

THE ROLE OF LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL MEANS OF MODALITY IN REALISING INTENTIONALITY OF MEDIA DISCOURSE

S. Rajeswari

Gokaraju Rangaraju Institute of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad, India

Abstract: *This study investigates the contribution of lexical and grammatical modality devices towards conveying intentionality in media discourse through a comparative analysis of feature journalism articles from The Times of India (TOI) and The Los Angeles Times (The LA Times). Mixed-methods corpus-assisted discourse analysis was employed on 20 climate feature articles. There were 85 lexical modal markers and 81 grammatical markers identified in the dataset. Findings show that TOI employs more epistemic modals such as “may” and “could” (over 50% of its modal verbs) and passive voice (15 times), indicative of a conservative, fact-reporting tone. The LA Times, on the other hand, uses more deontic modals (must, should) and evaluative adverbs (nine compared to three for TOI), and recurring conditional clauses (14 times), connoting urgency and commanding force. These patterns demonstrate how modality is not only a semantic category but also a rhetorical tool that resonates with journalistic intentionality, building persuasion, hedging, and depersonalization.*

Keywords: *modality, intentionality, media discourse, climate change journalism, corpus-assisted discourse analysis*

About the author: *Dr. S. Rajeswari is working as Associate Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Sciences, Gokaraju Rangaraju Institute of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. She obtained an M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur. She has 25 years of academic experience. She prepared English study material for an engineering course. She was the course writer for OU CDE and prepared video lessons for EMMREC and EFLU. She has published 21 research papers in various national and international journals and presented papers at several national and international seminars and Conferences. She has attended workshops, symposia, FDPs, and online certification courses in related areas. She teaches English, English for Technical Communication, English Language Communication Skills, and Advanced English Language Communication Skills Lab to enhance employability skills among the students.*

E-mail: rajishankar96@gmail.com

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2952-800X>

Copyright © 2026 S. Rajeswari

Article history: Received: 3 September 2025; Reviewed: 22 May 2026; Revised: 16 June 2026; Accepted: 20 June 2026; Published: 21 August 2026



This open access article is published and distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Citation (APA): Rajeswari, S. (2026). The role of lexical and grammatical means of modality in realising intentionality of media discourse. *Studies in Linguistics, Culture, and FLT*, 14(2), 52-70. <https://doi.org/10.46687/IPMX1299>

Introduction

Media discourse is at the center of constructing public realities and shaping collective opinion. Feature reporting directs readers toward certain interpretations of events, actors, and policy decisions through selective framing, lexical choices, and syntactic structure. In the contemporary information environment, such framing is further amplified through digital and social media, making the linguistic construction of meaning a powerful influence on public understanding (Wike et al., 2022). One of the principal linguistic mechanisms through which media discourse achieves this framing is modality. By expressing varying degrees of certainty, obligation, possibility, and evaluation, modal expressions influence how readers interpret events and assess the credibility of information. In linguistics, modality is regarded as one primary resource for marking a speaker's or writer's attitude, degree of commitment, and relationship to truth.

Modal expressions play a central role in persuasive and evaluative positioning by allowing journalists to calibrate certainty, obligation, and stance. Modality is extremely wide-ranging, from expressions of epistemic certainty and probability (e.g., *may*, *might*, *likely*) to expressions of deontic obligation and permission (e.g., *must*, *should*, *ought to*). It also includes grammatical resources such as conditionals, mood, and tense or aspect choice, which influence the mode of presentation of propositions to readers. More recent studies, though, have found that epistemic markers are likely to operate not only as semantic qualifiers but as deliberate rhetorical devices used to guide interpretation (Míguez, 2022). Feature articles are particularly rich in modal expressions because they combine factual reporting with interpretation, evaluation, and commentary. Previous studies have shown that modality is especially prominent in interpretive journalistic genres where writers negotiate authority and stance (Hyland, 2005; Rantsudu & Bartlett, 2024). Here, modality serves to do more than indicate levels of certainty: it builds authorial credibility, controls the threat of challenge, and directs readers towards intended senses. Corpus- and discourse-based studies have demonstrated that modality in journalism contributes to the construction of ideological positions and persuasive goals, appearing in both lexical items (modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives) and grammatical forms (conditional clauses, nominalizations, passive or active voice) (Lijuan & Afzaal, 2024; Rantsudu & Bartlett, 2024).

Although there is substantial research on modality in political speeches, public health communication, and social media discourse (Halliday, 2014; Lyons, 1977; Palmer, 2001; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2000; Hyland, 2005), relatively few studies have examined how lexical and grammatical modalities are used together in English-language newspaper feature articles across different national media contexts. Even fewer studies explicitly connect these linguistic choices to the discourse-level concept of intentionality, understood here as the

author's communicative aim to influence, persuade, or orient readers toward specific judgments or actions. While recent analyses of climate reporting or pandemic-era journalism illustrate the power of modality, they rarely combine three important aspects: a genre-specific focus on feature journalism, a detailed distinction between lexical and grammatical resources, and a direct link to intentionality. This gap makes it difficult to fully understand how journalists strategically use modal resources across different linguistic levels to achieve persuasive effects (Öhman & Liimatta, 2024; Wu & Wang, 2026).

