A STUDY ON MODALITY
IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM RESEARCH ARTICLES

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Abstract: The present paper contributes to the increasing investigation into the lexico-grammatical features of the English-medium research articles (RAs). The study investigated the use of modality in the RAs both as a whole and across the sections, and compared these features between two subsets - RAs from an internationally established journal and those from a non-indexed journal published in Vietnam. Data for the study was 30 RAs over a three-year time span from 2017 to 2019 from *English for Specific Purposes* and *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies.* The findings indicate a small disproportion in the frequency between these two groups of authors, with the international subset having a slightly higher normalized frequency. Modality distribution across sections suggests the same decreasing order for both subsets, which starts from *Conclusion* to *Results and Discussion*, *Literature review*, *Introduction* and ends with *Method,* with *Conclusion* being the section with the highest frequency, and *Method* with the lowest. Additionally, the international subset consistently has a slightly higher normalized frequency in all sections than that in the Vietnamese subset. It is expected that the issues unfolded from this study could theoretically contribute to a better understanding of modality in research papers in general and in those in the discipline of Applied Linguistics in particular; practically, the thesis is also hoped to promote the Vietnamese researchers in their endeavor to join the international academic community.

Keywords: modality, research article, research article structure, genre analysis

1. Introduction

Modality, which is concerned with the speakers'/writers' opinion and attitude towards the propositional content, has become the centrality of innumerable research for decades. Regarding academic written discourse, the skillful manipulation of modality markers has been explicitly acknowledged as a means to convey authors' stance, affection or judgment to both the propositions they make and the readers, as well as to modify their statements and avoid the risk of face-threatening communicative activity on the potential addressees (Almeida & Pastor, 2017,

p. 281). The proper use of modality would substantially support the pragmatic aspect in academic writing (Hyland, 1994; Myers, 1989), assist scholars in accurately expressing their research findings (Yang, 2018), and also reflect an advanced level of both linguistic and pragmatic proficiency in the written mode (Chen, 2010).

Of the various genres of academic writing, the RA, an essential vehicle for disseminating new knowledge, has become a frequent subject of various studies, of which a large number focus on modality. Yang et al. (2015) analyze a wide range of epistemic modality (EpM) markers in medical RAs and reach the conclusion that medical RA writers have a tendency to make tentative, reserved and

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objective claims throughout their work. From a contrastive perspective, Orta (2010) and Pastor (2012) investigate the use of modal verbs denoting epistemic modality (EpM) in RAs by non-native and native English speakers. The findings of these two investigations suggest a deviant handling of EpM markers on the part of non-native authors, which would make it more challenging to establish a proper tenor in their RAs. Others look at the distribution of EpM across different disciplines. Vázquez and Giner (2008) investigates RAs in the field of Marketing, Biology and Mechanical Engineering. The results indicate that the sociological features of each discipline have an effect on the way academic authors utilize EpM in their RAs. Vold (2006) examines EpM markers in RAs of two disciplines, Linguistics and Medicine, in three different languages, namely English, French and Norwegian. It is found that French-speaking researchers employ significantly less EpM expressions than their Norwegian and English-speaking colleagues. The disciplinary affiliation is reported to barely affect the number of markers used and the types of markers preferred. As regards the syntactic features, the previous studies unfold a general interest in the modal verbs. Yamazaki (2001) examines how *must*, *may* and *might* are used in chemical research reports as well as the level of certainty assigned to each verb. Bonilla (2017) reports on how different native and non-native English speakers employ *can(not)* and *could(not)* in both academic and informal texts. His work concludes that non-natives seem to overuse modal verbs in academic texts. The tendency of English learners to overuse modal verbs is also revealed in Hykes' (2000) and Yang's (2018) studies, both of which look at modal verbs in academic writing produced by students and professionals. Especially, the research by Almeida and Pastor (2017) examine the use of nine central modal verbs

in the RAs by native speakers in relation to discipline. The paper focuses on the differences between Linguistics and Engineering RAs, which belong to the soft and hard sciences respectively. The findings indicate that modal markers appear the most in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of the Linguistics RAs whereas the Background and Method sections of the Engineering RAs contain the largest number of modal verbs. Semantically, EpM is also found to be most frequently used, especially in the Introduction, Background and Method sections of Engineering RAs and in the Discussion and Conclusion parts of Linguistics RAs.

Within the Vietnamese scholarly community, modality has received increasing attention during two recent decades. The underlying theories revolving around modality, its categories and realizations have been investigated, summarized and presented by a good number of authors (Lưu Quý Khương & Trần Thị Minh Giang, 2012; Ngũ Thiện Hùng, 2003, 2011, 2015; Nguyễn Văn Hiệp, 2007; Võ Đại Quang, 2007, etc.). Experimentally, the employment of both English and Vietnamese modality means in different spoken and written genres such as literature (Bùi Thị Đào, 2014; Nguyễn Thị Nhung, 2016; Phạm Thị Nhung, 2016; Trần Thị Kim Chi, 2003), news stories (Nguyễn Thị Thu Hiền, 2008), social science articles (Nguyễn Thị Thu Thủy, 2012a, 2012b), TED talks (Bùi Thị Mỹ Lợi, 2018; Tôn Nữ Mỹ Nhật & Nguyễn Thị Diệu Minh, 2019), ambassadors' speeches (Trần Hữu Phúc, 2014) has been thoroughly explored. However, to our best knowledge, none has focused on the expression of modality in RAs in general and those by Vietnamese scholars in particular.

