

*Kornieieva I. O.,**Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Senior Lecturer at the Department of Philology and Translation
Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4821-772X>*

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING MODALITY IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Summary. The article examines the problem of the English-language modality in political discourse in semantic and functional aspects. Modal verbs are the necessary aspect in the English language. They help express the speakers' thoughts and provide an opportunity to imply additional meaning and ideas in what is said. Each modal verb has its own semantic coloring, it carries a certain number of meanings that can be completely opposite. Some modal words are similar in meaning, but have different levels of strength or categoricity, or relevance to the situation. We prove that the concept of «modality» is inherent in modal verbs, which is a significant phenomenon in political communication and has its own characteristics. It depends on many factors such as cultural traits, political situations, audience and communication goals. It gives language expressiveness and accuracy, helps to express not only facts, but also the degree of possibility, obligation, intention and other semantic aspects. Politicians skillfully use the so-called political language as a means of maneuvering, manipulations, refusals and propaganda. Modal verbs are necessary capital for political discourse, because they have the function of implying a different meaning without doing so openly and directly. Analyzing the speeches of V. Zelenskyi, Joe Biden and Donald Trump, we can confidently say, that they are masters of political discourse. By analyzing the speeches of well-known politicians, one can draw their own political position, thoughts, intentions and modal verbs they use illustrate that they are masters of political goals. And one should not underestimate the role of modality in these speeches, because it carries its own consequences and influences future events. Analyzing the modality capital one can also find the best approach to solving global problems and supporting international cooperation. This research has contributed to increasing the effectiveness of political speeches and ensuring the success of their implementation.

Key words: modal verbs, modality, political discourse, semantic coloring, functional aspect.

Introduction. Modality in political discourse plays an important role, as it not only expresses the intentions and commitments of political actors, but also shapes the attitude of the audience to certain issues and events. In this context, modality has specific functions and characteristics that depend on many factors such as cultural traits, political situations, audience and communication goals. Age and gender affect the perception of information and approaches to it, so it is important to adapt your messages to the audience. In addition, it is also significant to take into account cultural characteristics, because they determine the tone and form of the speech, including the use of language and symbols, which

must be understandable and acceptable to the audience. For example, in countries with different cultural customs and values, statements that may be perceived as offensive or inconsiderate should be avoided. Analyzing the world situation, you can also find the best approach to solving global problems and supporting international cooperation. This approach will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of political speeches and ensuring the success of their implementation.

We share the point of view of the scientists Perishko I. V., Velyka A. M., Ptykha V. A. [1], who prove that it is the modality that gives language expressiveness and accuracy, helps to express not only facts, but also the degree of possibility, obligation, intention and other semantic aspects in language expression.

Analysis of recent research and publications. In the field of linguistic research, many scientists paid attention to the study of modality in the English language: Voinalovich L. P. (2013, 2014, 2017), Yevchenko V. V. (2004), Kasiyan G. V. (2015), Kotnyuk L. G. (2018), Nikonova V. G., Garbar I. O. (2016), Perishko I. V., Velyka A. M., Ptykha V. A. (2023), Samoilova I. V., Podvoyska O. V. (2016), others.

Among foreign scientists (who research the role of modality in structures of utterance and its impact on communication, invent the concept of modality and its importance in pragmatic and semantic aspects of the English language) we can name Deirdre Wilson, Izchak Levin, Andreas Blank, Jonathan Hoekstra, Michael Friedman and others.

Together, these scholars contributed to a deeper understanding and analysis of modality in English, revealing its importance for language communication and linguistic research.

The purpose of the article is to study and systematize the use of modal verbs and constructions in English political discourse.

The object of research is the English-language modality in the political space, which covers all aspects of the use of verbs and constructions in the discourse related to political activity, communication and documentation.

The subject of research is semantics and functional aspect of modality in the English political discourse.

Methodology. The article uses the following theoretical and practical methods of research: 1. Analysis of literature and other sources on the problem; 2. The inductive method, which allows you to get from the general to the specific on the basis of already existing knowledge about the structures to be constructed; 3. Deductive method, which helps to draw logical conclusions from general hypotheses to specific ones; 4. Descriptive method for assessment language facts and its specifics.

Presentation of the main material. The relevance of this study lies in the fact that linguists continue to investigate all aspects of modal verbs, because in the modern world the role of the political arena is significant. That is why, it is necessary to continue to examine the statements of politicians in order to notice their intentions and true vision of situations in a timely manner.

