entries are the same as in academic writing.

The range of modality markers analysed and therefore the scope of the discussion is quite limited: for epistemic modality only the markers relating frequency of usage have been chosen, but for deontic markers only those covering the following range of meanings: obligation, prohibition, advice and permission. Thus, a wide scope of epistemic modal markers related to probability, certainty or uncertainty as regards the validity of the proposition, or degree of commitment to its truth-value, etc., has been omitted. This leaves several questions unaddressed so far, e.g., what is the balance between epistemic and deontic modality on the whole (which type dominates); what is the full range of modal meanings employed in the texts of dictionary entries and which of them dominate; what are the dominating modality markers.

## DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE OF ANALYSIS

The data comprised all entries for the letter E in *Oxford Fowler's Modern English Usage*: pages 192-235, the total number of entries is 206. The collection of data involved registering markers of frequency in the entries expressing modal meanings others than "statement of fact" for epistemic modality and all modal markers expressing deontic modal meanings listed above. Within each type relevant modal meanings were singled out, taking into account Quirk's, Leech's and systemic functional classifications as general guidelines for the data available. The meanings of some central modals, e.g., **can**, with ambiguous modal values (either epistemic or deontic) were identified relying on the context.

No distinctions regarding lexical-grammatical categories (word-classes) of modality markers – modal verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs or adverbial phrases – were made when grouping the data: their presence regardless of the category was important. *Possible, possibly, possibility* or *common/commonly, typical, typically* are no different as far as the modal meanings expressed by them are concerned. Thus, e.g., adjectives and adverbs of the same root were counted as one element when compiling the list of elements serving as modality markers, but tokens (number of incidences) of modality markers were also taken into account to find out the overall number of modality markers used to express particular modal meanings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. EPISTEMIC MODALITY MARKERS: FREQUENCY, PROBABILITY AND RECOMMENDED USE

The data on markers related to frequency of use are summarized in the table below. Examples:

> **Escalate…** is now <u>rarely</u> used in its first meaning 'to travel on an escalator'. By the 1950s, it had come into <u>regular</u> use to mean 'to increase or develop rapidly by stages', <u>chiefly</u> in the context of military and political conflicts. <u>Typical</u> examples of that time are…
>
> **e-mail**… is <u>often</u> spelt with a hyphen…
>
> **envelop**… <u>normally</u> pronounced en- rather than in-.
>
> **envisage**… in its <u>common</u> construction followed by a verbal noun...
>
> **Epic** is a term <u>traditionally</u> applied (first as adjective, later as a noun) to narrative poems.

The data show that the number of tokens is more than half of the total number of entries (105 for 206 entries), i.e. markers of frequency feature quite prominently in the sample. Sometimes several are found in one entry, so their distribution across entries is far from even. The total number of elements is 26, and in the group of higher frequency markers some are obviously more prominent: *normal/*

*Table 1* **High and low frequency markers.**

| Frequency markers | Set of markers and number of each marker's tokens | Number of markers | Number of markers' tokens |
|---|---|---|---|
| high frequency markers | normal/normally 20<br>common/commonly 18<br>often 13<br>usual/usually 11<br>typical/typically 5<br>regular (use) 3<br>generally 2<br>traditionally 2<br>increasingly (found) 1<br>chiefly 1<br>mainly 1<br>(in) many (uses) 1<br>ordinary (usage) 1<br>permanent (currency) 1<br>prevailed over 1<br>(by) weight of usage 1<br>widely (used) 1 | 17 | 83 |
| low frequency markers | sometimes 7<br>occasionally 4<br>rare/rarely 3<br>(a) few 2<br>from time to time 1<br>hardly ever 1<br>less usual 1<br>not much (used) 1<br>not often 1<br>some (currency) 1 | 9 | 22 |
| Total | | 26 | 105 |

*normally, common/commonly, often* and *usual/usually* account for the majority of tokens (62 of 83). High frequency usage markers are used overwhelmingly for recommended, not prohibited use. There is only one exception in the entry where "common" use is paired with "non-standard", but "common" is restricted twice: in terms of tenor (degree of formality) and regional variation:

> **easy**... otherwise, its use as an adverb is non-standard, though <u>common</u> informally in BrE.

