A Stylistic Analysis of the Use of Modality
to Identify the Point of View in a Short Story:

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ABSTRACT

The present paper used the modal framework of Simpson in doing a stylistic analysis of the story "Things You Don't Know" by Ian Rosales, a highly-acclaimed Filipino writer. Since stylistics has always been concerned with how readers interpret the texts by focusing on linguistic choices, the modal choices of the writer based on Simpson's modal framework would allow the readers to identify the attitude of the narrator. Indeed, results show that the epistemic type of modal was preponderant –this type apparently allows the readers to feel the narrator's uncertainty in situations or events. In addition, this modal framework also enables the readers to further identify the shade of a text, since the choice of modals highlights either a positive, negative, or neutral shade of a story. Since the epistemic modal was the most pronounced, the story is definitely negative in shade, and this can be inferred in the short story where the narrator is uncertain what was going on in her everyday affairs. In turn, this uncertainty is emphasised by the narrator's dependence on his/her perception of external appearances or surroundings.

Keywords: boulomaic; epistemic; deontic; dynamic; modality; shade

INTRODUCTION

Stylistics was previously regarded as a method that allowed readers to analyse language (Fish 1970). Modern day stylistics, on the other hand, became a tool in enriching theories of not only discourse, but also culture and society. In fact, stylistics has already branched into several sub-fields, such as feminist stylistics, cognitive stylistics, discourse stylistics, (Simpson 2004), and deconstructive stylistics (Mishra 2011). But generally, stylistics is regarded as an "accepted method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned language" (Simpson 2004, p. 2). The primary reason for this is that language is so complex due to its various forms, patterns and levels. In fact, there are corresponding words in different languages that may or may not share exactly the same interpretation in another language (Hazidi 2002).

Another way of doing a stylistics analysis is by identifying the text's meaning or interpretation using Halliday's (1994) 'functional' principles, namely ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. However, more recent treatments referred to the three functions as metafunctions and one of these functions, ideational function, was later renamed as 'representational function' (Graffi 2001). To define, the first function, ideational or representational metafunction, expresses the speaker's experience in the real world and inner world which is consciousness. Second is the interpersonal metafunction, which is concerned with the speaker's usage of the communicative function of the language, and the third is the textual function, which enables the speaker to organise messages in logical patterns or the speaker's potential to form a text (Halliday 1994). In relation to stylistics, these metafunctions could be used to analyse literary works since looking at actual texts as

the instantiation of language through the prism of the metafunctions can help readers understand how meaning is made through language (Halliday 1994).

Out of the three metafunctions mentioned in the previous paragraph, it was the interpersonal function that was tapped in this paper since it focuses on analysing the usage of modality, which the story has used extensively. Thus, the reason behind its preponderant use could be one of the following: to identify the attitude of the persona or the characters in a story (Simpson 1993); to identify "the area of meaning that lies between yes and no the intermediate ground" (Halliday 1994, p. 74), such as maybe and perhaps; or to identify the different degrees of certainty, obligation and probability. In addition, a focus on modality allows the readers to identify the speaker's opinion or attitude on the truth of a proposition or towards a particular situation described and expressed in a sentence (Simpson 1993). Thus, modality may be regarded as the "grammar of explicit comment" (Simpson 2004, p. 124), which, according to Halliday (as cited in Haratyan 2011), is a lexico-grammatical choice that would allow a thorough analysis of a language. This makes it somewhat similar with Halliday's SFL, which is concerned with how the speakers generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meanings through the "generalised metafunctions that relate language to the outside world where interactants and their social roles matter" (as cited in Haratyan 2011, p. 260). But then again, stylistics is technically a combination of many different types of text analysis. With these information, it is therefore safe to say that the stylistic analysis done in the chosen text of this research is deconstructive and cognitive –deconstructive because the analysis of interpersonal function allowed the researchers to discover "the inherent tensions, polysemy, un-decidability and open-endedness in a text" (Mishra 2011, p. 49), and cognitive because it is concerned with the cognitive effects of particular linguistic choices and patterns (Semino & Culpeper 2002).

