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INTERPERSONAL MEANING, PERSUASION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE: PACKING SEMIOTIC PUNCH

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Title of article: Interpersonal Meaning, Persuasion and
Public Discourse: Packing Semiotic Punch

Source: *Australian Journal of Linguistics*
Vol. 15, No. 1, 1995
pp. 33 - 67

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the discursive deployment of modality in one public text, with a view to outlining the significance of *grammatical metaphor* as resource for expanding the meaning potential that can be brought to bear on the modal assessment of English propositions and proposals. The implications of this interpretation of interpersonal meaning for critical social literacy in Australian schools is subsequently discussed with reference to two pieces of expository writing from a senior secondary school context.

0. NEGOTIATION

There are many respects in which texts can be construed as social processes of negotiation. Fairclough (1989, 1992a), for example, has drawn attention to the contemporary foregrounding of certain interpersonal resources in public discourse – the ‘synthetic personalisation’ whereby authorities attempt to construct a patently coercive solidarity with subjects they are seeking to control (which might be glossed as an incursion¹ of ‘public’ discourse into previously ‘private’ spheres; cf. Habermas 1991). Fairclough’s work raises the complementary issue of to what extent interpersonal resources can be deployed to challenge authority. Can private discourse invade more public spheres; and if so, which interpersonal resources are mobilised, from which subjects, to which agents or agencies of symbolic control (Bernstein 1990:138-139)? In this paper a functional linguistic deconstruction will be offered of one challenge of this kind, and potential implications for teaching critical social literacy in Western secondary schools will be briefly reviewed (Christie et al. 1991, Christie 1993).

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¹ Fairclough (1993:140) actually refers to these resources as a *colonization of the public sphere* by the private and an appropriation of private resources by the public sphere; I think, however, that a case can be made for treating the appropriation as an incursion of public discourse into previously private spheres – a weakening of classification (in Bernstein’s terms) designed by powerful public voices to colonize new frontiers.

1. INTERSUBJECTIVE MEANING

The semiotic excursion in question was published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (one of Australia's three leading broadsheet newspapers) on page 1, on Thursday, August 29, 1991. It consists of a letter from a concerned citizen, Ms Vanessa Chang, to the then Premier of New South Wales, Mr Nick Greiner, accompanied by a picture of Ms Chang. Ms Chang's father, for many years Australia's most renowned heart specialist, had recently been murdered – apparently as the culmination of an unsuccessful extortion bid by his murderers. In the previous election Greiner's conservative party had won office, running on a platform which promised to repeal the stringent gun laws introduced by the Labor government prior to the election. In the election, the Labor Party lost a number of key seats in country areas which they had traditionally held, with the gun law issue a key factor in these electorates. The verbal part of this text is presented as text (1) below (with formatting and paragraphing as published by the *Herald*):

(1) Ms Chang's letter to Mr Greiner

Dear Mr Greiner.

WHY HAVEN'T GUN LAWS BEEN CHANGED?

THE SHOCKING AND SENSELESS KILLING OF MY OWN FATHER, VICTOR CHANG, FORCES ME TO WRITE THIS LETTER. I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT HIS DEATH AND THE MURDER OF SO MANY OTHERS IN THE LAST TERRIBLE WEEKS HAS NOT PROMPTED AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE FROM THE GOVERNMENT!

After the needless killing of over a dozen people in the last two months I must emphasise the desperate need to review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state. Policies which, at present, are not stringent enough to prevent the slaughter of innocents.

How many more tragedies will have to occur? How many families will have to live with the anguish of not only the death of their loved one, but the thought that it could have been prevented?

I appeal to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed. I know that criminals cannot be stopped but surely we can limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons!

It would be irresponsible to ignore Australia's plea to reform antiquated gun law policies!

Sincerely,

VANESSA CHANG

In broad generic terms, the letter is a hortatory exposition (Martin 1985/1989, Martin and Peters 1985). As a first step, its structure can be displayed in stages, labelled according to the function they play in this text and the range of agnate² persuasive genres.

(2) The structure of Ms Chang's letter to Mr Greiner

Salutation (greeting)

Dear Mr Greiner.

Issue (what's at stake)

Why haven't gun laws been changed?

Authority (why I matter)

The shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang, forces me to write this letter.

Argument (rationale)

I cannot believe that his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks has not prompted an immediate response from the government!....