The present study seeks to address this gap through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of feature articles from major English-language newspapers representing Indian and American media contexts. Its main aim is to examine how lexical means of modality (such as modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs, modal adjectives, and stance verbs) and grammatical means (such as conditional constructions, mood and voice choices, and tense/aspect modulation) contribute to the realization of intentionality in media discourse. Specifically, the study asks: (1) Which lexical and grammatical modal resources are most frequently used in American feature journalism, and in what contexts? (2) How do these resources function to build authorial stance, weaken or strengthen claims, and guide reader interpretation? (3) Are there consistent patterns across newspapers or thematic frames that suggest systematic rhetorical strategies?

To answer these questions, the study compiles a corpus of feature articles and applies a mixed qualitative–quantitative method. Frequency analysis is used to identify prominent modal markers, followed by close discourse analysis of selected examples to explain how modality supports intentionality. The findings are expected to contribute both to the theoretical understandings of modality as a discourse strategy and to the applied insights into media persuasion that are relevant for media literacy and critical discourse analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Modality in Linguistics

Modality is a core linguistic category that expresses a speaker's or writer's judgment about the likelihood, necessity, obligation, ability, or desirability of a proposition. Traditional typologies identify three main types of modality: epistemic modality (indicating degrees of certainty or belief, e.g., *might*, *probably*, *it is likely that*), deontic modality (indicating obligation, permission, or necessity, e.g., *must*, *should*, *may*), and dynamic modality (indicating ability or disposition, e.g., *can*, *be able to*). Recent studies continue to refine this tripartite model, particularly in discourse-focused research that highlights the pragmatic consequences of different modal types (Rudin, 2025; Yang, 2021).

Foundational scholarship has significantly shaped contemporary understandings of modality and discourse. Halliday's systemic functional framework conceptualizes modality as an interpersonal resource through which speakers negotiate probability, obligation, and evaluation in social interaction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Lyons distinguishes epistemic modality from deontic modality by emphasizing the relationship between linguistic expression and speaker commitment to truth or necessity (Lyons, 1977), while Palmer further develops modality as a grammaticalized expression of subjectivity and speaker stance (Palmer, 2001). Coates demonstrates how modal auxiliaries function pragmatically in authentic discourse contexts, often conveying ambiguity, politeness, and hedging rather than fixed semantic meanings (Coates, 1983). These theoretical approaches collectively establish modality not merely as a grammatical category but as a discourse-level mechanism for positioning attitudes, authority, and interpersonal relations.

Modality is realised through both lexical and grammatical means. Lexical means include modal auxiliaries (*may, might, must, should*), semi-modals (*need to, have to, be able to*), adverbs and adjectives (*probably, certainly, possible, likely*), and stance verbs (*believe, suggest, claim*). Grammatical means include syntactic constructions and morphosyntactic choices such as conditional clauses, counterfactuals, mood and modality marking (e.g., the subjunctive), voice alternations (active vs. passive), and tense or aspect variation that frames commitments to time and certainty. Importantly, lexical and grammatical resources often interact. For instance, certain modal verbs are regularly paired with conditional structures to produce nuanced stance profiles (Abubakarova et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

From a discourse perspective, modality functions less as a purely semantic qualifier and more as a stance-taking resource. Epistemic modals can hedge claims, establish expertise, or create rhetorical distance. Deontic modals can foreground normative judgments or reinforce authority. Grammatical choices such as passive constructions, nominalizations, or conditionals can diffuse responsibility or project possible futures. Taken together, modality operates as a network of lexical and grammatical resources that jointly determine how information is evaluated, attributed, and positioned within discourse (Depraetere & Reed, 2020; Míguez, 2022).

Intentionality in Media Discourse

In media discourse, intentionality refers to the communicative goals that writers or institutions pursue through language choices, such as persuading, orienting readers' evaluations, legitimizing perspectives, or managing contestation. Although intentionality cannot be observed directly, it can be inferred from systematic linguistic patterns, framing devices, and intertextual strategies.

Feature journalism, in particular, is an interpretive and evaluative genre that combines narrative, backgrounding, and commentary. Such texts frequently mobilize linguistic resources to guide readers toward specific interpretations and affective responses (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024; Opgenhaffen & d’Haenens, 2011).