Modality, as a method of identifying the attitude of the persona or narrator, can be further understood through Palmer's (2003) categories namely, epistemic, deontic and dynamic. Epistemic modality is "concerned with the speaker's attitude to status of the proposition" while "deontic and dynamic modalities are seen as directives concerned with enabling the subject of the sentence to act" (Palmer 2003, p.7). However, deontic is concerned with the "circumstances external to the subject of the sentence", while with dynamic, the "control is internal to the subject and the ability comes from the subject's own ability" (Palmer 2003, p. 7). Examples of these modalities are:

1.   They may be on their way. *(epistemic)*
2.   You can report now. *(deontic)*
3.   You can eat a lot. *(dynamic)*

The modal *may* in example 1 show that the speaker is uncertain whether *they*, the subject in the sentence, are leaving or not. The modal *can* in the next two examples are expressed differently in these sentences. In the second example, the *can* is controlled by the speaker's permission (external), whereas in the third example, the *can* is controlled by the subject (internal).

Like Palmer (2003), Simpson (2004) also discussed modality according to points of view to better understand literary prose. According to Simpson, modality is concerned with the attitude and ability of the persona/narrator. It also refers "broadly to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. It also extends to the speaker's attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence" (Simpson 1993, p. 43). Thus, the usage of modality in a story captures senses, thoughts and feelings. Simpson (2004) also categorised modality (as early as 1993) into different shades, namely positive, negative and neutral. Abundant use of deontic and boulomaic modalities falls under

the positive and as Iwamoto (2007) says, "the general flow of discourse of this type is binding, obligatory, assertive, and strong" (p.181). Preponderant use of epistemic and perception modalities, however, give off negative shading that denotes alienation and uncertainty. Neutral shading is characterised by the absence of modality or modal judgment that "exhibits an uncommitted and detached connotation" (Iwamoto 2007, p.181) in discourse.

Since the aim of this paper was to analyse modality with regard to point of view of the short story, *Things You Don't Know*, Simpson's categories (as cited in Iwamoto 2007) were employed since Palmer's (2004) categories are somewhat classificatory and limited and may not be able to help in the analysis of the usage of modals and shade in the short story. Thus, the following questions were addressed:

1. What is the commonly used type of modal and modality element identified in the short story *Things You Don't Know*?
2. What is the speaker's attitude toward the situation or event?
3. What is the shade of the story based on the identified type of modality used?

FRAMEWORK

There are various studies with regard to modality and its function to different types of text (Bonyandi 2011, Coates 2003, Iwamoto 2007) and these studies employed different frameworks or models. This paper has opted to use Simpson's modal framework (Iwamoto 2007) because it focuses not only on the types of modality used in a literary prose, but also on how these modality determines "the essence of a story's style and that provides the story with its particular feel and colour" (Iwamoto 2007). Figure 1 summarises the types of modality, shade, represented concepts, and prominent features given by Simpson (1993, as cited in Iwamoto 2007), which were used in the analysis of the paper:
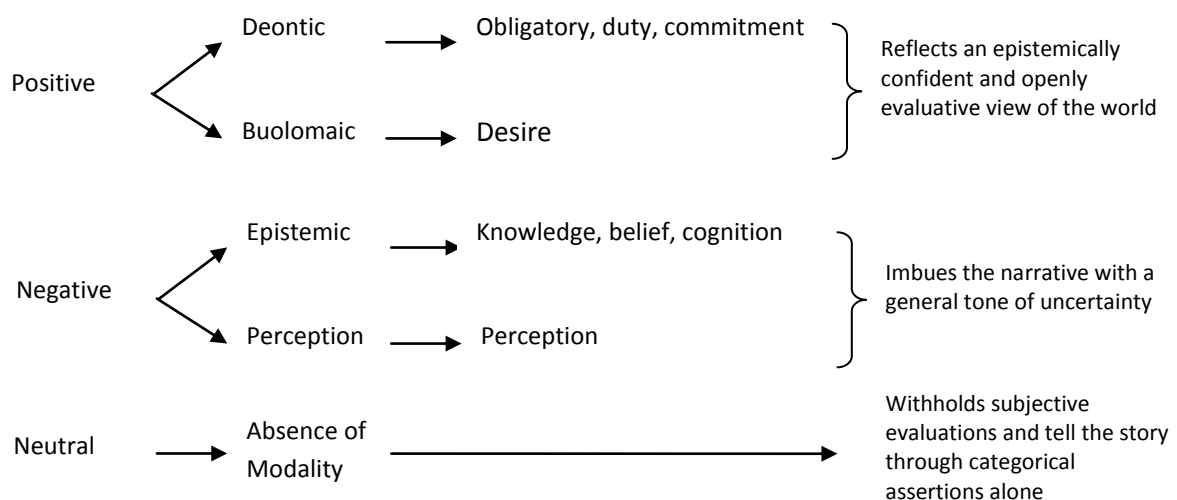