On the whole, an extensive review of the works on modality in RAs indicates

that although this domain has been well-researched, it is noticeable that most studies have exclusively focused on the modal verbs, leaving the other devices to denote this strand of meaning unexplored. In addition, there have also been few studies of RAs in the discipline of Linguistics as well as those by Vietnamese authors. This study is hoped to extend the previous studies and bridge this gap by comparing and contrasting the manipulation of modality in two sets of RAs in the discipline of Applied Linguistics - articles from an internationally established journal and articles from an English-medium journal written by Vietnamese scholars. The main questions this study is aimed to answer are: (1) To what extent is modality used in RAs in Applied Linguistics as a whole? (2) To what extent does the distribution of modality in the RAs in Applied Linguistics vary across sections? (3) What are the similarities and differences regarding these features between the two groups of subjects investigated?

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of modality and its subtypes. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 is to answer the research questions. The article closes with a brief consideration of the pedagogical implications of the findings and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Definition

Stamatović (2016) claims that modality remains "one of the few slippery notions employed in linguistics that resists any satisfactory formal definition" (p. 132). Various scholars relate the term *'modality'* to speaker's/writer's subjective stance. It has been widely argued that language is not merely used to convey factual information about the truth of the proposition contained in an utterance but also to express one's attitudes, opinions, ideas and ideologies about the events. To Lyons (1977), modality realizes the speaker's "opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes" (p. 452). This definition is also embraced by Palmer (2013, p. 2), an advocate of a semantically-oriented approach to modality. Modality can also be defined as the linguistic encoding (Biber et al., 1999, p. 966) or grammaticization (Bybee et al., 1994, p. 176) of the beliefs, subjective attitudes and opinions of speaker/writer towards the proposition manifested. Simpson (1993) refers to modality as a speaker's/writer's attitude toward or opinion about the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence as well as the attitude toward the situation or event described by that sentence. Along the same line, Quirk et al. (1985, p. 219) propose that at its most general, modality may be considered as "the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true".

In general, it is noted that with each scholar having their own way to approach the fuzzy notion of modality, a clear-cut definition of the term has not yet been determined. This paper, however, will strictly follow the one proposed by Palmer (2013), considering modality as the realization of the speaker's/writer's opinion or attitude towards the situation of the proposition, or the proposition itself.

2.2. Modality Markers

It has been commonly agreed that the most pervasive and principal means of modality expressions is modal verbs, which serve to give more information about the function of

the main verbs that follow them. Biber et al. (1999, p. 483) propose nine **central modals** used to express modality, namely *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would* and *must*. Biber et al. (ibid., p. 483) list *need*, *dare*, *used to* and *ought to* under the category of **marginal modals.** Another widely recognized subtype is that of **quasi modals**, a periphrastic modal form that are "formally distinguishable from, but semantically similar to the modal auxiliaries" (Collins, 2009, p. 15). Within the set of quasi modals, Quirk et al. (1985, pp. 137-146) distinguish between modal idioms and semi-auxiliaries as follows:

- Modal idioms (those that have an auxiliary as their first element): *had better, would rather, be to, have got to, had best, would sooner/ would (just) as soon, may/might (just) as well;*

- Semi-auxiliaries (those that do not contain an auxiliary as their first element, but in most cases involve *be* and a lexical item): *have to, be (un)able to, be about to, be bound to, be going to, be obliged to, be supposed to, be (un)willing to, be apt to, be due to, be likely to, be meant to.*

Unlike modal verbs, lexical devices - lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns - have received a disproportionate amount of attention from linguists as there exists a long tradition to solely or predominantly concentrate on the modal verbs and exclude other expressions (Dirven, 1989, p. 60, as cited in Khosravi, 2016, p. 4). However, having studied modality in large amounts of discourse, Hermerén (1978) and Holmes (1983) (as cited in McCarthy, 1991, p. 85) show a wide range of lexical items carrying modal meanings. The analyses show that, put together, other word classes may express modality more frequently than modal verbs, and that lexical verbs and adverbs appear considerably more often than nouns and adjectives.

Drawn heavily on the results of the previous studies on this domain (Biber et al., 1999; Ngula, 2015; Quirk et al., 1985), the potential lexical items to denote modality are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Lexical modality markers

Word class	Lexical markers
Verbs	advise, allow, allege, appear, argue, ask, assume, attest, authorize, believe, bet, calculate, claim, conclude, consider, constrain, convince, doubt, estimate, expect, fear, feel (like), figure, find, force, gather, guess, hope, imagine, imply, indicate, infer, know, look (like)/(as if), menace, oblige, order, permit, presume, promise, propose, reckon, recommend, request, require, (would) say, seem (like), sound (like), speculate, suggest, suppose, suspect, tend, think; threaten, undertake, urge, warn
Adverbs/ Prepositional phrases	actually, allegedly, apparently, arguably, assuredly, certainly, clearly, compulsorily, conceivably, doubtlessly, decidedly, definitely, evidently, incontestably, for me, in my mind, in my opinion, in my view, in truth, incontrovertibly, indeed, indisputably, indubitably, inevitably, likely, mandatorily, manifestly, maybe, naturally, necessarily, needless to say, obviously, obligatorily; of course, ostensibly, patently, perhaps, plainly, possibly, presumably, probably, purportedly, reputedly, seemingly, so far as appeared, supposedly, sure, surely, to me, to my mind, unarguably, unavoidably, undeniably, undoubtedly, unquestionably

