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INTERPERSONAL MEANING IN IELTS EXPOSITION AND DISCUSSION ESSAYS IN THE LIGHT OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

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A B S T R A C T

Interpersonal meaning is concerned with the way language users build up or maintain appropriate relationships with others in society. In Halliday (2014)'s view, it is through the interpersonal metafunction that users of language establish, take a position on people, things and situations in social relationships. Interpersonal expectations, which are implicit in the IELTS assessment criteria (Nakamura, 2009), are widely recognized as contributing to the quality of IELTS essays. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Halliday as an analytical tool, the present study explores how interpersonal meaning has been deployed by IELTS candidates in IELTS high scoring exposition and discussion essays. 90 sample essays from published books and official IELTS websites are selected as data for text analysis. The descriptive method is used to give a detailed description of interpersonal meanings under the two major systems: mood and modality in the light of Functional Grammar with a view to illuminating the salient linguistic features of IELTS academic essays written by highly successful test-takers, thereby providing IELTS test-takers with a better understanding of how to tactically manipulate the aspects of modality and mood choice, thus attaining success in writing IELTS academic essays.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

I. INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) is viewed as one of the most widely used and internationally recognised tests to measure test-takers' language proficiency in terms of listening, reading, writing and speaking skills (Coffin, 2004). In order to gain higher scores in the academic IELTS writing, in addition to four public criteria namely a wide range of lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, coherence and cohesion, task achievement, it is essential that the candidates should be cognizant of its interpersonal expectations which are implicit in the IELTS assessment criteria (Nakamura, 2009). In line with this,

this study is to disclose the prominent linguistic features of IELTS academic essays written by highly successful test-takers in terms of interpersonal meaning, thereby providing non-native writers with a better understanding of how to realize the discourse requirements of an academic IELTS essay, thus achieving success in writing IELTS academic essays.

The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the way language users build up or maintain appropriate relationships with others in society. In Halliday's view, it is through the interpersonal metafunction that users of language establish, maintain appropriate social relationships with others, or reflect their attitudes towards the subject

matter and it is concerned with clauses as exchange. That is, interpersonal function in written texts served as a site of interaction between writers and readers; in this way, language is used to construct solidarity and alignment with potential or target readers as well as attempt to influence others' behavior and attitude, signaling the writers' negotiation with readers (Thompson, 2004).

This study is to identify how language is

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Previous Studies

The interpersonal relationship occupies a crucial position in maintaining and establishing relationships with the readers, expressing viewpoints in writing (Butt et al., 2000; Lemke, 1992a; Martin, 1995). Several studies on interpersonal meanings in academic writing have been conducted up to now. Liu (2013) analyzed the use of evaluative language in Chinese university EFL students' argumentative essays based on Martin and White (2005)'s Appraisal theory and pointed out that high-rated essays successfully employed the Affect values to foreground personal voice and position readers attitudinally, thus presenting critical arguments.

Another study undertaken by Xuan and Huang (2017) investigated modality types, orientation, value, and polarity employed in Chinese ESL learners' writing in systemic functional linguistics perspectives and found that learners overused particular types of modal verbs and the majority of modality was simple and congruent.

Hadiani (2019) analyzed the interpersonal meaning deployed in students' explanation texts and found that declarative mood accounted for the highest proportion (97%) and modality was not widely used, indicating that the students supported their point of view using facts to build an equal relationship with the readers. As a result, they could produce effective explanation texts.

In a similar vein, Vrika et al. (2019) conducted an analysis of the interpersonal meaning in the report text written by the undergraduate students, using the framework from the Systemic Functional Linguistics by Eggins (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The results of their study showed mostly declarative mood and

used to interact with the IELTS examiners in terms of mood and modality employed by successful IELTS candidates. It is hoped that the findings of this research will enable IELTS test-takers to tactically manipulate the aspects of modality and mood choice in order to persuade IELTS examiners to accept their stance or attitudes, thus achieving higher scores for their IELTS academic essays.

modalization type realized in the report text and the students' mastery in the writing skill although there were still some mistakes the students made in writing some clauses. They also pointed out that using interpersonal meaning to analyze text might help to know whether students have a good grasph of writing skills.

