The Use of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in Covid -19 News:
An Analysis of Selected News in Digital Newspaper

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the use of modal auxiliary verbs in Covid-19 news in some articles in the digital newspaper. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause illnesses such as the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). In 2019, a new coronavirus was identified as the cause of a disease outbreak that originated in China. The virus is known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The disease it causes is called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared to have transmitted in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, with the first two positive cases. President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo has announced that two Indonesians have tested positive for the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the first two confirmed cases of the disease in the country. The disease has been reported daily in the Jakarta Post. The data were manually analysed for the various functions of the modal aid in question. The six categories of modal assistive devices, namely data, are characterized by competence, opportunity, forecasting, commitment, intent, and compliance. The results show that the author of the article has selected the predictor modal in the article, can, could, and will. Other modal types used are would, may, and must. The modal used reflects the opinion of the author of the article, and the use of can reports the highest frequency.

Keywords: Modal Auxiliary Verbs, Covid-19, Digital Newspaper Articles

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets to analyse modal auxiliaries and how they are used in Covid-19 news in digital newspaper in Indonesia. There are various definition of the term modal auxiliaries. Halliday (1970) states modality as the way that makes it possible for the speaker to interfere and take up a viewpoint in the speaking incident Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, (1985) assert that modality is how speakers decide on the genuineness of the topic. These definitions indicate a non-conclusiveness in the notion of modality. Modality is extremely important in written discourse as it conveys the writer's attitude both to the propositions, he/she makes and to the readers. Hyland (1994) states that the ability to use modality appropriately also contributes significantly to pragmatic aspect in English writing and influences the way a reader responds to the content of the writing. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the use of modal auxiliaries in reporting Covid-19 in digital newspaper to show how article authors show the opinion of covid-19 news. The leading questions are:

1. What are the modals auxiliary verbs used in digital newspaper articles on Covid-19?
2. What is the most frequent modal used in digital newspaper articles on Covid-19?
3. What is the use of the modal auxiliary verbs in digital newspaper articles on Covid-19?

MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

In this section we will revisit the definition of modal auxiliaries and show their functions from a broad perspective. Radford, Atkinson, Britain, Clahsen, &Spencer, (1999) stated that auxiliary verbs are verbs that precede the lexical verb and are perform various semantic functions. In this case therefore the auxiliary verb gives the lexical verb additional meaning. According to Huddleston & Pullum (2005) modality is defined as the speaker's verdict about the "necessity" and "possibility" of subjects. Leech (1987) avers that modals are used in writing and speaking, to express issues which are related to form opinions, understandings, purposes, obligations, free will and other associated notions. According to these definitions it can be deduced that modals speak for the writer or speaker in terms of what the writer or speaker think as important in the message to be put across. Modals can be indicated with the forms below:

1) Spanish flu outbreak **can** be bigger than the first wave. (Can)
2) Antigen test **could** also trigger a resurgence of covid-19 in the country. (Could)
3) Citizen **must** have the courage to ask about the novelty of the tools. (Must)
4) Indonesia **will** produce a corona virus vaccine in early 2022 called Merah Putih vaccine. (Will)
5) The officer **would** show it when opening the packaging of the test kits. (Would)

Modal auxiliary verbs, therefore, have several functions and one modal may have various meanings and one meaning can also be related to various modal forms. On the basis of Quirk & Greenbaum, (2000 p.52 - 56) description of modal auxiliaries this paper pursues the possible functions which every modal could impart.

Table 1: Quirk et al.'s (2000) Description of modal auxiliaries

	Modal	Use	Example
1	Can	Ability	He can speak English.
		Permission	
		-be allowed to	Can I smoke here?
		-be permitted to	
		Theoretical possibility	The road can be blocked (It is possible to block the road).
2	Could	Past ability	I never could play banjo.
		Present or future permission	Could I smoke here?
		Present possibility (theoretical or factual)	We could go to the concert The road could be blocked.
		Contingent possibility or ability in unreal conditions	If we had more money, we could buy a car.
3	May	Permission	
		-Be allowed to	You may borrow my car if you like.
		Possibility (usually factual)	This road may be blocked. (It is possible that this road is blocked).
4	Might	Permission (rare)	Might I smoke in here?
		Possibility (theoretical or factual)	We might go to the concert. What you say might be true.
5	Shall	Willingness (on the part of the speaker)	He shall get his money. You shall do exactly as you wish.
		Intention (on the part of the speakers only in Ist person)	I shall let you know our decision. We shall overcome.
		a) Insistence (restricted use)	You shall do as I say.
		b) Legal and quasi-legal injunction	The vendor shall maintain the equipment in good repair.
6	Should	Obligation and logical necessity	You should do as he says. They should be home by now.
		"Putative" use after certain expressions	It is odd that you should say this to me.
		Contingent use	We should love to go abroad.
		In rather formal real conditions	If you should change your mind, please let us know.
7	Will	Willingness. Used in polite requests	He'll help you if you ask him. Will you have another cup of coffee?
		Intention	I'll write as soon as I can.
		Insistence	He will do it, whatever he says.
		Prediction	
		-Specific prediction	The game will be finished by now
		-Timeless prediction	Oil will float on water.
		-Habitual prediction	He will always talk for hours if you give him the chance.
8	Would	Willingness	Would you excuse me?