How many more tragedies will have to occur?...

Appeal (demand for action)

I appeal to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed...

It would be irresponsible to ignore Australia's plea to reform antiquated gun law policies!

Valediction (leave taking)

Sincerely,

Vanessa Chang

Canonical staging of this kind tells us something about the social function of the text. However, to more fully appreciate its rhetorical force it is important to look closely at its construction of meaning – in particular at what systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) refers to as interpersonal resources (Halliday 1967, 1970, 1978, 1982, 1985, He 1993, Martin 1991, 1992a, b, in press, Poynton 1985/1989, 1990). These resources comprise what in other schools of linguistics would be distributed across the pragmatics of illocutionary force, indirect speech acts, evidentiality and intensity or stance (cf. Biber & Finnegan 1988, 1989, Chafe 1986, Labov 1972, 1984). In SFL they can be usefully divided into those foregrounding intersubjectivity³, typically orchestrating dialogue at the front of the English clause (the systems

² The term is from Gleason (1965) and refers to paradigmatic relations among units of description; in terms of contemporary critical theory it is closely related to intertextuality, interpreted as a system of immanent meaning potential.

³ Cf. Fairclough (1993:136) on identity (interpersonal) and relational (interpersonal) functions.

of MOOD and MODALITY; Halliday 1970, 1985), and those foregrounding subjectivity, typically encoding speakers feelings through groups and phrases, especially nominal groups (AFFECT, JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION; Martin in press, Iedema 1994, Iedema et al in press, Rothery forthcoming). In this paper it is Chang's deployment of intersubjective resources⁴ that will be the focus of attention.

2. POSITIONING THE LISTENER

In order to explore the rhetoric of Chang's intervention, we need to introduce the fundamental discursive strategy on which she draws – referred to in SFL as grammatical metaphor (Halliday 1985, Halliday & Martin 1993). Text (3) below, from the detective fiction of P.D. James, provides the point of departure for this discussion. In this passage, Commander Dalgliesh is interrogating a local police inspector with respect to his preliminary investigations. The exemplary passage is highlighted in bold face.

- (3) Commander Dalgliesh with Inspector Blakelock. (James 1978:153)

Commander Dalgliesh: "You were watching her closely all the time, Inspector? **Are you absolutely sure that Miss Foley couldn't have replaced the keys in the box without your seeing her?**"

Inspector Blakelock: "No, sir. **That would have been quite impossible.**"

The phenomenon in question here has to do with the meaning of Blakelock's *No, sir* in response to Dalgliesh's query. In this context, what does *No, sir* mean? And why could *Yes, sir* have meant the same thing? The critical point here has to do with which part of Dalgliesh's query *No, sir* is actually negotiating. In context, it means 'No, sir, she couldn't have replaced the keys', not 'No, sir, I'm not absolutely sure...'. In Halliday's (1985) terms, it negotiates the projected (*that Miss Foley couldn't have replaced the keys in the box without your seeing her*), not the projecting (*Are you absolutely sure*) part of the clause.

In this respect it contrasts with the alternative *Yes, sir*, which to function in this context would have to be interpreted as negotiating the projecting (*Are you absolutely sure*), not the projected clause (*that Miss Foley couldn't have replaced the keys in the box without your seeing her*).

Why, in such contexts, are both projecting and projected clauses candidates for negotiation? Halliday's way into theorising these phenomena is through the concept of metaphor. Traditionally, metaphor refers to the use

of one word or phrase in place of another, where the resulting expression has to be read both literally and figuratively to make sense in context. For example, if the poet writes that *his love is like a red red rose*, instead of that *his love is ardent*, then he is invoking a reading which notes literally that his love is similar to a red rose, and which at the same time has to be rendered figuratively along the lines of his love being describable as ardent (or however else the metaphor might be rendered, depending on reading position). Significantly, the meaning of the metaphor lies precisely in the tension between its literal and figurative interpretation – the literal plus (or perhaps better, times) the figurative layer. Note as well that the relationship between the layers is symbolic; there has to be some respect in which the figurative meaning can be derived from the literal meaning of the word or phrase in question.