Figure 1. The relationship between modal system, shade, represented concepts and prominent features

Deontic modality is the modal system of duty as it is concerned with speaker's attitude to the degree of obligation attached to the performance of certain actions. In short, deontic modal auxiliaries realise a continuum of commitment from (a) permission, such as (4) *you may take your seat*; (b), through obligation, such as (5) *you should be finished before lunch time;* and (c), and requirement, such as (6) *you must finish your degree* (Simpson, 1993, p.43). There are, however, sentences which use the deontic expressions but without modals. These are sentences that combine adjectives and participles (BE...that and BE...to), such as:

(7) *You are allowed to sit down.*   (BE+participle+to)
(8) *It is essential that you come on time.*   (BE+adjective+that)

Buolomaic modality, on the other hand, is closely related to deontic modality. It is a type of modality that expresses 'desire'. It contains verbs that suggest hopes, wishes, and desires. "Modal lexical verbs, indicating the wishes and desires of the speaker, are central in the boulomaic system," (Simpson 1993 p. 44) such as,

(9)   *They hope that they will get a raise*
(10) *She wished for a rich husband*
(11) *He grieves for her absence*

But then, "adjectival and participial constructions can carry boulomaic commitment, although related modal adverbs may also be used," (Simpson 1993, p. 44), such as

(12) *She dreams that he will come back.*   (BE+participle+THAT)
(13) *He is decent that's why he simply left.*   (BE+adjective+THAT)
(14) *Unfortunately, I don't love you anymore.*   (Modal adverb)

Epistemic modality, the third category, shows the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the expressed proposition and could be the most important with regard to the point of view of a story. It may be 'grammaticised' through (a) modal lexical verbs such as

 (15) *I presume you are right*

(b) adjectives in the BE...to and BE...that constructions, such as

(16) *I am certain to be right*
(17) *I am definite that I am right.*

Note, however, that "there is also a group of epistemic modal adverbs which includes, but is not restricted to, the following: arguably, maybe, perhaps, possibly, probably, certainly, supposedly, allegedly." (Simpson 1993, p. 45)

Perception modality, considered as a sub-category of epistemic modality, is regarded as the degree of commitment of the truth of proposition based on human perception which is usually visual perception. This is exhibited in sentences with adjectives in BE…THAT constructions and sentences using modal adverbs (Simpson 1993, p. 45) such as,

(18) *It is unquestionable that you are right*
(19) *Unquestionably, you are right.*

Based on the figure, the types of modals mark out the psychological point of view namely positive shading, negative shading, and neutral shading. Positive shading stories are

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stories that have strong, assertive, obligatory modals. Thus, these stories are marked by buolomaic modality and deontic modality. Negative shading stories, as opposed to positive shading stories, connote uncertainty or doubt and lack of assertion. As a result, epistemic modality and perception modality are common in these stories. The last type of shading is neutral shading. Stories with neutral shading are composed of judgment with no/or only a handful of modals and evaluative language and *verba sentiendi* (words denoting thoughts, feelings, and perceptions). Lastly, distinctive features are exhibited, as characterised by the type of shading that the persona/narrator uses (Iwamoto 2007).

METHODOLOGY

MATERIAL

The present study investigated the use of modals in the short story entitled *Things You Don't Know* by Ian Rosales Casocot, a creative writer, journalist and teacher in Dumaguete City, Philippines. This short story won first prize in the English Category of the 2008 Don Carlos Memorial Awards for Literature. The story was written in the first person, narrated by a housewife and a mother. She is faced with several problems, mostly financial and she is often confused and exhausted from thinking of what the future holds for her and her daughter. The restlessness of the main character was the reason why the researcher primarily opted to analyse this piece. The endless problems brought about by a jobless and uncaring husband and a distant daughter; pose a lot of uncertainties, which are highlighted with the excessive use of modalities.

