
MODALITY IN TEACHER-TO-TEACHER TALK OF ONLINE LEARNING: TENOR IN LANGUAGE USE

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to identify the reasons behind the realization of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning. The data of this study consisted of sentences that expressed modality, uttered by five primary school teachers as they discussed online learning. In addition, the teachers' responses during interviews were also used to provide deeper insights into the reasons for their use of modality. The data were collected by using three main instruments, namely: observation sheet, interview sheet, and voice recorder. The data analysis followed the three stages of qualitative data analysis, namely: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The findings revealed that the use of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning was affected primarily by tenor. This includes the roles the teachers played during the interaction, which were shaped by elements such as power, contact, affect, and formality. Furthermore, modality was also realized due to the values that teachers attached to online learning. Most of the teachers expressed negative attitudes and preferences, indicating dissatisfaction or discomfort with the practice. Therefore, it is important for the government and policymakers to take teachers' perceptions into account when designing and implementing educational policies, particularly those involving online learning in Indonesia.

Keywords: modality, teacher-to-teacher talk, online learning, tenor.

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi alasan di balik terealisasinya modalitas pada percakapan antara guru mengenai pelaksanaan pembelajaran daring. Data dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari kalimat-kalimat yang mengandung ekspresi modalitas yang diucapkan oleh lima guru sekolah dasar saat berdiskusi mengenai pembelajaran daring. Selain itu, tanggapan para guru pada saat wawancara juga digunakan untuk memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai alasan penggunaan modalitas. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan tiga instrumen utama, yaitu: lembar observasi, lembar wawancara, dan alat perekam suara. Analisis data mengikuti tiga tahap dalam analisis data kualitatif, yaitu: kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan modalitas pada percakapan antara guru mengenai pembelajaran daring dipengaruhi oleh *tenor*. Hal ini mencakup peran yang dimainkan oleh para guru selama interaksi, yang dibentuk oleh unsur seperti *power*, *contact*, *affect*, dan *formality*. Selain itu, realisasi modalitas juga disebabkan oleh nilai-nilai yang dilekatkan para guru terhadap pembelajaran daring. Sebagian besar guru menunjukkan sikap dan preferensi negatif, yang mencerminkan ketidakpuasan atau ketidaknyamanan terhadap pelaksanaan pembelajaran daring. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi pemerintah dan para pembuat kebijakan untuk mempertimbangkan persepsi guru dalam merancang dan mengimplementasikan kebijakan pendidikan, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan pembelajaran daring di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: modalitas, percakapan antara guru, pembelajaran daring, tenor.

Introduction

Online learning refers to an educational experience that involves the use of various digital devices, such as smartphones, laptops, and others to connect to the internet, either in real-time (synchronous) or at different times (asynchronous). In these formats, students engage in studying and communication independently with both teachers and peers (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Online learning overcomes barriers of time zones, location, and distance. Asynchronous learning enables students to access content whenever they need, while synchronous learning offers live interaction between students and teachers.

Modality refers to a speaker's expression of judgment or a request for the listener's judgment regarding the truth or value of a statement (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). It involves whether something is likely or unlikely (in the case of proposition) or whether it is desirable or undesirable (in the case of proposal). The modality system functions within the space of uncertainty between definite affirmation "yes" and definite negation "no". For instance, between the certainties of "they are" and "they are not," there are varying degrees of probabilities such as "they need," "they will," or "they might." Similarly, between the definitive like "do!" and "don't!" there are optional choices like "they have to," "they ought to," or "they can."

Halliday's modality system includes various grammatical components that convey the speaker's evaluation of the probability or obligation involved in the utterance (Chen, 2016). He distinguishes two types of modality, namely: modalization and modulation. Modalization refers to degrees of probability and usuality, whereas modulation relates to degrees of obligation and inclination (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In essence, modalization is concerned with what is likely to be true, while modulation addresses what ought to be true (Fairclough, 2003). Modality can be expressed through different forms, such as modal operators, modal adjuncts, interpersonal metaphors, and predicator constituent. Furthermore, modality is categorized by low, medium, or high value based on the strength of the speaker's judgment.