Extending this traditional notion of 'lexical' metaphor, Halliday (1985) introduces the concept of 'grammatical' metaphor to handle the phenomenon of one grammatical structure standing for another. For example, if we say *I'm sure the Inspector was very nervous*, we mean, epistemically, that there is a very high probability that the Inspector was very nervous – that the Inspector *must have been* very nervous, as opposed to *would have been* (median probability) or *might have been* (low probability). In other words, the projecting, first person, present tense, clause *I'm sure*, which attributes a mental state, stands for a high valued modalisation, which might have been more directly encoded as a modal verb (i.e. *must*); and it can stand for the high valued modalisation because it is similar enough in meaning to it to be so deployed. One grammatical structure (involving PROJECTION) is used to stand for another (MODALISATION). Thus the more likely tag for this example is *wasn't he*, not *didn't I*, even though the main grammatical Subject is *I*, not *the Inspector* (cf. the non-metaphorical *Dalgliesh is sure she's guilty, isn't he?*, not *isn't she?*⁵).

Thus, in general terms, it is the phenomenon of grammatical metaphor which gives the Inspector a choice of responding to the literal meaning or the figurative (i.e. transferred or metaphorical) meaning in text 3. Responding literally involves reading *are you absolutely sure* as a non-metaphorical relational attributive process describing the Inspector's mental state (and agnate to *were you sure, will you be sure, make sure, is he sure*, etc.):

Responding metaphorically, on the other hand, involves reading *are you absolutely sure* as a metaphorical relational attributive process standing for a high valued modalisation of certainty (and agnate to *is it absolutely certain*

⁴ It is not being suggested here that 'subjective' resources have no affect on the listener, but merely that they are not being offered up directly for negotiation - i.e. not at risk as Subject, Finite or Mood Adjunct (= Halliday's 1985/1994 composite Mood function).

⁵ *Isn't she?* could only function as a tag in this context with rising intonation, following a break in the rhythm (a silent beat), and indicating a shift in the source of the modalisation under negotiation (from how sure Dalgliesh is to how sure the speaker is). The critical issue here is symbolization: first person, present tense projections are similar in meaning to (in fact, they deconstruct the meaning of) modalisation, whereas third person, past tense projections are not so close.

that she couldn't have, is it impossible that she could have, might Miss Foley have been able to, was Miss Foley possibly able to, etc.):

In fact the Inspector plays it safe; he responds first to the metaphorical reading (with *No, sir*) and then covers his tracks by negotiating both the metaphorical modalisation of certainty (*Are you absolutely sure*) and the literal modulation (i.e. deontic modality) of ability (*couldn't*):

In order to negotiate both modalities, Blakelock has to use a metaphorical modality himself (*quite impossible*), since modality can be expressed just once through a modal verb in a standard⁶ English clause. The degrees of certainty and ability chosen by the Inspector are worthy of note. For certainty, he selects a median value (probable, not possible or certain) realised through the modal verb *would* (as opposed to *might* or *must*)⁷; for ability, he nominalises, and is thus able to select a high value, realised in his British English through the intensifier *quite* (as opposed to *almost* or *next to*) submodifying the adjective *impossible*. Blakelock positions himself in other words as 'fairly sure' that Miss Foley 'absolutely couldn't' have replaced the key, in a context where Dalglish was asking about 'absolute certainty'. This subtle renegotiation of the context is outlined in Figure 1.

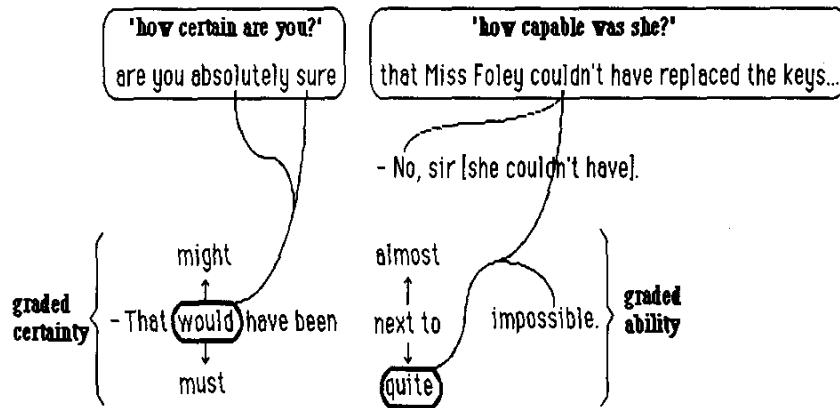


Figure 1

Blakelock's second move – responding to Dalglish's projecting MODALISATION with *would* and to his projected MODULATION with *quite impossible*

⁶ Halliday (1970/1976:193) notes that speakers sometimes produce two modals, with the second verb always realising modulation (deontic modality): *he might ought to be here* meaning 'perhaps he ought to be here'. He suggests that the double modals noted in non-standard Southern American dialects by Labov may operate on the same pattern.

