



## Modality and Modalization in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Perspective

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### Abstract

Modality is generally perceived as a syntactic-semantic category realized by different parts of speech to express possibility, probability, permission, volition, obligation and necessity. But the concept and employment of modality widely diverge in English and Arabic, and by corollary modalization is resorted to as an intrinsic process of devising an Arabic form of modality for an existing English modal, because modality expressed by prepositions and particles has not commonly been recognized as modals in Arabic, and on the other hand an English modal is lexicalized in Arabic. The present paper tackles the most common types of modality, examines the syntactic and semantic aspects of two kinds of modality, namely epistemic and deontic modality in English and Arabic and endeavours to shed light on an uninvestigated phenomenon in Arabic where particles and prepositions ranging syntactically from one letter/sound to phrasal prepositions which semantically denote modality and not just perform the task of mere function words, albeit there are only two categories of finite Arabic verbs of approximation and commencement which perform the function of helping the main verbs analogous to the English modals. Modality is of a paramount importance in any act of communication via language as it gives the communicator the options of expressing a proposition or an opinion over the extent to which the assertion is possible, probable, certain or obligatory among others.

Key words: deontic, epistemic, explicit, implicit, modality, modalize, lexicalize

### 1. Introduction

Modality is one of the most significant modes of expression in which interpersonal meaning is expressed as it simply denotes the speaker's/writer's attitude towards a reality, state or event or as defined by Quirk, *et al* (1985 :219), "the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified", and likewise by Hartmann and Stork (1972: 142), as "The way in which a speaker can express his attitude towards a situation in interpersonal communication." Halliday (1976:197), too, maintains that modality is "a form of participation by the speaker in the speech event. Through modality, the speaker associates with the thesis an indication of the its status and validity in his own judgment." More specifically, "Modality is said to express a relation to reality, whereas an unmodalized declarative treats the process as reality" (Downing and Locke, 1992:382). But being a syntactic-semantic category, it can only be approached from two complementary angles, namely form and meaning, because, as Palmer (1979:2) rightly asserts, it cannot be studied without taking into account its formal characteristics, nor can it be studied without some sort of semantic basis. However, the system of modality, according to Bell (1991: 139), is an extremely important one, for it gives the communicator the options of expressing an opinion about the extent to which the assertion is possible, probable, certain or frequent.

Some linguists and grammarians such as Quirk and Halliday distinguish between modality and modulation: the former is concerned with propositions, the latter with proposals; the former comprises probability, possibility, certainty and frequency, the latter obligation and inclination (Quirk, *et al*, 1985: 139-140). Halliday (1976:209), too, distinguishes between modality and modulation but states simultaneously that "they are closely interrelated". They are the same system in different functions, where 'functions' refers to components of the linguistic system: the one is interpersonal, the other ideational." Furthermore, "modulation is a condition imposed by someone; and if that someone is the speaker himself then it becomes a kind of modality" (Ibid). Hence, due to this overlap and what Halliday accurately describes as "the complex nature of the relationship between modality and modulation which he considers a kind of 'quasi modality' (Ibid: 205-213), it would suffice here to adopt the term 'modality as subsuming modulation.

## 2. English and Arabic Modality

### 2.1 English Modality

Modality in English is realized by different parts of speech, the most common of which are the auxiliary verbs or modals which can be classified into core modals such as *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will and would* and marginal or semi-modals like *dare, need, ought to, have to* and *used to*. It can also be expressed by finites such as *allow* or *permit*; the non-verbal forms of modality in English include adjectives such as *probable, possible, certain*; adverbs such as *probably, possibly, certainly*; and nouns such as *probability, possibility, certainty* in clauses like "*it is probable/ possible*" or a *probability/ possibility*, or "*it is certain! a certainty*". Below are some illustrative examples of core and marginal modal auxiliaries, most of which are borrowed from Quirk, *et al*, (1985: 219-239).

#### 2.1.1 Core Modals or Modal Auxiliaries

- i. *Can/Could*
  - *Can* you call back tomorrow? (Ability: Are you able to call back tomorrow?)
  - *Can/may* I smoke in here ? . (Permission: Am I allowed to smoke in here?)
  - The road *can* be blocked. (Possibility : It is possible to block the road}
  - I *could* play the banjo. (Ability)
  - *Could* I smoke in here? (Permission)
  - The road *could* be blocked. (Possibility)
- ii. *May/Might*
  - You *may* borrow my dictionary . (Permission)
  - He *may* never succeed. (Possibility: It is possible that he will never succeed)
  - *Might* I smoke in here? (Permission)
  - What you say *might* be true. (Possibility)
- iii. *Must*
  - You *must* be joking. (Necessity: It is necessarily the case that you are joking.)
  - You *must* be back by 10 o'clock. (Obligation: You are obliged to be back by ten).
- iv. *Shall/Should*
  - He *shall* get his money . (Willingness)
  - We *shall* let you know our decision. (Intention)
  - The Lessee *shall* pay to the Lessor at his office... (Legal Obligation)
  - You *should* do as he says. (Obligation and Logical Necessity = ought to )
  - If you *should* change your mind, please let me know. (Tentative Condition)
- v. *Will/Would*



- I *will* write as soon as I can. (Weak Volition! Intention: I intend to write as soon as I can.)
  - He *will* do it, whatever you say. (Insistence; Strong Volition: He insists on doing it.)
- *Would* you excuse me ? (Willingness ; Weak Volition)
  - That *would* be his father. (Probability)

Sometimes a modal auxiliary expresses more than one modal concept.