It is the use of modal verbs that allows politicians to successfully influence people's opinions, to maneuver between categorical and conventional expressions, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of political speech. For example, the verbs «must» and «can» can serve as a tool to strengthen obligations or opportunities, which helps to increase the persuasiveness of arguments and influence on public opinion. On the other hand, the use of the modal verbs «might», «may» in an affirmative sentence or «could» in the past tense can create a feeling of caution and blurring of thought, which allows you to preserve space for discussion and avoid conflict. The use of modal verbs «should», «ought to» focuses the attention of the audience on the need for action or a certain course of action, which contributes to the formation of united position.

The term «political speech» is intended to emphasize that politicians need some means of deflecting inconvenient questions or statements. They have a need for linguistic methods in order to convince society or a person that the speaker's opinion is correct and true [2, p. 235].

Even if we look at the situation in our country, we can see that the most famous politicians, namely the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi skillfully and accurately answers sensitive questions. Let's look at an interview from NBC where the journalist asks a colossally difficult and multifaceted question about air defense and its production for new challenges in the Russian-Ukrainian war. The Ukrainian President responds as follows: «*We need to save the country. Therefore, one of the ways is the joint production of air defense systems*» [3].

What exactly do we see in such a response? The question was posed clearly and when we think about it, the following associated thoughts arise in our heads – when it will start to be produced, how much money will be needed for this, what kind of money will be used (borrowed from European countries / America or from the Ukrainian budget), whether it is vital and decisive in the course of the war, why it was not done earlier, etc. However, the politician has his own unique answer, which essentially does not give any clarity, no promises. The only thing that can be assumed is that some countries will agree to cooperate and provide appropriate assistance.

However, the most interesting thing about Volodymyr Zelenskyi's answer is that he emphasized that «*we need to save our country*». There is some hidden meaning in this expression, which can be felt at the level of the subconscious. When we say that we need to do something, it is meant there is a need or, more strongly, a need for us. In our case, this necessity will have an impact on the entire nation, on its preservation and prevention of as many casualties as possible, both civilian and military. That is why, Mr. Zelenskyi uses this modal verb with the aim of: 1. to manipulate the feelings of citizens of their countries (so that they support the decision of financial aid to Ukraine and cooperation with it); 2. to speculate on the topic of war (so that politicians make decisions in our favor and speed up their moves); 3. questions the views of other influential politicians (for example, the situation when the Prime-Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban did not support sanctions against Russia); 4. taking

into account the previous point, forces Ukrainians to change their political position (for example, the attitude toward Viktor Orban) and causes certain controversies (for example, between Ukrainians and Hungarians).

Because of the reasons listed above, we can understand the importance of modal verbs in political discourse in further events.

Every speech of an influential political person is a propaganda of his own thoughts, visions, intentions and goals (or not only his own, but also that of the Congress / Government / Parliament, etc.).

Hence, politicians need to be judicious in their speeches and careful with their statements, as they may cause indignation or negative reactions from the population. That is why, they need a means of maneuvering, manipulation, refusal, such as modal verbs [4, p. 259].

Now let's pay attention to another no less interesting case of a speech in English by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi. As the diplomatic correspondent Paul Adams notes in his article, Mr. Zelenskyi does not waste time and gets to the point. He is a master of words and clearly knows how to get help and recognition of the tragic situation in Ukraine.

It is also worth noting that this speech was addressed to members of the British Parliament, as well as to ordinary people. Thus, he brings these two nations together with one common problem and one pain (although he did not mention the names of the war leaders). Referring to Winston Churchill's landmark speech on June 4, 1940, he drew parallels between painful historical challenges for the British and Ukrainians.

The President of Ukraine compared the 13 days of war in Ukraine and epoch-making and decisive battle of Britain in the Second World War. The quote by the military leader Churchill interprets: «*We shall fight in the woods, in the fields, on the beaches, in the cities and villages, in the streets, we shall fight in the hills*» [5]. As we have already noted above, Mr. Zelenskyi aptly used it to evoke a sense of empathy for us, Ukrainians, and to increase the supply of weapons and any other assistance to our military. However, we are interested in one more functional aspect – using of modal verb «shall».

This modal verb in Ukrainian documentation has a more categorical meaning than in English documents, although it also has the meaning of a strong prohibition in formal documents (laws, regulations, agreements) [6, p. 144].