The concept of intentionality in discourse is also closely connected to pragmatic and critical discourse traditions. Grice’s theory of conversational implicature emphasizes that communicative meaning extends beyond literal semantic content and depends on inferred speaker intentions (Grice, 1975). In media discourse analysis, Fairclough and van Dijk argue that linguistic choices in journalism are ideologically motivated and contribute to the construction of social realities, authority, and power relations (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2000). Similarly, Hyland (2005) highlights the role of stance and engagement features in shaping writer–reader interaction, particularly through hedging, boosters, and evaluative language (Hyland, 2005). These perspectives support the present study’s assumption that modality functions strategically in feature journalism to guide interpretation and frame ideological positioning.

Modality plays a central role in this process because it encodes levels of certainty, obligation, and probability that shape the persuasive force of claims. Hard-news reporting relies more on factuality and less on hedges, while feature articles utilize epistemic hedging, evaluative adverbials, and conditionals to achieve a balance of authority and subtlety. Grammatical devices such as passive voice, nominalization, and conditionals also increase intentionality by diffusing responsibility, generalizing claims, or projecting counterfactuals. Recent research documents evidence showing that modalization is one of the main mechanisms through which journalistic texts create evaluative and persuasive effects (Opdahl et al., 2023; Zahidi, 2025).

Previous Studies

In the recent past (2021–2025), modality research has widened to include a wide range of registers. Corpus studies have examined stance-taking patterns and modal use in diverse genres, while psycholinguistic studies have attempted to explain how readers construct modal meaning. Applied studies have investigated modality in sport reporting, health communication, and online news. For example, some studies show how stance-taking is shaped by lexical-grammatical pairings, while others demonstrate how modality interacts with multimodal features in online media (Wang et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024).

Despite this growing body of work, important gaps remain. Most recent studies focus on social media, multimedia formats, or political speech, rather than on traditional print feature journalism. Others investigate modality at a general level without distinguishing between lexical and grammatical contributions

in a genre-sensitive way. Few studies systematically compare how lexical and grammatical modalities function together in feature articles, even though this genre often makes intentionality more explicit than standard news reporting. Moreover, cross-newspaper or cross-topic analyses that examine how modal strategies vary according to institutional identity or subject matter are still rare. These gaps underscore the need for a focused, mixed-methods study of how Indian and American newspaper feature articles use lexical and grammatical means of modality to realise intentionality. Intentionality is therefore understood in the present study not as direct access to journalists' cognitive intentions, but as the discursive projection of communicative purposes that become observable through recurrent linguistic choices, evaluative positioning, and modal framing strategies. Following Fairclough (1995), van Dijk (2000), and Hyland (2005), intentionality is examined as a textual and interactional phenomenon manifested through discourse rather than as an individual psychological state.

Research Methodology

Corpus Selection

The present study employs a corpus of feature articles from leading newspapers to examine how lexical and grammatical means of modality contribute to the realization of intentionality in media discourse. Feature articles, as opposed to hard news, were selected because they are inherently interpretive, evaluative, and persuasive in nature. They offer a rich linguistic environment where authors strategically deploy modality to encode stance, guide reader interpretation, and manage authority, hedging, or evaluation.

The corpus comprises 20 feature articles published between February 2024 and August 2025, sourced from *The Times of India* and *The Los Angeles Times*. The selection prioritizes articles covering topics with social, environmental, and political significance, including climate change, public policy, and societal challenges. The final corpus size was deemed sufficient for qualitative discourse analysis while remaining manageable for detailed coding of lexical and grammatical features.

Table 1: *Corpus of Feature Articles Analyzed*

No.	Title	Newspaper	Date	Article Reference
1	Sustainability constraints have halved the land available for tree planting	<i>The Times of India</i>	August 30, 2025	(Kamal, 2025b)
2	Climate change added 41 days of dangerous heat in 2024, caused unrelenting suffering	<i>The Times of India</i>	August 30, 2025	(Kamal, 2024)

3	IIT-Madras study shows human activity can alter clouds, shake up climate models	<i>The Times of India</i>	August 27, 2025	(Gohain, 2025)
4	Young showcase talent at climate change competition	<i>The Times of India</i>	August 27, 2025	(n.d., 2025)
5	Hotter, drier, different: How climate change will alter L.A.	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	September 9, 2024	(Smith, 2024a)
6	Column: It's 2024. Time to start acting like climate change actually matters	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	January 4, 2024	(Roth, 2024)
7	Climate impacts in India: Experience, worry, and attribution to global warming	<i>The Times of India</i>	May 30, 2025	(Kamal, 2025a)
8	To fix climate anxiety, we first have to fix individualism	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	September 11, 2024	(Xia, 2024)
9	Year 2024 is on track to be warmest year on record: WMO	<i>The Times of India</i>	November 7, 2024	(Mohan, 2024b)
10	Climate change found to be main driver of worsening drought	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	November 7, 2024	(James, 2024)
11	Half of the world's population endured an extra month of extreme heat due to climate change	<i>The Times of India</i>	May 30, 2025	(n.d., 2025)
12	Will global warming turn L.A. into San Bernardino?	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	August 4, 2024	(Smith, 2024b)
13	Was 2024 hottest year ever on Earth? Weather agencies reveal shocking details	<i>The Times of India</i>	May 30, 2025	(n.d., 2025)
14	Climate California Live 2024 - Los Angeles Times	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	November 2024	(Roth et al., 2024)
15	India's annual mean temperature rose from 25.05°C in 2001 to 25.74°C in 2024	<i>The Times of India</i>	May 30, 2025	(Mohan, 2025)
16	Boiling Point: Not a great year for climate change at the Oscars	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	February 20, 2025	(Roth, 2025)
17	2000 dead, more than \$228 billion lost to top 10 climate disasters in 2024	<i>The Times of India</i>	August 30, 2025	(Mohan, 2024a)
18	Climate scientists hope this new mapping tool helps drive the point home	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	August 5, 2024	(Fonseca, 2024)
19	Record-breaking global warming grips Earth: An urgent call for action	<i>The Times of India</i>	February 28, 2024	(Bandyopadhyay, 2024)