Adjectives	(im)probable, (un)likely, advisable, apparent, appropriate, certain, clear, compulsory, confident, convinced, critical, crucial, desirable, doubtful, doubtless, essential, evident, expedient, fitting, good, important, indispensable, mandatory, necessary, needful, obligatory, obvious, positive, possible, possible, proper, sure, true, vital
Nouns	assumption, belief, certainty, chance, claim, danger, (beyond/ no/ without) doubt, estimate, estimation, evidence, fear, guess, hope, indication, likelihood, necessity, odds, opinion, order, permission, possibility, potential, probability, proposal, question, requirement, speculation, suggestion, tendency, theory

3. Research methodology

3.1. Data description

The data includes an international subset of 15 RAs and a Vietnamese subset of 15 RAs. RAs in the international subset were selected from *English for Specific Purposes*, a well-established journal in the discipline of applied linguistics which takes a worldwide interest in all branches of the subject. The journal is included in the Social Science Citation Index, an indicator of quality research publication, which marks its reputation and credibility. RAs in the Vietnamese subset were taken from *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, a serial publication launched as part of the *VNU Journal of Science. VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* is an official and independent publication of the University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) under Vietnam National University (VNU). The journal mainly concerns linguistics, foreign language education, international studies and related social sciences and humanities.

Traditionally, *English for Specific Purposes* publishes four volumes a year. On the other hand, *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* releases bimonthly four English editions and two Vietnamese ones. The RAs collected for this study are from the former. The RAs in this research were compiled from the latest issues in the three most recent years since the data collection process began, which

was in June 2019.

Between 2017 and June 2019, *English for Specific Purposes* contains 71 RAs whereas *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* includes 73 English-medium RAs in total. The examination of the RAs collected reveals that while all RAs in *English for Specific Purposes* concern Applied Linguistics, 13 out of 73 RAs in *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* are those of Pure/ Theoretical Linguistics. To ensure consistency, 13 RAs of the Pure/ Theoretical Linguistics discipline were excluded. Additionally, three RAs in the Vietnamese journal which were found to be written by foreigners, not native Vietnamese writers, were also discarded. The criteria for the RAs to have been included as data were: they concern applied linguistics, not pure/ theoretical linguistics; they consist of five sections - *Introduction, Literature review, Method, Results and Discussion,* and *Conclusion*. There were a total of 53 RAs in the international journal and 38 RAs in the Vietnamese one meeting the requirements, from which 30 RAs were randomly chosen.

The 30 English-medium RAs which had been chosen based on the abovementioned criteria and steps were compiled and downloaded as PDF files. Then the files were converted into text documents. Redundant details were also excluded to prepare the texts for later full-scale investigation. These details involve (1) information about author(s), volume and issue of the journal; (2) sections

of abstract, acknowledgement, references, appendices; and (3) endnotes, page number, and all figures, tables, charts, and diagrams. The total word count of RAs chosen varies from texts to texts, but RAs by international writers would generally be of longer length than those by Vietnamese ones. The word count of each subset is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Word count of two subsets

	Minimum length (words)	Maximum length (words)	Mean length (words)	Total word count (words)
International subset	5551	10,985	7,898.4	118,476
Vietnamese subset	2746	7912	5,088.0	76,320
Total			6,493.2	194,796

3.2. Data Analysis

Identification and categorization of markers: For each RA in the corpus, a manual verification was carried out in order to identify and categorize the modality markers into: Modal verbs, Verbs (lexical verbs), Adverbs (including adverbs and prepositional phrases functioning as adverbs), Adjectives, and Nouns. As mentioned above, the notion of modal verbs covers central modals, marginal modals and quasi modals. However, for the sake of simplicity, in this study *modal verb* serves as an umbrella term, subsuming all these categories. In addition, as Gustová (2011, p. 7) points out, semi-auxiliaries/ lexico-modals, a subtype of quasi modals, lie closer to main verbs than other subcategories, so items belonging to this subclass or those that are closely related to lexical items would be treated as such. For instance, *be (un)able to*, or *be likely to* would be classified as adjectives, and *be obliged to* or *be supposed to* will be considered as lexical verbs. To serve the purpose of this investigation, the items categorized as modal verbs in this study are as follows: *be about to, be going to, be to, can, could, dare, had best, had better, have got to, have to, may, might, must, need, ought to, shall, should, used to, will, would, would rather, would sooner, would (just) as soon.*

Calculation of Occurrence Frequencies: Since the texts in the corpus are not of the same length, the comparison of raw frequencies might lead to biased and unreliable results. A normed frequency allows users to know how many times an item occurs per X words of running texts, which represents the base of normalization. Thus, to gain normed frequencies, researchers need to take the raw frequency of an item appearing in one section, divide it by the size of that section, and then multiply the result by the base of normalization. The base of normalization would depend on the size of the corpus: it could be set to per 1 million words of running texts if the corpus is of approximately 100 million words, or per 10,000 words of running texts if the corpus is of 1 million words (Ngula, 2015, p. 124). As the overall size of the present corpus is nearly 200,000 words, it is justifiable to set the base of normalization at per 1000 words of running texts. The formula to convert each frequency into a value per a thousand words is as follows: $\mathbf{F_N = F_O*1000/C}$, with F_N: the normalized frequency; F_O: the observed frequency; C: the corpus size. It was these normed frequencies that were based on to describe findings concerning the distribution of modality markers between two subsets of data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. The Use of Modality in the Entire RAs

The analysis unfolds a noticeable fact that modality expressions appear in every RA of both the subsets of the data set. Table 3 presents the maximum and minimum numbers of occurrences of modality devices, as well as the estimated average number of tokens occurring in one RA in each subset.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of modality markers in the corpus.

