Types of Modality

Jakobson’s Theory/Palmer 1974

• 3 Categories of modals:
  → epistemic vs. non-epistemic
  → non-epistemic = subject-oriented and discourse-oriented
• Subject-oriented: Bill can run a mile in four minutes. (Talk about the subject)
• Discourse-oriented:
  - You may come in. (= I permit you to come in) = addressee
  - May I come in? (= Do you permit me to come in?) = addressee

1. Epistemic

- From the Greek *episteme* = knowledge
- When a modal verb is used to express the speaker's opinion about a statement
- Example: It might be true
- Expressing attitude about whether it is true or not, accepting that there is a possibility, but not being certain

Modality is Everywhere

Types of Modality

• 1. Epistemic
• 2. Deontic
• 3. Dynamic

1. Epistemic

- Impossible: He will not be there
- Improbable: He will probably not be there
- Possible: He will possibly be there
- Probable: He will probably be there
- Certain: He will be there
2. Deontic

- Greek for "duty"
- When a modal verb is used to affect a situation, by giving permission, etc
- Example: You can go when you've finished.
- * = giving permission to control the situation

2. Deontic

- Forbidden: You must not go out
- Permissible: You may go out
- Recommended: You should go out
- Obligatory: You must go out

3. Dynamic

- *Dynamic modality* does not express the speaker's opinion, nor does the speaker affect the situation:
- Example: He can speak perfect French.
- * = describing a factual situation

3. Dynamic

- Ability: I can swim
- Volition: I will go to see Tim

Exercises

- 1. He must be back before dark
- 2. The test should not take longer than 20 minutes
- 3. Students may use the gym
- 4. Tim has to have the right solution; he is the expert

Exercises

- 5. The bank will give you a new credit card
- 6. I can ride a bicycle
- 7. Bill may work for the BBC
- 8. The road might be blocked
Sources

• http://www.usingenglish.com/glossary/dynamic-modality.html
• http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modal_logic