Therefore, given the crucial essence of interpersonal meanings, the purpose of this study is to apply insights gained from the analysis of interpersonal meanings to raise IELTS test-takers' awareness of the essential role of the interpersonal metafunction as a social link in persuading the readers, particularly the IELTS examiners to accept their arguments, thus contributing to score enhancement in their essays.

2.2. Theoretical Background

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), when people use language, there are two basic types of speech roles: Giving and Demanding to signify their intention in terms of the nature of commodity being exchanged. The exchange of goods and services and information comes into the four fundamental speech functions namely Offer, Command, Statement and Question. The giving and demanding of goods-&- services is realized as an 'offer' and a 'command' respectively, while the giving and demanding of information is realized as a 'statement' and a 'question' as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Giving or demanding (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 136)

role in exchange	Commodity exchanged	
	Goods-&-services	Information
Giving	'offer' Would you like this teapot?	'statement' He's giving her the teapot.
Demanding	'command' Give me that teapot!	'question' What is he giving her?

In Halliday 's opinion, the interpersonal meaning is typically realized by the two major systems: Mood and modality.

2.2.1. Mood

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) identified two essential functional constituents of the Mood component: the Subject, which is a nominal group, and the Finite element, which is part of a verbal group. "The Subject supplies the rest of what it takes to form a proposition: namely, something by reference to which the proposition can be affirmed or denied" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 145). The subject has an interpersonal function in nature with 'modal responsibility'. The ordering of Subject and Finite in the clause plays an essential part in signaling speech roles in that it can indicate whether the major clause is indicative or imperative. If indicative, it can be either declarative or interrogative. An interrogative clause can be further divided into yes/ no interrogative and Wh-interrogative types.
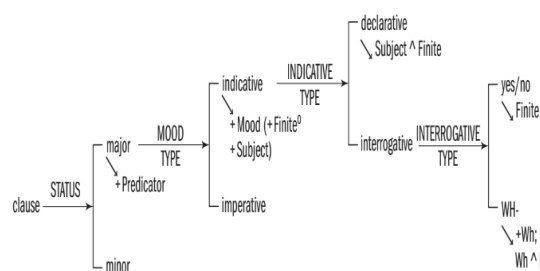

Figure 1. The MOOD system network (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 24)

2.2.2. Modality

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 172) indicated that modality system also occupies a crucial position in carrying out the interpersonal metafunction of clauses showing "the speaker's judgment, or request of the judgment of the listener, on the status of what is being said".

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 176) stated that modality construes the area of uncertainty that lies between yes and no: "the intermediate degree between positive and negative poles", indicating the speaker's attitude or assessment towards the propositions (statements and questions) and proposals (offers and commands), which corresponds to two main categories: modalization and modulation. Modalization refers to the proposition when the commodity exchanged is information while modulation is concerned

with to the proposal when the commodity exchanged is goods-&-services. A proposition can be argued in terms of the scales of probability (*possibly/ probably/ certainly*) and usuality (*sometimes/ usually/ always*) while a proposal can be represented in respect of degrees of obligation (*allowed to/ supposed to/ required to*) and degrees of inclination (*willing to/ anxious to/ determined to*). With the use of the system of modality, the writers want to express their assessment of probabilities and attitudes (Thompson, 2004; Fontaine, 2013) or indicate that they are uncertain or tentative and is not committed to the truth value of the proposition (Butt et al., 2000).

To show the degrees of certainty about the truth value of a proposition or the range of possibilities, modality is further given three distinguished values: high, median and low (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 180), where modality is viewed as a continuum. For example, modality 'certain' shows a high probability, meanwhile 'possible' indicates a low probability (Halliday, 1994, p. 358).

