

# Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality in Ernest Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Date of Article</p> <p>Received : 2023/12/06</p> <p>Received in revised form: 2023/12/14</p> <p>Accepted: 2023/12/17</p> <p>Available online: 2024/3/27</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Epistemic Modality, Evidentiality, Conceived Truthfulness, Willett, The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Ernest Hemingway</p>	<p>Epistemic modality refers to the use of modality which is based on the speaker's evaluation and judgment in relation to the degree of confidence of the knowledge on the proposition. In the current study, Willett's (1988) taxonomy of Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality is applied to Ernest Hemingway's <i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i>. The study shows how the characters, in this short story, express their knowledge about the world around them. Speakers often make judgments based on perceptual, reported, or inferred evidences, thus the relationship between epistemicity and evidentiality is often close and difficult to demarcate. However, while epistemicity involves the speaker's or writer's evaluation, judgment and degree of commitment attached to the truth-value of a piece of information, evidentiality involves the speaker's or writer's assertion of the source and kind of evidence at their disposal (Mushin, 2001). The results of the study show that the characters use 'possible assertion' more than the other types of assertion depending most on 'reasoning-based' type sources, and for conceived truthfulness, most of them are 'potential' as characters always give possibilities and are not sure about the actions and the events that occur in the story.</p>

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## 1.Introduction

One of the main functions of linguistic communication is creating and maintaining social harmony between human beings. Speakers and writers can convey complex feelings and emotional states to each other through the inventory of linguistic expressions they have at their disposal. Many of these functions of discourse can be held under the name of modality. Modality is a term used in "grammatical and semantic analysis to refer to

contrasts in mood signalled by the verb and associated categories"(Bussmann, 1996: 754). In English, modality can be expressed either by modal verbs, e.g. may, will, can or lexically using lexical verbs such as want, need, etc. Moreover, it can be expressed by sentence adverbials like hopefully, maybe, etc.

One of modality types is epistemic modality, which is defined by Simpson (1993:44) as the kind of modality which is

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“concerned with the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed”. Palmer (2001:84) argues that epistemic modality is much easier to be identified among the other types of modality. Marked by "must" (necessity) and "may" (possibility), speakers / writers, as they communicate, make judgments not assertion. Moreover, it is concerned with the speaker's attitude and regarded as the modal of propositions rather than of actions, events or states. However, epistemic modality is very important in the analysis of how the characters express the world around them in fictions (Neary, 2014: 176).

Willett(1988,pp.52,86-88) states that 'epistemic modality' includes, in addition to the degree of certainty or confidence, evidentiality, the term that refers to provenance of proof that the speakers have for their suppositions. Chafe and Nichols (1986) argue that the relationship between a source of knowledge (evidence) and the degree of commitment and speaker's belief and attitude (epistemicity) lies in the fact that speakers or writers often make judgments and show a certain degree of commitment to what they say by providing some sort of 'evidence' that supports the propositional content of the information they provide and make their contribution more assertive.

## 2. Modality

Halliday (1994: 88) argues that modality is the intermediate degrees between the positive and negative poles. Further, he (1994: 356) adds that modality refers to the area of meaning that lies between yes and no. In social context, modality is part of action which is done by the language user when s/he changes his/her linguistic experience with the other which is

represented in a text, and in this case the language user may give his/her own suggestion or comment in the commodity of what s/he is saying. Modality contains perspectives, considerations, attitudes or judgments of the addresser to the information which are realized by a way of question, statement, offer, and /or command.

Downing and Locke (1992: 383) note that modality is recognized as a semantic category which covers notions such as possibility, obligation, probability, necessity and permission. Lately, the concept of modality has been extended to cover other concepts such as regret, doubt, desire and wish. Further, they add that in a very general term, modality may be utilized to express a relation with reality, whereas a non-modal utterance treats the process as reality. However, they classify modality into two main types: Epistemic Modality and Deontic Modality.

Simpson (1993:43) argues that “modality refers to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. It also extends to their attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence.” He classifies and describes four modal types of English; the deontic system, the boulomaic system, and the epistemic system with its subsystem of perception modality.

