

## Malaysians' Voices on Operation Al-Aqsa: A Modality Analysis of Editorial Letters

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of modality in letters to the editorial in Malaysian newspapers following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. The operation, carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023, sparked a significant response from Malaysians, who expressed their opinions through these letters, condemning Israel's retaliatory attacks against Hamas. The use of modality in these letters influences how Malaysians express certainty, obligation, and possibility, shaping their stance and persuasive impact. However, there is limited research on how modality functions in this context, making it essential to analyze it through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The study analyzes modality through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Its objectives are twofold: (1) to examine the use of modality in letters to the editor in Malaysian newspapers and (2) to explore how the modality system is realized in expressing opinions on the conflict 100 days after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. The study analyzed 42 letters from the editorial columns of two mainstream Malaysian newspapers, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*, using Systemic Functional Linguistics. The findings reveal that the writers employed a total of 324 different modal expressions to articulate their opinions on the conflict. Additionally, the study indicates that the use of modality in these letters depends on the propositions of the sentences. Writers use modality to express judgments and opinions, as well as to persuade readers to take action. They frequently use modal verbs that convey obligation, such as "*perlu*" (must), "*boleh*" (can), "*akan*" (will), "*dapat*" (can), and "*mampu*" (able to). This study contributes to a deeper understanding of public sentiment and the linguistic strategies employed in newspaper discourse on geopolitical conflicts.

**Keywords:** Modality system; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Operation Al-Aqsa Flood; Palestine-Israel conflict; letters to editorial

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## INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2023, the world was shocked by an attack launched by Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement), commonly known as Hamas on Israel. The attack, which began at dawn on October 7, 2023, was named Operation Al-Aqsa Flood by Hamas (Syed Ahmad Fathi, 2023). For the global Muslim community, Hamas' attack on Israel is seen as a courageous act to fight for the rights of the Palestinian people, whom the Israeli nation has long oppressed. Issues such as the increase in Israeli settlements, desecration and encroachment upon the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the siege of Gaza by the Israeli military, and repeated Israeli military attacks on the Palestinian population, resulting in the deaths of over 11, 000 Palestinians in the past two decades have triggered a significant response from Palestinian fighters against the Israeli military (Harian Metro, 2023a).

The Israeli side referred to the attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023, as "Operation Iron Swords" (Syed Ahmad Fathi, 2023). Israel has retaliated against the attack and claims that these retaliatory attacks are acts of self-defense against Hamas. The ongoing warfare between Palestine and Israel (until January 26, 2024) has claimed the lives of at least 25,900 Palestinians (Berita Harian, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2024). This casualty figure is expected to rise due to Israel's reluctance to comply with international law and the Geneva Conventions. The world's anger has also escalated due to Israel's actions in cutting off basic supplies to the Palestinian population, such as water, food, and electricity. Furthermore, air strikes targeting hospitals and shelters have drawn condemnation from around the world. Israeli leaders have labeled Operation Al-Aqsa Flood as a terrorist act, a statement supported by most Western leaders and the majority of mainstream Western media (Basim Tweissi, 2023). Western media outlets have portrayed Operation Al-Aqsa Flood as an act of violence. The Western media's coverage of the Al-Aqsa Flood is generally biased, misleading, and presents a pro-Israel narrative (Basim, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2023b).

Malaysia, as an Islamic nation with a strong diplomatic, is seen as steadfast in supporting Hamas's struggle through Operation Al-Aqsa Flood to free Palestine from the grip of Israeli cruelty (BBC News, 2023). The unwavering support continues despite the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, revealing that Malaysia faces threats and intimidation from foreign countries because it supports Palestine (Astro Awani, 2023). Apart from government initiatives such as the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) organising a Week of Solidarity for Palestine starting on October 29, 2023 (Utusan Malaysia, 2023), Malaysian newspapers have also boldly reported on all of Israel's actions and atrocities against the Palestinians, considering their actions as war crimes. The Malaysian people have taken several initiatives themselves as a sign of support and solidarity for Palestinians, such as actively launching campaigns to boycott Israeli products and organizing public demonstrations to protest against attacks on Palestine. Additionally, a Malaysian hacking organization known as DragonForce Malaysia has initiated the 'Call for Cyber Jihad' on social media (Harian Metro, 2023b). The support is not limited to social media; it is also expressed through letters to local newspaper editorials to convey their views and opinions on the ongoing crisis.

In media discourse, letters to editorials (hereafter referred to as LTE) are recognized as a distinct genre of writing due to its different nature compared to other forms of media discourse (Cavanagh, 2019) and based on its characteristics and functions within newspapers (Hobbs, 2019). The LTE section, also known as letters to the editor (Raeymaeckers, 2005), is a platform provided by the newspaper's editorial team to allow readers to share their views and thoughts on specific issues happening worldwide based on previously published news reports (Van & Ha, 2021).

