

A Comparison Between the Modality Analyses of Two Ellen Talk Shows

Ae Mon Kyaw^{a*}

^aCollege of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Xiamen University, China

ABSTRACT

According to Systemic Functional Linguistics, modality is the realization of the interpersonal meaning. Many modality analyses have been conducted in political speeches, debates and student's writing. However, there have been a few comparisons of two talk shows where the same participant interacted with two different power statuses. This article explored with whom and what type of modality Ellen, the host of Ellen Talk Show, used more and the ambiguous situations where it is difficult to decide propositions or proposals. With the theory of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985; Halliday, 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014), the article found out that Ellen used more modality with the teacher (30%) than with the Vice President (17%). Despite she is supposed to communicate in formal language, she chose to speak in an informal way. Secondly, Ellen enjoyed more or less the same probability in two Talk Shows, while two times more obligation and 4 times more inclination with the teacher. Finally, it is significantly found that ambiguous situations can occur when obligation and inclination – 'have to' and 'want to' - are realized in the exchange of information, and probability 'am going to' is found in the realization of an offer and 'can't' in a command.

ARTICLE INFO

Paper type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received: 27/04/2022
Revised: 12/01/2024
Accepted: 25/03/2024

Keywords:

- Modality
- Systemic Functional Linguistics
- Talk Show
- Social Status

1. Introduction

According to Mireille Guiliano (n.d.), "Intelligence, knowledge or experience are important and might get you a job, but strong communication skills are what will get you promoted." Communication skill and interpersonal skill play an important role in our daily life. People need to act according to the context. Halliday's Systemic functional Linguistics (1985,1994) sees language as an exchange and the interpersonal meaning is realized by mood and modality. The use of mood and modality can differ based on the power, affection and contact (Eggins, 2004)

Modality has been represented as the linguistic expressions traditionally. For example, in a language class, modality is taught as "can, could, shall, should, may, might, must". "Modality refers to the area of meaning that lies between yes and no – the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity." Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

Halliday views the language as a clause of an exchange of (i) information, (ii) goods and services. The information exchanged can be somewhere between Yes and No, decoding somewhat uncertainty. Halliday and Matthiessen cited in Eggins (2004) states that the modality that is used to argue about the probability or frequency of propositions is called modalization. According to Halliday (1985, 1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2002, 2014), modalization involves two kinds of meanings: *Probability* and *Usuality*.

Probability is either yes or no, that is, maybe yes maybe no. Usuality is both yes and no, that is, sometimes yes, sometimes no. Modalization can be expressed in three ways: (a) the use of finite modals such as can, could, shall, should (b) the use of Mood Adjuncts such as probability, certainty (c) the combination of both finite modals and Mood Adjuncts such as might possibly, maybewill.

* kyawaemon@gmail.com (Kyaw)

- (1) it's *really* for the school is money.
- (2) "I *would* go to my restaurant to work there."

These above examples are extracted from the Ellen's Talk Show with the teacher. In the above example (i), *really* in the sentence "it's *really* for the school is money" intensify the meaning of the proposition or given information. The teacher imposed the high demand of fund in the school using the high value probability, *really*. In the example (ii), *would* moderates the proposition exchanged. The frequency of the fact "going to restaurant to work" is moderated with the use of usuality modalization '*would*'.

Likewise, the modality that moderates the goods and service exchanged is called modulation. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), modulation involves two kinds of meanings: *Obligation* and *Inclination*. Obligation is the representation of the degree of a command: 'allowed to/ required to/ supposed to/ have to' and Inclination is the representation of the degree of an offer: 'willing to/am determined to/want to'. Modulation can be expressed in two ways: (a) the use of finite modal operators (b) through the expansion of the predicator either by a passive or by an adjective.

- (3) You know, you *have to* think about that.
- (4) I *want to* hear about your acts of good.