### 2.1 Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality is connected with “any modal system that indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he says” (Palmer, 1995:51). This degree of commitment in the truth of proposition can range from certainty, neutrality to uncertainty that the state of affairs applies (Nuyts, 2000). Epistemic

modality can be explicitly expressed by epistemic modal verbs (e.g. may, might, can, could), epistemic adjectives (probable, possible), epistemic adverbs (relatively, possibly), and mental state predicates (think, believe). Moreover, Gavins (2007:110) argues that epistemic modality can be triggered by modal auxiliaries such as (must, may, might, could, should), modal lexical verbs such as (believe, suppose, think), modal adverbs such as (perhaps, maybe, possibly, probably, certainly, supposedly) and certain syntactic structures such as in the familiar "BE...TO" and "BE...THAT" constructions "(You are sure to be..., It is certain that..., It is doubtful that...)".

Palmer (2001,pp.24-29) categorizes three types of 'epistemic modality' in terms of the 'judgments', which indicates 'uncertainty', the type that indicates 'inference' in terms of monitoring of proof, and the type that indicates 'inference' based on general knowledge. They are categorized into 'speculative', 'deductive', and 'assumptive'. The first type refers to the speakers' uncertainty about their suppositions, the second refers to the speakers' 'firm judgment' in terms of having proof, whereas the third type refers to 'judgment' based on general knowledge. However, for Palmer, evidentiality falls within the modal system:

Epistemic modality and evidential modality are concerned with the speaker's attitude to the truth-value or factual status of the proposition and may thus be described as 'propositional modality'. The basic difference between epistemic modality and evidential modality is that with epistemic modality speakers make judgments about the factual status of the proposition, whereas with evidential modality

they indicate what the evidence is that they have for it (2001: 24).

The claim made following this view is that "Evidentially asserts the evidence, while epistemic modality evaluates the evidence. While evidentiality qualifies the source that justifies the assertion of a proposition, modality qualifies the genuine belief of the speaker about the truth of the proposition" (Pietrandrea, 2005: 33). Where an English modal verb like must is treated as a modal, it can also be treated as an evidential marker depending on the context of use. Such ambiguity has led some scholars (e.g. Palmer 1986; Palmer 2001), to analyze evidentiality as a subclass of modality, whereas others have argued for a strict separation between the two categories (e.g. Aikhenvald 2004).

### 3. Willett's (1988) Taxonomy of Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality

Willett (1988,pp.86-88) explains his own taxonomy of Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality thinking that epistemic modality includes evidentiality. His own taxonomy has three main parameters which are: 'assertion', 'source', and 'conceived truthfulness' in which he relates the "source of information" to the epistemic code determined by "assertion" type, and to "conceived truthfulness".

For the "source" of information, it is either "direct" or "indirect". The 'direct' source involves 'attested' proof in which the communicators have a sensed evidence which can be 'visual', 'auditory', or other senses. On the other hand, the indirect source has two types which are 'Reported' and 'Inferring'. 'Reported source can be either 'second hand', 'third hand', or 'folklore'. The 'second hand source' refers to the communicators"

knowledge of something extracted from someone witnesses it directly. The 'third hand' refers to the speakers' knowledge of an event by knowing it from someone who hears or is told by another one who witnesses it directly. For the 'folklore' source, it refers to the speakers' knowledge of an event in terms of 'established oral history'. 'Inferring' has two types, if it refers to the knowledge of the communicators' about an event depending on observing the circumstance of that event, it is called "results inference", while, if it is based on 'reasoning', it refers to the interlocutors' knowledge of certain event depending on certain criteria like their own 'intuition', 'experience', or 'mental construct called "reasoning inference".

The second 'parameter' of Willett's taxonomy is 'assertion' which ranges from 'strongest assertion' to the 'weakest assertion'. It has four types: 'emphatic', 'probable', 'possible' and 'doubtful'. 'Emphatic' represents the strongest value of assertion, while 'doubtful' is considered as the weakest value among the other types. The third 'parameter' of Willett's taxonomy is that 'conceived truthfulness' which ranges from 'factual', 'potential', up to 'unlikely'. Furthermore, Willett(1998) relates his first 'parameter' of his taxonomy, which is 'source' of proof, to the other parameters 'assertion' and 'conceived truthfulness' in that the 'source' of proof in terms of certain 'conceived truthfulness' affects the degree of 'assertion'.