Analytical Approach

The study adopts a mixed qualitative–quantitative methodology, combining corpus-assisted tools with discourse-analytic techniques to examine how modality contributes to intentionality in feature journalism. The analytical process comprises several interconnected steps, presented in Figure 1, and discussed below.

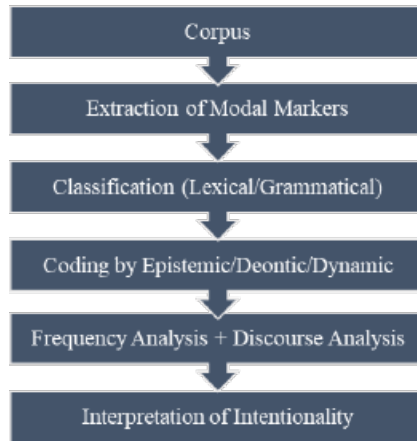


Figure 1. *Corpus-Based Methodology for Investigating Modality and Intentionality*

Step 1: Identification and extraction of modal markers

All instances of modality were systematically identified in the corpus. Lexical markers include modal verbs (*may, might, must, should*), semi-modals (*need to, have to*), modal adverbs (*probably, certainly, definitely*), adjectives (*likely, possible, certain*), and verbs of stance (*assert, suggest, believe*). Grammatical markers encompass syntactic constructions that encode modality indirectly, such as conditional clauses, passive voice, mood variations, and tense/aspect modulation. Each article was read carefully, and occurrences of these markers were highlighted to ensure that both explicit and subtle expressions of modality were captured. This comprehensive extraction is essential because some evaluative or persuasive intentions are realised through subtle grammatical patterns rather than overt lexical items.

Step 2: Classification by modality type

Each identified modal marker was categorized according to epistemic, deontic, or dynamic modality.

- Epistemic markers express the writer's judgment or assessment of probability, certainty, or knowledge, thereby indicating confidence or hedging (e.g., *might, probably, likely*).
- Deontic markers indicate obligation, necessity, or permission, revealing evaluative or normative stance (e.g., *must, should, may*).
- Dynamic markers refer to the ability, capacity, or potential action, typically associated with actors or agents (e.g., *can, be able to*).

This classification allows for systematic comparison of how different types of modality contribute to shaping the author's communicative intent.

Step 3: Corpus-assisted frequency and co-occurrence analysis

After coding, quantitative analysis was conducted using AntConc to generate frequency counts and concordance lines for each lexical and grammatical marker. This step facilitates the recognition of the most frequent modal forms and patterns throughout the corpus. Co-occurrence patterns were also taken into account – whether, say, epistemic modals are more likely to accompany conditional clauses, or deontic modals with passive constructions as a means of softening authorial blame. This stage ensures that the study captures not only freestanding markers but also how they cluster in encoding nuanced evaluative meanings.

Step 4: Discourse-level qualitative analysis

After the quantitative phase, targeted passages were studied qualitatively to see how modal options achieve intentionality. This includes examining:

- How epistemic modals hedge claims or project expertise.
- How deontic modals guide reader judgment or imply normative expectations.
- How grammatical devices (e.g., passives, conditionals, tense shifts) frame events, manage agency, or emphasize consequences.

This step integrates linguistic findings with discourse function, showing how lexical and grammatical modalities collectively construct authorial stance, persuasion, and ideological positioning. Examples are annotated and interpreted to illustrate the strategic deployment of modality in guiding readers' interpretations and aligning with the article's intended communicative effect.

Step 5: Reliability and validation

To enhance reliability, the coding framework was developed using established modality classifications derived from prior linguistic research. Coding decisions were cross-checked repeatedly during the analytical process to ensure consistency between lexical and grammatical categories. Ambiguous instances were revisited in relation to their surrounding discourse context before final classification. In addition, concordance outputs generated through AntConc were manually verified to minimize extraction inconsistencies. Because the study is exploratory and discourse-oriented in nature, emphasis was placed on interpretive consistency rather than automated annotation. The integration of corpus-assisted frequency analysis with qualitative discourse interpretation strengthens methodological triangulation and enhances the validity of the findings.