MODE OF ANALYSIS

Simpson's Modal System (cited in Iwamoto 2007) comprising deontic, buolomaic, epistemic and perception, were identified, numbered, and labelled in the short story as shown in sample analysis below. Then, the modals were further categorised into modal auxiliary, modal lexical verbs and modal adverbs. The next step carried out was to identify the modal shading that marks the point of view of the narrative in order to recognise the psychological point of view of the persona. The said process led to the discovery of the general tone of the short story.

Sample Analysis

She fidgets in my arms.//112 She wants [Buolomaic—modal verb] to get down, and when I put her down, Margot resumes her flitting about in the kitchen, the wave of white fluttering about her.//113 For the briefest moment, I can [Epistemic—modal auxiliary] believe she is a cloud trapped in my little house.//114 I can [Perception—modal auxiliary] see, outside my kitchen windows, the quickening day settling into the golden sluggishness of the afternoon//115. Another day will [Epistemic modal auxiliary] soon be over, and my husband will [Deontic modal auxiliary] be coming home.//116 I want [Buolomaic modal verb] to tell him there will [Epistemic modal auxiliary] be no more television shows to mask what has remained unsaid. //117

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the short story, *Things You Don't Know*, the four types of modalities were identified and categorised, and the occurrences of these modalities and their elements were tabulated as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of modals and modality elements

Modality Elements	Deontic	Buolomaic	Epistemic	Perception	Total
Modal Adverbs	0	0	21	0	21
Modal Auxiliaries	2	1	18	2	23
Modal Lexical Verbs	1	9	23	3	36
Total	3	10	62	5	80

As can be seen in Table 1, epistemic modality has the highest number of occurrences by a large margin, followed by buolomaic with just 13 occurrences. Secondly, epistemic modality outnumbered the rest of the types with regard to modality elements. Generally, "epistemic modal markers are used for signalling judgments of belief, certainty or truth and for foregrounding the narrator's efforts to interpret and make sense of what he sees and hears" (Simpson 2004, p. 125). This is apparent in the uncertainty of the narrator all throughout the story as shown in the passages below which would explain the writer's constant use of this modality:

Passage 1

*I don't **know** where Marlon goes during the day. It has been two weeks. I **suppose** he is out looking for work. I **suppose** it is hard, given the rough times. It's not easy, I **suppose**. And especially so when you are an architecture graduate, but have spent the last five years chasing papers in a no-name shipping company. When he comes home, at six o'clock sharp, he smells of defeat and the day's traffic. That's when I **know** all is not well still. The answer is in his furtive eyes, and the way he **will** not look at me.*

The preponderant uses of the modal *suppose* clearly shows that the speaker lacks confidence in her knowledge of the situation. She is unaware of what is happening to her husband inside and outside of the house and this is further supported by the modal verb *know* in the first sentence of the paragraph (*I don't know...*). As the passage progresses, the speaker's lack of confidence fades, the speaker slowly becomes certain of her knowledge of the events. Suddenly she is aware, and this awareness was emphasised through the same modal verb *know* (*I know…he will not look at me*). This style of "using epistemic modals with both positive and negative polarity obfuscates parts of the narrative" (Simpson 1993, p. 48), which was the effect, suggested in this passage. This is the same effect alluded in the narrative of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, as seen in the following lines:

*I **know** they were paying no attention to me, and how could I repay the compliment, since they were paying no attention to me? I don't **know**. I **knew** it and I did it, that's all I **know**.*

It is apparent in the passage that the use of modality highlights "uncertainty, bewilderment and alienation in order to show general reluctance to interpret events and actions, and when such interpretations are made, they are based on references to stimuli in the immediate physical environment" (Simpson 1993, p. 48).

*I follow the sound of my own angel as she flits about the house again, her toga dragging along with her. I **wonder** how this must go: my sanity, or the fragility of her young imagination? Each one weighs in equal measure, or so it **seems** —but **sometimes** enough is enough. I call Margot to me.*

Again, the narrator is trying to understand the situation by "trying to make sense of the world," Simpson (2004, p. 126), but obviously, she is unsuccessful in doing so, as marked by the epistemic modal *wonder and seems. "*Epistemic modality principally foregrounds the narrator's efforts to interpret and make sense of what he sees and hears" (Simpson 2004, p. 126), as seen in the lines *I wonder how this must go on* and *so it seems.* The interpretation, therefore, becomes heavily dependent on how the narrator interprets the external appearance of the environment. This is also supported by Hacquard and Wellwood (2012) who claimed that "epistemic modality is the speaker's assessment of probability and predictability" which is what passage 2 is implying – that the readers can/may detach themselves and depend on what the narrator will declare.