⁷ Cf. alternative responses such as *Well, sir, that might have been quite impossible, though I need to check* or *Absolutely sir. That must have been quite impossible from all I've learned.*

As might be expected, the flexibility engendered in discourse by interpersonal grammatical metaphors creates opportunities for verbal play. Facetious responses to metaphors of MOOD are well known (e.g. *Is your name Dalglish or Dalglish? – Yes.*); and metaphors of modality provide similar opportunities for speakers to unexpectedly reconstrue the context as a text unfolds. Consider Dalglish's most famous ancestor, in the opening passage of *The Valley of Fear* (exemplary negotiation in bold face):

(4) Sherlock Holmes with Dr Watson. (Doyle 1981a:769)

"I'm inclined to think---" said I.

"I should do so," Sherlock Holmes remarked impatiently.

I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals; but I'll admit that I was annoyed at the sardonic interruption. "Really, Holmes," said I severely, "you are a little trying at times."

In this example Watson introduces a projecting clause (*I'm inclined to think*) standing for a median valued modalisation (*it would probably be that...*). But before we even learn what he is about to modalise, Holmes jumps in and reconstrues Watson's modalisation as literally a first person (*I*), present tense (*'m*), modulated (*inclined*), mental process of cognition (*think*) by telling him to do just that for a change – to think! This process of renegotiation is itself deeply symbolic of the relationship between Watson and Holmes (i.e. very collegial, but with Holmes in complete control) is outlined in Figure 2.)

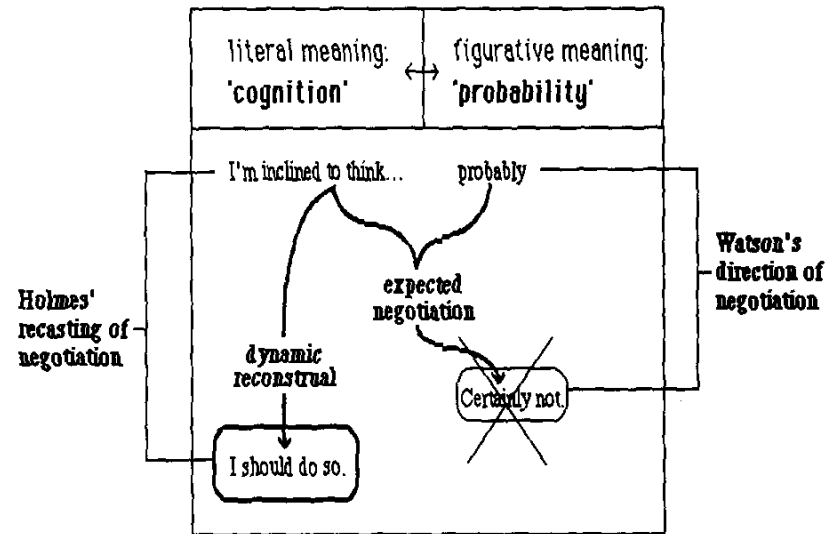


FIGURE 2

Holmes' facetious reconstrual of Watson's aborted conjecture in text (4)

3. INTERSUBJECTIVE RESOURCES FOR ASSESSMENT (MODALITY)

Having established grammatical metaphors of modality as an important negotiating resource in conversation, we will review Halliday's (1970/1976, 1985) account of this system of interpersonal meanings in some detail. In light of the ineffability of the meanings involved (Halliday 1984a), and Halliday's incorporation of metaphorical realisations, his framework will be presented in some detail. The basic non-metaphorical grammatical resources in question involve modal verbs (including *needs to, dares to, is to, has to, has got to, had better*), modal adverbs (including *probably, presumably, predictably, possibly*) and related periphrastic expansions of the verbal group via the verb *be* and a following adjective or passive verb (*be willing to, be prepared to, be able to, be anxious to*). A survey of the more familiar of these resources is provided below (for grammatical details see Halliday 1970/1976, 1985).

