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## MODAL VERBS AS EDITORS' PERSONAL STANCE MARKERS: AN ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI ENGLISH NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the use of different modal verbs for the purpose of personal stance marking in Pakistani English newspaper editorials. For this purpose, a corpus of 250 editorials has been developed from the editorials published in 'The News' and analyzed using AntConc 3.4.4.0. Results show that the modals of prediction (will, would) are most extensively used in Pakistani English newspaper editorials which further means that prediction is the characteristic feature of the said editorials. In addition, Pakistani editorialists have been found to report information about news events with personal as well as institutional judgements and stances which have been realized through the use of different modal verbs. Moreover, the editorialists have also been found to use the said verbs to maintain their authorial persona, make the readers align with their personal or institutional views and thereby manipulate their opinions in favour or against the state of affairs. To cipher the development of negative impression in readers' minds about this bias or manipulation, the writers have been found making use of 'intermediate value' models. Thus, the study suggests the readers of Pakistani English newspaper editorials to be conscious of the fact that the said editorials might be biased and affect their opinion.

**Keywords:** Editorials; editorialists; editors' stance; modality; modal verbs; stance markers; personal stance in editorials.

### INTRODUCTION

Stance marking is the most fundamental human activity which is accomplished with the help of language. People judge the world which they live in, express their beliefs, desires, emotions and agree or disagree with other humans through social interactions (Orta, 2010). Stance, according to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999), is known by different names that cover a wide variety of degrees. It can be defined as an assessment, personal feeling, value judgment, or attitude. These things add personal stances to the propositions. Other labels, which language users use for it, include evidentiality (Chafe 1986), affect (Ochs, 1989), evaluation (Hunston & Thompson, 2000) and appraisal (White, 2001). Hyland includes 'hedge' under the same label, saying that with the help of it different writers could convey their opinions in propositions rather than facts: "items are only hedges in their epistemic sense, and only then when they mark uncertainty" (1998: 5).

Stance is marked in a number of ways like, (a) personal marking (b) lexical marking and (c) grammatical marking. Lexical stance markers, generally, rely on the judgmental type of lexical items such as adjectives, nouns, or verbs etc. Grammatical stance markers, on the

other hand, are grouped and labeled as; (a), modals or semimodals (b) stance nouns as well as propositional phrases, (c) stance adverbials, (d) stance complement clauses and (e) pre-modifying stance adverbs (noun phrases and adjective or stance adverbs).

Modal verbs have an effect on the meanings of the propositions. They convey two different kinds of meaning, namely epistemic as well as deontic. The later modals are regarded as a prerequisite for acts with the help of which the speakers give or lay permission to perform an action. The former, on the other hand, deals with beliefs or knowledge by which a speaker conveys his judgment about the state of affairs, or events (Hoye, 1997).

The diachronic study of stance has also been observed in many studies. Among them include the studies by Biber (2004); Bista (2009); Butler (1990); He and Wang (2012); Holmes (1988); Hyland (1996); Maks and Vossen (2010); Mirahayuni (2002); Nartey and Yankson (2014); Ngula (2017); Panacova (2008); Shayegh (2012); Shayegh and Nabifar (2012) Taavitsainen's (2001). Study by Taavitsainen (2001) traces the use of modality or mood in medical register. Biber's (2004) research finds stance in a multi register corpus, a view from history, and concludes that stance marking differs across registers i.e. strategies of stance, even with same functions, may be different from register to register. Similarly, their frequency can also decrease or increase. Similarly, Butler (1990) and Hyland (1996) highlighted the modality in scientific writing. In the same way Holmes (1988) found the use of modality in ESP and EAP textbooks. He and Wang (2012); Mirahayuni (2002) and Panacova (2008) observed the use of modality in non-native speakers' academic writing. Likewise, Ngula (2017) explored the use of modality in research articles, Bista (2009) Maks and Vossen (2010); Shayegh (2012) and Shayegh and Nabifar (2012) explored in political discourse and in much the same way Nartey and Yankson (2014) explored the use of modals and modality in political manifestos.

However, this study, presents an investigation of the use of modality in newspapers, with a special focus on the texts of the editorials selected for this study. It involves the major principles in the study of stance marking through modal verbs as well as the main terminologies linked with it. For, a number of studies (e.g. Bonyadi, 2011; Fowler, 2013; Halliday, 1994; Hayat & Juliana, 2016; Khalid, 2013; Lawal, 2015; Ntsane, 2015) have also highlighted modality in world renowned English newspaper editorials and there is a possibility that Pakistani English newspapers might also be presenting personal as well as institutional stance through the editorials.

