MODALITY AND VOICE IN OPINION WRITING: GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF EXPERIMENTING WITH EDUCATION IN THE JAKARTA POST

M. Ridho Kholid

English Education Study Program

UIN Raden Intan Lampung

Indonesia

Article Information	Abstract
	The objective of this study is to analyze how modality and voice are used in an opinion article from The Jakarta Post titled Experimenting with Education. Opinion writing is an important genre in journalism because it not only informs but also persuades and influences public opinion. This research applies qualitative descriptive method with Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics. The data is one editorial article, published on April 19, 2025, which was chosen because it deals with sensitive issue of education policy in Indonesia. The findings show that modality is expressed mostly through high-value epistemic (will) and deontic (must, let us stop), which give strong sense of certainty and obligation. Modal adjuncts such as consistently and oftentimes also strengthen the critique. Voice choices indicate that active voice is dominant when the editorial assigns blame to policymakers and institutions, while passive voice is used to highlight systemic problems or hide the actor. The implication of these findings is that linguistic features such as modality and voice are strategically employed in opinion articles to construct authority, emphasize urgency, and shape readers' perception of policy issues. This suggests that critical awareness of language choices is essential for readers to understand how media discourse influences public opinion and frames debates on national education. Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Modality; Voice

Introduction

Opinion writing is very important in journalism. It is a type of writing where the writer gives opinion, explains social problems, and tries to make readers think in a certain way. Unlike normal news report, which only focuses on facts, opinion writing goes deeper into interpretation and analysis. It gives space for discussion in democratic society, where people can criticize the

Corresponding author: ridhokholid@radenintan.ac.id

government and take part in public debate (Fauziah & Bashtomi, 2024). The press is often called the fourth estate, because it works to monitor government action and create public dialogue, and opinion articles are one of the main tools for this purpose (Syafryadin, 2019).

The success of opinion writing does not depend only on the facts but also on the way language is used. Language can show power, position, and authority. It can make readers agree, disagree, or think differently. The writer must choose carefully how strong or soft the statement should be, whether to show agreement or disagreement, and who is responsible for action (Anwar, 2019; Ngula, 2017). If grammar is seen only as mechanical rule, then we miss how ideology and power are working inside language (Bria et al., 2019).

Two grammar elements that are very important in opinion writing are modality and voice. Modality is about the words that show possibility, obligation, or certainty. Words like must, should, may, or can make the statement sound strong, polite, or careful. With modality, the writer can show balance between being confident and being cautious (Inzunza, 2020; Moskowich & Crespo, 2019). Voice is about the choice between active and passive sentence. When we say "the government failed," it is clear who is responsible. But when we say "the policy failed," the agent is hidden, and responsibility is not clear. This choice changes how readers understand the problem (Irfayani & Rokhuma, 2023; Trajkova, 2011).

Research also shows that modality and voice work together. Modality helps the writer to show credibility and build solidarity with readers, while voice decides how clear the responsibility is. Together, these choices affect how readers think about issues (Hanafi, 2023; Moskowich & Crespo, 2019). In critical discourse analysis, it is shown that language choice is not neutral, but full of ideology that guides readers to a certain interpretation (Ngula, 2017).

Even if there are many studies about modality and voice, research on Indonesian English-language opinion articles is still limited. The Jakarta Post is the most famous English newspaper in Indonesia, and it connects local readers with international audience. It reports Indonesian issues for the world and also explains global issues for Indonesian readers. But studies about its opinion articles are still few, especially about grammar strategies like modality and voice (Syafryadin, 2019). Most studies focus more on the topic or framing, but less on how grammar is used to build authority and stance (Irfayani & Rokhuma, 2023).

This gap is very important because education is always a hot issue in Indonesia. Education reform, inconsistency of policy, and problems of equality are often discussed in The Jakarta Post opinion section. Education debate is not only about technical matters, but also about politics and ideology. Opinion articles about education give space for struggle of ideas and civic participation. But until now, there are still few studies about how language is used in these debates.

For this reason, the article "Experimenting with Education" from The Jakarta Post is a good case for analysis. This article criticizes the unstable education system in Indonesia and points out the negative effect of inconsistent policies on students. Studying this article can show how modality and voice are used to make readers think critically and to assign responsibility. It also shows how language in opinion articles influences public view about national development and democracy.

This study has two contributions. First, from language perspective, it gives new understanding of how modality and voice work in Indonesian English opinion writing. This is important because not many studies analyze this. Second, from social perspective, it shows how language frames education debate, who is blamed, and how urgent the problem is. In Indonesia, where education reform is very politicized, this analysis is meaningful for understanding public engagement.

