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Modality of possibility and necessity in news and informational-analytic discourse

Abstract

The present paper aims to comparatively examine language patterns of the modality of possibility and necessity in news discourse and informational-analytic discourse. Continuous sampling was used to select the material of 40 news and 40 analytic articles from 2 American journals – “Time” and “Newsweek”. Grammatical and lexical means of manifesting modal (axiological) meanings were identified and further analyzed using grammatical, semantic and contextual analysis. Statistical analysis was used to determine the frequency of the meanings actualization. It was found that prevailing modal meaning in news discourse was action possibility determined by the situation described, by personality traits and abilities or object features. Axiological meanings of necessity were represented by obligation resulting from various circumstances or described situation. These features only partially correspond to the discourse goal. Speaking about possibility or obligation/necessity of subject’s actions, the addresser not only informs the reader about an event but makes some conclusions and suggests possible or necessary ways to solve the problem in an implicit form. The informational-analytic discourse also actualizes the modality of possibility and necessity. However, this discourse type is marked by the prevalence of the modal meanings of necessity with varying degrees: obligation, necessity, advice. In the meantime, the addresser, within this discourse type, prefers to advise or strongly recommend something often using we-utterances. Modal verbs and their equivalents were the most frequent to express the modal meanings. Lexical language means were rarely for the purpose.

Keywords: modality, possibility, necessity, axiological meaning, discourse, addresser

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