In Pakistan, most of the newspapers belong to the private groups and publish news with freedom. Pakistani English Press is considered more reliable than the electronic media and holds a good repute among the people. English is an international language and in Pakistan, for the most part highly qualified individuals and policy makers read English newspapers and this is why English newspapers are called elite newspapers. English press is, thus, considered as somewhat more responsible than the local or national press. Therefore, decision makers mostly depend on the English Press for better perception of various issues through the reading of editorials which frame the essence of a newspaper and reflect its policy (Hayat & Juliana, 2016).

This study involves the corpus developed from editorials published in famous Pakistani English newspaper namely 'The News'. The basis for choosing 'The News', is its status as the main English language newspaper in Pakistan because of its publication, circulation,

readership and fame among the people and its take is considered genuine and independent on the issues of national and international significance. Moreover, this newspaper is considered as an elite newspaper and has a special place among the major media groups in Pakistan, regarding readership, publication and popularity. It has a distinctive approach, point of view and ideology in managing national and international issues. Its impact on policy and decision making is significantly stronger than any other newspaper in Pakistan. Similarly, this newspaper gives exceptional inclusion of local and international news which makes it the best newspapers among the rest.

The justification for choosing editorial for the study is based on the grounds that, as Hayat and Juliana (2016) put it, it is the presentation of a particular contemporary event with an understanding and basic assessment so as to entertain, influence, inform and teach the readers. In addition, the editorial throws light on the contemporary issues and proposes possible solutions. The stance of an editorial is affected by the proprietary structure, newspaper's policy and the political condition in which the specific newspaper is being published. Keeping it in view, this study aims to investigate whether the editorials published in the said newspapers are affected by personal or institutional stance or not. For this purpose it intends to seek answers for the following questions:

1. What are the most extensively used modal verbs in Pakistani English newspaper editorials?
2. How do Pakistani newspaper editorial writers tend to make use of modals for personal stance?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A writer may select the various grammatical tools in order to convey his message in written language. The real-world events are presented in newspapers through various linguistic choices. Through the use of linguistic choices at various levels, the reconstructed text can be seen in the journalistic discourse. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) suggested by Halliday (1994), states that language is a social semiotic resource which is used to impart meanings in context. Thus, through SFL, an analyst can know how the linguistic choices are incorporated under any social context to fill in the texts of the concerned discourse with the evident meanings. According to SFL, language serves three purposes: (a) experiential or ideational meta-function that expresses the views of the world as perceived by the language users; (b) interpersonal meta-function establishes and maintains social relationships; and (c) textual meta-function combines and organizes the experiential and interpersonal meta-functions to produce an effective and coherent discourse flow.

In editorials, there is an important role of hedging which ensures that the statements of the writer have been presented with an appropriate accuracy so that the reader may be persuaded by the given view about the topic. Furthermore, as far as the content of a newspaper is concerned, prototypically, the main purpose of the content is to maneuver the mind and imagination of the reader. In fact, the printing press represents world in the form of language because, as (Fowler, 2013) observes, that language is a semiotic code which imposes structure of values on whatever is represented. And so, news-like every discourse constructively patterns that of which it speaks.

A newspaper assumes that there is always only one reasonable point of view on any matter presented to the public. An editorial seems to affirm this point of view. Thus, an editorial

represents the opinion of the newspaper owners. Fowler (2013) points out what is true about newspaper editorial, apart from offering values and beliefs, is that it employs textual strategies which foreground the speech acts offering values and beliefs. It is, of course, these textual strategies which are adopted by the editorial writers who are the concern of this study.

Modal expressions signify judgement as to truth (correct) likelihood (certainty) and possibility (might). Other modal usages stipulate obligations (should, ought to) and grant permission ('may'). This linguistic device (modality) is an important means by editorial writers to have the insistence of a speaker who has assumed a position of authority, the authority here includes a claim to know what is inevitably going to happen. (Herndon, 1976) shares this view when she points out that a sentence is made up of a modality constituent that includes tense and sentence modifiers such as negation. According to her, this proposition is a verb or additional noun phrase – each of which is related with the verb in a situational relationship. This alteration is actually central to the work because it really shows the extent to which the writer is committed to any statement written in newspaper editorials.