- You *may* be right. (Possibility: it can also be realized non-verbally)
  - a. It is possible that you are right.
  - b. Perhaps / May-be, you are right.
  - c. You *may have to* play it again. (Possibility + Obligation).
- She *must* have been willing to help. (Necessity + Volition).

### 2.1.2 Marginal Modals :

#### i. Ought

##### i. a – You *ought to* start at once. (Obligation)

##### i. b – They *ought to* be here by now. (Necessity)

Marginal modals *dare*, *need*, *have to* and *used to* can be used either as modal auxiliaries (with bare infinitive) or as lexical verbs {with to-infinitive (Quirk, *et al*, 1985:172: 83) .

#### ii. Dare

- He *dare* do anything. He *dare* not. How *dare* he say such thing? (As an auxiliary in affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences)

#### iii. Need

- He *needn't* go now. *Need* he go now? (Usually in negative and interrogative sentences)

#### iv. Have /Has/Had to

- He *has to* abide by the agreement. (Obligation)

The marginal modal *have to* can occur after a core modal like *may*, *will* etc.

- The children *may have to* go to bed now.

#### v. Used to

- He *used to* fish for hours.

## 2.2 Arabic Modality

In Arabic, there is no such grammatical category to express modality, albeit it can be realized by certain verbal forms of modality functioning as auxiliaries called verbs of "approximation and commencement" أفعال المقاربة والشروع. They act as auxiliaries for they precede the finite verbs in the present tense or imperfect form, quite analogous to English modals. They comprise *kaada* كاد, *shara'a* شرع, *ja'ala* جعل, *akhatha* أخذ, and *qaama* قام as demonstrated below:

### Modal Verbs of Approximation and Commencement أفعال المقاربة والشروع

#### i. *akhatha* أخذ begin, set about, commence

- *akhatha yaqra'u bisautin* "aalin... أخذ يقرأ بصوت عالٍ

He began to read aloud.

#### ii. *awshaka / yooshku* أوشك/يوشك to verge on, on the verge of, on the point of:

- *yooshku 'ann yanzula fikum* "iisaa bin Maryam hukman "aadilan

يوشك أن ينزل فيكم عيسى ابن مريم حكماً عادلاً

Jesus, son of Mary, is about to pass a just judgment.

#### iii. *Ja'ala* جعل begin, set about, commence

- *ja'ala yaf'alu kathaa* جعل يفعل كذا He began doing such a thing.

وقد جعلت إذا ما قمت يتقللني ثوبي فانهض نهض الشارب التمل



(Lane, 1988: 431)

I was beginning to feel when I rose  
My garment so heavily burdened me.  
That I stood up like an intoxicated drinker.

- iv. *Shara*”a شرع begin , set about, commence  
- *Shara*”a *ash-shaa*”iru *yanshidu qasii datahu*. شرع الشاعر ينشد قصيدته.  
The poet started/commenced reciting his poem .
- v. *qaama* قام set out , start  
- *qaama yuhaajimu khasmahu* قام يهاجم خصمه  
He started to attack his opponent.
- vi. *kaada* كاد almost, on the verge of  
- *Kaada yamootu “atashan*. كاد يموت عطشاً  
He was about to / on the point (verge) of dying of thirst.  
- *Yakaadu al-barqu yakhtfu ‘absaarahum*: (البقرة:20) يَكَاذُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَرَ هُمْ  
Lightning has almost snatched away their sight.

#### Defective Modal Verbs

1. “*asaa* عسى maybe, might be, could, should  
- *maathaa* “*asaa ‘ann af*”al ماذا عسى ان افعل What should I do?  
- *maa* “*assaahu yaqool*. ما عساه يقول What could he possibly say?  
“*asaa al-ayaamu tan*”umu lii biqurbin  
wa-ba”da al-hajri muru al-“*ayashi yahloo*.  
عسى الأيام تنعم لي بقرب وبعد الهجر مرّ العيش يحلو  
May days bring me close (to my sweetheart)  
And after desertion, the bitter life turns sweet.
- ii. “*alla* عَلاَ, la”*alla* لَعَلَّ maybe, perhaps  
“*allaka taf*”alu *thaalik* May-be you will do it. عليك تفعل ذلك  
la”*alla* zaydan *qaadimun al-yama* لعل زيدا قادم اليوم  
Perhaps/maybe Zaid will come today.
- iii. *layta* ليت might , would or expressing wish:  
*Laytahu kaana hunaa* ليتنه كان هنا I wish he were here.