Tools and Software:

- AntConc for concordance searches, keyword analysis, and frequency counts of lexical and grammatical markers.
- NVivo for qualitative coding, thematic organization, and annotation of modal expressions in context (optional; manual coding used where software was not applicable).

Findings and Analysis

Lexical Means of Modality

Using AntConc, the frequencies of key modal verbs (*must, should, may, might, could*) and modal adverbs (*probably, clearly*) across *The Times of India* and *The Los Angeles Times* feature articles were extracted and tabulated.

The AntConc analysis produced the frequency counts, reported in Table 2:

Table 2. *Comparison of Grammatical Markers*

Newspaper	must	should	may	might	could	Verbs sub- total	probably	clearly	Adverbs subtotal	Total Lexi- cal Modality Markers
<i>The Times of India</i>	8	5	12	3	10	38	2	1	3	41
<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	10	7	8	4	6	35	4	5	9	44
Total	18	12	20	7	16	73	6	6	12	85

This reveals that while both newspapers display similar overall volumes of lexical modal markers, *The Times of India* used more epistemic modals (*may, could*), accounting for over 50% of its modal verbs, indicating a more cautious reporting style that privileges possibility and qualification. In contrast, *The Los Angeles Times* deployed more deontic modals (*must, should*), suggesting a stronger evaluative or persuasive orientation. Modal adverbs appear nearly three times more often in *The Los Angeles Times*, reinforcing its interpretive approach.

Concordance snapshots from AntConc illustrate context:

- *The Los Angeles Times* (Roth, 2024): “We **must** act now, because the window for effective climate action is closing quickly.”
- *The Los Angeles Times* (Xia, 2024): “We **must** find the courage to care, to change, to reimagine the systems that got us into such a devastating crisis in the first place.”

- *The Los Angeles Times* (Xia, 2024): “It can’t just be my dream, or your dream. It **has to** be our collective dream.”
- *The Los Angeles Times* (Smith, 2025): “...governments **should** accelerate investment in clean-energy infrastructure if long-term climate goals are to be achieved.”
- *The Times of India* (Kamal, 2025b): “These findings **may** indicate that, under current constraints, reforestation alone will not compensate for carbon loss.”
- *The Times of India* (Mohan 2025): “The monthly fluctuations **may** suggest shifting rainfall patterns within the monsoon season.”
- *The Times of India* (Mohan 2025): “...which **may** hint at evolving climatic conditions.”
- *The Times of India* (Gohain 2025): “The findings, scientists say, **could** help reduce uncertainties in global climate models.”
- *The Times of India* (Kamal 2025b): “Brazil alone represents one-fifth of the potentially suitable area,” followed by recommendations that wealthier economies **could** strengthen international support through financing and technology transfer.

These examples show how “**must**” and “**should**” deploy a strong directive force in *The LA Times*, whereas “**may**” and “**could**” in *The Times of India* are used as hedges, reflecting greater epistemic restraint.

Grammatical Means of Modality

Using AntConc and manual coding, the results were obtained and reported in Table 3 and visualised in Figure 2:

Table 3. *Use of Linguistic Strategies in Climate Change Reporting*

Newspaper	Conditional Clauses ('if'-'will')	Passive Structures	Means of Expressing Futurity ('will be')	Counterfactual ('would ... have')	Total Grammatical Markers
<i>The Times of India</i>	10	15	12	5	42
<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	14	8	11	6	39
Total	24	23	23	11	81

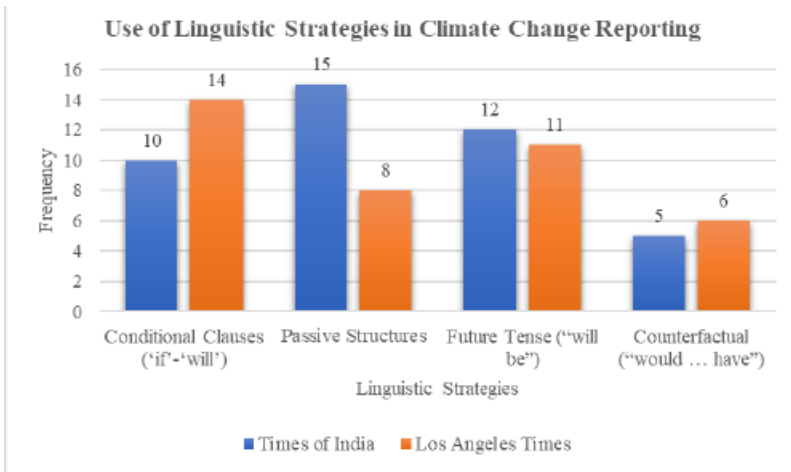


Figure 2. *Use of Linguistic Strategies in Climate Change Reporting*

- Conditional clauses are more frequent in *The LA Times*, consistent with its engagement in speculative framing.
- Passive structures occur more often in *The Times of India*, aligning with its factual, depersonalized reporting style.
- Future tense usage is evenly distributed, reflecting forward-looking discourse in both outlets.
- Counterfactual constructions are modest but significant in both contexts, underscoring hypothetical reasoning.