Setting aside ability (modal *can, could* in the sense of 'able'), Halliday interprets the system as offering resources for negotiating degrees of polarity – the semantic space between positive (*is, do*) and negative (*isn't, don't*). His 1985:334-341 account of the semantics of the MODALITY system is presented in broad outlines in Figure 3, including the major dimensions of VALUE (how we grade our assessment), ORIENTATION (how we assign responsibility for our assessment and how explicit we are about doing so) and MANIFESTATION (how we assess propositions with respect to probability or usuality and proposals with respect to obligation and inclination). Sample realisations for each system have been included; modulations of ability have been integrated alongside inclination under the superordinate feature [readiness] – following Matthiessen (in press).

Something of the richness of the system is exemplified below, with respect to short passages from texts taken from the late 19th, early 20th and late 20th centuries. In light of Bernstein's (e.g. 1990) work on coding orientation, one cannot help wondering about the genesis of the system and the role played in its genesis by Bernstein's old and then his new middle class.

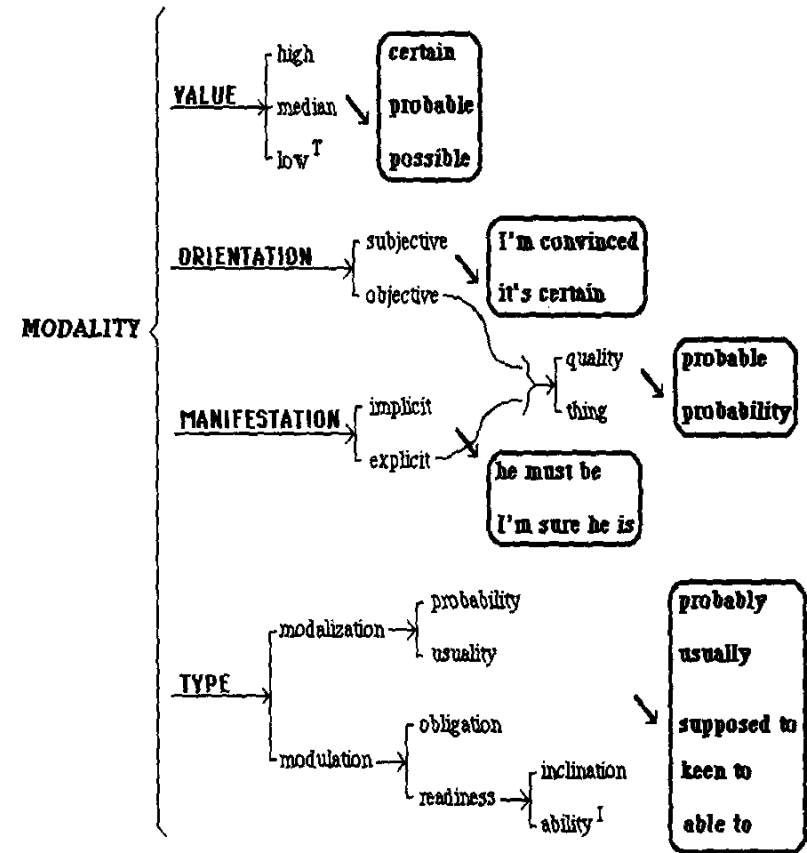


FIGURE 3
Overview of modality systems⁸

⁸ The *I/T* superscripts linking ability type with low value provisionally block the possibility of grading ability; a more precise description would allow for grading through the nominal meaning potential of objective realisations (e.g. *quite able, great ability*).

- (5) Examples from the second half of 19th Century (Doyle 1981b:942)
- I have no doubt** the connection between my boots and a Turkish bath...
and yet **I should be obliged to you if you would** indicate it.
...which **I should** illustrate if I were to ask you who shared your cab...
I don't admit that a fresh illustration is an explanation,
you would probably have had no splashes,
and if you had they **would certainly** have been symmetrical.
Therefore **it is clear** that you sat at the side.
Therefore **it is equally clear** that you had a companion.
That is **very evident**.
Absurdly commonplace, is it not?
- (6) Examples from the first half of 20th Century (from J Priestley *An Inspector Calls*, quoted from Martin 1992a; see also Halliday 1982)
- I think** we've just about come to the end of this wretched business --
I don't think so.
It wasn't necessary.
And I thought **it better not** to.
I think you'd **better** look at it.
I don't see any particular reason why **I should**.
Probably not.
- (7) Examples from the second half of 20th Century (from *Educating Rita*, opening scene in film; for analysis see Cranny-Francis and Martin 1994)
- It's that stupid bleeding handle on the door -- **you want** to get it fixed.
Ah, yes, yes, I I I **meant to**.
Well, that's no good, is it -- **always meaning to**?
You want to get on with it,
the poor sod on the other side **won't be able** to get in
you **won't be able** to get out.
Well, that **would** at least constitute some sort of start, **wouldn't it**?
But you **may** call be Frank.
I suppose it is.