Papafragou (2005) sees truth–conditionality from the epistemic view of modality. She counters the epistemic position of modality that it does not contribute to truth-conditional contents, using Halliday's argument that modality is external to the content of any proposition and thus, constitutes the attitude taken up by the speakers. This means, of course, that modality represents the opinion of any speaker or writer and that there is no total commitment to the truth of the statement. Gotti (2003, p. 271), focusing on the Helsinki corpus of English texts, found the commonly used "verbatim expression", in contrast with "the simplest common figures for the 'shall' form in scientific articles. Smith (2003, p. 252) focuses on diachronic development, and it must be pointed out that the use of "must" was most concentrated in fiction and genre, with the most important development of news reports. These two studies have shown that samples can reflect the general characteristics of a particular type.

Bonyadi (2011), in his study based on comparative textual analysis of editorials published in American and Persian English newspapers, noticed that the mentioned editorial writers used auxiliaries of prediction i.e. will, would in their editorials. The study also reported a difference that prediction modals were used most frequently by American newspaper editorial writers as compared to Iranian writers who used the modals of necessity with greater frequency. The study called modality as a linguistic property which the language users could use to create favourable or unfavourable bias or to manipulate the opinion of the readers.

Khalid (2013) conducted a research to examine the presence of authorial subjectivity in Scottish English newspaper articles. The examination results that the modal verbs work as the indicators of ability, permission, possibility and the Scottish newspaper article writers depend on the use of modals to infuse their voice into the text to maintain authorial presence in the text and to establish contact with their readers.

Ntsane (2015) investigated the process of interaction management between an editorialist and his readers to know that how the writers of editorials engage a reader as a participant in the argument while establishing their authoritative persona. Plus, he investigated that how the editorialists made their readers align with their views. Results of his study indicate that editorialists utilize modality to establish their authority and interaction or engagement with their readers.

According to Lawal (2015) press makes use of modality as a method to report news. The reason for it, as he states, is that modality involves the claim of a person assuming the position of authority and claiming or asserting to have the knowledge of what will happen in future. He regards 'must' crucial for editorial text writers to exercise the right to claim of knowing about future happenings. He adds that editors have to follow the ideology of the newspaper. Therefore, they make use of modals subjectively. Hence, the editorial writers may not be committed to truth of propositions.

Many media centers in Pakistan play an important role not only in public opinion building but also in decision-making by political and military leadership (Hayat & Juliana, 2016). The media has the power to make sure that a change in perception empowers the knowledgeable people. The media has the power to change the world by propagating its philosophy to the public. Therefore, the media arguments are important (Smith, Immirzi, & Blackwell, 1975). Emphasis is laid on all essential media functions tailoring such features as education, entertainment, and violence against the media (Yousafzai, 2007). The newspaper is usually regarded as the most responsible and authentic source of media (Hassam, Ali, Iqbal & Raza, 2013). The preparation of the printing completes in three parts. First, the definition of a situation is given, followed by a summary of questions and evaluating the whole situation and finally delivering realistic, logical conclusions and practices, solutions, proposals and recommendations (Van Dijk, 1996). In this context, English-language newspapers in Pakistan are considered to be important regarding their functions and media coverage throughout the country for a long time (Rafiq, 2007).

There cannot be two opinions on the significance of the articles. Writers of the articles help create readers' ideas (Smith, Immirzi, & Blackwell, 1975). Central role of the writers is to convey and persuade by communicating opinion (Van Dijk, 1996). The authors create a larger ideological position of the owners and managers of each newspaper (Henry & Tator, 2002). Through the article, there is an opportunity to communicate with readers by giving comments on various questions. (Reath, 1998). Pakistani print media cover some of the key issues in the past. The point is, Are these shows ethical? To attract the attention of the media readers in Pakistan modeled "hello", which says: Do what is good, whatever value (Hassam, et al., 2013). According to the government and financiers, newspapers are affected commercially with the policies, and 'The News' is a private media group newspaper and relies on government for advertisements to some extent (Tawab, 2000).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Corpus of the Study**

This study employs purposeful sampling to develop or select the corpus. Let it be made cleared that this study is not corpus based. Rather it is corpus driven. Major reason behind it includes: (1) the study focuses on the use of modality as the stance marking in Pakistani newspaper editorials. Hence, to assist a new research, 250 English newspaper editorials have been driven from a bigger sample in a previous study, published in 'The News' during the months of March-April, 2017. The said newspaper is ranked among top broadsheets on newspapers' official websites.