	Max. (tokens)	Min. (tokens)	Mean (tokens)
International subset	253	61	127.2
Vietnamese subset	161	27	76.3

The highest number of modality tokens per RA in the international group is 253, which is about 1.5 times higher than that in the Vietnamese. Meanwhile, the minimum number of modality markers in the international set is 61, which is nearly 2.3 times higher than that in the Vietnamese. Consequently, it can be seen that the RAs in the international subset generally employ more modality tokens than those in the Vietnamese as a typical RA in the international group would consist of about 127 modality markers on average whereas a RA in the Vietnamese group would comprise roughly 76 items.

This disproportion in the mean of modality markers between the two groups undoubtedly results from the marked difference in the size of each subset. As can be seen from Table 4,

the 30-text corpus consists of a total of 194,796 words, 3,053 of which are markers denoting modality. In detail, regarding RAs by the international researchers, it is found that the 118,476-word subset includes 1,908 tokens of modality markers. Meanwhile, the RAs by Vietnamese authors, which are approximately 1.5 times shorter in length (76,320 vs. 118,476), contain 1,145 cases of modality realization in total. The raw tokens show a much larger number of modality devices in the RAs by the international writers than in those by the Vietnamese writers; however, by the normalized values, we can see that the overall frequency of modality markers employed by the international authors is only slightly higher than that by the Vietnamese researchers, with the distribution per 1000 words being 16.10 and 15.00 respectively.

Table 4. Distribution of modality markers in the entire RAs

	C	F_O	F_N
International subset	118,476	1,908	16.10
Vietnamese subset	76,320	1,145	15.00
Total	194,796	3,053	15.67

Note. C = corpus size (words); F_O = observed frequency (occurrences); F_N = normalized frequency

4.1.2. The Distribution of Modality across Sections

Table 5 features the occurrence of modality markers in five distinct sections of the RA by two groups of authors.

Table 5. Numbers of occurrences of modality markers across sections

	International subset		Vietnamese subset	
	Length	Tokens	Length	Tokens
Introduction	10,348	117	4,338	42
Literature review	18,893	297	17,023	242
Methodology	22,652	246	8.,696	55
Results and Discussion	55,534	976	40,042	685
Conclusion	11,049	272	6,222	118
Total	118,476	1,908	76,320	1,145

From the raw frequencies, it is apparent that international researchers utilize more modality markers than their Vietnamese counterparts in every RA. However, due to the different lengths of each segment, in order to compare the two subsets, it is essential to rely on the normalized frequencies, which are represented in Figure 1 below.
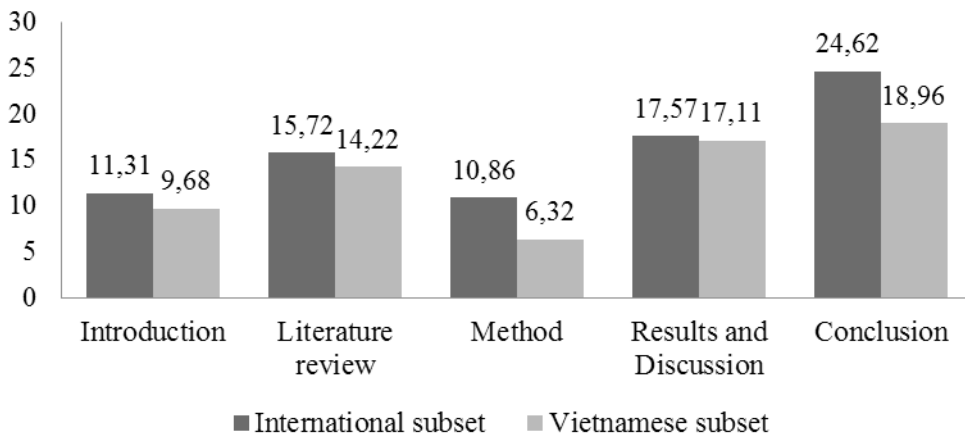

Figure 1. Normalized frequencies of markers across sections (per 1,000 words).

Mention first should be made of the fact that modality markers in the international subset occur more frequently than those in the Vietnamese within every RA section. The figures also reveal that the ranking of each section based on the modality density is identical in both groups, with *Conclusion* being the segment with the highest marker frequency and the *Method* section with the lowest.

In detail, the *Conclusion* section is found to have the highest normalized frequency among all, with the density of modality markers per 1,000 words in the international and Vietnamese subset being 24.62 and 18.96 respectively. The employment of modality in the segment helps outline an overview of the findings (as in 4.1 and 4.2) and tentatively claims the achievements of the study as well as its contributions to the Linguistics field, as in (4.3) and (4.4).