An example can be cited by the following poetic line from a poem by Jamil bin Mu”amar or Jamil Buthayna translated into English by Nicholson, 1994:238) :

الا ليت ريعان الشباب جديد ودعرا تولى يا بئين يعود  
Oh, might it flower anew that youthful prime  
And restore to us, Buthayna, the bygone time

#### Modalized Particles

- i. *qad* قد ( Probability, Possibility)  
*qad tanjhu khitatuhu wa qad tafshal* قد تنجح خطته وقد تفشل  
His plan may succeed or it may fail .  
But when a verb in the past tense follows *qad*, the meaning is emphasized to express certainty rather than probability.  
- *qad ra’aytu al-lissa hunaa ‘ams* قد رأيت اللص هنا أمس  
I did see the burglar here yesterday.  
(I am certain that I saw the burglar here yesterday.)
- ii.a *rubba* رب It precedes only an indefinite noun in the genitive case, denoting few or many with implicit modality of probability, possibility :



- *rubba ramaytin min ghayri raami* رب رمية من غير رام  
Many a hitting shot could be made not by a skilled shooter.
- ii.b *rubbamaa* ربما (*rubba + maa*) It precedes a verb (in the past or present tense) or a noun :
- *rubamaa yawoodu al-athiina kafaroo lau kaanoo muslimiin* (*Al-Hijr:2*)  
رُبَمَا يَوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ كَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ (الحجر: 2)  
Perhaps those who disbelieved will wish that they had been Muslims.
- *rubamma zaarani zaydun* ربما زارني زيد Zaid might have visited me.
- *Rubbamaa al-mustaqabl 'afdhala min al-haadhir*  
ربما المستقبل أفضل من الحاضر

#### Modalized Prepositions

##### i. “*alaa* على must, should

It is either followed by a verb preceded by ‘ann ان or by a noun to express obligation equivalent to the English modal *must* :

- “*alayka bi-alsabr*. عليك بالصبر. You must be patient,  
or: You must have patience.
- “*alayka ‘ann tutii*” *al-qwaniin*. عليك أن تطيع القوانين.  
You must obey the laws.
- *maa ‘alaa al-rasool ilaa al-balaagh* (المائدة: 99) مَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ
- (The messenger must (has only to) deliver the message. Or the messenger's obligation /duty is but to deliver the message.) {*Al-Maa’ida* (the Table): 99}

In legal discourse, “*alaa* على denotes obligation and commitment. equivalent to the modal *shall* :

الوطنية وحقوق الانسان على المطبوعات احترام الحقيقة والامتناع عن نشر ما يتعارض مع مبادئ الحرية والمسؤولية  
وقيم الامة العربية والاسلامية. (من قانون المطبوعات الاردني)

(Publications *shall* respect truth and *shall* refrain from publishing anything that contradicts the principles of freedom, national obligations, human rights and values of Arab and Islamic nation. (Jordan Publication Law)

##### ii. // *llam* اللام may, can, could

It expresses permission, possibility and assertion :

- *laka ‘ann taf’ al maa tashaa* (Permission) لك أن تفعل ما تشاء  
You can / may do as you wish.
- *hal laka ‘ann tatasila thaaniyatan ghadan?* (Possibility)  
هل لك أن تتصل ثانية غداً؟ Can you call back again tomorrow?
- *liyajzihihum allaahu 'ahsana maa ‘amaloo* (النور: 38) ليجزيهم الله أحسن ما عملوا (النور: 38)  
God may reward them according to the best of their deeds. (Assertion)

Two remarks are worth noting on the negation of “*alaa* على by the negative particle *laysa* ليس :

First, negation of obligation changes obligation to improbability or unlikelihood, correspondingly in English *must* or *should* becomes *may + not*, as in the following poetic line:

على المرء أن يسعى بمقدار جهده وليس عليه أن يكون موفقا  
“*alaa al-mar’i ‘ann yas’aa bi-miqdaari juhdi*  
*wa-laysa ‘alayhi ‘ann yakoona mufaqaa*  
One should exert as many efforts as one could  
But one may not necessarily succeed.