Keeping in view the limitation of this study, (involving editorials published through The News newspaper during the months March-April, 2016 written by Pakistani editorial writers, 250 editorials might be taken sufficiently enough to establish the degree of reliability being favourable or unfavourable. The reason behind it is that, these editorials form a sound

collection of data which can be analyzed meaningfully and purposefully on the ground that it represents the same variety of discourse i.e. editorials of attack, criticism, praise, defense etc.

### **Editorial Classifications**

According to Hall (2003), newspaper editorials can be classified into the editorials of attack, of criticism, of defense, of entertainment and of praise. This study involves all of these classes of editorials. The reason behind is that the corpus included all editorials published from March-April, 2016.

### **Criteria for Corpus Driving/Selection**

The corpus was selected on the basis of following parameters i.e. relativity with different newspaper networks, daily/weekly issues, signed/unsigned manuscripts written by editorial writers representing an editorial board, online availability, written/published in English (Siddique, 2017).

### **Corpus Retrieval**

As mentioned earlier, the corpus for this study was retrieved from a previous study by Siddique (2017) to support to a new research. The retrieval process went through: (i) receiving data in electronic form with prior consent and permission of the researcher; (ii) recording of the corpus in Microsoft Excel marking file number, token types, word types, sources, publication dates, etc.; (iii) renaming of editorials; (iv) removing editorial titles, publication dates and author names; (v) Conversion of the corpus files into notepad for processing in AntConc 3.4.4.0 processor; (vi) collecting/gathering the editorials in one folder namely 'compiled up files 1 to 250' which was further set/named as 'All Editorials (1-250)'

### **Distribution and Length of Corpus**

As it has already been mentioned, the corpus of this study comprises of 250 editorials published in Pakistani highly esteemed English newspaper i.e. The News. The length of the corpus is given below:

Table 1: Corpus Length

<b>Name of Newspaper</b>	<b>No. of Editorials</b>	<b>Word Types</b>	<b>Word Tokens</b>
The News	250	9,633	103,860

### **Corpus Analysis**

Analysis of the corpus of this study has been carried out through following procedure:

#### **Analysis model**

The corpus of the study has been analyzed in the light of functional approach by Halliday (2004) which helps analyze the relationship between the types of modality i.e. (1) deontic and (2) epistemic, and the degrees of modality i.e. low, medium and high as being the ideology or stance markers.

#### **Tuning procedure**

A tuning procedure for the modal expression was devised to find the frequency of the modal expressions in the corpus using AntConc 3.4.4.0, 2014. The said expressions have been given here in the table below:

Function/Expression	Modal Verbs
Prediction	will would
Possibility	can could may might
Necessity	must should
Modal Adverbs	unlikely undeniably apparently clearly truly accurately unacceptedly grandy surely genuinely less likely
Evaluative Adverbs	woefully substantionally seriously painfully deadly badly sadly cynically cheifly not surprisingly unfortunately frighteningly ruthlessly efficiently  uncritically  rapidly understandably
Reporting Verbs	claim voice warn declare admit speculate hope doubt concede predict announce charge
Knowledge verbs	seem appear believe
Generic Phrases	It seems that there is no doubt that it is never acceptable it makes us worder doubts have now arisen it is clear that it is obvious that