#### 4. The Snows of Kilimanjaro: Background

The Snows of Kilimanjaro is a short story written by Ernest Hemingway in 1936 to examine the ways that people misunderstand each other's loss and pain. The story is about

two characters namely Harry and Helen. They frequently struggle to cope with their pain and despair. Harry, the main character, battles hard to climb from misery after the First World War, and now that he is sick with gangrene and on the verge of death, he describes how "it was all over" (Hemingway, 1995: 57). He was a writer, but he lives his life without putting his writing talent at risk, and there is nothing he can do to change it. He was too preoccupied with getting out of the fight.

He meets Helen, a widow with two children. Her husband died when she was still a teenager, and her children were perished in an aircraft crash. Harry is extremely fortunate in that he can marry a widow from an affluent family. Harry married Helen not because he loves Helen, but because he wants what Helen has, which is money. He is no longer in need to work hard in order to gain money and pleasure. He regards riches and money as the most significant source of pleasure (Pratiwi, 2011:31).

Burgess (1985: 128) claims that The Snows of Kilimanjaro is a narrative about the psychological aspect of contemporary people, as depicted by Harry, the primary character in the story, in confronting death; how death is felt as it approaches; and modern people's views about death. This narrative is also peppered with imagery of death and the presence of death itself. As a result, Harry's death becomes a horrifying parody of existence.

#### 5. The Analysis

Willett's (1988) taxonomy of Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality is used to investigate epistemic modality and evidentiality. The study adopts an qualitative

approach to read the short story in pursuit the three parameters 'assertion', 'source', and 'conceived truthfulness' of epistemic modality which are given by Willett's (1988), and detailed as follows:

### 5.1 Emphatic Assertion

Emphatic Assertion reflects Harry's conflict, when he mentions death in the opening sentence of the short story:

1. "The marvellous thing is that it's painless," he said. "That's how you know when it starts."  
"Is it really?"  
"Absolutely. I'm awfully sorry about the odor though. That must bother you."  
"Don't! Please don't."  
"Look at them," he said. "Now is it sight or is it scent that brings them like that?"

The epistemic coding is considered as 'emphatic assertion' which is fulfilled by the use of " Absolutely " as an epistemic marker. The source behind this assertion is of the 'reasoning-based' type and the conceived 'truthfulness' is 'factual'. This type of epistemic assertion reflects the conflict and confusion of Harry and his wish to die. It indicates an immediate conflict, as a way to create an opening disturbance. Using dialogue in the first page of the story means writing a real scene rather than exposition or description a scene. Another example of emphatic assertion emphasizes Harry's desire to die when he lays waiting for death, the main theme of the story:

1. When she goes, he thought. I'll have all I want. Not all I want but

all there is. Ayee he was tired. Too tired. He was going to sleep a little while. He lay still and death was not there. It must have gone around another street. It went in pairs, on bicycles, and moved absolutely silently on the pavements.

The writer uses 'emphatic assertion' which is fulfilled by the use of the modal verb 'must' as an epistemic marker, the source behind this assertion is also 'reasoning-based' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'factual'. Here, the epistemic assertion shows Harry's indifference about death and his feeling that he has very little time left to live. He is too tired and goes to sleep waiting for death but death does not come to him and must go somewhere else. Another examples of emphatic assertion happen because of the interlocutor's having an 'inferring evidence' of the 'results-based' type which conceive their 'truthfulness' as 'factual'. They occur when Halen tries to help her husband, Harry, as possible as she could because of her deep love and concern about him:

2. "Please tell me what I can do. There must be something I can do."
3. "I'm sure it will. It's overdue now. Then, in town, they will fix up your leg and then we will have some good destruction. Not that dreadful talking kind."
4. "If you have to go away," she said, "is it absolutely necessary to kill off everything you leave behind? I mean do you have to take away everything? Do you have to kill your horse, and your wife and burn your saddle and your armour?"



## 5.2 Possible Assertion

Harry continually emphasizes his belief that death is imminent. This type of assertion also expresses his desire to die.

5. "You can take the leg off and that might stop it, though I doubt it.

Or you can shoot me. You're a good shot now. I taught you to shoot didn't I?"