Second, the negation of “*alaa* على by *laysa* ليس abrogates its function of modalization as can be demonstrated by the Quranic clause: *laysa “allayka in* فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ which occurs in four Quranic surahs, namely, *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), *Nisaa’* (Women), *Al-Maa’da* (The Table), *Al-Anfaal* (The Spoils) and *An-Noor* (Light). It is rendered into English as follows:

- It is not required of thee (Apostle), to set them on the right path (Ali, 1978: 110)
- Thou art not responsible for guiding them (Arberry, 1964 :40)
- It is nor for thee {O Prophet} to make people follow the right path (Asad, 1980: 61)
- Not upon you (Mohammad) is their guidance (Hilali and Khan, 1996:68)
- Their guidance is not your responsibility (Kassab, 1994:73)

Likewise, the Quranic clause *laa jinaaha “allaykum* فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ occurs in four in the above Quranic surahs rendered into English as follows:

- There is no blame on you if ye reduce it not to writing. (Ali, 1978:114)
- then it shall be no fault in you if you do not write it down (Arberry, 1964:44)
- You will incur no sin if you do not write it down . (Asad, 1980: 63)
- Then there is no sin on you if you do not write it down. (Hilali and Khan, 1996:73)
- no sin will attach to you if you do not write it. (Kassab, 1994:76)

#### Modal Lexical Verbs

Modality can be lexically realized by finite verbs, the most common of which are :

i. *yajb* يجب (Imperfect or Present), *wajaba* وجب (Past), equivalent to *must*, or *have to*. It expresses necessity or obligation and precedes a noun, the preposition “*alaa* على or the particle ‘*ann* ان followed by a verb.

*Yajibu itibaa” al-ta”liimaat* يجب اتباع التعليمات Instructions must be complied.

- *yajb / wajaba “alayhi ‘ann yath”una* يجب/وجب عليه أن يذعن *“una* يجب/وجب عليه أن يذعن
- *Wajaba “alayhii ‘ann yashkur /ash-shukra* وجب عليه أن يشكر / الشكر
- *Yajib ‘ann tutii” al- qwaniin.* يجب أن تطيع القوانين.
- *kamaa yajb* كما يجب as it must/should be

In legal discourse, for instance, the modal *shall* generally expresses an explicit modality for obligation with implicit futurity whereas its equivalent is either the finite verb *yajib* يجب or the particle “*alaa* على or both . The model *shall* expresses an obligation in constitutions, laws, by-laws, agreements, contacts, instructions, or orders. *Shall* in the following example indicates orders or instructions : “Candidates *shall* remain in their seats until all the papers have been collected”. Besides *shall* can express determination in a very formal style, especially when used with pronouns other than *I* or *we*: “He shall be given a fair trial”... (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1991:1163). It is also used in the religious texts as in Christ’s commandments. “Thou *shall* not steal.” In the above example of instruction, the obligation with *shall* can be rendered into Arabic in three ways by employing the Arabic finite modal *yajib* يجب , by using the preposition ‘*alaa* على or by both:

- Candidates must remain seated.
- a- *yajibu “alaa al-murashahiin ‘ann yabqoo ( or: al-baqaa’) fii maqaa”idihim .*  
يجب على المرشحين أن يبقوا (البقاء) في مقاعدهم
- b- *“alaa al-murashahiin ‘ann yabqoo (al-baqaa’) fii maqaa”idihim*  
على المرشحين أن يبقوا (البقاء) في مقاعدهم.



c- *yajibu "alaa al-murashahiin 'ann yabqoo (a-l-baqaa') fii maqaa" idihim*

يجب على المرشحين أن يبقوا (البقاء) في مقاعدهم

The modal *shall* is employed as equivalent to the Arabic finite verb in constitutions, laws, by-laws and even contracts, agreements and jurisprudential maxims. The Arabic finite verb can be affirmative or negative :

- *Yubayinu al-qaanoon "alama al-dawlati wa-shu" aariiha wa-nasheeduha al-watanii.* يبين

القانون علم الدولة وشعارها وأوسمتها ونشيدها الوطني (دستور دولة الكويت، مادة:5) The flag, emblem, badges, decorations and National Anthem of the State *shall* be specified by law. (The Constitution of the State of Kuwait, article:5)

- *al-dharooraatu tubeehu-l-mahzooraat* الضرورات تبيح المحظورات

Necessities *shall* render prohibited things permissible.

- *yutahamlu al-dhararu al-khaasi li-daf'i al-dharari al-"aam.*

يتحمل الضرر الخاص لدفع الضرر العام

Private injury *can* be tolerated to dispel public injury.

- *laa yunkaru taghyiiru al-ahkaami bi-taghyiiri 'az-zamaan*

لا ينكر تغير الاحكام بتغير الزمان

Change of judgments *shall* not be denied by change of times

- *al-idhtiraaru laa yubtilu haqqa-l-ghayr* الاضرار لا يبطل حق الغير

Pressing necessity *cannot* invalidate the right of another.

Analogously, the use of the modal *can* is employed in Art.106 of the USA Constitution:

Congress *cannot* make laws concerning trade that favor one state over another. -

It is worth mentioning that some jurisprudential maxims express obligation by the verb which function as the English modal verb *على* (*yajib*) or the modalized preposition *"alaa* يجب *for obligation, i.e., must.*

- *ist"maalu an-naasi hujatun yajibu al-"amalu bi-haa* استعمال الناس حجة يجب العمل بها

People's usage *must* be an operative proof.