The research will analyze how modality is used in the article: whether the writer uses strong obligation like "must," or softer choice like "may." It will also look at voice: when the writer uses active voice to show who is responsible, or passive voice to hide the actor. This analysis can show how grammar works together with ideology and persuasion.

The contribution is not only describing grammar, but also explaining how it builds persuasion and ideological stance. Modality and voice are not simple grammar forms, but they

are tools to influence readers and shape public debate. In the case of Indonesian journalism, they also show how local issues like education are connected with global writing style and norms.

In conclusion, opinion writing is an important part of journalism. It connects facts with interpretation, and it uses grammar choices like modality and voice to influence readers. Previous studies already show the importance of these grammar features, but the research in Indonesian English opinion writing is still limited. By analyzing The Jakarta Post article "Experimenting with Education," this study will contribute both to linguistics and to understanding how education debates are shaped in Indonesian media. This shows that language is never neutral, but always full of meaning, ideology, and power.

Methods

This study used a qualitative descriptive method with Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics(Brown & Yule, 1983). The focus was not on numbers, but on meaning in grammar, especially modality and voice. In SFL, grammar was seen as a resource for meaning. Modality showed the level of certainty or obligation, while voice showed agency and responsibility. By combining SFL and CDA, the study was able to explain how grammar was used for persuasion and ideology.

The data were taken from one opinion article from The Jakarta Post titled Experimenting with Education, published on April 19, 2025. This text was chosen because it was an editorial, so it showed stance, evaluation, and persuasion. It also discussed education policy, which was a sensitive issue in Indonesia where responsibility and obligation were often debated. The Jakarta Post was considered important because it was an English newspaper for both Indonesian and international readers.

The article was taken from the online archive of The Jakarta Post. The text was downloaded and saved for analysis. Because the data were a public text, there was no ethical problem. The study respected the source, kept the original text, and explained the procedure clearly.

The analysis looked at two main grammar features: modality and voice. Modality included modal verbs like must, should, may, can, as well as semi-modals and adverbs like probably or certainly. It could be epistemic (certainty) or deontic (obligation), and it could be high, medium, or low in value. Voice was about active and passive sentences, and how the agent was shown or hidden. Active voice gave clear responsibility, while passive could hide it. Nominalization was also studied because it could change a process into a thing.

To keep reliability, a codebook was used. The coding was tested first and then improved. Another reader also coded part of the text to check agreement. Notes and memos were kept as an audit trail. Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation of theories, by checking negative cases, and by giving full examples in the findings. The researcher also reflected on their own position and discussed with a colleague. Because the data were a public text, member checking was not needed.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the editorial "Experimenting with Education" from The Jakarta Post reveals systematic patterns in the use of modality and voice to construct stance, assign responsibility, and persuade readers in the debate about Indonesia's education policies. Instances of modality are distributed across modal verbs, modal adjuncts, and lexicalized expressions of necessity or probability. Meanwhile, voice choices alternate between active and passive constructions, each strategically employed to emphasize or obscure agency. The combination of these grammatical features allows the editorial to critique policy inconsistency while reinforcing its authority as a collective institutional voice.

Modality appears primarily through modal verbs such as can, must, should, and will, as well as modal adjuncts like especially, consistently, only, and oftentimes. These resources encode degrees of obligation, certainty, and evaluation. For instance, the article concludes with the appeal: "For the sake of their future, let us stop the policy flip-flop." Here, the imperative let us

stop functions as a high-value deontic modality, urging immediate collective action. Earlier, the text reports: "If the plan materializes, it will dismantle the legacy of former education minister Nadiem Makarim." The modal will signals strong certainty about projected outcomes, reinforcing the inevitability of policy reversal. In another example, the statement "Oftentimes, however, the policies fail to take into consideration the aspirations of students and teachers" incorporates a modal adjunct (oftentimes) to generalize the critique, portraying policy neglect as a habitual reality rather than an isolated occurrence.

To present these findings systematically, the following table summarizes the types and frequency of modality expressions found in the text:

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Modality

Type of Modality	Examples from Text	Frequency
High-value deontic	*must stop, let us stop*	2
Medium-value deontic	*should help students prepare* (rephrased from Mu'ti's claim)	1
High-value epistemic	*will dismantle, will be available, will begin*	5
Medium-value epistemic	*may originate from noble intention*	1
Modal adjuncts/adverbs	*especially, consistently, only, oftentimes, equally confusing*	6
Lexical modality	*necessary, required, fail, evident*	4
Total		**19**

The pattern indicates a preference for high-value modality, particularly epistemic will and deontic imperatives, which together convey both certainty and obligation. Adjuncts and evaluative lexis supplement these modal resources by providing nuanced criticism and generalization.