2.2.3. IELTS Academic Writing Task 2: Exposition and Discussion

The IELTS writing texts are conducted in the testing context within limited time and no consultation of other materials is permitted to support the writer's point of view. The Writing Task 2 of the IELTS Academic Test requires test-takers to write an essay to express a view and produce an argument clearly and persuasively in English. The topics in the Writing Task 2 are of common interest relating to environment, education, family, work, media, health, globalization or traditional culture suitable for and easily understood by candidates. The way to deal with IELTS Writing Task 2 is similar to an academic-style essay on a common topic. Moor and Morton (2005, 2007) viewed task 2 as an essay-like genre, a predominant genre in tertiary settings.

Two subtypes of argumentative essays - exposition and discussion are selected for the analysis in this study due to the fact that they are commonly used in IELTS essays task 2 prompt (Nakamura, 2009; Riazi & Knox, 2013). An exposition is a text type that requires the writer to adopt a position and argue for it, endeavoring to persuade the reader to accept the proposition using evidence (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Feez & Joyce, 1998b; Martin & Rose, 2008), that is a one-sided argument text. In exposition, more than

one argument is normally presented in favour of a thesis (Martin, 1985, p. 14). Meanwhile, a discussion is a more sophisticated argument in comparison with an exposition, as it involves the consideration of an issue from a number of perspectives (Knapp & Watkins, 2005) or to discuss both sides of an argument (Coffin, 2004; Feez & Joyce, 1998b; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Martin, 1985; Woodward-Kron, 2005), that is, a two-sided argument text.

III. METHOD

Drawing on SFL developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) as an analytical tool, the present study explores how interpersonal meanings are employed by successful IELTS candidates in IELTS sample essays. Accordingly, the descriptive method was applied to give an in-depth analysis of interpersonal meanings used in Band 9 essays or ones prepared by an examiner as an example of a very good model to disclose the prominent features of mood and modality in light of Functional Grammar.

In addition, the qualitative method was applied because the purpose of this research is to examine how interpersonal meanings are demonstrated in the IELTS sample essays, as Seliger and Shohamy (1989, p. 116) stated that "qualitative and descriptive research are concerned with proving descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally, without the interventions of an experiment or artificial contrived treatment". The qualitative method helped to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of IELTS academic writing while the data were quantitatively analyzed.

In terms of unit of analysis, the clause, the highest unit of grammatical analysis has received a special status in systemic functional linguistics. English clauses can be conceptualized along the dimensions of stratification, rank, and metafunction. According to Thompson (2004), a clause is any stretch of language centred on a verbal group. "The clause is the mainspring of grammatical energy; it is the unit where meanings of different kinds, experiential, interpersonal and textual, are integrated into a single syntagm." (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 74).

90 exposition and discussion essays from books published by Cambridge University Press or official IELTS websites were selected. Based on the work of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the analysis involves first dividing the sample essays into clauses. There are 3,581 clauses including 764 clause complexes, 620 simplexes and 1,030 embedded clauses in the data. Among the 764 clause complexes, there are 475 two-clause complexes, 203 three-clause complexes, 64 four-clause complexes, 17 five-clause complexes, 4 six-clause complexes and 1 seven-clause complex as follows:

1 clause (1 x 620)	=	620
2 clauses (2 x 475)	=	950
3 clauses (3 x 203)	=	609
4 clauses (4 x 64)	=	256
5 clauses (5 x 17)	=	85
6 clauses (6 x 4)	=	24
7 clauses (7 x 1)	=	7
Embedded clauses	=	1,030

Total	**3,581**

The study examined mood and modality deployed in each IELTS essay in order to evaluate interpersonal meaning. This includes identifying the Finite type and skipping non-finite clauses. The mood was determined by the order of the Subject and Finite. If the subject preceded the Finite (Subject^Finite), this indicates that the clause is in the declarative mood. If the ordering is Finite^Subject, this is labelled interrogative, and the imperative mood can be recognized if there is no subject or finite. In addition, the Speech Function (either as statement, question, command, offer, or demand) was inspected.