على اليد ما اخذت حتى تؤديه

- *"alaa al-yadi maa akhathat hataa tu'adihi* على اليد ما اخذت حتى تؤديه

What has been taken *must* be handed.

The modal *shall* is used whenever an obligation is apparent in the passive verb, past or present; the latter is the more recurrent.

*yuqbalu qawlu al-mutarjumu mutlaqa* يقبل قول المترجم مطلقاً

The interpreter's words *shall* be absolutely acceptable.

ii. *yanbaghii* ينبغي should , ought to

- *Wa-maa yanbaghii li-lrahmaan 'ann yatkhitha waladan.* (Mary:92)

The Most Compassionate need not take a child. (مريم:92) وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لِلرَّحْمَنِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا

It is inconceivable that the Most Compassionate should take for Himself a son.

iii. *yajoozu* يجوز (Prsent)/ *jaaza* جاز (Past) : may, might ,can, could

- *Yajoozu/yasmahu laka 'ann tudakhin.* يجوز (يسمح) لك أن تدخن

you can(are allowed) to smoke.

- *jaaza lahu 'ann yaf"ala thaalik.* جاز له أن يفعل كذا

He may do so. He is allowable to do so.

vi. *yuhtamal* يحتمل may , might, could

- *yuhtamalu/yurajahu 'ann yusaafira ghadan.* يحتمل/ يرجح أن يسافر غداً

He may/might travel tomorrow . (It is probable that he will travel tomorrow)



v. *yastaṭīi*”u يستطيع be able to, can

- *tastaṭīi*”u ‘ann taf”al maa tashaa’ تستطيع أن تفعل ما تشاء

You can / may do as you wish.

Nouns (sometimes preceded by the preposition *min* من), Adjectives and Adverbs, e.g., *min al-muḥtamal* / *min al-mumkin* من المحتمل / من الممكن possible, possibly, likely, maybe...

- *hunaaka halun mumkunun / muḥtamalun l-lkhilaaf*. هناك حل ممكن/محتمل للخلاف

There is a possible solution to the dispute, i.e. one that may be accepted.

### 3. Epistemic and Deontic Modality

#### 3.1 Epistemic Modality

The term ‘epistemic’ etymologically comes from a Greek word signifying ‘knowledge’. By corollary, epistemic modality denotes one’s knowledge or judgment on the basis of prior experiential knowledge; it evinces itself in assertion or implication that a state of affairs is known or believed to exist. “Epistemic modality relates to what one knows to be in fact the case or what one judges to be possible or likely on the basis of prior experiential knowledge. It concerns statements which assert or imply that a state of affairs is known to exist or is believed to exist (Mitchell and El-Hassan 1994:44). Lyons (1977:799) goes further to distinguish between ‘subjective epistemic modality’ and ‘objective epistemic modality’ in that the former relates to the speaker’s opinion such as expressing a reservation, whereas in the latter the speaker is committed to the factuality of what he/she says in the proposition. Epistemically, there can be different degrees of modality ranging from possibility or probability to certainty that a proposition or an opinion is true according to one’s own model of reality, as in:

- The sky is covered with black clouds. It *can* rain tonight.

(To the best of the speaker’s knowledge.)

In other words, epistemic modality relates to propositions and the degree of truth or certainty to be attached to them, as can be seen in the following example from contemporary journalism :

- You *cannot* all detect the same odours ...the smell of cooking pork *cannot* be detected by about 50% of the adult males and 10% of adult females. (*The Independent* , 21/12/1993)

In English, epistemic possibility can be expressed by *may*, *might*, and *could* in the sense ‘it is possible that...’ and by *should/ought to*, *will* and *would* as ‘it is probable that...’

- Who knows, Sara *may* be at home now. (epistemic possibility)
- Sara *will* be at home now . (epistemic probability)
- Sara *must* be at home now. (epistemic certainty)

In Arabic both types of epistemic modality can be expressed by *rubbama* ربما, *qad* قد, *la”ala* لعل and *laa budda* لا بد :

- *rubamaa/qad takoon saara fii al-beiti al-’aana*. ربما / قد تكون ساره في البيت الآن Or: *la”ala saara fii al-beiti al-’aana*. لعل ساره في البيت الآن

Sara may/might/ could be at home now.

- *rubbamaa yataḥatam* “alayaka ‘ann tal”aba thaniitan. ربما يتحتم عليك أن تلعب ثانية

You may have to play again.

- *Laa budda ‘ann takoon saara fii al-beiti al-’aana*. لا بد أن تكون ساره في البيت الآن

Sara must be at home now.