3.1 *Orientation and manifestation – what are we arguing about?*

Halliday uses the terms orientation and manifestation to refer to the way in which speakers formulate 'indicative' and 'imperative' speech acts as negotiable propositions and proposals. At issue here is the rhetoric whereby modality and the source of the modal assessment (i.e. the speaker) is structured into or around the Subject and Finite MOOD functions (e.g. *She must...*), with attendant repercussions for tags (*mustn't she?*) and elliptical responses (*Oh, must she?*)

3.1.1 *Explicit subjective*

Under the heading explicit subjective, Halliday places the grammatical metaphors typically involving first person, present tense, mental processes (or their relational clause agnates which attribute a mental state – e.g. *I have a suspicion that...*).

- (8) I reckon Greiner is corrupt, isn't he?
– He is.

These metaphors explicitly construct the speaker as the source of the assessment, and to some extent, as we have seen in the Holmes to Watson repartee, place the speaker's authority to assess at risk. (cf. the marked response *Oh do you?* to the opening move in (8)).

3.1.2 *Implicit subjective*

Under the heading implicit subjective, Halliday places non-metaphorical realisations through one or another modal verb. Modal verbs implicitly construct the speaker as the source of the assessment, and place the speaker's assessment, although not her authority to assess, directly at risk (cf. the modality adjusting responses such as *he would be, he must be*).

- (9) Greiner might be corrupt, mightn't he.
– He might be.

3.1.3 *Implicit objective*

Implicit objective assessments are realised through modal adverbs (for modalisation – probability and usuality) or periphrastic verbal groups (for modulation – inclination and obligation).

- (10) Perhaps Greiner is corrupt, isn't he?
– He is.

They have the effect of disassociating the speaker from the assessment, which has been removed from the verbal part of the Mood function. Thus in (10), the first move invites negotiation of polarity (*is he or isn't he*), nudging aside negotiation of the modality (*perhaps*).

3.1.4 Explicit objective

Like explicit subjective assessments, explicit objective assessments make use of grammatical metaphors. Instead of expanding the clause through projection, explicit objective metaphors make use of nominalisation to disassociate the speaker from the assessment, which is reconstrued as an aspect of ideational, rather than interpersonal reality. The assessment itself is only very indirectly at risk, and its source is not open to challenge. Thus in (11), the response negotiates the polarity of the proposed possibility (*it is or it isn't*), not its modality (cf. *it might be possible that, it would be possible that, it must be possible that* – the semantics of the last of which, with its contradictory high and low assessments of probability, is in need of considerable contextualisation). In order to get at the nominalised modality and negotiate, it is necessary to abandon the proposition to hand and replace it with an alternative one (*It's more than possible that; it's a dead certainty that...*).

- (11) It's possible that Greiner is corrupt, isn't it?
– It is.

3.2 Value – how strongly do we feel?

The system of value focuses attention on the strength of a modal assessment. Setting aside ability, which is not gradable in verbal form, modalities of probability, usuality, inclination and obligation can all be scaled according to whether their value is low, median or high. Implicit objective realisations of modality are deployed in Table 1 to display the respective scales.

Halliday (1985) makes the point that, interpreted in this light, modality can be seen to open up a semantic space between *is* and *isn't* for propositions and *do* and *don't* or *will* and *won't* for proposals – in other words, it establishes the potential for degrees of polarity in both the indicative and imperative realms of negotiation.

TABLE 1: LOW, MEDIAN AND HIGH VALUED REALISATIONS FOR MODALITY TYPES

TYPE	low value	median value	high value
PROBABILITY	possibly	probably	certainly
USUALITY	sometimes	usually	always
INCLINATION	be willing to	be keen to	be determined to
OBLIGATION	be allowed to	be supposed to	be required to
ABILITY	[be able to] ⁹	–	–

3.3 Type – what are we negotiating?

The system of type distinguishes between the system of modalisation, which opens up degrees of polarity for propositions (i.e. statements and questions) and modulation, which opens up degrees of polarity for proposals (i.e. offers and commands). Halliday (1970/1976) reviews the grammatical differences between the two systems. Here we will focus briefly on the semantics of the negotiation involved.