Regarding modality, the study identified all modal elements including modal adjuncts, predicator, mental or attributive clause. Then, determine the degree by which IELTS writers demonstrate the certainty (Modalization) or the degree of imposition (Modulation) with three values: high, median, or low and realize modality orientation.

The following table presents the abbreviation of mood types and modality for a manageable and easy analysis.

Table 2. Abbreviations for data analysis

Types	Abbreviation
Declarative	D
Imperative	Imp
Interrogative	Int
Probability	P
Usuality	U
Obligation	O
Inclination	I

Three values	
high	H
median	M
low	L

Command	243	9.53%
Offer	18	0.71%
Total	2,549	100%

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Mood Structure

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), two important functional elements of the mood component are the *Subject* and the *Finite*, the ordering of which determines whether the major clause is declarative, interrogative or imperative. As can be seen from Table 3 below, in terms of the usage of mood structures, declaratives represent over ninety-nine percent of the whole data. This remarkably high percentage is apparent since the primary purpose of an essay is to give information, especially to persuade readers to accept the proposition (Emilia & Hamied, 2015). The writers need to provide a full, clear picture of the issue and present their ideas expressing their opinion based on the academic topic. While imperatives and interrogatives are rarely used with a very small percentage (0.12% and 0.04% respectively) in the total data.

Table 3. Mood types

Mood Types	Number	Rate
Declarative	2,542	99.84%
Imperative	3	0.12%
Interrogative	1	0.04%
Total	2,546	100%

Imperatives are found to have the lowest frequency in the essays because they may make the writing less convincing and persuasive. It is worth mentioning here that all the imperative structures use the *let's* form, which functions to enable the expression of the subject. Only two instances in interrogative mood appear in the data. The questions are intended to attract the reader's attention and interest, rather than to demand information. Examples of imperative and interrogative moods are illustrated as follows.

(1) ||| Let's examine. |||
(2) ||| Is this a true argument? |||

Table 4. Speech function

Speech function	Number	Rate
Statement	2,287	89.72%
Question	1	0.04%

In terms of speech function, declarative mood is employed to give information and, as a result, statements take up the largest proportion (89.72%), followed by commands (9.53%) and offers (0.71%). Questions account for a relatively small percentage (0.04%). It is natural that statements are expressed by declarative clauses, questions by interrogative and commands for goods and services by imperative (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014; Thompson, 2004) while offers can be realised through different mood structures such as declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives. These statistics are very similar to those of Hadiani's (2019) study that the prevailing proportion of students' writings is in declarative form. However, in the data, the writers make commands through a declarative structure rather than through an imperative, which can make the obligation less bossy. A declarative enables the writer to give an opinion about whether or not that something should be done (Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic & Camps, 2001). Below are some examples of clauses functioning as commands, but grammatically having the structure of a declarative.

(3) ||| If one of them <u>has to</u> do all the work alone after office hours, || they will be under tremendous pressure. |||

(4) ||| Governments <u>are required</u> to allocate the required budget [[based on the results achieved]]. |||