(4.1) The context is a practical trades training environment, with trades specialists, who though they <u>may</u> have completed initial teaching training, have not been trained as language and literacy specialists. However, these tutors <u>appear</u> to be integrating language and literacy into carpentry training, and both tutors and learners <u>appear</u> to be drawing on a range of ways to support

the learning of specialised terms, primarily through tutor and learner talk around the practical work. In New Zealand, programmes at this level <u>need</u> to be visibly integrating language and literacy within vocational training (Tertiary Education Commission, 2014). This study shows that such integration of language and literacy and vocational training <u>appears</u> to be taking place. [I1802]

(4.2) *The present study reinforces the findings of previous studies. Training <u>can</u> increase quantity of ideas and the order of brainstorming sessions solitary to group brainstorming is effective (Baruah & Paulus, 2008). [...] Furthermore, brainstorming <u>could</u> enhance learning motivation and improve learning performance as well as other soft skills for students (Blatchford et al, 2003; Gillies, 2003; Dooly, 2008; Saed, 2011). [V1705]*

(4.3) *This paper offers several contributions. It combines the work done in ESP and corpus linguistics with that being done in disciplinary literacy, drawing on the technical advances of the former to produce a resource that <u>can</u> enhance the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the secondary school context. The resulting Secondary Phrase Lists fill an important gap between discipline-specific lemma lists that represent the language of disciplinary content, and phrase lists which <u>tend</u> to be combinations of lexical and grammatical words that represent discourse moves and functions. [...] Finally, the paper makes a theoretical contribution by showing the extent of a core lexical academic vocabulary at the content word phrase level <u>appears</u>*

to be limited, more so than lexical bundle phraseology, supporting the need for the pedagogical approach of disciplinary literacy. [I1901]

(4.4) *It contributed a model of idea generation training for writing which <u>could</u> be implemented in similar situations. [V1705]*

Modality in *Conclusion* also functions to reflect the limitations (as in 4.5 and 4.6) and put forward viable implications (as in 4.7) as well as suggestions for further research (as in 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10).

(4.5) *Firstly, the research had no control over the genres and levels of difficulty of the assignments. These factors, <u>obviously</u>, <u>could</u> influence the students' writing performance. Secondly, [...]. Therefore, further research <u>should</u> be carried out using more data [...]. [V1903]*

(4.6) <u>*Clearly*</u> *having more participants in this aspect of the study <u>might</u> have raised, or not, the level of analysis allowed and <u>possibly</u> the level of agreement between participants. [I1804]*

(4.7) *Firstly, the results have demonstrated that ability grouping <u>can</u> be effective in some contexts for lower level ESP language learners, and it <u>would</u> be useful to continue with this practice. For more proficient learners, however, it <u>would</u> <u>seem</u> that some changes to the current practices are <u>required</u>. [I1801]*

(4.8) *[...] and future research <u>needs</u> to procure content teacher ratings from STEM. In the end no ratings <u>can</u> represent all possible teaching and learning contexts, and [..]. [I1901]*

(4.9) *It <u>would</u> be interesting to further explore whether [...]. Proposal reviewers <u>would</u> be a highly informative source for such*

research. [I1904]

(4.10) [...] further studies <u>should</u> be conducted. Since this study only focused on high school English teachers' perceptions of in-class speaking assessment, further research <u>can</u> explore the high school teachers' practice of [...]. Future studies <u>can</u> also [...]. [V1804]

The section with the second highest frequency of modality devices is *Results and Discussion*. The data suggest that in every 1,000 words in this segment, there is an average of 17.57 markers employed in the international subset and 17.11 items in the Vietnamese one. Modality enables researchers to present their findings and their personal interpretations of the results (as in 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13). It also serves to connect the present study to previous works, pointing out how it contrasts or resonates with them (as in 4.14 and 4.15).

(4.11) In Table 2, it <u>can</u> be seen that [...]. In brief, pragmatic features based on Speech Act theory of the structure "I + CNFV and EA collocations" <u>can</u> be employed effectively in communication; therefore, learners of English and native speakers of English <u>should</u> master them to get better conversations. [V1805]

(4.12) It is <u>evident</u> in Figure 4c that [...]. Most of the disciplines <u>seem</u> to balance [...]; others <u>tend</u> to rely more either on [...]. [I1703]

(4.13) In addition, the description denotes that flower is always attractive though its smell is fragrant or malodorous. With smelly, the lines <u>seem</u> to send a message to the couples that love <u>should</u> always be respected at all costs. It <u>may</u> not be as perfect as expected but it is fruitful and acceptable. Following is another instance of using extending

technique for love conventional metaphor. [V1702]

(4.14) In contrast to these studies, the present study was in a context where the tutors and learners <u>could</u> rely on [...]. [I1802]

(4.15) Applying findings by Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010), Pigada and Schmitt (2006), and Waring and Takaki (2003) to the present study revealed that after reading 500,000 words of SFF, L2 learners <u>might</u> be able to recognize the forms of between 27% and 43% of the science word list, and recall the forms of as much as 53% of the list. Learners <u>would likely</u> experience similar gains in terms of meaning recognition, with a potential increase of between 28% and 34% of the word list; however, ability to recall meanings <u>could</u> vary considerably, with possible gains as low as 9% or as high as 38% of the word list. In addition, learners <u>could</u> also be able to recall the grammatical functions of as much as 49% of the word list. In sum, learners <u>could</u> experience the following technical vocabulary gains given a 500,000-word SFF reading commitment. [I1705]

Literature review ranks third on the list of sections with high frequency of modality, with the normalized figures in the international and Vietnamese groups being 15.72 and 14.22 markers per 1,000 words respectively. The presence of modality in this section allows authors to highlight seminal works on the topic, their possible limitations as well as contributions to the field (as in 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18). Modality may also express authors' perspective or approach to the subject (as in 4.19).