Modalisation (epistemic modality in formal semantics) is concerned with assessing states of knowledge. The two key systems are probability (how sure?) and usuality (how often?). Their implicit objective form of realisation involves modal adverbs, which may be used to reinforce the value of an accompanying modal verb as in Table 2.

TABLE 2: LOW, MEDIAN AND HIGH VALUED REALISATIONS FOR MODALISATION

value	probability	usuality
high	must certainly	must always
median	would probably	would usually
low	might possibly	might sometimes

As noted above, modalisation enables the negotiation of propositions, defined by Halliday (1984b, 1985) as discourse moves which give (statements) or demand (questions) information. An exemplary proposition is negotiated via probability in (12).

⁹ Nominalised objective forms of ability do open up the possibility of grading, via nominal group resources, for example a low ability..., a median ability..., a high ability to conduct electricity.

- (12) You must be Greiner.
 – Yes, I am.

Modulation (deontic modality in formal semantics) is concerned with assessing *commitment* to action. The two key systems are inclination (how willing?) and obligation (how obliged?). Their implicit objective form of realisation involves a periphrastic form of the verbal group – the verb *be* plus an adjective or passive participle as outlined in Table 3. The *be* plus adjective forms realise inclination, with the adjective allowing submodification (e.g. *I'm very determined, rather keen, quite willing*); the *be* plus passive participle forms realise obligation, which is not open to grading of this kind¹⁰ (**I'm very required to*).

TABLE 3: LOW, MEDIAN AND HIGH VALUED REALISATIONS FOR MODULATION

value	inclination	obligation
high	must, be determined to	must, be required to
median	will, be keen to	will, be supposed to
low	may, be willing to	may, be allowed to

As noted above, modulation enables the negotiation of proposals, defined by Halliday (1984b, 1985) as discourse moves which give (offers) or demand (commands) goods and services. An exemplary proposal is negotiated via obligation in (13). Note that to bring modulation into play, an indirect speech act must be deployed (in this case, a declarative clause standing for an imperative one), since grammatically the system of modulation is only available in the indicative. In Halliday's (1985) terms then, negotiating commands through the system of modulation depends on grammatical metaphor – in this case, interpersonal metaphors of mood.

- (13) You must act now.
 – All right, I will.

3.4 Modality metaphors

As just noted, deploying modulation to negotiate the semantic space between *do* and *don't* in commands (or *will* and *won't* in offers) depends on

¹⁰ Comparable grading is available for explicit objective forms: *there is a strong requirement that...*, *he's under some obligation to...*, *it's with our explicit permission that...*

grammatical metaphors of mood (indirect speech acts in pragmatics). Grammatical metaphor is also required to open up the explicit objective and explicit subjective manifestation and orientation options reviewed above.

- (14) Congruent: say = mean
 MEAN: Greiner must be corrupt
 SAY: Griener must be corrupt

Metaphorical: say stands for mean
 MEAN: Greiner must be corrupt.
 SAY: I'm sure Greiner is corrupt.

As far as modalisation is concerned, subjectivity is regularly rendered explicit through first person, present tense mental processes of cognition (e.g. *I think, I reckon, I suspect*) or relational processes of cognitive state (e.g. *I'm sure, I'm convinced, I'm uncertain*). Here, ideational resources for projection (Halliday 1985) are deployed to symbolise assessments of propositions.

Objective modalisation is regularly rendered explicit through nominalisations of probability and usuality, either as a quality or a thing. Here, ideational resources for constructing participants are deployed to distance modalisations from negotiation. Adjectives such as *possible, probable, certain, usual, typical, common* and so on are commonly used to construe modalisations objectively as qualities; nouns such as *possibility, probability, certainty, unusuality, regularity, typicality* and so on are commonly used to construe modalisations objectively as things (this is the grammatical source of fields such as gambling, risk theory and statistics).

As far as modulation is concerned, subjectivity is regularly rendered explicit through first person, present tense mental processes of affection (e.g. *I want, I need, I'd like, I'd hate*). Here again, ideational resources for projection (Halliday 1985) are deployed to symbolise assessments of proposals.