Sample extracts:

- (*The LA Times*, Smith, 2024) “If global warming continues, Los Angeles will experience unprecedented heatwaves.”
- (*The Times of India*, Kamal, 2025b) “The area where forests can store carbon has been halved, raising concerns.”

These instances highlight how grammatical structures underpin modal meaning: the conditional + will framing in *The LA Times* constructs projected futures; the passive “has been halved” in *The Times of India* emphasizes change in the object rather than the agent.

Contribution to Intentionality

The interplay of lexical and grammatical modality constructs distinct intentional profiles in the two newspapers:

- *The Los Angeles Times* adopts a more engaged, persuasive stance, using directives (*must*, *should*), modal adverbs (*clearly*), and conditional futures to guide reader interpretation toward urgency and action.

- *The Times of India* conveys a more distanced, factual posture, favoring epistemic modals (*may, could*), passive constructions, and neutral futurities without explicit urgency.

These patterns align with the broad rhetorical aims of each outlet: *The LA Times* steers readers toward interpretive engagement, while *The Times of India* emphasizes transparent reporting of scientific or observational findings.

NVivo Qualitative Coding Summary

Modal tokens were assigned NVivo thematic node coding, capturing intentionality: Persuasion, Hedging/Epistemic Caution, Predictive Framing, and Depersonalization. Figure 3 presents node frequency counts.

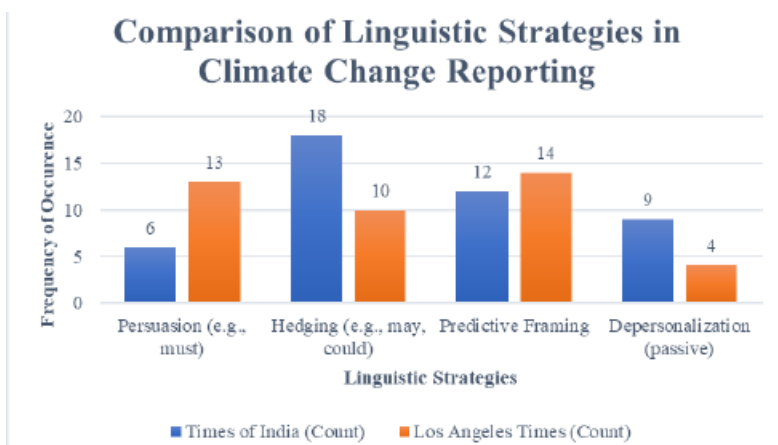


Figure 3. *Comparison of Linguistic Strategies in Climate Change Reporting*

- *The LA Times* contains more persuasion codes than the other analysed paper, reinforcing its directive tone.
- *The Times of India* uses more hedging than *The LA Times* in maintaining its conservative epistemic policy.
- Framing in predictive through future tense and conditionals is strong.
- Depersonalization suggests *The Times of India*'s preference to locate phenomena in the center rather than actors.

Interpretation in discourse:

- *The LA Times*' headlines tend to end with declarations such as, "We must ensure the next generation does not inherit this crisis". These codings indicate a strategic rhetorical action to engage and convince readers.

- *The Times of India* often employs sections such as “These results may reflect broader trends”, which the hedging node identifies, emphasizing authorial restraint and focus on credibility.

Although frequency differences between the two newspapers are not substantial in absolute terms, their distribution reveals distinct discursive tendencies. *The Times of India* exhibits greater reliance on epistemic modality, whereas *The LA Times* employs more deontic modality and evaluative expressions. These tendencies suggest differing rhetorical approaches to climate communication despite the shared thematic focus.

Discussion

The quantitative findings point towards different modality profiles of the two papers. In all, 85 lexical markers were found, with *The Los Angeles Times* having more directive and persuasive statements (44 compared to 41 in *TOI*). Deontic verbs such as *must* (10 instances) and *should* (7 instances) were particularly frequent in *The LA Times*, whereas *The TOI* leaned toward epistemic forms like *may* (12) and *could* (10). These patterns suggest a comparatively stronger tendency toward urgency and evaluative framing in *The LA Times*’ corpus.