In the above example (iii), the speaker commands the listener to think about something. The command is modulated with the obligation modulation verb, "*have to*". In the example (iv) "*want to*" decodes the meaning of inclination. In the exchange of the service, 'want to' signals that the speaker is willing to receive the proposal from the listeners. Therefore, Halliday (1994) stated that there are four kinds of meanings that modality can function: *Probability*, *Usuality*, *Obligation* and *Inclination*.

There are occasions when it is difficult to decide the type of the modality. According to Eggins (2004), there are two main situations that blur the differentiation between information and goods and services. The first situation is when the topic is about the third person.

E.g. He *must* pay respect to the teachers and attend the class regularly.

The teacher informs the student's parents about the school rules and class attendance. Therefore, this is the proposition to the parents. However, if the student is nearby, the student is commanded to attend the class regularly.

In delivering the information or proposition, the grammar of proposal '*must*' is used with the discrete meaning of obligation.

The second situation is when modulation is used to demand direction, advice or permission.

E.g.

- (5) Do I *have to* do it or not?
- (6) *Should* I go to the party?
- (7) *Can* I come in?

In the above examples, all of the three sentences function as questions, but modulation such as *have to*, *should*, and *can* are used to demand direction, advice and permission respectively. Therefore, unclear-cut boundary between information and goods and services can occur when modulation is used to exchange information (Eggins,2004).

A number of research have been conducted on the use of mood and modality in political fields. However, there are a few research comparing two databases and focusing on the power influence on the use of modality. The present study will analyze two Ellen Talk Shows and focus on how Ellen, the host of the talk show, will vary her use of modality according to the power status. The method of the study is Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar revised by Matthiessen (2014) and Eggin (2004).

A Malaysian researcher, Khalid, P. Z. B. M. (2013), analyzed the modality used in the Newspaper Articles about the Scottish Ship RMS Queen Elizabeth, using Martin and White's appraisal (2005) and Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar revised by Matthiessen (2004). The article found out that Declarative mood was used to give information and a lot of modal markers were used to deliver the subjective message and authorial assessment. It is stated that the result is contrary to Pound's (2010), which claimed that news does offer authorial distance and objective message. Lihua (2009) studied the modality of the editorial in the China Daily from the systemic functional linguistics, highlighting the relationship between the modality and the social power. She found out that the certainty and obligation modals- will, should, have to, need to and must – construes the authority and power in the editorials. The prediction modals – will- reveal the commitment to the future actions.

Winter and Gärdenfors (1995) explored how interpersonal expectations and power dynamics affect the semantics of modal verbs in language. The authors contend that power dynamics in the speech situation are closely related to deontic uses of modals (relating to obligation and permission). Additionally, they examine epistemic uses (pertaining to necessity and possibility) and propose that these are not metaphorical transfers but rather pragmatic extensions of deontic uses. The goal of the analysis is to methodically explain how different expectations and power dynamics influence the conceptual frameworks that underlie modal language expressions. The Pionery & Isti'anah (2017) did a modality Analysis in Melania Trump's and Ivanka Trump's Campaign Speeches in Republican National Convention from the point of view of Vendonk's Stylistics (2002). The article explored the type of modality used in both speeches and function of them. It was found out that Ivanka Trump used one more type of modality- Usuality- than Melania Trump, but they employed more or less the same in other types. The function of the dominant modalities- commitment and self-promotion- were found to refer to the inclination and self-promotion respectively. (Okafor & Issife, 2017) conducted the modality analysis on the Nigeria's President MuhammaduBuhari's Inaugural Speech using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. The article found out that Declarative mood and modal auxiliary verbs were dominantly used to deliver the information and the politician's commitment.

Yuyun (2010) examined the mood and modality of the arguments in a senior high school debating. With the help of the database of Travers' discourse analysis (2001), the article explored the modality type, modality value and orientation. The result shows that declarative mood, medium probability and explicit subjective modality are mostly found in the debate. In addition, mental verbs such as think, believe, know are found to be used for the subjective explicit arguments. Qohroudi & Ghane (2010) explored the relationship between music and the use of mood and modality. Mozart music cannot enhance the participants' use of mood and modality in writing. The mood and modality used in writing is Declarative mood, epistemic and deontic modality.