Table 2: Tuning Procedure of Modal Verbs

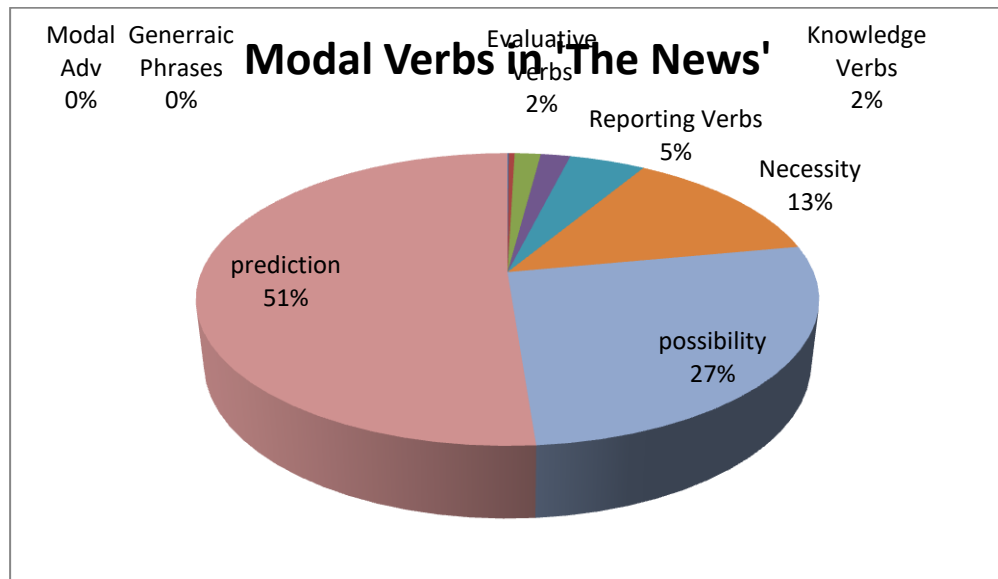
## RESULTS

Results of the study are as follows:

### Modal Expressions in 'The News'

Sr. No.	Modals	Frequency
1	Modal Adverbs	1
2	Generic Phrases	5
3	Evaluative Verbs	22
4	Knowledge Verbs	25
5	Reporting Verbs	64
6	Necessity	182
7	Possibility	363
8	Prediction	695
<b>Total</b>		<b>1357</b>

Table 4.1: Modal Expressions in 'The News'



Pie Chart 1: Modal Expressions in 'The News'

The results showed that the editorial writers used modal verbs in their editorials which were published in the News. Frequency of the use of different modal verbs in the editorials published in the said newspaper is that the frequency of modal adverb (*like clearly, unlikely, truly, less likely, genuinely, apparently, accurately, unacceptably, surely etc.*) is 1, of generic phrases (*like It is obvious that, It is never acceptable, There is no doubt that, It makes us wonder, It seems that, Doubts have now arisen that, It is clear that*) is 5, of evaluative adverbs like (*badly, chiefly, deadly, woefully, painfully, seriously, sadly, unfortunately, and understandably etc.*) is 22, of knowledge verbs likes (*appear, believe, seem etc.*) is 25, of reporting verbs like (*warn, claim, admit, voice, hope, doubt, declare, announce etc.*) is 64, of necessity (*like should, must*) is 182, of possibility (*like can, could, may and might*) is 363 and finally of prediction (*like will, would*) is 695. In this way, the use of modal adverbs seems to be minimum whereas the use of prediction expressions seems to be maximum in the editorials written by Pakistani editorialists for The News.

## DISCUSSION

The first question of this study was to know about 'What are the most extensively used modal verbs in Pakistani English newspaper editorials?' To answer this question, the use of different modals including generic expressions, modal verbs, reporting verbs, evaluative adjectives, modal adverbs, etc. were examined. The examination resulted in that Pakistani English newspaper editorialists made extensive use of the modal verbs of prediction i.e. 'will' and 'would'. This means that Pakistani English newspaper editorialists, while discussing the situations, make their own predictions about future happenings. It also highlights that prediction is the most important feature of Pakistani English newspaper editorials. The same results have been reported in a study by an Iranian researcher Bonyadi (2011).

Halliday and Hasan (1989), as mentioned earlier in the introduction section, classified modal verbs according to values into high (*like must, need to, have to, ought to*), intermediate (*including shall, should, will, would*) and low value modals (*involving can, may, could, might*). As the results of the study show that the editorial writers have used 'will' and 'would' with maximum frequency, it means that Pakistanis English editorialists make frequent use of 'intermediate value' modal verbs. And according to Qian (n. d.) different types of modal



verbs are related with different degrees of politeness in communication process. In their function, low value modals show politeness in communication, whereas high value modals express impoliteness in communication. It implies that if the writers make use of high (impolite) and low degree (polite) modals, there can be the possibility for their writings to be approached negatively with writer's tilt in favour or against the situation. Therefore, it might be that the editorial writers make use of neither high nor low value modal verbs. Instead, they make conscious use of the intermediate value modals to cipher any negative perception among their readers.