Voice choices further contribute to the persuasive texture of the editorial. Active constructions dominate when agency is clear and the editorial seeks to assign responsibility. For instance, "Policymakers… prioritize appearance over substance" directly identifies actors and their misguided priorities. Similarly, "Critics have warned that the program will deepen social segregation" attributes evaluation explicitly to identifiable agents. By contrast, passive constructions are employed when the writer intends to emphasize outcomes or diffuse accountability. In "the national education system has only devoured its schoolchildren", the system itself is animated as the agent, but in a metaphorical, impersonalized way that deflects responsibility from specific policymakers. Likewise, "part of the huge budget has been wasted on experimenting with new systems" foregrounds the loss while backgrounding the actual spenders.

Table 2. The Distribution of Voice

Voice Type	Examples from Text	Frequency
Active with explicit agent	*Policymakers prioritize appearance…*; *Critics have warned…*; *Statistics Indonesia has found…*	9
Passive with agent omitted	*budget has been wasted*; *policies are evident*; *students are not to pursue secondary education*	6
Passive with agent present	Rare, e.g., *was initiated by President Prabowo Subianto*	2
Total		**17**

The findings show a preference for active voice, which foregrounds accountability of policymakers, critics, and institutions. Yet, passive constructions are selectively used to dramatize negative outcomes or obscure agency when critique is directed at systemic rather than individual failings..

Discussion

The editorial Experimenting with Education shows how modality and voice are used to make strong persuasion and authority in Indonesian education debate. The frequent use of will makes the policy result look inevitable. It gives the text strong certainty and less space for other interpretation. This agrees with Romadlani and Harjanto who say high epistemic commitment makes the text more authoritative. In this way, the editorial sounds sure and confident when it talks about education failure (Romadlani & Harjanto, 2024).

Beside epistemic modality, deontic modality also plays big role. The sentence "let us stop the policy flip-flop" is not only comment but also a call to action. It shows the editorial as a moral voice that asks readers to take responsibility. It also supports the media function to mobilize discussion and hold leaders accountable. The mix of certainty (will) and obligation (must, let us stop) makes the text both authoritative and collective (Muhaimi & Sribagus, 2019).

Adjuncts like consistently, only, and oftentimes give more power to the critique. For example, "consistently underperformed" shows failure is not one time but regular problem. Such words make the critique sound stronger and more serious. This use of evaluative words reflects what Words like fail, evident, necessary, and required mix description with judgment. They push the reader to see the problem as fact and not opinion.

The choice of voice also gives strong meaning. Active voice is used to blame policymakers and ministries directly. For example, "Policymakers… prioritize appearance over substance" shows who is responsible. By naming actors like Statistics Indonesia or the Religious Affairs Ministry, the editorial makes them accountable. Passive voice is used in other places to show systemic effect. For example, "part of the huge budget has been wasted" shows loss but hides the actor. "Students are not to pursue secondary education" makes students look like victims of the system. This balance of active and passive makes the text flexible: sometimes it blames actors, sometimes it highlights the bigger system (Muhaimi & Sribagus, 2019).

These strategies are not only style, but also function. They help the editorial to critique unstable policies and mobilize readers to demand change. The editorial connects with public feeling about "new government, new policy" (Kaplan, 2023). It shows frustration and fear that education always becomes a tool of politics. Through modality, the text says failure is inevitable. Through voice, it both names the guilty and shows the harm to students. This mix makes the editorial persuasive and powerful.

In general, the study shows that modality and voice are important tools for opinion writing. Epistemic modality gives certainty, deontic modality gives moral call, active voice gives blame, and passive voice gives systemic view. These linguistic choices make the editorial more than information; they make it a guide for public opinion. As Green says, media texts can influence discourse and even reform agendas (Green, 2016).

In short, Experimenting with Education uses modality and voice to create ideology, mobilize readers, and attack weak policy. These language choices are not neutral but carry strong social and political meaning. The editorial tries to defend education stability and integrity, while criticizing leaders who use education for politics. This shows how grammar is not only structure but also a tool for power, persuasion, and change in Indonesian education debate.

Conclusion

This study concludes that modality and voice play very important role in shaping the stance and persuasion of opinion writing in The Jakarta Post. The article Experimenting with Education shows that strong modality, especially through will and must, makes the critique look more certain and urgent. At the same time, active voice makes policymakers directly responsible, while passive voice highlights the effect of policy failure on students and society. These choices are not neutral grammar but strategies to influence the reader and frame Indonesia's education debate. The study also shows that analyzing grammar in media is useful to understand ideology, power, and responsibility in public discourse. It is suggested that further research can compare more articles, so that we can see whether the same pattern also appears in other topics and in different media

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