- *Laa budda ‘annhaa raaghibatun fii al-musaa”ada*. لا بد أنها كانت راغبة في المساعدة

She must have been willing to help



Lyons (Lyons,1977:799) avers that subjective epistemic modality suggests the speaker's "opinion, or hearsay, or tentative inference". Its very essence is "to express the speaker's reservations about giving an unqualified, or categorical, 'I-say-so' to the factuality of the proposition embedded in his utterance". Objective epistemic modality, on the other hand, does not express such reservations. In an objective epistemically modalized utterance, the speaker is committed to the factuality of what he says in the proposition. He is doing nothing else, but "performing an act of telling" (Ibid). Compared with subjective epistemic modality, objective epistemic modality seems to be less basic (Ibid: 805). For example:

It *may* rain tomorrow.

On its subjective meaning, the above example expresses the view of someone who reasons on the basis of personal evidence. On its objective reading, the above example is used to state a conclusion based on scientific data and measurements. Lyons proposes that objective interpretations do contribute to truth conditions, since they mark an inference which is guaranteed by a stable and reliable body of data. The objective readings will be as follows:

- a. If it *may* rain tomorrow, we should take our umbrellas.
- b. It is surprising that it *may* rain tomorrow, since there was no sign of a cloud all day today.
- c. The weather forecast told viewers that it *may* rain tomorrow.

### 3.2 Deontic Modality

Being intrinsic, deontic, which is also derived from the Greek, 'deon' denoting binding duty, "is concerned with the necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents" (Lyons,1977: 823). Thus it can be described as dynamic modality as relates to actions or performative acts in response to a particular moral or legal authority or to a certain need to realize the use of language in expressing a desire or wish, obligation, undertaking and permission as manifestation of an individual's personal involvement. The language user may employ the modal *shall*, for instance, to perform a threat or promise and to lay an obligation by using *must* or give permission by the modal *may* or *can*. Permission is denied when the modal *may* or *can* is negated, as in the following seemingly apocryphal confrontation between a Maitre d'hotel and trouser-suited woman reported by *The Independent*:

- I'm sorry madam; you cannot go into the dining room like that. Ladies in trousers are not properly dressed." (*The Independent*,15/12/1993)

Deontic modality can be directionally speaker-oriented or addressee-oriented.

#### 3.2.1 Speaker-Oriented Deontic Modality

This kind of modality refers to the speaker as the deontic source, i.e., the performer of the act of permission, obligation, etc., e.g.,

- You *may* smoke in this room. (permission)  
Laka 'ann tudakhina fii haathihi al-ghurfati. لك أن تدخن في هذه الغرفة
- You must follow the instructions.  
Yajibu "alayka 'itibaa"u al-ta"limaat . (يجب عليك اتباع التعليمات)

The above sentence containing two modals of obligation is quite common yet not genuine Arabic where one suffices. It can be stated by having one finite modal verb, e.g., *Yajibu itibaa" al-ta"limaat*: يجب اتباع التعليمات or better by the modalized preposition "*alaa*", e.g.

- "*alayaka itibaa" al-ta"limaat* عليك اتباع التعليمات

In contrast with the above strong obligation in the sense it is imposed on the performer realized by *must* in English and *yajib* يجب in Arabic, the modal *should* or *ought to* and the

modalized defective verb *yanbaghi* ينبغي both express mild or internal obligation followed optionally by *laka* لك as in :

- *Yanbaghi (laka) 'ann tusaafra al'aana.* ينبغي (لك) أن تسافر الآن.  
You should / ought to travel now.

Pertinently, the omission of the defective verb *yanbaghi* ينبغي turns the obligation into permission, e.g.,

- *laka 'ann tusaafra al'aana.* لك أن تسافر الآن.  
You may travel now.

### 3.2.1 Addressee-Oriented Deontic Modality

While the speaker in 3.2.1 can deontically express what is possible or necessary, the speaker can also ask the addressee about whether he/she considers an action deontically permissible or necessary; in other words, the addressee is involved in performing the action that he/she is permitted or requested to do. This sub-type of modality is realized in English by the modals *may, might, can, could* and *shall*. The modals in the following examples evince the addressee's request for permission to open the door, go with (a person) and come in (a place) regardless of the stylistic differences :

- *May I open the door ?*
- *Can I go with you ?*
- *Could I come in ?*

In Arabic, the modalized preposition // ل preceded by the interrogative *hal* هل can be an appropriate equivalent :

- *hal lii 'aftaha al-baab ?* هل لي أن أفتح الباب ؟  
Can/may I open the door?
- *hal lii 'ann 'athhaba ma'aka ?* هل لي أن أذهب معك ؟  
Can/could I go with you?
- *Hal lii 'ann 'adkhul ?* هل لي أن أدخل ؟  
Can/could I come in?