The previous studies mainly focused on the modality used in the sensitive, political fields, argumentative talks in school, and newspaper. There are a few comparisons between two materials or speeches. No comparisons have been made in the use of modality by one person towards two different social beings. The talk show can reflect the speaker's real attitude as it does not offer the preparation time to talk. Therefore, it is more authentic, reliable to study the instant responses of Ellen to different social classes. Unlike the previous studies, the present study will compare Ellen's use of modality when communicating with two different social beings- Vice President and a volunteering teacher. In terms of Social status and Power, the Vice- President is the distinguished and respected official in the U.S. On the other hand, the young volunteer teacher in a village is not well-known yet. She has just started earning her name. The objective of the present research paper is to find out how the host, Ellen, responded in different social contexts.

- (1) In the two Talk Shows, with whom does Ellen employ the modality more?
- (2) In the two Talk Shows, which type of modality does Ellen use more? In the two Talk Shows, what are the situations where there is an unclear cut between information and goods or services?

2. Methods

With the aim to find out the relation between the Modality and the power status, the Talk Show is selected as a material where a great deal of interactions takes place. Ellen Talk Show has invited a number of guests from different social backgrounds such as politics, celebrities, teachers, musicians, etc. Among them, to compare the

mood structures employed by Ellen when she communicated with two different social beings, Ellen Talk Show with Vice President, Joe Biden (Joe Biden was the Vice President in the Ellen Talk Show in 2015.), and Elle Talk Show with a teacher are chosen. In the Talk Show, some clauses talking to other people- the audience- are omitted.

The transcript of Ellen Talk Shows are taken from You-Tube video, first. The scripts, accessed in 2019 April, are provided under the youtube video. The Ellen talk show with the teacher, with the Url of <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uup3EMvDTeo>, is 14 kb of words and the one with the Vice President, with the Url of <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTEiibVnRgI>, is 15 kb of words. Then the materials were analyzed using Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday (Eggins, 2014). To answer the first and second research question, the modalities of the two talks are identified as Obligation, Inclination, Probability and Usuality. To search the ambiguous situations, functions of the mood structures of the conversations are identified as statements, questions, command and offer and compare the modulated or modalized clauses and speech function of the whole sentence.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Ellen's Use of Modality with Two Different Social Beings

With the aim to find out the difference in the type of modality used in different contexts, the article used two Ellen Talk Shows- the one with Vice President and another with a volunteering teacher. Being analyzed with the tool of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, the article answers the first research question: with whom does Ellen uses the modality more in the two Talk Shows?

Table 1. The Frequency of Total Modality Ellen Employed in Both of Her Talks

Exploring Ellen's Modality	Ellen with V.P	Ellen with Tr
Total Modality	6	15
Total Clauses	35	50
Average Modality	17%	30%

The table 1 shows the number of modality that Ellen used in one Ellen Talk Show with the Vice President (n=6) and another with a teacher (n=15). The number of total clauses Ellen contributed to the talk is 35 in the talk with the Vice President and is 50 in the one with the teacher. It can be seen that Ellen had an opportunity to talk more with the teacher than the Vice President. Ellen was more like a listener with the Vice President. Regarding the use of modality, Ellen used only 6 times (17%) out of her total talk (n=35) while 15 times (30%) out of her total talk (n=50).

According to Cate Poynton (1985), the talk with Vice President is considered to be formal because of unequal power, infrequent contact and low affection – not close friends. Unequal power between the participants can cause the participants to show the politeness (Eggins, 2004). In addition, politeness can be linguistically shown through the use of modality (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kyaw, 2014; Meyer, 1989; Salager- Meyer, 1997).

However, the analysis shows that Ellen used nearly two times more modality with the teacher than she did with the Vice President. During the whole talk with the V.P, Ellen most of the time demanded the information and positively commented on what Vice President had mentioned. This is assumed to be due to the low affective involvement. One interesting point is that Ellen did not use many modal operators as modulated interrogatives to demand information when interacting with the Vice President. For example,

- (8) 'Where you going?'
- (9) 'What are you in Los Angeles for?'
- (10) What is it?