Tenor refers to the social role relationships between individuals involved in an interaction. It encompasses four main aspects, namely: status or power, formality, affect, and contact. Status or power relates to whether the participants hold equal or unequal positions of authority in the interaction. Formality concerns whether the interaction takes place in a formal or informal context. Affect refers to the emotional involvement or commitment of the participants, which can be either positive or negative. Contact involves how often the interactants engage with each other, whether regularly or occasionally. Additionally, tenor also includes the values conveyed by the participants, which may be neutral or emotionally charged, either positively or negatively.

Several studies have explored the concept of modality, for instance: Chen (2016) examined how lexicographers construct identity through usage notes in the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, a learner's dictionary. Espindola and Wang (2016) investigated modality in three tenancy agreements, focusing on a bilingual text in Chinese and English and its comparable counterpart in Brazilian Portuguese. Additionally, Ahmad, Mahmood, and Farukh (2020) studied how modal verbs function as stance markers in newspaper editorials.

Based on the previous studies elaborated above, it can be concluded that while modality analysis has been widely explored, it has primarily focused on written texts. Only a limited number of studies have examined spoken text. This observation aligns with Popping and Roberts (2009), who noted that modality analysis has largely been applied to newspapers and letters to the editor. Therefore, the present study focuses on analyzing modality in spoken text, specifically in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning. This focus also responds Kosko and Herbst (2012), who emphasized the need for deeper investigation into modality in teacher-to-teacher talk to uncover valuable insights about teaching practices and teachers' perceptions.

Analyzing teacher-to-teacher talk can provide researchers with valuable insights into teachers' perceptions and values, their understanding of the pedagogical and social dimensions of the teaching profession, as well as specific features of teacher discourse (Kosko & Herbst, 2012), particularly in the context of online learning. Moreover, examining teacher talk serves as an important means to explore how teachers reflect on their work, construct professional identities, and negotiate social relationships (Little & Little, 2008).

Therefore, the researcher believes it is essential to carry out a study on modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning. In this study, the researcher identified the reasons for the realization of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning.

Method

The Data and Source of Data

The data of this study consisted of sentences containing expressions of modality, uttered by teachers during discussions about online learning. These utterances were collected through a one-week observation conducted in the teachers' office during break time. In addition, teachers' responses to interviews were also used to help explain the reasons behind the use of modality in their conversations.

The data sources of this study were five primary school teachers from a private primary school in Medan. All the names of the participants then were presented in pseudonyms. The selection of these five teachers was based on a convenience sampling technique.

Instruments

There were three instruments used by the researcher in collecting the data, namely: observation sheet, interview sheet, and voice recorder.

1. Observation Sheet

Observation sheet was used to identify the realizations of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning.

2. Interview Sheet

Interview sheet was used to guide the researcher in asking questions related to the realization of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning.

3. Voice Recorder

Voice recorder was used to record the sentences uttered by the participants during the observation and the interview.

Data Analysis Procedure

The sentences expressing modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning and teachers' responses to the interview were analyzed through the three steps of qualitative data analysis, namely:

1. Data Condensation

In this step, the sentences expressing modality were selected. After that, they were classified according to the types of modality, including modalization and modulation. Teachers' responses to the interview were also condensed.

2. Data Display

In this step, the data were displayed in tables. The data were displayed to show the realizations of modality.

3. Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The research question was answered by describing and explaining the meaning of the data based on the theory of tenor, and the conclusion is reached based on the data display.

Findings

The reasons for the realization of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning was revealed based on the theory of tenor and the interview conducted by the researcher. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), tenor refers to the individuals involved in a particular situation. It includes the roles that participants play in the interaction, such as: institutional, status, contact, and sociometric roles, as well as the values they bring into the context, which may be neutral or emotionally charged, either positive or negative.

Based on the analysis of the data, it was found that the realization of modality in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning is affected by tenor. This is due to the roles played by the teachers involved in the conversations, particularly in terms of power, contact, affect, and formality.