4.2. Modality

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 176) defined modality as a construction of the area of uncertainty that lies between yes and no: 'the intermediate degree between positive and negative poles', indicating the speaker's attitude or assessment towards the propositions (statements and questions) and proposals (offers and commands), which correspond to two main categories: modalization (*probability and usuality)* and modulation (*obligation* and *inclination*).
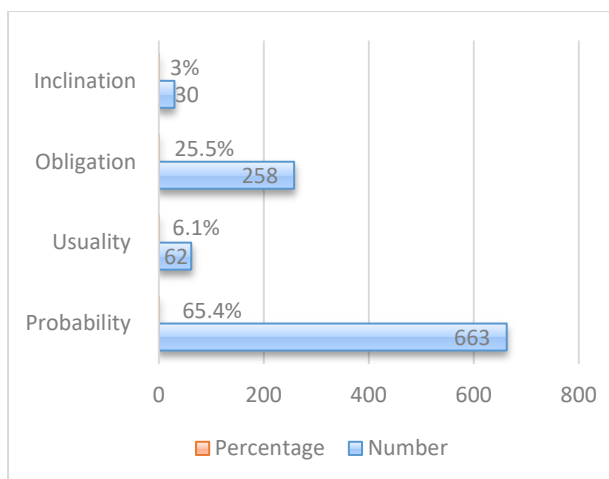
Figure 2. Distribution of each type of modality

As indicated in Figure 2, probability is the most common with 663 instances, accounting for 65.4% in the total distribution of modality, followed by obligation with 258 instances, making up 25.5%. Usuality and inclination are the least common, representing 6.1% and 3% respectively. The following are some examples taken from IELTS sample essays.

(5) ||| Next, the packaged foods have excess amount of oil, sugar, salt, synthetic chemicals and preservatives [[which are disastrous to health]] || and this *might* cause cholesterol, obesity, diabetes and other health hazards. |||

(6) ||| Both partners *can* take various roles within the family || to manage daily chores and responsibilities [[that come along with children]]. |||

(7) ||| Moreover, investment in removing crime *will* lead to the foundation of an egalitarian society [[where people will be able to live peacefully and safely]]. |||

(8) ||| In conclusion, longer prison terms *certainly* instill fear in the minds of potential criminals || and discourage them [[from committing crime]]. |||

(9) ||| Crime rates of young offenders are *definitely* on the rise || and researchers say || that there has been over 52% increase in crime by youngers below the age of 18. |||

(10) ||| *I think* || this comes with numerous advantages. |||

(11) ||| I *am sure* || in the future this trend *will* expand in all the businesses || and *will* become a major factor for the growth. |||

In Examples (5), (6), (7), and (10) the writers use finite modal operator *will, can, might* to indicate the probability of an issue. In addition, mood adjuncts like *certainly,*

definitely in Examples (8) and (9) are employed to express their attitudes and add their judgment of probability to a proposition that can be argued in a particular way. The writers also utilise mental clauses such as *I think* in Example (10), and *I am sure* in Example (11) as an explicit subjective way of indicating probability, expressing their explicit arguments. It is obvious that probability is most commonly employed by the writers since they explicitly or implicitly qualify their attitudes or commitment to the truth of the proposition by means of probability.

It is worth noting that in modalization, IELTS writers hardly ever use usuality (6.1%) when compared to probability (65.4%). Here are some examples of usuality application cited from the IELTS sample essays.

(12) ||| To conclude, even though [[doing unpaid jobs]] allows young people [[to learn about social commitment]], || it is *always* best for the children [[to spend much of their time on their education and their physical fitness]] || in order to prepare themselves for their future.||| (13) ||| On the other hand, students [[studying in co-educational schools]] are *often* bustling with self-confidence ||and are *usually* extrovert in nature. |||

(14) ||| I am *never* shocked || when I hear about movies [[that can bring profits amounting to two hundred millions dollars]]. |||

Modal adjuncts such as *always, usually, often, never* are deployed in Examples (12), (13), and (14) to express how frequently a proposition is held by the writers to be true with high, median or low degree of usuality.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2014) stated that modulation involves the expression of two kinds of meanings namely obligation or inclination. As indicated in Figure 2, the use of obligation is more common with 258 instances (25.5%) compared to inclination with 30 cases (3%) in IELTS sample essays.