This also contradicts Eggins (2004:103).In formal language, incongruent mood choices should be the preference, but Ellen used typical mood 'interrogatives' –without modal operators - to demand information.All things considered, it can be noticed that despite power inequality, low contact and affection, Ellen still prefers to

communicate in informal language. This could be because of (a) the field; the topic they are talking about is casual, (b) the place; Ellen Talk Show, which is an informal talk (c) the culture that the participants belong to, and (d) personal preference. Therefore, the use of modality is not only concerned with tenor but also related with field, setting, culture and personal preference.

3.2. A Shed Light on the Distribution of Modality in Two Talk Shows

The second research question of the article, what modality Ellen employed more in the two talk shows, is represented with the following figure.

Figure 1. Comparison of Modalities That Ellen Employed with Two Different Social Beings

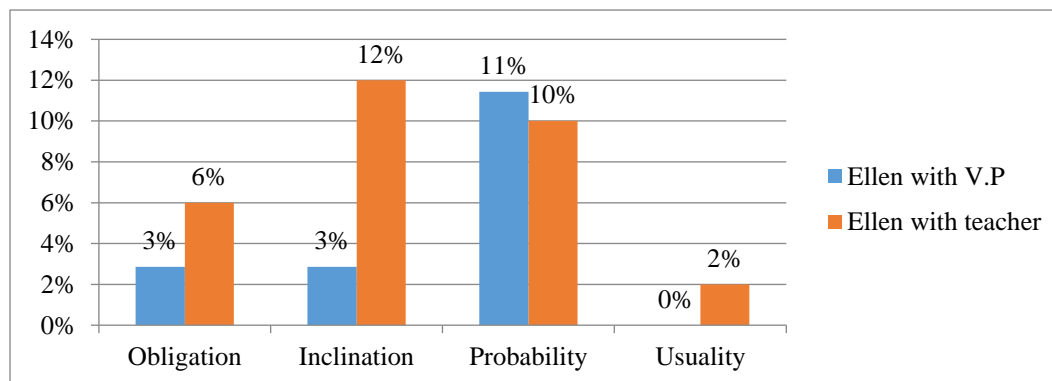


Figure 1 compares the modalities that Ellen employed in the analyzed two materials. At the general first glance, it can be seen there is only 1% or 2% difference in the employment of probability and usuality while there is much difference in the use of probability and usuality. Regarding obligation and inclination, Ellen enjoyed half of the number of obligation with the Vice President (3%, $n=1$) than with the teacher (6%, $n=3$) and four times fewer inclinations with the Vice President (3%, $n=1$) than the teacher (12%, $n=6$).

In the talk with the Vice President, Ellen used only one obligation (have to) and one inclination (would). The modality, 'have to', in 'How many times do you have to stand up?' shows the authority rather the speaker's authority. This agrees with Liu (2009), and "have to" realizes the meaning of external authority. "While *must* conveys the personal authority of the speaker, *have (got) to* conveys obligation based up some external compulsion" (Fairclough, 1989). In this case, Ellen used 'have to' to avoid her own authority but to mean the rule of the government, instead. Therefore, the only one 'have to' is not her own command but the obligation according to the situation. Furthermore, the inclination modality, 'would', in 'Would you sit down?' is the modulated interrogatives to offer the Vice President a seat. Ellen, here, might have used 'sit down'. As sit down sounds like a command, she employed modulation would, which sounds an offer. However, in her welcome to the teacher, Ellen used 'Come on down', where there is no use of modal operator, and it sounds like a command.

Significantly, there is no use of usuality (0%) but high employment of probability (11%). Qohroudi&Ghane' research studied the use of mood and modality in EFL learner's writings and indicated the connection between probability modality and arguments (Qohroudi & Ghane', 2010). However, the use of probability, in this research, is not to argue but to ask for the Vice President's plan.

For example,

- (11) What *are* you and Jill *gonna* do for Valentines' Day?
- (12) Seriously, you *must* be here for another reason besides my birthday.

