

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In effective writing, making statements containing certain degrees of certainty is a skill. The use of epistemic modality is one way of establishing as well as evaluating possibilities and the degree of confidence of writers or speakers in what they write or say (Coates,1983). Whether or not a writer or a speaker shows confidence in the truth of a proposition it is determined by the presence of epistemic modality in the sentence. Research done in this area has shown that mastering the use of epistemic modality is not an easy task.

When writers in the field of journalism inform the public, they actually express the news details by reconstructing news events. The news details can play two roles which are, either they impose on the readers or they establish facts. In order to say what they want to say, writers have to make conscious selections of language options within the system, which are lexical, grammatical and sequencing (Halliday, 1985). The selection of the options is motivated by the writers and they convey particular meanings in particular ways and these are supposed to have particular types of effects.

According to Hyland (1998, 2000) and Vande Kopple (1985) writing is defined as a social and communicative action between the writer and the reader. Writing is considered as an organization of discourse using linguistic resources. It is also the writer's stance towards either the contents or the reader. According to the authors, writing consists of cohesive and interpersonal features which help readers to "connect", organize and interpret materials in a way preferred by the writer. It also has to do with the interpretations of interactional expressions and values of a particular discourse community. The selection of lexical items and modalities sends

signals to the reader about the writer's doubt or certainty about what is being pointed out.

Crismore and Farnsworth (1989 as quoted in Hyland, 2005) carried out a research on Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* to examine the use of meta-discourse in the book. Both authors did a study to find out how meta-discourse was used by Darwin in truth propositions. Darwin used hedges to talk about the truth which some researchers will call epistemic modality. The excerpt below illustrates Crismore and Farnsworth's (1989 as quoted in Hyland, 2005) analysis of Darwin's use of meta-discourse markers.

The whole subject, **I think**, remains vague; nevertheless, **I may**, without here entering on any details, state that from geographical and other considerations, **I think it highly probable** that our domestic dogs have descended from several wild species. In regard to sheep and goats, I can form no opinion **I should think** from facts communicated to me by Mr. Blyth on the habits, voice and constitution of the humped Indian cattle, that these had descended from a different aboriginal stock from our European cattle; and several competent judges believe that these latter have had more than one wild parent. With respect to horses, from reasons I cannot give here, **I am doubtfully inclined** to believe, in opposition to several authors, that all the races have descended from one wild stock. (pg 68)

According to Crismore and Farnsworth (1989), Darwin, a scientist, was very cautious and it was the case where he presented his claims with deference to the views of his readers. He created space for dialogue with his listeners by not making a claim to his findings. He used the verb "I think" allowing his readers and listeners to argue with him. By using the phrase "I think", he did not make a claim about matters he could not prove and thus he showed respect for his audience. Darwin used hedges to talk about his truth propositions which some authors call epistemic modality, because his writings were based on his probability of the truth.

Epistemic modality questions the certainty or probability of a statement. It is an expression of attitude which can be accomplished by using a linguistic device.

Epistemic modality also reveals the writer's confidence or lack of confidence in the proposition expressed. To the native speakers, using epistemic modalities is not a problem.

Modality covers a very wide range of functions which includes assertions and denials of any degree or manner of effect, belief, certainty, desire, obligation, possibility or probability.

This is a quantitative research into linguistic devices which are grammatical in function and display the intention of expressing a truth proposition by the utterer. The truth proposition can be manipulated to various degrees and this depends on how much knowledge of the situation the utterer intends to conceal, reveal or express sincerely. The linguistic devices in the study are modalized versions of the components of language.

## **1.2 THE PROBLEM**

This is a grammatical study and it intends to find out the use of auxiliary modals as well as modalized statements in interviews. Its aim is to find out why the utterances in an interview use auxiliary modals or lexical predicates.

At the same time, it is also a study to highlight how speakers avoid making truth propositions and the linguistic devices they use to avoid making claims or mitigating the effects of the issue being discussed.

Asians, whose second or third language is English, who follow such discussions do not realize the implications of the linguistic devices used to maneuver the topic and it is hoped that this research will help to open the eyes and ears of an ignorant sect of the audience who are loyal fans of such television programmes which actually does not answer the question or address the topic, the reason which has brought them out on to stage for a discussion.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this research is to know how much epistemic modality is used in a TV talk show especially in circumstances where interview participants are discussing controversial issues. A grammatical analysis is used to expose how sentences are modalized to convey truth propositions in sentences within interviews.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION**

To meet the requirements of the objective of the research, three research questions have been formulated and they are as follows:

- 1.4.1 How many epistemic modals are used in a text where several people hold the floor in a forum?
- 1.4.2 What is the percentage difference between modalized statements of forum participants and unmodalized statements within the same interview?
- 1.4.3 How many sentences in the interview reflect commitments of truth by the speakers?

### **1.5 THE AIMS AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to find out how frequent are epistemic modals used in interviews comprising two or more people. The second aim of this research is to explore how frequently epistemic modals occur when speakers discuss topics which are sensitive or controversial. Thus with the above aims of the research, two hypothesis will be tested. They are as follows:

## **HYPOTHESIS 1**

Evaluative sectors where all participants in the interaction express their views probably have a much higher proportion of epistemic modal forms.

## **HYPOTHESIS 2**

Sensitive topics, which potentially involve the speaker talking about him /her and/or controversial points of view, are probably correlated with high usage of epistemic modals.

This is an unobtrusive qualitative research and it uses content analysis as the main strategy of conducting the research. The sample is selected at random and the framework for the coding is based on the Categorization Model (see Chapter 2) which this research has adapted and used.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study is a thorough examination of a transcript of a television interview for the types of linguistic devices used by its participants when answering questions about an on- going issue. The research also examines how participants express truth propositions and the linguistic devices used. It will expose the language skills of native speakers while using modalized statements to express themselves.

The study intends to highlight the relevance of TV interviews of politicians who actually cannot commit or make claims to many issues discussed throughout the interview. The research hopes to show that MTP interviews are actually farcical in nature without much seriousness or convictions of utterances by the speakers.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Due to time constraints and the huge volume of data available for analysis, only one sample was analyzed. The sample was extracted from the archives of *MSNBC Meet The Press* which is available on the net. The research only involved one transcript which generated adequate amount of data necessary to produce a research report.

Future research can involve more samples of interviews and can do comparative studies between types of issues discussed by forum or interview participants. The research can include comparisons between different types of discourses. A frequency count can be done based on the dimensions of the categorization model, or code.

It is a small study of a television interview's transcript and the results cannot be generalized to cover all the interviews held every week by the particular television station. However, it will emphasize the functions of modalized statements and their active uses in conversations and how speakers can speak yet refrain from making claims. The use of epistemic modality in sentences is overall a common grammatical device and it has the same function in whatever context it is being used in conversations.

## **1.8 SUMMARY**

The study of modality and epistemic modality can be done on any type of discourse to find out the true implications of the written and spoken language.