(4.16) Baker (1998) reasoned that providing learning environments and supporting

infrastructures that are conducive to successful learning activities can encourage students' motivation [...]. Kim (2012) found that the practice of ability grouping can lead to more work for teachers, as they are required to adjust materials for different levels. [I1801]

(4.17) *[...] a study by Ceylan (2015) shows that the more strategies the students employ, the more autonomous they might become as [...]. [V1905]*

(4.18) *Existing needs analyses suggest [...]. However, these findings must be treated with caution for the purposes of program design since [...]. [I1702]*

(4.19) *Wong (2000, p. 61) states that this use of yeah in native speakers is rare and seems to "mark failure of the search" for an appropriate linguistic item to use in a certain circumstance. However, it appears that there is something that [...]. [V1904]*

The *Introduction* section is found to have a relatively low modality density. Specifically, international writers employ a total of 11.31 markers per 1,000 running words while the figure for Vietnamese authors is only 9.68. Modality in this segment is used to sketch out the current situation regarding the subject of the study as well as to emphasize the gap left to be filled (as in 4.20 and 4.21).

(4.20) *It is important to take a holistic view that accounts for academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and cultural integration (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011; Mamiseishvili, 2012). Therefore, as part of a review of the institute's EAP program, a comprehensive needs analysis was undertaken. This paper reports on [...]. [I1702]*

(4.21) *Along with the implementation of the English pilot program, it is required by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) that English testing and assessment be comprehensively conducted in terms of four skills, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening (Dispatch No 5333/ BGDĐT-GDTrH) so that students, upon their completion of high school education, will have achieved [...]. In the light of MOET document, high school students should be able to communicate in English in both spoken and written forms. [V1804]*

Ranking last on the list, *Method* is the section with the lowest frequency of modality since per 1,000 words there are only around 10.86 and 6.32 markers deployed in the international and Vietnamese subset respectively. Modality realization in this part contributes to the description of data as well as the analysis procedure. For example,

(4.22) *Although a more accurate assessment of threshold levels may be reached by a random sampling of texts (e.g. Sajid, 2013) from the LtSC to create the sub-corpora, the Top 10 corpus was collected and organized due to the intuitive organization scheme which would likely be applied within a classroom setting. In other words, the Top 10 corpus was organized in this manner due to the expectation that a classroom instructor would more likely ask students to collect the top 10 letters rather than compiling a random sampling of letters from the top 100; the Top 50 was compiled to serve as an additional benchmark in the analysis. [I1704]*

(4.23) *These films discuss current social issues in official contexts such as*

working environments of businessmen, politicians, congressmen, and police. Similar features of these films <u>can</u> enhance the validity and reliability of data collected from them. From the chosen films, conversations are gathered. Selected conversations <u>must</u> have opening sections and be between two participants - a staff and a manager aged from 20 to 60. [V1703]

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Modality Use in the Entire RAs

Findings obtained from the data analysis of 30 RAs in the field of Linguistics written by both international and Vietnamese authors disclose the occurrence of 3,053 modality markers out of the 194,796-word corpus, which means that there is an average of 15.67 markers per 1,000 running words. Modality is also found to appear in every RA examined, with approximately 127 and 76 items used in each RA in the international and Vietnamese group respectively. The large number of modality markers employed as well as their presence in every single RA within the corpus evidences the undeniable prevalence and central importance of this phenomenon in academic written genre in general and in RAs in particular.

The analysis indicates a minor difference in the frequency of modality markers between the international and Vietnamese subsets, which likely suggests that the Vietnamese researchers are as proficient in the employment of modality as the international ones. The present findings are in contradiction with the previous results obtained from the other studies on the modality-related performance of non-native high school or college students (Chen, 2010; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Milton & Hyland, 1999; Yang, 2018), graduates (Hykes, 2000), or postgraduates (Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2005) who tend to underuse, overuse or misuse modality expressions. The explanation for this distinction might lie in the different levels of language proficiency of the subjects involved; the writers in this study are mostly researchers, teachers and university lecturers with undoubtedly a high command of English, who would be able to produce language more accurately and skillfully. This claim aligns with the statements of Milton and Hyland (1999), which advance that non-native students would approximate native-like usage in tentative expressions as their proficiency improves, and of Chen (2010), which contend that the increase in language proficiency of non-native learners would result in a progress in intercultural pragmatic competence.

4.2.2. Modality Distribution across Sections

The investigation of modality distribution at sectional level reveals that concentrations of modality are found most often in the *Conclusion* section. The number of modality markers decreases in descending order from *Results and Discussion* to *Literature review*, *Introduction* and finally *Method*. This order of high frequency of modality distribution across RA sections is quite distinct from the one which has uniformly been reported by other linguists such as Adams-Smith (1984), Butler (1990), Salager-Meyer (1994), and Varttala (1998) in previous works on this genre, which is *Discussion - Introduction - Results - Method*. The discrepancy might be attributed to the nature of the RAs in the data set. It is noticed that RAs in those studies mentioned above follow the IMRD macrostructure structure (Introduction - Method - Results - Discussion) whereas the RAs selected as data for the present research are of the Introduction - Literature review - Method - Results and Discussion - Conclusion pattern.

With the appearance of the *Literature review* and *Conclusion* section, the function and the content of each segment in RAs vary greatly; as a result, the frequency of modality use in the corpus of this study is likely to differ.