Here, the writer uses a 'possible assertion' which is fulfilled using the modal verb 'can' as an epistemic marker, the source behind this assertion is 'reasoning-based' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'potential'. Here, the epistemic assertion occurs when Harry has an injury on his leg, which becomes gangrenous, his wife asks him what she can do for him, he tells her that she can "take the leg off" as an attempt to stop his gangrenous or to shoot him, yet she does not do that. This indicates that death has become boring for Harry like everything in his life after the scenes that he has seen in the war. In another example of possible assertion, Halen tries to prevent Harry from drinking:

6. "Don't drink that," she said. "Darling, please don't drink that. We have to do everything we can."  
"You do it," he said. "I'm tired."

Hemingway, in this example, uses another possible assertion' fulfilled by using the same modal verb 'can' as an epistemic marker, the source behind this assertion is 'reasoning-based' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'potential'. Here, the epistemic assertion occurs when Halen begs her husband, Harry, to stop his drinking to ease his suffering and promises him that they can do everything. In this example, it is noticeable that Harry is

giving up on his situation because he is drinking alcohol which will trigger his symptoms. Also, he is also convinced that he is dying and there is nothing to do about it. Another examples of possible assertion happen because of the interlocutor's having an 'inferring evidence' of the 'results-based' type which conceive their 'truthfulness' as 'potential'. However, they mirror Halen's infatuated with her husband:

7. "I don't quarrel. I never want to quarrel. Let's not quarrel any more. No matter how nervous we get. Maybe they will be back with another truck today.

8. Maybe the plane will come."

## 5.3 Probable Assertion

This type of assertion is used by the author to show Halen's interest in Harry and Harry's giving up on his life:

9. "Wouldn't you like me to read?" she asked. She was sitting on a canvas chair beside his cot. "There's a breeze coming up."  
"No thanks."  
"Maybe the truck will come."  
"I don't give a damn about the truck."

Hemingway uses 'probable assertion' which is fulfilled by using the modal verb 'may' as an epistemic marker. The source behind this assertion is 'reasoning-based' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'potential'. In this conversation between Harry and Halen, she asks him if he would like to read but he refuses. In an attempt to ease his pain, she tells him that "the truck" may come, but he does not care whether it comes or not. This example shows that Harry is giving up, not because he is a coward, as his wife describes him, but

because he believes that it is more comfortable for him at this time to lay down and die rather than wait for a truck or airplane that will most likely never arrive. Again, everything he does is a result of his injury as well as his regret for what he missed in his life and wasting his years without doing valuable things such as showing his talent as a writer. Another example of probable assertion occurs when Harry illustrates the possibilities that worsen his condition:

10. "I suppose what I did was to forget to put iodine on it when I first scratched it. Then I didn't pay any attention to it because I never infect.

Then, later, when it got bad, it was probably using that weak carbolic solution when the other antiseptics ran out that paralyzed the minute blood vessels and started the gangrene."

Another 'probable assertion' fulfilled by using 'probably' as an epistemic marker is used by the writer. The source behind this assertion is 'attested' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'potential'. Here, the probable assertion occurs when Halen and Harry have an argument about living in Africa. Harry begins to lament her luck and complain about what happened to them, especially her husband's leg, which begins to inflame. Harry sets possibilities and an explanation for what happened to his leg, saying perhaps because he did not put iodine on it when he first scratched it and did not pay attention to it because he had never been infected before. The other possibility he puts is that when the other antiseptics ran out, it was probably that weak carbolic solution that

blocked the minute blood vessels and initiated the gangrene.

Another example of probable assertion happens because of the interlocutor's having an evidence as 'attested' type which conceives its 'truthfulness' as 'potential'. It shows how Halen criticizes Harry for constantly arguing with her:

11. Well, there would be no more quarrelling. He could promise that. The one experience that he had never had he was not going to spoil now. He probably would. You spoil everything. But perhaps he wouldn't.

#### 5.4 Doubtful Assertion

In the following example of doubtful assertion, Halen expresses her husband's indifference to death:

12. All right. Now he would not care for death. One thing he had always dreaded was the pain. He could stand pain as well as any man, until it went on too long, and wore him out, but here he had something that had hurt frightfully and just when he had felt it breaking him, the pain had stopped.