(15) ||| He *must*, therefore, remain silent || so that others do not get disturbed. |||

(16) ||| Furthermore, if children *have to* engage in community service during their leisure time, || they will not have time [[to play sports or games]]. |||

(17) ||| The salary gap between them *should* not exist || as it brings instability in the society. |||

(18) ||| Therefore, *it is essential* [[to give our brain a rest from time to time]] || in order

to maintain the ability [[to receive]] and [[analyse new information]]. |||

(19) ||| Another point is || that those kids may interrupt their school work || and _be allowed to_ get a work early || when they leave school. |||

The writers use such modulated finites as _must_ in Example (15), _have to_ in Example (16), _should_ in Example (17), attributive clause _it is essential_ in Example (18) or the predicator _be allowed to_ in Example (19) to express obligation.

The results of the analysis show that inclination is rarely employed compared to obligation. Consider the following extracts from the IELTS sample essays.

(20) ||| First, they _are able to_ relate to these people [[who are under similar circumstances]].|||

(21) ||| For example, a student can enjoy medicine || only if he _wants to_ become a doctor.|||

In order to show the willingness or ability to fulfil an offer, the writers use _be able to_ in Example (20) or _want to_ in Example (21), which can convey an implicit attitude.
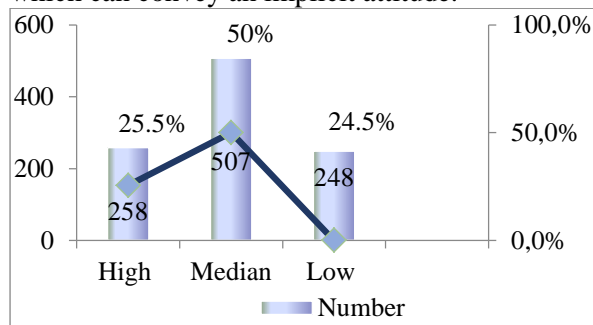

Figure 3. Distribution of modal values

With reference to modal values, the analysis of the sample essays reveals that successful IELTS writers favour median degrees such as _will, would, should, I think, be supposed to, it is probable, usually…_ with 507 instances, making up 50% to show the degrees of certainty about the truth value of a proposition or the range of possibilities. Modality with a high degree of probability, obligation, inclination or usuality represented by _must, have to, certainly, always, be required, I believe, I am sure, etc._ accounts for only about 25.5% in the data. However, linguistic resources denoting a low degree, namely _can, could, be willing to_, _be allowed to, sometimes, possibly…_ are relatively less common with 248 cases, equaling just under a quarter of the total data set. Below are some

examples of modality use with three values: high, median, and low.

(22) ||| First of all, _I believe_ || it is a mistake [[to base our views on broad generalisations about the characteristics of men and women]] || as such stereotypes _often_ inaccurate. |||

(23) ||| It takes only a few years for teenagers [[to become adults]] ||and if they did not figure out [[how to manage their finances at high school]], || they _will_ struggle as adults || when they _have to_ manage everything on their own. |||

(24) ||| This _will_ greatly benefit students [[who are learning or researching]] || since they _are less likely_ to be distracted by people or things around them. |||

(25) ||| While there are _certainly_ valid arguments to the contrary, || I personally _believe_ || that the drawbacks of living alone far outweigh its benefits. |||

(26) ||| In conclusion, working couples _should_ share their household chores || because it _will_ help them [[reduce the workload and in turn, the stress]]. |||

(27) ||| Seniors _can_ contribute to the family || by taking care of the children || while young adults are at work. |||

(28) ||| For example, a recent study revealed || that this lifestyle is the main cause of stress || because people [[who live alone]] _often_ have no one [[to share their problems with]]. |||

(29) ||| [[Taking care of aging population]] _is_ also _required_ from a social justice perspective. |||