Traditionally, within the IMRD structure, the *Introduction* section is mainly used to discuss the research of others, thus the need to deploy a great number of modality markers in order to mitigate claims. Within the pattern of the RAs in the corpus of the present analysis, the function of *Introduction* is just to briefly introduce and address the necessity to conduct a study by outlining facts about the current situation in the world and in the existing literature; therefore, it seems justifiable that this section does not include many modality markers. *Literature review* now takes on the major function of the conventional *Introduction* in the IMRD structure, which is to offer a general overview of previous works, point out the gap to bridge and highlight the adopted theoretical framework, thus providing more room for a high frequency of modality actualization. Modality in this RA segment, especially EpM, serves as a politeness strategy for scholars to cautiously criticize fellow researchers as they remark upon other others' theories and former works (Vold, 2006, p. 82).

Within the traditional IMRD structure, *Results* and *Discussion* are two separate segments, the former of which contains a small number of modality markers as it is dedicated to the presentation of concrete numbers and statistics whereas the latter has a high frequency of modality means as it is to relate to non-evidential claims and judgments of truth and doubt or certainty (Hykes, 2000, p. 14). On the contrary, in the RAs selected as data for this study, the combination of the two sections of *Results* and *Discussion* results in the use of modality which allows

academic writers to report new findings with an appropriate degree of tentativeness so as to acknowledge the possibility that they could be proven wrong, thus creating a scientific foundation as well as enhancing the credibility of the writings (Hykes, 2000, p. 12).

The presence of the *Conclusion* section in the corpus of this study marks a key difference between two RA structures. Since *Conclusion* is entirely devoted to summarizing the study, providing suggestions and implications, the need to employ modality markers to tone down statements and present claims with precision and caution is clear. Additionally, it is noteworthy that although the *Results and Discussion* section includes far more modality markers than *Conclusion* (1,661 vs. 390), its frequency per 1,000 words ranks after that of *Conclusion* (17.57 vs. 24.62, in the international subset; 17.11 vs. 18.96, in the Vietnamese group). The explanation for these figures seems to be the length of the two sections. The *Results and Discussion* section contains a total of 95,576 words, much longer than the length of *Conclusion*, which is only 17,271 words in total; consequently, *Conclusion*, with a high number of modality tokens distributing over a relatively short segment, becomes the section with the highest frequency of markers.

In line with the previous studies which analyzed the RAs of the traditional IMRD structure, the present study reveals that *Method* is the segment with the lowest frequency of modality tokens. This feature is probably because its function in the two structures is the same. The *Method* section in both patterns is set out to account for the actual process of data collection and data analysis; therefore, the heavy use of modality means in this segment would be inappropriate.

5. Conclusions

This paper has presented relatively detailed descriptions and explanations of the use of modality in Applied Linguistics RAs from a comparative perspective, drawing on a corpus of 30 Applied Linguistics RAs published in *English for Specific Purposes* and *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* between 2017 and 2019. Overall, modality expressions are found to be present in every RA in both the international and Vietnamese subsets; the overall occurrences of modality markers used by international writers are only slightly higher than those of Vietnamese researchers, suggesting that the Vietnamese authors' proficiency in the employment of modality is not vastly different from their international fellows'. As far as the modality distribution across RA sections is concerned, though each section in the international and Vietnamese subsets presents different normalized frequencies, the order of each section regarding modality density is identical between the two groups, with *Conclusion* being the section with the highest frequency.

The authors hope that this study has contributed to the genre analysis literature with relation to modality. Theoretically, it extends and refines previous studies with a focus on only the modal verbs as a means of denoting modality. The overall picture of the modality employment in Linguistics RAs drawn from this analysis confirms the prevalence and significance of modality in RAs in particular and in scholarly written genre in general, thus pointing out the need for further studies on this notion in the future. In addition, based on the results of the study, pedagogical implications can be drawn. Modality presents a considerable challenge to learners of English, which might be due to their imperfect language proficiency,

native language transfer, and cultural transfer (Letica, 2009, p. 131). Another explanation might be the underestimation and partial presentation of this phenomenon in the teacher and student textbooks, as well as in language teaching classrooms (Efstathiadi, 2010, p. 13; Yang, 2018, p. 126). Therefore, it is expected that the findings will to some extent assist the Vietnamese scholars to generate their RAs to the expectations of their academic discourse community with regard to modality expression. For example, in the academic writing courses for undergraduates and post-graduates, students need to be made aware of the range of linguistic means to convey modality and instructed to see the functions of this area of language in RAs, as well as in different sections of the genre.

The findings obtained from this study may provide a foundation for further inquiries. Although the research has reached its aims, there remain some unavoidable limitations which need to be acknowledged and addressed in future research. Firstly, the present paper applies the term *'international'* as a reference to authors whose works are published in the *English for Specific Purposes* journal; there is no uniformity regarding their nationalities. In other words, these writers may be native and non-native English speakers. Future analyses could therefore focus on only those written by English native speakers. Secondly, as this study only focuses on RAs written in English, RAs in Vietnamese are left unexplored. As a result, investigations in the future could compare and contrast the employment of modality in Vietnamese-medium and English-medium RAs within the academic community in Vietnam. Finally, the sole focus of this research is on RAs concerning the field of Applied Linguistics; consequently, it would be instructive to explore the modality distribution in RAs in other subfields within Linguistics.