Modal verbs, in the view of Keifer (1994) and Palmer (1986; 2001; 2007), help language users express 'what should be', 'what may be', 'what would be', and 'what is'. Thus, the writers make frequent use of modal verbs to show possibility, necessity and prediction in their writing. However, this is just one side of the coin. In fact, modality involves the claims or assertions of a person assuming the position of authority and claiming or asserting to have the knowledge of what will happen in future (Lawal, 2015). Therefore, the editorial writers make use of modal verbs to predict about future on one hand, and to show their authority by claiming their knowledge of future happenings. In addition, it is one of the main goals of the writer to maintain a relationship with his readers to convey his ideas. For this purpose, the writers of newspaper editorials make a skillful use of modal verbs to infuse their voice into the text, to maintain authorial presence in the text and to establish contact with their readers (Khalid, 2013; Ntsane, 2015).

Similarly, the second concern of the study was to know how do Pakistani English newspapers editorialists tend to make use of modal verbs to establish personal stance. Main aim behind this question was to make the readers aware of the fact that editorialists tend to make use of the said verbs to establish either a favorable or unfavorable bias throughout the text to manipulate their readers' opinion.

In this regard, it is evident that the said editorialists made a frequent use of the different types of modals including modal auxiliaries, modal adjectives, evaluative adverbs, knowledge verbs, reporting verbs etc. This means that the editorial writers have reported the events, under their discussion in editorials, with their own attitude. To increase the degree of modality, the writers of editorials have made an excessive use of modal adverbs like surely, truly, unlikely, etc. to subjectively define the situations. Similarly, they have also used evaluative adverbs to mark desirability towards the state of affairs. In the same way, the writers of editorials have also made use of reporting verbs like claim, hope, doubt etc. which is the clear indication that the said editorialists have injected their attitude and opinion into truth value of the content reported in the editorials (Ntsane, 2015).

Modality, in reality, is taken as a speaker's attitude or opinion toward a proposition or a state of affairs described in the proposition (Lyon, 1977; Quirk, 2010). Meaning thereby is that the speakers or writers make use of modality to mark their attitude or opinion in the texts or talk. Similarly, a characteristic of modality is that it is judgemental in nature (Palmer, 1986; 2001; 2007) and involves the manifestation of judgements or evidences about the actual condition of the situations (Chafe, 1986; Palmer 1986; 2001; 2007). As modality expresses the opinion of the speakers and writers, it does not have any assurance of truth of the propositions (Papafragou, 2005). Hence, no person can find even a single entirely objective, unbiased and value free text. In fact, it is the writers' authorial interest, view point and vision, which defines the essence of the style of a story and gives the story a particular "feel" and "color"

(Simpson, 1993: 5). This feel or colour develops a particular stance of the writer in an editorial. According to Tawab (2000) the stance of a newspaper is affected commercially. Lawal (2015) adds that editors have to follow the ideology of the newspaper and in the view of Henry and Tator (2002) the authors create a larger ideological position of the owners and managers of each newspaper. Therefore, they make use of modals subjectively. Additionally, in the opinion of Hayat and Juliana (2016), the stance of a newspaper is affected by the proprietary structure, newspaper's policy and the political condition in which the specific newspaper is being published. And the article writers depend on the use of modals to infuse their voice into the text, to maintain authorial presence in the text and to establish contact with their readers (Khalid, 2013).

Hence, it is evident that modal verbs are used by the writers to mark their attitude or opinion i.e. personal stance toward a proposition or a state of affairs described in the newspaper editorials. As modality expresses the stance of the writers, the truth of the stance marked in the newspaper editorials with the help of modal verbs might not be objective, unbiased and value free. Therefore, the study bewares the readers of newspaper editorials to be conscious of the fact that editorialists can manipulate their opinions or make them align with their personal as well as institutional views by infusing or injecting personal stance with the help of modal verbs.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion of above results leads to the conclusion that the modals of prediction (will, would) are most extensively used in Pakistani English newspaper editorials which means that prediction is the characteristic feature of the said editorials and the Pakistani editorialists not only report information about news events but they also provide the readers of their editorials with personal as well as institutional judgements and stances which are realized through the use of different modal verbs, modal adverbs, reporting verbs, generic phrases, knowledge verbs, etc. The editorialists use these modal verbs to maintain their authorial persona, make the readers align with their personal or institutional views and thereby manipulate the opinion of the readers. To cipher the development of negative impression in readers' minds about this bias or manipulation the writers make use of 'intermediate value' models. Thus, the study suggests the readers of Pakistani English newspaper editorials to be conscious of the fact that the said editorials might be biased and affect their opinion.

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