The above examples pertain to classical Arabic rather than the spoken variety where lexical modals are usually employed, e.g.,

- *Hal tasmahu lii 'ann aftha al-baab ?* هل تسمح لي أن أفتح الباب ؟  
Do you allow/permit me to open the door?
- *hal yumkunanii 'ann 'athhaba ma'ak ?* هل يمكنني أن أذهب معك ؟  
Is it possible to go with you?
- *hal yumkunanii / bi'istaa'atii / 'ann 'adkhul ?* هل يمكنني / باستطاعتي أن أدخل ؟  
Can I come in ?

### 4. Modals Expressing Both Types of Modality

The signification of modals epistemically or deontically is in many cases context-bound. The English modals *may, might and could* epistemically denote probability or likelihood, equivalent in Arabic to the modal defective verbs *la'alla* لعل, *layta* ليت and the modalized particle *qad* قد or the compound particle *rubbamaa* ربما as in :

- Sarah may be at home now.
- *la'alla saarah fii al-bayti al'aana.* لعل ساره في البيت الآن.
- *rubbamaa saarah fii al-bayti al'aana.* ربما ساره في البيت الآن.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that the above sentences explicate that *la'alla* لعل is usually followed by a nominal sentence which consists of a topic and a comment.

The latter, i.e. the comment, may be a noun phrase or a verb phrase. But deontically,



the English modals *may*, *might* and *could* signify permission equivalent in Arabic to the modalized preposition/ل/ as in:

- You *may* smoke here.

*Laka 'ann tudakhina hunaa .* لك أن تدخن هنا

- Might I make a suggestion ?

*Hal lii 'ann uqadima iqtraahan?* هل لي أن أقدم اقتراحا؟

- Could I borrow your book ?

*Hal lii 'ann asta "iira kitaabak?* هل لي أن أستعير كتابك؟

Epistemically, the English modals *may*, *might* and *could* denote possibility, and probability or likelihood, equivalent in Arabic to *qad* قد or *rubbamaa* ربما :

- That may or may not be true.

- *Qad / rubbamaa yakoonnu aw laa yakoonu thaalika sahihan.*

قد / ربما يكون او لا يكون ذلك صحيحا .

He might arrive in time.

- *Qad / rubbamaa yakoonnu samii 'asghara 'ikhwaanihi* Sami قد / ربما يكون سامي أصغر اخوانه could be the youngest of his brothers.

The modalized particle *qad* can be used epistemically to denote speculation when it precedes the finite verb in the present or imperfect as in :

- *qad tanjhu khatatuhi wa qad tafshal* قد تنجح خطته وقد تفشل

His plan may succeed or it may fail.

The above sentence expresses likelihood which seems to be equally divided between success and failure of the plan . The particle also expresses possibility as in:

*qad yasdu al-kathaab.* قد يصدق الكذاب .

The liar might tell the truth : It is possible that the liar might tell the truth.

But when a verb in the past tense follows *qad*, the meaning is emphasized to express certainty rather than probability.

*qad ra'aytu al-lissaa hunaa 'ams.* - قد رأيت اللص هنا أمس

I did see the burglar here yesterday. (I am certain that I saw the burglar here yesterday.)

Likewise the modal "*asaa* عسى epistemically denotes possibility, probability or likelihood as in the following Quranic verse (aya):11, *sura al-Hujraat* (The Dwellings or Apartments):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ (الحجرات: 11)

*Yaa 'ayhaa al-thiina 'amanoo laa yskhar qawmun min*

*Qawmin " 'asaa 'ann yakoonoo khayran minhum,,*

You who believe! Let not any people scoff at another people,  
the latter *may* be better than the former.

### 5. Explicit and Implicit or Covert Modality

In the above discussion and exemplification, modality has been explicitly realized in both English and Arabic. In Arabic, however, modality can be implicit in an interrogative particle '*annaa* أنى and *kayfa* كيف (both equivalent to 'how'), as it is demonstrated in the following Qur'anic verses which evince translators' variation in the choice of the modal.

أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي غُلْمٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي الْكِبَرُ وَأَمْرَاتِي عَاقِرٌ (آل عمران : 40 )

*'annaa yakoonu lii ghulaamun wa-qad balaghanii al-kibaru*

*wa-kaanat 'imra'atii "aaqiran" (The Quran, Al-"imraan: 40)*



- How *shall* I have a son, seeing my wife is barren, and I have attained to the declining of old age? (Arberry, 1964:302)
- How *shall* I have a son, seeing I am very old, and my wife is barren? (Ali, 1978: 133)
- How *can* I have a son when old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren? (Asad, 1980: 72)
- How *can* I have a son when I am very old, and my wife is barren?" (Hilali M and Khan, 1984: 7)
- How *would* I have a son, now that I have grown old , and my wife is barren ? (Kassab,1994:88)

أَتَى  
Another Quranic verse exemplifying 'anna  
- أَتَى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ (آل عمران : 47)

How *shall* I have a son when no man has touched me? ( Hilali and Khan : 75).