The prevalence of high over low frequency markers shows that *Fowler* tends to promote good practice, rather than advise against bad.

The examples from entries cited above show that modality markers concern frequency of usage as such ('typical examples'), spheres of use, i.e. field ('in the context of military and political conflicts'), semantics, syntax, spelling,

pronunciation. Other aspects are: word-building and inflection, style, etc. – in fact, language elements of any level.

Only five high frequency markers from Table 1 are present in Hyland's (2005) list of hedging items in academic writing (in Vazquez and Giner, 2008: 179): *generally, mainly, often, typical/typically, usually*. It should be noted, though, that in texts of dictionary entries they have the function opposite to that attributed to them in research on academic writing (where they are viewed as hedges modulating statements). As hedges in academic writing, these words modulate claims on universal truth, but in dictionary entries they are opposed to *rare* and other markers of low modality, thus acquiring the function of markers of high or strong modality.

*Frequent* is practically always synonymous to "recommended" by an authoritative dictionary. This could be explained by the fact that in corpus studies and corpus-based dictionaries the concept of frequency is now elevated to the status of the main argument in favour of legitimacy of a particular instance of use: 'If a pattern becomes very frequent in use across very large quantities of text, then it becomes 'entrenched' as part of the system. Frequency in text becomes probability in the system' (Stubbs, 2007: 127). The *Fowler's* dictionary echoes this stand by mostly refraining from any advice with markers of either high or low frequency referring to use and by explicitly stating at least twice in the sample that widespread use is a stronger argument than any opinion:

> **enjoin**…this construction is now too <u>common</u> to be objected to.
>
> **extend**…few would object to its use today, which is <u>common</u>.
>
> **erotica**… is a plural noun… although it is <u>often</u> treated as a singular mass noun…

The last example is seemingly an opposite case (recommended usage is not the form used most often), but the recommendation is immediately qualified by the subsequent statement: 'In many uses number is not explicit'.

However, when high frequency markers refer to opinions and beliefs about language use, they are often challenged:

> **equal**… is <u>often</u> regarded as an absolute that cannot be qualified. However, this rule does not apply to all meanings.

Thus, while 'Different genres, […] establish […] sets of specific modality markers' (Hodge and Cress, 1999: 142), they may also use the same modality markers in different meanings or functions which can be established only if markers are viewed not in isolation but in relation to other members of the whole set and to the words they qualify (i.e. in their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations). The meanings of frequency markers fit well into the categories suggested for 'modalization' by systemic functional linguistics, namely: probability, degrees of likelihood or usuality/frequency.

Notably, *Fowler's* avoids using *frequent/frequently* in its entries, and with a good reason: frequency is a technical term in corpus linguistics where it can and should

be measured exactly, but corpus data were not the primary source of *Fowler's* – they were "consulted" for improvements. Other words relating to frequency are used instead, frequency being presented as a scalar property from *normal/common*, etc. to *rarely, hardly ever*. The scale of frequency is further differentiated by additional markers for frequency markers: *very (common), more, most (often, usual, commonly used, etc.), about (equally common), less (usual)*.

## 2. DEONTIC MODALITY MARKERS AND THE RANGE OF DEONTIC MODAL MEANINGS

The data on deontic modality markers are summarized in the table below.

*Table 2* **Deontic modality markers.**

| Modal meanings | Set of markers and number of each marker's tokens | Number of markers | Number of markers' tokens |
|---|---|---|---|
| strong obligation | has to be used 1<br>need to use 1<br>requires/is required 2 | 3 | 4 |
| weak obligation | Should (be distinguished, followed by, pronounced, replaced, used, written, etc.) 10 | 1 | 10 |
| obligation | | 4 | 14 |
| strong prohibition | cannot (say, be used) 4<br>not possible 1<br>not permitted 1 | 3 | 6 |
| weak prohibition | should not (be used) 5<br>should (be avoided, replaced by) 2 | 1 | 7 |
| prohibition | | 4 | 13 |
| permission | can (say, be used, substituted with) 3 | 1 | 3 |
| advice, positive | (it is) useful (to) 2<br>(it is) advisable (to) 1<br>(it) is best (to) 3<br>better (formation) 1<br>prefer/(is) preferred/<br>(is) preferable (to)/preferably/<br>(with a) preference (for) 13 | 5 | 20 |
| advice, negative | (is) best (avoided) 2 | 1 | 2 |
| permission, advice | | 7 | |
| Total | | 15 | 52 |