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Online resources

The Grammar Lab: http://www.thegrammarlab.com/?p=160

Appendix: Data sources

Table A.1. RAs in the international subset

Code	Articles
I1701	The student laboratory report genre: A genre analysis. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(45)*, 1-13.
I1702	"Step Out of the Cycle": Needs, challenges, and successes of international undergraduates at a U.S. University. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(46)*, 15-28.
I1703	A move/step model for methods sections: Demonstrating rigour and credibility. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(46)*, 90-106.
I1704	"New opportunities" and "Strong performance": Evaluative adjectives in letters to shareholders and potential for pedagogically-downsized specialized corpora. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(47)*, 40-51.
I1705	Science-specific technical vocabulary in science fiction-fantasy texts: A case for 'language through literature'. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(48)*, 44-56.
I1801	Is ability grouping beneficial or detrimental to Japanese ESP students' English language proficiency development? *English for Specific Purposes*, *(49)*, 39-48.
I1802	'We learn as we go': How acquisition of a technical vocabulary is supported during vocational training. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(50)*, 14-27.
I1803	Multilingual and multimodal practices at a global startup: Toward a spatial approach to language and literacy in professional contexts. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(51)*, 55-68.
I1804	Investigating the technical vocabulary of plumbing. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(51)*, 84-97.
I1805	Bringing reality to the classroom: Exercises in intertextuality. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(52)*, 1-12.
I1901	Position vectors, homologous chromosomes and gamma rays: Promoting disciplinary literacy through Secondary Phrase Lists. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(53)*, 1-12.
I1902	Using corpus-based discourse analysis for curriculum development: Creating and evaluating a pronunciation course for internationally educated nurses. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(53)*, 13-29.
I1903	A prosodic profile of American Aviation English. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(53)*, 30-46.
I1904	Articulating societal benefits in grant proposals: Move analysis of Broader Impacts. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(54)*, 15-34.
I1905	If you can defend your own point of view, you're good: Norms of voice construction in student writing on an international Master's programme. *English for Specific Purposes*, *(54)*, 110-126.

Table A.2. RAs in the Vietnamese subset

Code	Articles
V1701	World Englishes from a holistic view and considerations on English education in Vietnam. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *33*(6), 41-55.
V1702	Poetic metaphors of love in English and Vietnamese. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *33*(6), 56-64.

V1703	Verbal strategies used in opening a conversation in office settings by English and Vietnamese staff and managers. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *33*(6), 65-77.
V1704	Speech act types in conversations in the "New interchange" series. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *33*(6), 78-92.
V1705	The effectiveness of collaborative brainstorming training procedures at pre-writing stage in intermediate English classes. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *33*(6), 123-141.
V1801	EFL students' voices on learner autonomy at a university in the Mekong delta. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *34*(2), 26-38.
V1802	Translating proper names in a literary text: A case of Harry Potter novel in Vietnam. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *34*(2), 39-50.
V1803	The application of strategy-based instructions to teach writing to first-year English majored students. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *34*(2), 51-61.
V1804	An investigation into EFL teachers' perceptions of in-class English speaking assessment. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *34*(2), 125-139.
V1805	Pragmatic features of the structure "I + cognitive non-factive verb and epistemic adverb collocations". *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *34*(4), 59-70.
V1901	Integrating culture into EFL teaching behind classroom doors: A case study of upper secondary teachers in Vietnam. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *35*(1), 55-67.
V1902	Primary English language teachers' engagement in professional development. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *35*(1), 131-142.
V1903	The use of nominalization in EMI student writing - A longitudinal perspective. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *35*(3), 73-82.
V1904	A relevance-theoretic analysis of *yeah* as a discourse marker. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *35*(3), 176-186.
V1905	Language learner autonomy and language learning opportunities inside and outside classroom. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *35*(3), 187-200.

NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ TÌNH THÁI
TRONG CÁC BÀI BÁO KHOA HỌC TIẾNG ANH

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết đóng góp vào thực tiễn nghiên cứu các đặc trưng từ vựng-ngữ pháp của thể loại bài báo khoa học tiếng Anh. Công trình nghiên cứu cách diễn đạt tình thái trong toàn bài báo cũng như trong từng mục của bài báo, và so sánh những đặc trưng này giữa hai nhóm bài báo - những bài báo quốc tế và những bài báo chưa thuộc danh mục quốc tế được viết bởi người Việt Nam. Cứ liệu phân tích là 30 bài báo Ngôn ngữ học ứng dụng xuất bản trong khoảng thời gian 2017-2019 từ 2 tạp chí *English for Specific Purposes* và *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* (tạp chí *Nghiên cứu Nước ngoài*). Kết quả cho thấy có sự khác biệt, nhưng không đáng kể, về tần suất sử dụng các phương tiện biểu đạt tình thái giữa hai nhóm tác giả, với nhóm bài báo của các tác giả quốc tế có tần suất cao hơn. Về tình thái trong mỗi mục của bài báo, kết quả cho thấy cả hai nhóm tác giả có xu hướng sử dụng giống nhau: theo tần suất từ cao nhất đến thấp nhất là *Phần kết luận, Kết quả và thảo luận, Tổng quan, Mở đầu, Phương pháp nghiên cứu.* Trong tất cả các mục, tần suất sử dụng ở nhóm tác giả quốc tế luôn cao hơn so với nhóm tác giả người Việt. Công trình nghiên cứu hy vọng là một đóng góp nhỏ vào việc phát triển thực tiễn viết bài báo khoa học bằng tiếng Anh của những học giả người Việt.

Từ khóa: tình thái, bài báo khoa học, cấu trúc bài báo khoa học, phân tích thể loại.