These differences are significant because they illustrate how modality functions as a mechanism for constructing distinct forms of journalistic intentionality. The greater use of deontic markers in *The Los Angeles Times* suggests an orientation toward reader engagement and normative evaluation, encouraging audiences to view climate change as an issue requiring action and responsibility. In contrast, the preference for epistemic markers in *The Times of India* reflects a more cautious communicative strategy that foregrounds uncertainty, evidentiality, and informational credibility. Consistent with Halliday’s interpersonal model of language and Hyland’s concept of stance, these modal choices shape the relationship between writer, information, and audience, thereby contributing to different patterns of persuasive and interpretive framing.

Grammatical analysis yielded 81 markers, with *The TOI* favoring passive constructions (15 vs. 8 in *The LA Times*) and *The LA Times* more frequently employing conditional clauses (14 vs. 10 in *The TOI*). Both newspapers used future tense forms at comparable levels (11–12 instances each), suggesting a shared focus on predictive framing. Importantly, the interplay of these markers contributes to intentionality: persuasion codes were more prevalent in *The LA Times*, while hedging and depersonalization dominated in *The TOI*.

These results confirm that lexical and grammatical modalities are not isolated but work in tandem to construct stance and guide interpretation. By quantifying modal distributions, this study illustrates how institutional styles manifest in language use: directive force in *The LA Times* and epistemic restraint in *The*

TOI. Such contrasts indicate that modality may contribute to the construction of intentionality and rhetorical positioning within feature journalism discourse. Given the relatively small exploratory corpus, the quantitative findings are interpreted descriptively rather than as claims of broad statistical generalizability. Frequency contrasts are therefore used primarily to identify discourse tendencies and rhetorical preferences across the two newspaper contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that modality is a critical linguistic resource for realizing intentionality in feature journalism. Quantitative findings – 85 lexical and 81 grammatical markers – reveal systematic contrasts between the two outlets: *The LA Times* foregrounds persuasion and urgency through deontic verbs and conditional futures, while *The TOI* emphasizes caution and objectivity through epistemic modals and passive forms. These patterns suggest that modality functions as an important rhetorical resource in shaping climate discourse and reader interpretation.

The study contributes to linguistic theory and applied media analysis by connecting modality to intentionality in feature journalism. While limited to English-language print articles, future research could extend to multimodal and digital contexts. Ultimately, the findings confirm that modality is not a neutral category but a strategic resource, central to the construction of authority, persuasion, and ideology in media discourse.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author did not use generative artificial intelligence or AI-assisted technologies to generate the scientific content, interpret the findings, or draw conclusions. AI-assisted tools were used only for language editing, grammar checking, and referencing. The author carefully reviewed and takes full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

Representative prompts used during manuscript preparation included:

- “Improve the academic style of the following paragraph while preserving its original meaning.”
- “Rewrite this paragraph to reduce textual similarity without changing the scientific content.”
- “Suggest a more appropriate figure caption for this figure.”
- “Write this reference in the journal’s required reference style.”

References

- Abubakarova, B. M., Almurzaeva, K., & Usmanov, T. I. (2022). Lexical means of expressing modality in modern English language. *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Actual Issues of Linguistics, Linguodidactics and Intercultural Communication (TLLIC 2022)*. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0011608900003577>
- Bandyopadhyay, K. (2024). *Record-breaking global warming grips Earth: An urgent call for action*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/environment/record-breaking-global-warming-grips-earth-an-urgent-call-for-action/articleshow/108079280.cms>
- Coates, J. (1983). *The semantics of the modal auxiliaries*. Croom Helm.
- Depraetere, I., & Reed, S. (2020). Mood and modality in English. In B. Aarts, J. McMahon & L. Hinrichs (Eds.), *The handbook of English linguistics* (2nd ed., pp. 207–227). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119540618.ch12>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. Edward Arnold.
- Fonseca, R. (2024). *Mapping tool shows your city's possible climate in 60 years*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/california/newsletter/2024-08-05/mapping-tool-look-up-cities-climate-future-essential-california>
- Gohain, M.P. (2025). *IIT-Madras study shows human activity can alter clouds, shake up climate models*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/iit-madras-study-shows-human-activity-can-alter-clouds-shake-up-climate-models/articleshow/123545013.cms>
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Vol. 3. Speech acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368811_003
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203783771>
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
- James, I. (2024). *Climate change found to be main driver of worsening drought*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-11-07/climate-change-driving-western-drought>
- Kamal, N. (2024). *Climate change added 41 days of dangerous heat in 2024, caused unrelenting suffering*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/climate-change-added-41-days-of-dangerous-heat-in-2024-caused-unrelenting-suffering/articleshow/116710774.cms>
- Kamal, N. (2025a). *Climate impacts in India: Experience, worry, and attribution to global warming*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>