In the talk with the teacher, the lowest number of modality is usuality (2%) and the highest number is inclination (12%). This is because Ellen offered the teacher some help who is struggling for the underprivileged school whereas with the Vice President, Ellen was mostly a goods or service receiver (3%). Pionery&Isti'anah

(2017) analyzed the modality in Melania Trump's and Ivanka Trump's Campaign Speech and found out that the existence of inclination can result the commitment. However, in the present research, the use of inclination modality is to signal the offer from the third party. The only inclination modality that Ellen used is low value inclination- 'want to' and 'would like to'. For example, (i) And they *want to* support all of your acts of good. (ii) And they *want to* support the students at your school.

In addition, the only obligation modality that Ellen used in the talk with the teacher is the same as the one she did with the Vice President, 'have to', low obligation modality, which does not decode the speaker's authority. For example, (i) 'you know, you *have to* think about that.' (ii) '*you have to* rest.'

Therefore, in both talk shows, the use of obligation 'have to' reveals that Ellen seemed to try not to be authoritative regardless of the power of the listeners. She respected both of the two guests. The use of inclination 'want to' with the teacher and 'would' with the Vice President also reveals Ellen's awareness of power distance with both of the guests. She enjoyed more inclination with the teacher as she offered some contribution to the teacher's work whereas she was more like goods and services receiver with the Vice President.

3.3 Contribution to the theory of SFL

The third research question is to find out the situations where there is unclear cut between information and goods and services. According to Eggins (2004), modality can be ambiguous when the grammar of proposal, modulation, is used to exchange information, that is, statements, or questions. Modulation occurs frequently in offers, commands and suggestions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Table 2. The Situations Where Propositions and Proposals Cross Over

Unclear Cut Situation (Total)	Statement	Question	Command	Offer
Obligation	4	1	-	-
Inclination	10	-	-	-
Probability	-	-	2	1
Usuality	-	-	-	-

As shown in Table 2, modulation for obligation (n=4) and inclination (n=10) is used in exchanging information, especially in statements (n=14) rather than questions (n=1). These ambiguous modalities are largely found in Ellen Talk Shows with the teacher rather than with the Vice President. This could be because in the talk with the teacher, they mostly exchange information about the situation of underprivileged school, how the teacher is struggling for the children, and the contribution from Ellen. In line with the theory, in the description of how hard she works for the school or the children, the third party, the teacher employed inclination and obligation modality 'want to', 'would like to', 'it was necessary to' and 'have to'. Likewise, in Ellen's report of the offer from the third party, 'want to', 'would like to' and 'have to' were used. Therefore, it can be concluded that 'want to', 'would like to' are the inclination modulation that can be used for giving information. And 'have to' and 'it was necessary to' are the obligation modulation that can be used for giving information. The following are the examples of modulation used in giving information.

E.g.

- (13) And they *want to* support the students at your school. (inclination)
- (14) and *have to* wake up again the next day at 6:00 Am to teach. (obligation)
- (15) but *it was necessary to* help pay for- (obligation)

In demanding information, obligation modulation 'have to' occurs once, "How many times do people *have to* stand up?" which is enjoyed by Ellen addressing to the Vice President. Concerning exchanging goods and services, while the teacher was describing the effort she has made for the school, Ellen suggested "You can't function. You can't be". In this example, the probability 'can't' is used in the proposal. Therefore, the clauses can

function as a command or as an effort beyond her ability. Lastly, it is also found out that ‘am going to’, high probability, is also used in an offer “I am gonna clip this on”. This is the clause uttered by Ellen addressing to the Vice President. Ellen offered him to wear a microphone on his body. Therefore, the present research firmly argues that the propositions and proposals cross over not only when modulation is applied in an exchange of information but also when modalization is utilized in an exchange of services and goods. Undoubtedly, the use of modalization in a command and offer is relatively low.