To identify the shading that marked the two passages, they are evidently negative as shown in the overuse of epistemic modals that "connote uncertainty or doubt and lack of assertion" (Iwamoto 2007). Also, the story is characterised by "narrative modality where an often 'bewildered' narrator (or character) relies on external signals and appearances to sustain a description" (Simpson 2004, p. 127). The use of perception modals also emphasises a negative shade, and although very few perception modals appeared in the text, they are still worth noting as they contribute to the overall shade of the story.

*Each one weighs in equal measure, or so it **seems** —but sometimes enough is enough. He does not **seem** surprised by my sudden presence.*

The modal lexical verb *seem*, shows the narrator's uncertainty about events and about the other character's motivations and this is fore grounded by a negative shade (Simpson 2004). Apparently, the narrator seemed to be struggling with the fact that finances are limited and that the other character does not seem to care. According to Simpson, negative shading is highly effective in fiction in order to heighten the struggles of the narrator in shaping her understanding of what was going on. It may be noteworthy to mention that, for some reason, the shade of the text is somewhat similar with the short story *How my Brother Brought Home a Wife* by another highly acclaimed Filipino writer Manuel Arguilla, as shown below:

Example 1

*He faced the sun and from his mouth came a call so loud and vibrant that the earth **seemed** to tremble underfoot*
*Labang's white coat, which I had wished and brushed that morning with coconut husk, glistened like beaten cotton under the lamplight and his horns **appeared** tipped with fire.*

The modal lexical verbs *seem* and *appear* are both perception modals and are markers of negative shading. The narrator in Example 1 gives an impression that he is familiar with his environment, and yet, there are movements that seem to be taking place, giving him illusions of the world/reality which are out of his control. This story also includes a main character who also serves as the narrator. This therefore shows that, when negative shade is highlighted, the use of Perception modals may be highly effective. To sum, Simpson (1993,

p. 53) posits that a "language that is rich in epistemic and perception modalities highlights uncertainty about characters and events.

Before ending the discussion, the type of modality element is worth discussing for its contribution to the overall shade of a story. Modal lexical verb is the element used by all types of modality, it highest in epistemic, followed by buolomaic. In deontic and perception modality, modal lexical verbs can also be found. A close look at Table 1 shows that aside from epistemic modality, lexical verbs are used in almost half or more than half of the total number of modals per modality. These examples illustrate the usage of modal lexical verbs in the short story:

a.   *I **want** to tell him that the Internet bill is already due. [buolomaic]*
b.   *I **suppose** he is out looking for work. I suppose it is hard, given the rough times. It's not easy, I **suppose**. [epistemic]*
c.   *I **try** to remember half-forgotten Spanish lessons to call her bluff. [deontic]*
d.   *The whole thing **sounds** harmless enough…[perception]*

One possible reason why modal lexical verbs abound can be explained through the concept *words of estrangement* originally coined by Uspensky. According to him, "a type of narration where the author pretends to have no access to the internal states of characters, establishes this pre-tense by the use of non-factive verbs or words of estrangement, such as *seemed* and *appeared*" (McIntyre 2006, p. 25). Statements b, c, and d for example, are indirect descriptions. Again, this can be explained by the fact that the narrator's view, who also happens to be the main character, was the only point of view conveyed as the story unfolds. Her point of view of the reality was the only thing provided with each event. As a result, the readers are obstructed from understanding the text completely and they have to heavily depend on what the narrator will unfold next. This is supported by a similar study by Nissen (2000), who analysed a fiction entitled *Making the Jump* by Eudora Welty. The passage below shows the use of words of estrangement in order for the narrator to also play a vital and active role in the signifying process.