1. Power

Power refers to whether or not the roles people are playing are ones in which they have equal or unequal power. The teachers involved in the conversations have equal power because they are teachers teaching at the same school.

2. Contact

Contact refers to whether or not the roles people are playing put them in settings where they have frequent or infrequent contact. In relation to the contact, the teachers involved in the conversations have frequent contact in which they always meet each other at school.

3. Affect

Affective involvement refers to situations that can be classified according to whether the roles people are playing are high or low in terms of affective involvement. This dimension refers to how emotionally involved or committed people are in a situation. In relation to the affect, the teachers are affectively involved in the conversations because they are friends.

4. Formality

The equal power, the frequent contact, and the good affective involvement finally lead the conversations into informal conversations. According to Eggins (2004), informal situation would typically involve interactants who are of equal power, who see each other frequently, and who are affectively involved. Furthermore, in casual conversations, people are simply conversing rather than achieving any obvious pragmatic goal. The realization of modality is then influenced by this informal context. Modalization is used to express probability in informal situations, and modulation is used to express opinion (Eggins, 2004).

The use of modalization to express probability can be seen below.

*semua **pasti akan** tatap muka kak*

(Everyone **will surely** choose face to face learning)

The data shows how the speaker argues about the probability of people that will choose face to face learning compared to online learning.

The use of modulation to express opinion can be seen below.

tapi mungkin semuanya masih wajib dengan maskernya
(but the students **probably have to** wear the mask)

The data shows how the speaker opines about how the learning will be conducted in the future.

Besides talking about the roles played by those taking part in the activity, tenor also talks about the values that the interactants imbue (either neutral or loaded, positively or negatively). Online learning has been applied in Indonesia since March 2019. Unfortunately, this online learning is implemented without any preparation given, especially to the teachers. For that reason, it affects how the teachers think about the learning. Most of the teachers have negative preference on online learning. It can be seen from the data below.

aku rasa lebih ke negative yah..... karena yah, karena kita gak bisa memantau yah 100% gitu apa yang dikerjakannya gitu, buktinya sekarang yah kayak versi dadakan gitu, ada yang tidak benar-benar belajar, prnya juga benar-benar siapa yang ngerjakan kan tanda tanya

The negative values that the teachers imbue in relation to online learning finally lead the realization of modality. Modality is realized by the teachers to show her judgment on online learning. Moreover, probability and obligation are mostly realized in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning because online learning is something new for the teachers. For that reason, the teachers tend to express her judgment on online learning and how it should be implemented.

karena itu tadi, karena mungkin ini hal yang baru, jadi itu masih belum jadi suatu, jadi apa ya masih banyak yang belum sadar, jadi kita harus kasih tau dulu, jadi makanya lebih banyak kita berbicara tentang yang seharusnya, kewajiban yang harus dilakukan, ketimbang keinginan, karena kalau ditanya keinginan pasti nanti jatuhnya gak ada yang mau online learning, namanya juga hal yang baru kan gitu

So, it can be concluded that modality is realized in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning is because of the tenor itself. It is because of the roles played by the teachers taking part in the conversations (power, contact, affect, and formality) and also the values that the teachers imbue about online learning (positive and negative values).

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that tenor has impacts on the language use. The teachers' roles in the talks, as well as the values they imbue about online learning, have an impact on the modality's realization. When it comes to tenor, it's clear that language usage will change dramatically both in informal and formal situations. The findings of this study show that the informal situation has an impact on the realization of modality. Modalization in teacher-to-teacher talk of online learning is used to express probability while modulation is used to express opinion. The results of this study are in line with Eggins (2004).

Based on the results of the study, there are some suggestions given:

1. To the lecturers, it is suggested to use this study as reference in their attempt to teach modality to students.
2. To other researchers, it is suggested to use this study as reference in their attempt to conduct a study, especially in teacher-to-teacher talk and educational context.
3. To the government, it is suggested to use this study as consideration in their attempt to make policies regarding the implementation of online learning in Indonesia.

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