- india/climate-impacts-in-india-experience-worry-and-attribution-to-global-warming/articleshow/121368087.cms
- Kamal, N. (2025b). *Sustainability constraints halve land available for tree planting*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/sustainability-constraints-halve-land-available-for-tree-planting/articleshow/123590212.cms>
- Lijuan, D., & Afzaal, M. (2024). Analyzing modality-mediated ideology in translated Chinese political discourses: An ideological square model approach. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1057/S41599-024-03302-Z>
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics* (Vols. 1–2). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620614>
- Míguez, V. (2022). On epistemic modality and discourse strategy: Evidence from Galician adverbs. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 201, 32–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2022.09.003>
- Mohan, V. (2024a). *2,000 dead, more than \$228 billion lost to top 10 climate disasters in 2024: Report*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/2000-dead-288bn-lost-to-top-10-climate-disasters-in-24-report/articleshow/116779646.cms>
- Mohan, V. (2024b). *Year 2024 is on track to be warmest year on record: WMO*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/year-2024-is-on-track-to-be-warmest-year-on-record-wmo/articleshow/115060473.cms>
- Mohan, V. (2025). *India's annual mean temperature rise up from 25.05°C in 2001 to 25.74°C in 2024, Electricity generation from renewable sources increased more than three times in 10 years*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indias-annual-mean-temperature-rise-up-from-25-05c-in-2001-to-25-74c-in-2024-electricity-generation-from-renewable-sources-increased-more-than-three-times-in-10-years/articleshow/121665364.cms>
- Öhman, E., & Liimatta, A. (2024). Text length and the function of intentionality: A case study of contrastive subreddits. In M. Hämäläinen, E. Öhman, S. Miyagawa, K. Alnajjar & Y. Bizzoni (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Natural Language Processing for Digital Humanities* (pp. 1–8). Association for Computational Linguistics. <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2024.nlp4dh-1.1>
- Opdahl, A. L., Tessem, B., Dang-Nguyen, D. T., Motta, E., Setty, V., Throndsen, E., Tverberg, A., & Trattner, C. (2023). Trustworthy journalism through AI. *Data & Knowledge Engineering*, 146, 102182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.datak.2023.102182>

- Oppeghaffen, M., & d'Haenens, L. (2011). The impact of online news features on learning from news: A knowledge experiment. *International Journal of Internet Science*, 6(1), 8–28.
- Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167178>
- Rantsudu, B., & Bartlett, T. (2024). The role of deontic modality in the construction and mitigation of evaluation in hard news reporting. *Journal of World Languages*, 10(1), 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2023-0059>
- Roth, S. (2024). *Column: It's 2024. Time to start acting like climate change actually matters*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/newsletter/2024-01-04/column-its-2024-time-to-start-acting-like-climate-change-actually-matters-boiling-point>
- Roth, S. (2025). *Boiling Point: Not a great year for climate change at the Oscars*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/newsletter/2025-02-20/boiling-point-not-a-great-year-for-climate-change-at-the-oscars-boiling-point>
- Roth, S., Xia, R., Briscoe, T., Morin, M., Rust, S., Mitchell, R., Seidman, L., Short, A., Haggerty, N., James, I., Potts, M.E., & Jaipersaud, A. (2024). *Climate California Live 2024 - Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/9cgfubrs1w-123>
- Rudin, D. (2025). Asserting epistemic modals. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 48(1), 43–88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10988-024-09423-7>
- Smith, H. (2024a). *Hotter, drier, different: How climate change will alter L.A.* Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-09-09/hotter-drier-different-how-climate-change-will-alter-l-a>
- Smith, H. (2024b). *Will global warming turn L.A. into San Bernardino?* Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-08-04/will-global-warming-turn-la-into-san-bernardino>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2000). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446217856>
- Wang, Z., Fan, W., & Fang, A. C. (2022). Lexical input in the grammatical expression of stance: A collexeme analysis of the introductory it pattern. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 762000. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.762000>
- Wike, R., Silver, L., Fetterolf, J., Huang, C., Austin, S., Clancy, L., & Gubbala, S. (2022, December 6). *Global Views of social media and its impacts on society*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/views-of-social-media-and-its-impacts-on-society-in-advanced-economies-2022/>

- Wu, W., & Wang, J. (2026). A study on the modality of climate news discourse: The case of *The New York Times*. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 13, Article 102582. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2026.102582>
- Xia, R. (2024). *To fix climate anxiety, we first have to fix individualism*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-09-11/climate-anxiety-essay>
- Yang, S. (2021). *A systemic functional study of modality in modern Chinese*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8020-5>
- Young showcase talent at climate change competition*. (2025). The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/young-showcase-talent-at-climate-change-competition/articleshow/123489309.cms>
- Zahidi, I. (2025). Modalization strategies and axiological values in sports discourse: an analysis of a media dossier. *Saudi Journal of Language Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SJLS-08-2024-0047>
- Zhu, P., Hua, J., Tang, K., Tian, J., Xu, J., & Cui, X. (2024). Multimodal fake news detection through intra-modality feature aggregation and inter-modality semantic fusion. *Complex & Intelligent Systems*, 10(4), 5851–5863. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S40747-024-01473-5>