It is apparent that different degrees of modality reveal the kinds of interpersonal relationships between the writers and the readers. The successful IELTS writers aptly express their positions or stances on the topic of discussion with more frequent use of median values, which indicates an open attitude to negotiation regarding the issue they are arguing about since in an academic paper, writers have to judge very carefully the extent to which they put forward a claim as certain or as still open to doubt (Thompson, 2004). If high modality is more frequently employed, their piece of writing may appear dogmatic and difficult for the IELTS examiners to accept their opinions.
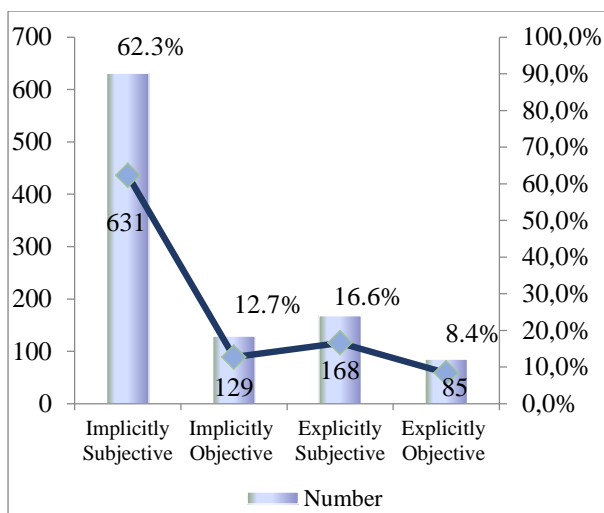
Figure 4. Distribution of modality orientation

Regarding orientation, among the four types of modality orientation, IELTS writers tend to employ more implicitly subjective (62.3%) rather than explicitly subjective (16.6%), implicitly objective (12.7%), or explicitly objective (8.4%) to show their opinions or attitudes. Consider the following extracts from IELTS sample essays.

(30) ||| But *I believe* || that scales of pay do not *always* reflect the importance of any job to the society.|||

Probability (H) (ES); Usuality (H) (IO)

(31) ||| In addition, considering gifted students [[who do not have money to pay for education]], *I believe* || that states *should* finance their education. |||

Probability (H) (ES); Obligation (M), (IS)

(32) ||| In conclusion, although [[spending money on harsh punishment]] is a lesson for criminals and public, || *I think* [[working on the main reason of crime]] is a much more effective strategy || to eliminate crime completely || as it *will* be better for the safety of people and for the progress of the country. |||

Probability (M) (ES); Probability (M) (IS)

(33) ||| For example, a determined person, || who *is keen to* apply that lifestyle, *will* find the time throughout the day [[to apply it]]. |||

Inclination (M), (IO); Probability (M) (IS)

(34) ||| Firstly, after they reach a certain level of maturity, || children *should* be encouraged to make their own decision. |||

Obligation (M), (IS)

(35) ||| To recapitulate, there are *certainly* some valid reasons [[to scientifically alter the foods]] [[we consume; || however, considering the potential health consequences [[that may arise due to this]], || I am against this practice.|||

Probability (H), (IO)

The findings reveal that the probability is mainly construed by Finite operators such as *will* in Examples (32) and (33). In addition, the writers also employ the modal adjuncts such as *always* in Example (30), *certainly* in Example (35), showing implicit manifestations of objective orientation, while in Examples (30), (31) and (32), the modality is realised by the projecting mental clauses *I believe, I think* and the proposition by the projected idea clauses.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of interpersonal meaning analysis indicate that declarative clauses are regarded as the most typical realization of the speech role to give information in exposition and discussion essays. In terms of modality, IELTS writers exhibit the most frequent use of probability to establish and maintain relationship with the readers, to express their attitudes and judgements of certain topic raised in the task requirements. Regarding modality value, median values are more popular than low and high values, which indicates an open attitude to negotiation to the issue they are arguing about.

It is obvious that knowing how to make good use of modality and mood choice enables academic IELTS writers to persuade their readers to accept their stance or attitudes easily. As Eggins (2004, p. 175) states that modalization and modulation, the two complementary resources for tempering what we write in which "modalization is a very rich area of grammar, allowing great subtlety in the expression of judgement of certainty and usuality" and modulation is a way to express ''judgments or attitudes about actions and events''.

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