		Insistence	It's your own fault; you would take the baby with you.
		Characteristic activity in the past	Every morning he would go for a long walk.
		Contingent use in the main clause of a conditional sentence	He would smoke too much if I didn't stop him.
		Probability	That would be his mother.
9	Must	Obligation/Compulsion	You must be back by 10 o'clock
		Necessity (Logical)	There must be a mistake.

From Table 1 above, modals can be summarized into three categories based on their major uses as:

1) "permission/ possibility/ ability": - can, could, may, might
2) "obligation/necessity": - must, should
3) "volition/ prediction": - will, would, shall"

It can also be noted that the same modal sometimes are used to express different functions like that of "probability", "possibility" and "certainty", and "ability", "permission" and "obligation".

Downing and Locke (1992) aver that modality appears as a linguistic feature generated by a variety of linguistic phenomena among which modal verbs play a special role. Modal auxiliaries are divided into two groups: epistemic and deontic.

According to Huddleston and Pullum (2005), epistemic modality expresses meanings relating primarily to what is necessary or possible given what we know (or believe). This can be paraphrased as that type of modality that is related to judgment and expressing judgment on whether something is or is not the case. E.g. He *may* be telling a lie.

Deontic modality is the second category of modality. The meaning of deontic modals is related to permission or obligation, rather than possibility and necessity. Palmer (1990) distinguishes between epistemic and deontic modality stating that the two uses of the modals are essentially making a judgment about the truth of the proposition, the other being concerned with influencing actions, states or events. These kinds of 'influencing actions', states or events have to do with permission and obligation that is being laid upon the referred individual or thing, E.g. Social distancing *must* be observed.

The purpose of this paper is to analysed the use of modal auxiliaries in reporting Covid-19 in digital newspaper to show how article authors represent opinion about Covid-19.

THE COVID-19

The 2019-nCoV or H-CoV-19 virus (now dubbed SARSCoV-2) is a member of the beta coronaviruses and can cause acute severe respiratory symptoms or possibly mild, cold-like symptoms (Cheng and Shan 2020). Its epidemiological characteristics have hampered the establishment of a better classification of the disease. The peculiar genetic features of the

virus which enabled it to potentially jump across different species—putatively from bats or pangolins to humans (Andersen, Rambaut, Lipkin, Holmes and Garry. 2020)—have effectively facilitated its rapid spread (Cheng and Shan 2020)

According to WHO Situation Report-59 released on 19 March 2020 (The World Health Organization 2020), the second 100,000 Covid-19 cases were confirmed within the last 12 days in March, whereas the first 100,000 cases were confirmed over the first three months of the pandemic that is January 2020 to March 2020. This indicates the severity of the disease as well as its spread among humans.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia is part of the ongoing worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was confirmed to have spread to Indonesia on 2 March 2020, after a dance instructor and her mother tested positive for the virus. Both were infected from a Japanese national. By 9 April 2020, the pandemic had spread to all 34 provinces in the country. Jakarta, West Java, and Central Java are the worst-hit provinces, together accounting almost half of the national total cases. The media became active in disseminating the government protocols in order for its citizens not to contract and spread the disease. It is against this effort by the media to disseminate Covid-19 information that this article seeks to examine the use of modal auxiliaries in digital Newspaper coverage to show the authors' opinion about Covid-19.

INDONESIA DIGITAL NEWSPAPER

There are several newspapers that report issues of Covid19 in Indonesia. These include *The Jakarta Post, Republika Online etc.* The language of the press then presents a perception of 'reality' in the form which it regards as most suitable for its readership thus implying keeping the power of media discourse hidden from the mass of the population is a natural tendency in journalism.

Media centres play an important role not only in public opinion building but also in decision-making by the readers. Therefore, the articles written about Covid-19 by digital newspapers are important in shaping the opinion of the readers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Particular attention, then, is paid on the choice of modal auxiliaries in the articles that enhances the opinion of the authors about Covid-19. Digital newspaper is considered to be important regarding its function and readership coverage throughout the country for a long time Ngoge (2014). The news articles about Covid-19 are not just coverage of news events but also comments on events and contain background information, explanations, interpretations as well as opinions on Covid-19. The articles could be seen as a conscious expression of the newspaper's position on Covid-19. It could be seen as the voice of the newspaper, seeking to inform, admonish, influence, appeal and motivate readers concerning Covid-19. The voice of the newspaper reporters drives the researchers in situating this paper within modal auxiliary framework to show the author's opinion about Covid-19.