Consider article 22 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which states that «*Constitutional rights and freedoms are guaranteed and shall not be abolished*» [7]. From Chapter 1, we made sure that «shall» (in addition to the meaning of an order) can also take on the meaning of moral obligation.

Drawing a conclusion from a little preliminary study of the Constitution, one can see a subtle note of propaganda and manipulation in Churchill's statement, as well as in his citation by Zelenskyi. After all, by saying that we must fight everywhere, using «shall», we can use ambiguity, because it is not only an order, but also a moral obligation.

That is – currently in a state of war and a significant period in history of Ukraine and its forward existing, its space on political arena, – our moral obligation to save it everywhere.

Let's remember the mastery of political speeches of Joe Biden, who always had a strong position regarding support for Ukraine, the supply of weapons and ammunition. However, the Ex-President

of the United States cleverly maneuvered his statements by using modal verbs.

First of all, we suggest you look at a vivid example of the fact that Biden really supported Ukraine in the situation of Russian aggression: *«We will continue to supply Ukraine with critical weapons and equipment as long as we can»* [8]. In order to confirm his final opinion about supporting the side of Ukraine and convey these thoughts to the citizens of his country, Biden used the modal verb «will». Here it probably had the meaning of desire, intention and promise.

We suggest to pay attention to another expression of the Ex-President of the USA: *«Putin in banking on the United States failing to deliver for Ukraine. We must, we must, we must prove him wrong»* [8]. Not to mention the fact that he powerfully confirmed his opinion by repeating the modal verb «must» as many as three times, one can understand that this sentence contains an important point.

Biden claims that they must or they are obliged to prove to Putin that he is wrong. The use of the verb «must» in this context is very apt and logical, because it best conveys a strong obligation or compulsion from the perspective of the speaker – that is, Joe Biden. In other words, he not only showed some strong obligation, but also confirmed that was his own opinion, which was quite strong in political discourse.

Now let's look at another famous politician, Donald Trump. It is certain that when Ukrainians try to remember his famous antics, the first thing that comes to mind is the following: *«If I'm president, I will have that war settled in one day, 24 hours»* [9].

It is certain that many people then became interested in how he was going to accomplish this mission, so the correspondent asked him a counter-logical question, how exactly he could end the war in such a small period of time as one day. Trump's answer shocked and probably still shocks many people: *«First, I'll meet with Putin, I'll meet with Zelenskyi. They both have weaknesses and they both have strengths. And within 24 hours that war will be settled. It will be over. It will be absolutely over»* [9].

Despite the fact that this statement does not contain any specifics, clearly laid out plans and own political position, you can see the modal verb «will» used in almost every sentence. Considering its semantic function, we can conclude that Trump is trying to show his clear ambitious intention and give the whole world a promise that this will definitely happen.

From the study of Donald Trump's statements on the topic of Russian aggression and the expediency of excessive US aid, it can be concluded that the current US President aptly and skillfully uses modal verbs to his advantage.

Donald Trump has a somewhat blurred vision of the situation in Ukraine, he does not directly support Russia, but he does not protect Ukraine, and at the same time he mostly uses the modal verbs «should» (rebuke), «have to» (obligation arising from the circumstances), «will» (intention, promise).

On Summit G 7, 2025, Zelenskyi stated: *«EU-leaders need to continue calling on Trump to use his real influence to end the war»* [10].

On Summit G 7, 2025, Ukrainian President said strongly that peace requires not only pressure on Russia, but also real security guarantees and weapons. President stressed that Ukraine is ready for negotiations and an unconditional ceasefire, but only with the active support of its allies.

On June 24 and 25, 2025, a NATO Summit was held in The Hague, the issues of which were the following: guaranteeing the readiness and stability of civil society, giving impetus to innovation and development of the defense-industrial base, in particular, a part will go to help Ukraine.

Zelenskyi's speech was clear: *«Ukraine is ready to buy equipment and support American manufacturers. Europe can help. We also talked about the possible cooperation of drones. We can strengthen each other»* [11].

Zelenskyi wants to end the war, clearly raises questions about the future of world security, Ukraine's defense and sees ways to economic cooperation. The Ukrainian leader uses «need», «can», «possible» in the strong and non-compromise way.

During an interview with NBC News on Friday, 11 July 2025, Donald Trump said: *«US must send more weapons to Ukraine»*. Using «must», Trump has suggested he is ready to greenlight a major military aid package for Ukraine via NATO [12].

