

## PERSONAL ATTITUDE AND MODALITY IN NARRATIVE FICTION

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**Annotation:** This article explores how personal attitudes are expressed through modality in narrative fiction. Drawing on pragmatic and stylistic theories, the study investigates how authors use modal verbs, adverbs, and subjective language to convey evaluation, doubt, certainty, and emotion. The analysis focuses on selected excerpts from 20th-century English prose, highlighting how modality contributes to character development and narrative stance. The findings suggest that modality serves as a central tool in the construction of subjectivity and narrative voice.

**Keywords:** Modality, Narrative Voice, Subjectivity, Stylistic Devices, Pragmatic Markers, Personal Attitude, W.S. Maugham

### Introduction

Personal attitude is a fundamental aspect of human communication and literary narrative. In narrative fiction, writers often employ linguistic devices that reveal their stance or the stance of their characters toward events, people, or ideas. One of the key tools in this process is modality, which refers to the expression of possibility, necessity, obligation, belief, and other forms of subjective evaluation.

In literary prose, modality is not just a grammatical or semantic feature—it is deeply tied to stylistic and pragmatic dimensions of language use. This article investigates how modality functions as a carrier of personal attitude in narrative fiction, focusing especially on epistemic and deontic modality. The aim is to show how modality helps shape the narrator's voice, tone, and evaluative stance, contributing to the reader's understanding of the fictional world.

### Methods

This study uses a qualitative stylistic analysis method. Three short excerpts from 20th-century English narrative fiction were selected for close reading. The selection

included prose by authors such as W.S. Maugham, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. These texts were chosen for their use of subjective narration and rich modal expression.

The analysis focused on identifying:

- Epistemic modality (e.g., might, must, could, probably)
- Deontic modality (e.g., should, ought to, must)
- Modal adverbs (e.g., perhaps, surely, undoubtedly)
- Pragmatic markers that reveal evaluative stance (e.g., I suppose, I guess, it seems that)

Each instance of modality was analyzed in context to understand how it contributed to the narrator's or character's personal attitude.

### Results

The analysis revealed several patterns in how modality functions to express personal attitude:

#### 3.1. Epistemic Modality and Tentativeness

In Maugham's prose, modal verbs like might, could, and seem are used to convey doubt or emotional distance. For example, in *The Moon and Sixpence*, the narrator often uses I suppose and it seems to me to frame personal judgments cautiously, thereby signaling humility or hesitation.

#### 3.2. Deontic Modality and Moral Judgment

In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, the use of should and ought to is common in internal monologues, especially in moments of moral reflection. These forms convey not only necessity but also internalized social norms, highlighting the character's inner conflict.

#### 3.3. Modal Adverbs and Emotional Nuance

Across all excerpts, modal adverbs such as probably, surely, and perhaps were used to soften claims or express emotional coloring. For instance, Joyce's narrative voice in *Dubliners* relies on perhaps to introduce ambiguity or irony.

#### 3.4. Pragmatic Markers and Subjective Framing

Subjective expressions like I believe, I imagine, and I dare say were found to add a conversational tone to the narrative, enhancing the presence of the narrator's personal voice.

## Discussion

The findings confirm that modality is central to the stylistic and pragmatic construction of personal attitude in narrative fiction. In particular, epistemic modality allows narrators to indicate degrees of certainty or doubt, subtly guiding reader interpretation without overt authorial intrusion. Deontic modality, meanwhile, often reflects moral or social judgments, aligning the character's voice with broader cultural norms.

These modal strategies contribute to what Simpson (1993) calls narratorial point of view, creating layers of subjectivity that enrich the literary texture. In Maugham's work, for example, the frequent use of modal hedges like I suppose or it may be suggested a narrator who is observant yet reserved, judgmental yet unwilling to commit fully. Such use of modality creates a nuanced narrative persona that engages the reader in active interpretation.

Moreover, modal adverbs and pragmatic markers serve to embed evaluation within seemingly objective narration. They often function as stylistic fingerprints, signaling the presence of an authorial or character perspective. This blending of subjective and objective tones is a hallmark of 20th-century narrative fiction, where authorial distance is both maintained and subtly undermined.

## Conclusion

Modality plays a critical role in expressing personal attitude in narrative fiction. Through the use of modal verbs, adverbs, and pragmatic markers, authors encode evaluative stances, emotions, and levels of certainty into the narrative. This study highlights how such linguistic features contribute to the construction of narrative voice and subjectivity, particularly in the prose of W.S. Maugham and his contemporaries. Further research could explore the interaction of modality with other stylistic devices, such as irony, focalization, and free indirect discourse.

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