> *There was some way she began to move her arms that was mysteriously sweet and yet abrupt and tentative, a delicate and vulnerable manner, as though her breasts gave her pain. She made many unnecessary trips back and forth across the floor, circling Clyde where he sat in his steamy silence, a knife and fork in his fists.*

The use of *some way* and *as though* also limits description, which results to the narrator taking the readers on a process of discovery. As a result, these words of estrangement "imply that the narrator does not know if her conjectures are correct. They are connotators of restricted knowledge" (Nissen 2010, p. 4). A strong statement by Malmgren (1985) posits that a narrative that is marked by a great many words of estrangement is a narrative whose speaker, presents himself as diffident, circumspect, innocent, uninvolved, or simply ignorant" (p.41). The three passages extracted from the story highlight this ignorance of the narrator. In brief, narration appears in the form of an interpretation of 'facts' made available (Lee, 2010) and if the character's interpretation of these facts is limited, then words of estrangement are likely to be used.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper primarily examined the short story, *Things You Don't Know* by Ian Rosales Casocot using the framework of Simpson in order to reveal the over-all shade of the story. It has been revealed that epistemic modality is widely used with 62 instances, which is far

greater in number compared to the next most used modality with just 10 instances. Accordingly, a large number of occurrences with this type of modality make the readers feel the uncertainty of the narrator to the attitude of the characters and to the situation or events by relying only to the external appearance or surrounding (Simpson 1993). Indeed, the narrator, who is also the main character, was in a state of ambiguity, which is clearly manifested as early as the first line in the story: *Sometimes it is enough to know that most days you can get through, even to the bitter end, simply by playing pretend.* She was portrayed as hesitant whenever a decision has to be made. In fact, it is safe to say that there was never an instance where she was assured of what was going on with the other characters and with every event in the story. This is supported by Morini (2011), who claimed that "if the narrator is the character within the story, what he/she can tell will be limited to what he/she sees/knows" (p. 598).

This study further shows that perspective and particular modals can add 'colour' or 'feel' to the text (Simpson 1993). Thus, through modality, the narrator's point of view can be controlled by the writer by using the functions of these modalities. Consequently, the shade marker identified is negative, due to the frequent use of epistemic modality. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, epistemic modals give off an uncertain feeling, which is negative, and this is supported by Simpson (2004, p. 127) who claims that negative shading is 'a narrative modality where an often "bewildered" narrator or character relies on external signals and appearances to sustain a description.' A similar study by Trimarco (2013), which identified the shade in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, confirmed that they are mostly negative in shade due to the preponderant use of the phrase *I don't know,* a mark of uncertainty. However, the use of epistemic modals may not be the only feature of a negative shade, Gothic or existential styles (Simpson 2004) should also be considered. This is one interesting area which should be dealt with in other studies.

Yet another insight is the claim of Morini (2011) that the narrator's point of view should not be regarded as being told by a single point of view only. The "experiencing self" and the "narrating self" should be differentiated when doing a stylistic analysis on narratives, because the experiencing self is foregrounded while the narrating self does not step in to provide a sober, retrospective evaluation" (Morini 2011, p. 600). But to classify the narrating voices requires an entirely different analysis for doing so would require a different taxonomy of Simpson (1993) – the I-narrator and the I-reflector. Lastly, words of estrangement allow the narrator to assert himself in giving the final word despite the constant uncertainty in the entire text. This, according to Nissen (2000), leaves the readers to interpret the signs in such a way that they feel is coherent with the depiction of the characters up to that point.

Pedagogically, this study presents the way the writer employs modals, and the abundant use of modals enhance the meaning of the story. Thus, these may imply that students be made aware of their different functions in different contexts (Nauze 2009). Herewith, understanding the way these modals works could also lead to better appreciation of short stories or even other literary works primarily because of the vibrancy that modals add to the text. Therefore, students, especially those who are enrolled in creative writing, have to be encouraged to employ modals to augment the meaning of their work. Aside from this, foregrounding particular types of modality could show a shade of a story which reveals a psychological point of view of the persona/narrator of the story (Simpson 2004). With this, students could consciously highlight certain types of modality in his/her writing for it could contribute "to the special 'feel' of the text" (Simpson 1993, p.74). In brief, understanding how modals function in a context could lead to better reading comprehension of a short story or any literary works, and knowing how to apply modals could make one's story or literary work more indicative. Thus, meaning may develop "outside the text in a dynamic relationship

with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions" (Babaee & Montashery 2012, p. 24).

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