Here, Harry uses a doubtful assertion epistemic modality which is fulfilled by using 'would', as an epistemic marker, followed by 'not'. The source behind this assertion is 'attested' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'unlikely'. Here, Death is a major theme in Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and occurs in various distinct ways, both directly and indirectly. The most apparent connection to death is Harry's wounded and his realization that he has little time left to live. Here, the doubtful assertion expresses Harry's feelings about death, as

Halen explains that he does not care about death, and the only thing that hurts him is the pain that was the result of his leg injury, and for this reason Harry always wishes to die.

In another example of doubtful assertion, Hemingway emphasizes Harry's disability of writing in spite of the fact that he is a good writer:

13. Now he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well. Well, he would not have to fail at trying to write them either.

In this example, Hemingway uses a doubtful assertion epistemic modality which is fulfilled by the use of the modal verb 'would' followed by 'not' as an epistemic marker, the source behind this assertion is 'reasoning-based' type and the conceived truthfulness is 'unlikely'. Here, the doubtful assertion occurs when the author suspects Harry to write the stories he had saved to write. Despite the fact that he is a writer, he has been hesitant to write, and it appears that he fears that some of the better things he has seen and realized in his life would go uncaptured and unread. Because every day of not writing rest and existence what he despised, weakened his ability and softened his will to work, so that, in the end, he does not work at all. He thinks that Harry is waiting peacefully to die and giving up because of what happened to him in the war. However, Harry regrets never having written his best experiences.

In another example of the same assertion epistemic modality, fulfilled by using the modal verb 'could', followed by 'never', Halen explains why writing has been put off and delayed by Harry:

14. Maybe you could never write them, and that was why you put them off and delayed the starting. Well he would never know, now.

### 5.5 Conclusion

This study reveals that Willett's (1988) taxonomy is applicable in detecting the style of the writers and in how the minds of the characters work. It formed that epistemic modality is a linguistic phenomenon which exists in fiction discourses. 'Epistemic marking' includes 'evidential distinctions' which is shown throughout investigating the data which affirms how the 'source of evidence', in terms of certain type of 'conceived truthfulness', determines the type of epistemic coding.

'Possible assertion' is used more than the other types of assertion and concerning the second parameter of epistemic modality, most sources are of 'reasoning-based' type. For conceived truthfulness, most of them are 'potential', this shows that characters in this short story, especially Harry and Halen, always give possibilities and are not sure upon the actions and the events narrated in the story, This is recognized especially with the plane which Harry is waiting to come and survive him.

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الشكلية الحكمية والدليلية في قصة إرنست همنغواي:

"ثلوج كليمنجارو"

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الملخص:

تشير الشكلية الحكمية إلى استخدام الطريقة التي تستند إلى تقييم المتحدث وحكمه فيما يتعلق بدرجة ثقة المعرفة في الاقتراح. في الدراسة الحالية ، يتم تطبيق نموذج ويلييت (1988) للشكلية الحكمية والدليلية على قصة ثلوج كليمنجارو للكاتب إرنست همنغواي. تظهر الدراسة كيف تعبر الشخصيات ، في هذه القصة القصيرة ، عن معرفتها بالعالم من حولهم. غالباً ما يصدر المتحدثون أحكاماً على أساس الأدلة الإدراكية أو المبلغ عنها أو المستنتجة ، وبالتالي فإن العلاقة بين الشكلية والأدلة غالباً ما تكون وثيقة ويصعب تحديدها. ومع ذلك ، فإن الشكلية تنطوي على تقييم المتحدث أو الكاتب وحكمه ودرجة الالتزام المرتبطة بقيمة الحقيقة لجزء من المعلومات ، فإن الدليلية تنطوي على تأكيد المتحدث أو الكاتب لمصدر الأدلة ونوعها الموجود تحت تصرفهم. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الشخصيات تستخدم "التوكيد المحتمل" أكثر من أنواع التوكيد الأخرى التي تعتمد في الغالب على مصادر النوع "المبني على الاستدلال" ، وبالنسبة للصدق المتصور ، فإن معظمها "محتمل" حيث أن الشخصيات تعطي دائماً الإمكانات والاحتمالات وليسوا متأكدين من الأحداث التي تحدث في القصة .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشكلية الحكمية، الدليلية، المصادقية المتخيلة ، ويلييت ، ثلوج كليمنجارو ، إرنست همنغواي.