After Trump had addressed the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, the 30-th of September 2025, he has said in a post on his Truth Social platform: *«Kyiv can win all of Ukraine back in its original form», «Ukraine could get back the original borders from where this war started»* with the support of Europe and NATO, due to pressures on Russia's economy [13].

With «can» and «could» Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to end the war. Donald Trump has implemented an emotional impact on the political consciousness of citizens, on the course of political processes. This is one of the practices that shape the sphere of political communication to develop public consensus.

In **Table 1** we give examples from political speeches of the famous leaders taking into account technologies, when using modal verbs.

So, from this table we see that well-known leaders skillfully operate with technologies (logical emphasis constructions, generalization, anaphora, metaphor, asidenton, hyperbole, phraseology, epiphoneme, manipulation, antithesis) of political discourse using the variety of modal verbs.

Conclusion and perspectives of further research. From above-mentioned information based on the theoretical background, the opinions of many authors on the problem and the actual study of illustrative sources, the following conclusions can be drawn: 1. Modal verbs are the necessary aspect in the grammar of the English-language. They help express the speakers' thoughts and provide an opportunity to imply additional meanings and ideas in what is said; 2. Modal verbs have the concept of «modality», which means not only the speaker's attitude to the situation, but also the border between the real and unreal. Modal verbs have their own functions and are significant in communication; 3. Each modal verb has its own semantic color, it carries a certain number of meanings that can be completely opposite. Some modal words are similar in meaning, but have different levels of strength or categoricalness, or relevance to the situation; 4. Political discourse is a separate category of discourse, because it has its own characteristics. Politicians skillfully maneuver it using so-called political language; 5. Modal verbs are necessary capital for political discourse, because they have the function of implying a different meaning without doing so openly and directly. This factor is critically important for political discourse and its language; 6. By analyzing the speeches of well-known politicians, one can draw a conclusion about their own political position,

Table 1

Examples of technologies in political speeches of well-known politicians

Politician	Original	Technology
V. Zelenskyi	This is a fight we will absolutely win	intensifying adverbs
Joe Biden	We will not rest until every American is safe	logical emphasis constructions
Donald Trump	We need to build back than ever before	generalization
Donald Trump	Together we will rebuild our economy stronger than ever before	anaphora
Donald Trump	We must confront the challenges of today to secure a brighter tomorrow	anaphora
Joe Biden	The soul of our nation is at stake, we must rise to the occasion	metaphor
Donald Trump	Every voice must be heard; every opinion matters	asidenton
Donald Trump	Our determination knows no bounds; we will persevere	hyperbole
Donald Trump	We must work together to tackle the challenges ahead; our unity is paramount	anaphora
V. Zelenskyi	The challenges we face are daunting, but we will overcome them together	hyperbole
V. Zelenskyi	The challenges we face may be daunting, but our resolve in unwavering	hyperbole
V. Zelenskyi	You cannot negotiate with a bear while it's eating your leg, you cannot negotiate with a street robber who has you pinned to the floor and we don't need to worry about humiliating Putin any more than we would need to worry about humiliating the bear or the robber	phraseology
V. Zelenskyi	And I told anyone I knew, anyone who would listen that Ukraine would fight and Ukraine would be right	phraseology
V. Zelenskyi	We must remember our shared humanity in times of adversity	epiphoneme
Donald Trump	As president, the first step I will take will be to get control of the virus that's ruined so many lives	manipulation
Donald Trump	Our commitment to change is unwavering	antithesis

thoughts, intentions, and the modal verbs they use illustrate that they are masters of political discourse; 7. The world leaders widely operate with technologies of political discourse (logical emphasis constructions, generalization, anaphora, metaphor, asidenton, hyperbole, phraseology, epiphoneme, manipulation, antithesis) using the variety of modal verbs; 8. The role of modal verbs in everyday communication and political discourse should not be underestimated, because they carry their own consequences and influence on future events.

The further research in this field is seen in elaborating the initial course, trainings on the art of political speeches, the effective language means in diplomacy for foreign affairs students or for postgraduates, master-degree students of the diverse specialties.