- (15) Congruent
 MEAN: I would sack him.
 SAY: I would sack him.

Metaphorical
 MEAN: I would sack him.
 SAY: I'd like to sack him.

Objective modulation is regularly rendered explicit through nominalisations of inclination and obligation, either as a quality or a thing. Here, ideational resources for constructing participants are deployed to distance modulations

from negotiation. Adjectives such as *willing, keen, ardent, permissible, requisite, compulsory* and so on are commonly used to construe modulations objectively as qualities; nouns such as *intention, desire, determination, need, obligation, regulation, compulsion* and so on are commonly used to construe modulations objectively as things (this is the grammatical source of the various fields of bureaucratic administration – public, private, military, paramilitary, etc.; see Iedema in press).

4. POSITIONING THE READER

As exemplified in section 2 above, modality is a fundamental resource in dialogue – as part of the ongoing construal and reconstrual of meaning in repartee. Its role in dialogic interplay is examined in detail in Halliday (1982) and Martin (1992a). In monologue, modality functions as an equally fundamental resource for positioning a reader/listener – as part of the dialectic whereby a speaker/writer rhetorically manoeuvres to naturalise a specific reading position (Halliday 1992a, Martin 1992a, b). As far as modality is concerned, this process of positioning seldom involves a single voice (cf. however the discussion of texts (20) and (21) in section 5 below), and this is one aspect of Bakhtin's (e.g. 1981, 1986) insistence on the inherent dialogism of any text.

Chang's hortatory exposition is no exception to this principle, and its deployment of modality would appear to entwine Greiner in a rather uncomfortable semiotic web. An analysis of the modality in Chang's text is presented below, with her grammatical metaphors of obligation, probability and ability unpacked.¹¹

(16) Modality in Chang's exposition

Issue

Why haven't gun laws been changed?
{unmodalised}

Authority

The shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang, forces¹² me to write this letter.
{unmodalised}

Argument

¹¹ Chang's modulated declaratives could be further unpacked as mood metaphors, since they function semantically as commands; this step has not been pursued here. For discussion of the semantic overlap between agency and modulation see Halliday (1985:264-266).

¹² Note that Chang means that she is writing the letter because of her father's death, not that she **has to** write the letter; so *forces* is not taken as metaphorical obligation here.

I CANNOT BELIEVE¹³ that his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks HAS NOT prompted an immediate response from the government!

{median obligation: his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks **ought to** have prompted an immediate response from the government}

After the NEEDLESS¹⁴ killing of over a dozen people in the last two months I MUST EMPHASISE THE DESPERATE NEED to review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state.
{median, then high obligation: Now that over a dozen people were killed who **shouldn't** have been in the last two months you really must review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state}

Policies which, at present, are not STRINGENT enough to prevent the slaughter of innocents.

{ability: Policies which, at present, **cannot** prevent the slaughter of innocents}

How many more tragedies will **have to** {high obligation} occur?

How many families will **have to** {high obligation} live with the anguish of not only the death of their loved one, but the thought that it could have been prevented?

Appeal

I APPEAL to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed.

{high obligation: you **must** realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed}

I KNOW that criminals **cannot** {ability} be stopped

{high probability: **certainly** criminals cannot be stopped}

but **surely** {high probability} we **can** {ability} limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons!

IT WOULD BE IRRESPONSIBLE to ignore Australia's PLEA TO reform antiquated gun law policies! {high obligation: you **must** reform antiquated gun law policies}

An overview of the process through which Chang positions and repositions Greiner is outlined in Figure 4. Her negotiation of obligation and ability is presented as one stream in this dialectic, on the left of the diagram; her negotiation of probability is presented to the right. Subjective and objective

¹³ Chang's explicitly subjective modulations, *I cannot believe...has not* and *I must emphasise the desperate need* both contain implicitly subjective modulations (*cannot* & *must*) which have not been separately analysed here; they function in the metaphor to push up the value of the obligation. Similarly the explicitly objective *need* is taken as part of the subjective metaphor *I must emphasise the desperate need*.

¹⁴ *Needless* (and *need* following) might have been treated as just outside the modulation system, in the border area between modulation and projection (cf. the cline between desire and modulation – *I want you to go, I need you to go, I require you to go, you are required to go, you must go, go*).