Other translators of the Quran such as Arberry, Yusuf Ali, and Asad, among others use the modal *shall*, but Irving, and Kassab cogitate the sense of modality that denotes possibility in his rendition of the above verse (*aya*) :

- How *can* I have a child while no human being has ever touched me? (Irving,1992:56)
- How *could* I have a son, whereas no human being has touched me ? (Kassab,1994:89)
- كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمُوتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ (البقرة: 28)
- How *can* ye reject the Faith in Allah ? – seeing that ye were without life, and He gave you life.. (Ali, 1991:23)
- How *can* you disbelieve in Allah? Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life. (Hilali and Khan, 1984 : 7)

Unlike Ali and Hilali and Khan, Arberry and Kassab do not cogitate any sense of modality , which shows its intricacy.

- How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead, then He gave you life..
- How do you deny Allah, whereas He gave life after you had been (Kassab,1994: 9)

Implicit modality can also be detected in Arabic literary discourse as can be seen in the following instance from Taha Hussein in interrogative sentences beginning with '*ayna* (where).

- أين أجد القدرة على أن أدفع يدي مع هذه الأيدي واحرك فمي مع هذه الأفواه ! إنما أنا جالسة بين هؤلاء النساء أنظر اليهن ضيقة بهن وأتلهى عن الجوع بهذا الخبز الرقيق (ص 36)

- Where *could* I find the strength to put out my hand amidst these hands or make my jaws labour like those other jaws ? All I *could* do was to sit among those women, glancing at them, irritated by them, cheating my hunger with small, fine pieces of bread ? {Taha The Call of the Curlew} translated by the researcher and (Hussein's *Du''aa al-Karawaan* published by E.J. Brill:1980:26)

Unlike English wherein modality is exclusively and explicitly verbal, modality in Arabic is described in the deep structure of nominal (verbless) sentences as demonstrated in the following jurisprudential maxims:

لا ضرر ولا ضرار *laa dharara walaa dhiraar*

Injury *must* not be met by injury.

The above maxim can be differently worded to express obligation by using the modal *shall* : “ No injury *shall* be committed nor *shall* be met by injury.”

- *laa "ibrata f-l-dalaalati fii muqaabalti al-tasriih* لا عبرة في الدلالة في مقابلة التصريح  
Signification *shall* not be taken into consideration  
when it is in collation with explicitness .



## 6.. Conclusion

Modality is a significant mode of expressing the speaker's/writer's attitudes towards a reality, state or event, syntactically externalized by different parts of speech in English and Arabic. In English, however, there is an autonomous grammatical category of auxiliaries acting as helping verbs by preceding the main verbs normally labeled as 'modals which have no neat counterparts in Arabic wherein there are only two syntactic linguistic forms functioning as modals namely the detective verbs "asaa, la"ala and layta indicating possibility/probability, and the verbs of commencement and approximation such as *shar'a* (start or commence) and *kaada*, (is about to). Various types of dichotomized modality in both languages have been surveyed and exemplified such as epistemic and deontic modality, be it speakers-oriented and addressee-oriented, together with a new dichotomy of explicit and implicit or covert modality, the latter is almost Arabic-specific realized by the imperfect or non-past finite verb which necessitates a modal in the English surface structure. The research has also shed light on this implicit or covert modality which is non-verbally realized by the nominal or verbless sentence exemplified manifestly in the legal and religious-legal or jurisprudence discourses.

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#### Transliteration of Arabic Sounds

ا	ع	
a	أ	gh غ
b	ب	f ف
t	ت	q ق
th	ث	k ك
j	ج	l ل
h	ح	m م
kh	خ	n ن
d	د	w و
th	ذ	y ي
r	ر	Short Vowels
z	ز	u <i>dhamma</i>
s	س	a <i>fat-ha</i>
sh	ش	i <i>kasra</i>
s	ص	Long Vowels
dh	ض	aa الف
t	ط	oo الواو
d	ظ	ee الياء
“	ع	ay اي
		au او



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Professor A. B. As-Safi is a translation theorist and practitioner. He has written two books on translation: *Translation: Theory and Practice* (1974) and *Translation: Theories, Strategies and Basic Theoretical Issues* (2011). He has also translated into English: *Taha Hussein: The Call of the Curlew*, (published by E. Brill, Leiden, 1980), *Iraq: 30 Years of Progress* (published by Ministry of Information and Culture, 1998); and into Arabic: *Catford's A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1983). He has published twenty-five papers in Belgium, Britain, Holland, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Poland. He has supervised more than forty MA theses and ten PhD theses. He holds PhD in literary translation from Lancaster University, Britain. In addition to teaching and research, he has occupied several posts as Head of English Department at Basrah University, Iraq, and Translation Department at Al-Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq, President of Iraqi Translators' Association, and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Al-Zaytoonah University, Jordan and is currently supervising MA theses and lecturing on translation at postgraduate level at Petra University, Jordan.

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