STUDIES ON MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

There is a large number of studies in modality and this indicates how rich the field is. The studies have ranged from the use auxiliary verbs by students of English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language to the use of modal auxiliary verbs in journals, with each focusing on different perspectives of the modal auxiliary verbs. We will focus our study on the use of modal auxiliary verbs are required to use linguistic resources accurately when presenting their research findings for publication, and the appropriate selection of modal auxiliary verbs help them reach that goalModal verbs may express more than one type of modality, such as possibility, probability, necessity, obligation, and so on. Because modal verbs may have different semantic values depending on the context in which they appear, their use determines the propositional value of the message transmitted (Alcaraz, 2000: 66).

Kenneth & Odhiambo (2020) studied that the modal auxiliary verbs used perform various functions according to Quirk et al's (2000) taxonomy. These functions include ability, possibility, intention, prediction, obligation, and quasi legal use.

The comparative analysis of these newspapers revealed that both the editors chose mainly predictive auxiliary modals such as *will* and *would* to the other types of modal. The predictive modal suggested that prediction about the future *"what will/would happen"* was the major apprehension of the editorial writers. This paper focused on editorials which is the diverging point with the current paper which will analyse modals in news articles.

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to analyse modal auxiliary used, their frequency, and the uses of modal auxiliary verbs in digital newspaper. It used a purposive design to select the newspapers articles for the period 1St September 2021 to 23rd November 2021. It is the wider research that will use the data collected for the whole period.

DATA ANALYSIS

The paper used qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a methodological strategy that enables researchers to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at a meaning, and it facilitates the understanding of the types, characteristics and organizational aspects of documents as social products in their own right as well as what they claim.

The uses of modals in this paper are derived from Quirk et al (2000) schema of modal auxiliaries The analysis was also guided by our research questions which are: what is the most frequent modal used in digital newspaper articles on Covid-19 and what is the use of the modal auxiliary verbs in digital newspaper articles on Covid-19?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis in digital newspaper described that all the six central auxiliary verbs were used. These auxiliaries were: *will, may, can, could, should, must*. This indicates that the article authors use a variety of modals to pass their messages to the readers.

The data of the modals collected and analysed show different distribution of frequency in modal auxiliary verbs.

Table 2: The distribution of modals in data

Modal	Frequency	Percentage
WILL	5	21.8
MAY	1	4.3
CAN	5	21.8
COULD	1	4.3
SHOULD	2	8.7
MUST	9	39.1
TOTAL	**23**	**100**

THE FUNCTIONS OF MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

Having collected the frequency data, the data was analysed manually with regard to different functions of the modal auxiliary verbs in question. Uses of modals in this paper are derived from Quirk et al (2000) schema of modal auxiliaries.

A total of 23 modal auxiliary usages are recorded in the data. A few of these modal auxiliaries are randomly picked for the purpose of discussing their functions. Examples of modal auxiliaries used in the context of the selected articles of this work are listed:

ABILITY

"Ability" in the sense of this study is based on the capability of an agent to perform actions.

1) *Serious issues on a global scale can only be overcome ...*
2) *However, experience shows that no country can succeed in overcoming a pandemic.*
3) *The 3T remains the best ways we can reduce the risk of Covid – 19.*

PREDICTION

Prediction is used as a modal auxiliary and makes a statement about an event, situation, happening, and act (Quirk *et al* 2000). Instrumentally, it is used to make prediction which is not definite. The data discussed below show the prediction functions of modals.

1) *Indonesia will produce a corona vaccine in early 2022 called Merah Putih vaccine.*
2) *All eyes of the world will look at Indonesia as a developing country against the pandemic.*
3) *Naturally, any government efforts to handle the pandemic will be effective.*

OBLIGATION

Quirk et al. (2000) state that obligation indicates an act that is considered by the speaker to be obligatory in which an agent is obliged to do something. It indicates duty, expediency and expresses condition that makes a statement less direct. It makes formal request or offer. The data below exemplify such modals.

1) *The officer must show it when opening the packaging of the test kits.*
2) *The community must contribute in suppressing the surge in covid cases.*
3) *They must adhere to any sectors like tourism and educations.*
4) *We must maintain the vaccination and health protocol movement.*
5) *Indonesia should learn from the current soaring cases in the UK.*

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we can see that modal auxiliary verbs that are dominant to be used are *must* 39.1% to express obligation. To express prediction and ability which was found in 21.8% for *will* and *can*.

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