4. Conclusion

The use of modality of the host, Ellen, in two talk shows, is analyzed using the database Ellen Talk Show with the Vice President and Ellen Talk Show with a teacher. The results reveal that Ellen used more modality with the teacher than with the Vice President, which is surprisingly remarkable. In the interaction with the higher power social being, low affection and contact, the language is regarded to be formal (Egins, 2004). Ellen was expected to use more modality to show respect or politeness as modality can attenuate the proposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kyaw, 2014; Meyer, 1989; Salager- Meyer, 1997). However, Ellen mostly preferred informal language, using 17% modality of her own utterances in the interaction with the Vice President despite 30% modality with the teacher. This is assumed to be due to the personal preference, field, culture and the setting (Talk Show, not a Panel Discussion). Moreover, the type of modality Ellen used in the two talk shows is more or less the same in probability except obligation and inclination. Ellen used 2 times more obligation modality and 4 times more inclination modality with the teacher than the Vice President. She offered more goods and services to the teacher. The only use of low obligation ‘have to’ in both of her talk shows suggests her avoidance of authoritative tone or low affection with the guests. Ellen’s varied uses of inclination - ‘want to’ with the teacher and ‘would’ with the Vice President-also reveal Ellen’s awareness of power distance with both of the guests. Thirdly, the present research significantly found that the boundary between the information and goods and services becomes blur not only modulation is used in the exchange of propositions but also the modalization is used in the exchange of proposals.

References

- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Egins, S. (2004). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. Guiliano, Mireille (n.d.). “Women, Work & the Art of Savoir Faire Q&A.” Mireille Guiliano, Retrieved from mireilleguiliano.com/women-work-the-art-of-savoir-faire-qa/.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1st ed.). London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A., & Christian, M. I. M. Matthiessen. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar*, 3.
- Halliday, M.A.K., Matthiessen, C., & Halliday, M. (2014). *An introduction to functional grammar*, Routledge.
- Khalid, P. Z. B. M. (2013). *Modality Analysis of the Newspaper Articles about the Scottish Ship RMS Queen Elizabeth*. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2013.v2n9p458>
- Kyaw, A.M (2014). *The Study of Hedges in the Third Presidential Debate between Obama and Romney in 2012* [M.A dissertation, University of Yangon]
- Lihua, L. I. U. (2009). *Discourse construction of social power*. 59–78.
- Martin, J., & White, P. R. (2005). *The Language of Evaluation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230511910>
- Meyers, G. (1989). The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles. *Applied Linguistics*, 10, 1-35.
- Okafor, V. C., & Issife, G. U. (2017). *Mood and Modality in Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari's Inaugural Speech: A Stylistic Study*. 14.

- Pionery, H., & Isti'anah, A. (2017). *Modality Analysis in Melania Trump's and Ivanka Trump's Campaign Speeches in Republican National Convention, July 19th, 2016*. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 17(1), 24–35. <https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.2017.170104>
- Pounds, Gabrina. (2010). Attitude and subjectivity in Italian and British hard-news reporting: The construction of a culture-specific 'reporter' voice. *Discourse Studies - DISCOURSE STUD.* 12. 106-137. 10.1177/1461445609346777.
- Poynton, C. (1985). *Language and gender: Making the difference*. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Qohroudi, M. Q., & Ghane', Z. (2010). *Mood and Modality in Iranian EFL Learners' Writings: A Focus on the Effect of Mozart music on Enhancing Assertiveness*. 11.
- Salager-Meyer, F. (1997). *I think that perhaps you should: A study of hedges in writtenscientific discourse*. Retrieved from <http://eca.state.gov/education/engteaching/pubs/BR>
- TheEllenShow (2015, 06, 26). *Surprise! It's Vice President Joe Biden!*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTEiibVnRgI>
- TheEllenShow (2019, 01, 03). *Ellen Gives Back to Inspiring Special Education Teacher Jenna Albi*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uup3EMvDTeo>
- Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Winter, S., & Gärdenfors, P. (1995). Linguistic modality as expressions of social power. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics*, 18(2), 137-165.
- Yuyun, I. (2010). *A Mood and Modality Analysis of Arguments in Senior High School Debating*. 6.