Examples:

> **enough**… <u>cannot</u> be used with mass nouns…
>
> **each and every**… is <u>best</u> reserved for special effect…
>
> **entitled**…<u>should not</u> be used as a synonym of *liable to*… Here should be replaced by *deserved to*.
>
> **either**… it is <u>advisable</u> to restrict *either* to contexts in which…
>
> **encrust**, meaning 'to cover with a crust', is <u>preferable to</u> *incrust*.
>
> **eventuate**… *result* or *come about*, or simply *happen*, are often <u>preferable</u> alternatives.

The range of modality markers used in dictionary entries for obligation comprises only four units, i.e., it is much narrower than in the list provided by Leech (**must, have to, got to, should, ought to, need to, had better, shall, require**) (1994: 163-164). Two elements are used for prohibition out of six in Leech (**cannot, may not, mustn't, shouldn't, oughtn't to, had better not**) (ibid.: 165). Notably, for either obligation or prohibition **must**/**must not**, carrying the strongest implications, are not used. Generally, other expressions are used about twice as often than central modals for deontic modality.

The range of deontic modality meanings in the table is: obligation, prohibition, permission and advice. For advice **prefer, preferred, preferable, preferably, preference** are listed among other modality markers. While they are described by Leech in the section *Mood, emotion and attitude* (1994:157-158) and preference does not feature in lists of deontic modal meanings, in the texts of dictionary entries this group of words certainly refers not to personal liking and disliking, but to advisability or desirability of particular use, and can therefore be viewed as belonging to specific deontic modality markers established, as suggested by Hodge and Kress, by different genres of texts (1999: 142). It should be noted, however, that in some entries **preference** and **preferred** could possibly denote also preferences of speakers:

> **eastward, eastwards…** are both used for the adverb, with a preference for *eastwards*.
>
> **eyrie**… is the preferred spelling.

In this case they would be indicators of frequency and thus epistemic rather than deontic modality markers, but the context does not allow us to disambiguate the meaning, thus indeterminacy of interpretation is inevitable.

Obligation and prohibition are each represented by 14 and 3 tokens, and weak modality prevails in both summarily over strong: 17 versus 10 tokens. Since both permission and advice (positive and negative) are weaker than obligation and prohibition, they add 25 tokens to low modality markers, i.e. low deontic modality prevails convincingly over strong: 42 to 10 tokens.

As compared to epistemic modality, even though it is represented in the data by frequency markers only, deontic modality markers have a considerably lower profile in the dictionary.

## CONCLUSIONS

Within each of the two types of modality: epistemic and deontic, the scale of low and high modality in *Fowler's* dictionary entries has been identified, which means that modality of lexicographic discourse can be described as gradable.

High modality markers traditionally indicating a high degree of reliability and authority of lexicographic statements largely give way to low modality markers which dominate in terms of both the number of elements and the number of their tokens.

The domination of low modality in the texts of entries and of epistemic modality over deontic modality changes the relationship between dictionary makers and the two categories of dictionary readers: the general public and the academic community. It makes the traditionally highly prescriptive dictionary of usage part of modern academic discourse where low modality markers limiting the claim to absolute truth are common. The dictionary respects these conventions; and it also delegates part of the choice in matters of language use to the general user, acknowledging that the standard of usage is differentiated, not uniform.

Functions or meanings of modality markers may differ depending on the genre of text and can only be established by taking into account both their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, i.e. their place in the system and the immediate context. Thus, markers of high frequency in lexicographic discourse are indicators of a high degree of probability of occurrence of a word, form, phrase, etc., and are, as in corpus studies, an argument in favour of established (and therefore acceptable) use. This results in some epistemic markers referring to probability or likelihood in the dictionary having functions opposite to those characteristic of them in academic discourse beyond lexicography.

Different genres (academic writing and dictionary entries) can use specific modality markers.

Genre (or type of discourse) and context are therefore the decisive factors in establishing the meanings and functions of modality markers.

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