Bibliography:

- Perishko I. V., Velyka A. M., Ptykha V. A. Modalities in English: Theory and Semantics. *Bulletin of science and education*. 2023. 8 (14). P. 258 – 267. DOI: 10.52058/2786-6165-2023-8(14). URL: <http://eprints.zu.edu.ua/id/eprint/37953> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Samoylova I. V. & Podvoyska O. V. Lexical features of political speeches. *Scientific notes of Nizhyn State University*. 2016. V. 1. P. 235 – 238. URL: http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Nzfn_2016_1_47 (Available: 30.09.2025)
- NBC News Ukraine. War fatigue, changes in military strategy and whether peace talks are possible. What Zelenskyi said in an interview with NBC-BBC News Ukraine. 2023. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cqqpv759kyyo> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Kasiyan G. V. Speech etiquette as a means of implementing communicative strategies in social and political discourse. *Bulletin of Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University*. 2015. (77). P. 258 – 263. URL: <http://eprints.zu.edu.ua/id/eprint/17324> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Adams P. «Shame on you»: How President Zelenskyi uses speeches to get what he needs. BBC Home – Breaking News, 2022. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60855280> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Yevchenko V. V. Recent modifications of the functional and communicative characteristics of English modals. *Bulletin of Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University*. 2004. (17). P. 143 – 146. URL: <http://eprint.zu.edu.ua/id/eprint/1455> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Constitution of Ukraine. The Law from 28.06.1996 № 254 k/96-VR URL: <https://rm.coe.int/constitution-of-ukraine/16871f58b> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Joint Press Conference/The White House, Remarks by ex-President Biden and President Zelenskyi. 2023. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/12/13> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- CNN Politics, Transcript of CNN's town hall with Donald Trump 2023. URL: <https://www.edition.cnn.com/2023/05/11/politics> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- Reuters. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/ukraines-zelenskiy-seek-g7-support-trumps-early-exit-puts-dampener-summit-2025-06-17> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- BBC News Ukraine. NATO Summit 2025. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/Ukrainian/articles/c86gpp3j91no> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- The Guardian. Andrew Roth. Trump expected to deliver weapons to Ukraine through NATO allies. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/11/trump-russia-ukraine-weapons> (Available: 30.09.2025)
- BBC News. The United Nations 2025. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/article/c07vm35rryeo> (Available: 30.09.2025)

Корнєєва І. Англомовна модальність у політичному дискурсі

Анотація. У статті розглядається проблема англомовної модальності в політичному дискурсі в семантичному та функціональному аспектах. Модальні дієслова є необхідним аспектом в англійській мові. Вони допомагають висловити думки мовців та надають можливість натякати на додатковий зміст та ідеї у сказане. Кожне модальне дієслово має своє семантичне забарвлення, воно несе певну кількість значень, які можуть бути абсолютно протилежними. Деякі модальні слова подібні за значенням, але

мають різний рівень сили або категоричності, або релевантності до ситуації. Ми доводимо, що поняття «модальність» притаманне модальним дієсловам, що є значним явищем у політичній комунікації та має свої особливості. Воно залежить від багатьох факторів, таких як культурні риси, політичні ситуації, аудиторія та цілі комунікації. Воно надає мові виразності та точності, допомагає виражати не лише факти, але й ступінь можливості, обов'язку, наміру та інші семантичні аспекти. Політики вміло використовують так звану політичну мову як засіб маневрування, маніпуляцій, відмов та пропаганди. Модальні дієслова є необхідним капіталом для політичного дискурсу, оскільки вони мають функцію натякати на інший зміст, не роблячи цього відкрито та прямо. Аналізуючи промови В. Зеленського, Джо Байдена та Дональда Трампа, можна впевнено сказати, що вони є майстрами політичного дискурсу. Аналізуючи промови відомих політиків, можна виділити їхню власну політичну позицію, думки, наміри,

а модальні дієслова, які вони використовують, ілюструють, що вони є майстрами політичних цілей. І не слід недооцінювати роль модальності в цих промовах, оскільки вона несе свої наслідки та впливає на майбутні події. Аналізуючи модальний капітал, також можна знайти найкращий підхід до вирішення глобальних проблем та підтримки міжнародної співпраці. Це дослідження сприяло підвищенню ефективності політичних промов та забезпеченню успіху їхньої реалізації.

Ключові слова: модальні дієслова, модальність, політичний дискурс, семантичне забарвлення, функціональний аспект.

Дата першого надходження рукопису
до видання: 28.10.2025

Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису
після рецензування: 26.11.2025
Дата публікації: 30.12.2025