Typically, these letters aim to highlight concerns that matter to the readers. According to Raeymaeckers (2005), reader studies indicate that LTE is widely read and highly valued, and the review or opinion section is typically read by many readers (Siti Aiesha & Syamimi, 2020; Hayek, Mayrl, & Russmann, 2019). Furthermore, studies also show that letter to editor publications by active readers are important and should be considered of equal stature and at par with other published manuscript types (Kumar, 2022). The LTE section allows the voices of the speakers to be heard by the public and can influence public opinion on a particular issue. In fact, according to Siti Aiesha & Syamimi (2020), through LTE, not only are people empowered to voice their opinions and provide perspectives to other readers, but the media also has the potential to gain new information about public agenda and current issues through the readers' perspectives. LTE writing has a higher degree of interpersonal value compared to news reports, which often try to avoid using interpersonal themes to maintain the objectivity of news delivery (Huzaifah, 2018). Through LTE, speakers can express various emotions, viewpoints, opinions, desires, wishes, and statements that call upon readers to act upon their discourse. LTE reflects the interpersonal thinking function of the speaker through the use of modality, which indicates the readers' stance or attitude towards the issues previously reported in news articles (Rafi' & Meethaq, 2016).

This study aims to examine the use of the modality in LTE in Malaysia newspapers for online publication and to explore the realization of the modality system that the writers have employed in conveying their points of view on the ongoing conflict between Palestine-Israel after 100 days of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood was launched by the Hamas. It is important to address the public perspectives on this conflict since the previous research has shown that reader's perceptions of the conflict are often influenced by the framing, language, and narratives used in news reporting. Depending on the outlet, coverage may elicit stronger emotional responses or reinforce existing biases among readers. In the case of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, the way media outlets described the event, attributed responsibility, and contextualized it within the broader conflict would likely shape how readers understood and responded to the incident. Numerous studies have found that newspaper coverage of the conflict often exhibits biases, either pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian, in how the issues are framed and portrayed which can shape public perceptions of the conflict (Jackson, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023). The Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter referred to as SFL) framework by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) has been chosen to analyze the use of modality in LTE as SFL is capable of investigating the functions of words and sentence structures as effectively (Forough & Ruzy, 2012).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review covers several themes related to the analysis of newspaper editorials and letters to the editor (LTE). These themes include the use of evaluative devices in editorial texts, the influence of editorial cartoons on readers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of LTE in expressing views and opinions on social issues, and linguistic analysis of LTE across different newspapers.

Wijayanti (2020) focused on the evaluative devices used in Pangudarasa editorial texts, while Bantugan (2020) investigated the impact of editorial cartoons on Facebook during the COVID-19 quarantine. Lockstone-Binney et al. (2021) explored the influence of speakers in tourism editorial journals, and Bajwa et al. (2021) examined LTE on poverty reduction issues in the Daily Dawn newspaper. Comparative studies of LTE among newspapers were conducted by

Van & Ha (2021) and Iqra et al. (2023), revealing differences in writing styles influenced by cultural backgrounds. Siti Aiesha & Syamimi (2020) analysed LTE on the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, highlighting the varied descriptions of COVID-19 used by Malaysians. Martini (2021, 2022) explored the linguistic features and public opinions represented in LTE discussing the Armenian genocide.

While the literature provides valuable insights into editorials and LTE, it has some limitations. Past studies have been seen to focus on linguistic features (Wijayanti, 2020; Martini, 2021, 2022) but have not fully explored their impact on readers or any policy discussions. While comparative studies such as Van & Ha (2021) and Iqra et al. (2023) highlight cultural influences but lack a broader analysis of public discourse and studies on issue-specific LTE do not assess their persuasive power (Bajwa et al., 2021; Siti Aiesha & Syamimi, 2020). Hence, more interdisciplinary research is needed to understand how LTE influence public opinion.

The literature review related to the analysis of modality in various discourses, including LTE, political discourse, and special messages. Rafi' and Meetaq (2016) conducted a study on modality analysis in LTE, focusing on the functions and variations of modal usage. Mohammad Fadzeli (2021) and Yang (2021) also examined modality in different languages, exploring its role in conveying truthfulness and analyzing its types, degrees, and manifestations. Dayang Sariah et al. (2020) analysed modality in political discourse, specifically in parliamentary debates in Malaysia, highlighting the usage of informative and command modality by government and opposition speakers. Muhammad Faizul et al. (2022) studied the use of modality in special messages during the Movement Control Order, observing modal verbs serving commanding and informative functions. Ali and Saleem (2023) investigated the use of modality in English-language newspaper corpora in Pakistan, focusing on modal verbs of obligation to address the COVID-19 pandemic and shape public perception. While the literature provides valuable insights into modality in LTE, political discourse, and special messages, it also has some limitations that must be highlighted. Past researchers such as Rafi' & Meetaq (2016), Mohammad Fadzeli (2021), and Yang (2021) were seen to be more focused on analysing the modal functions in discourse but do not fully explore the modality impact on audience perception. Although Ali & Saleem (2023) and Muhammad Faizul et al. (2022) examine modality in crisis communication, the lack of comparative analysis across different contexts weakens the broader applicability of their findings.

To sum up, previous research has not concentrated on LTE as a source of data that addresses highly sensitive issues like the geopolitical conflict between Israel and Palestine. Given Palestine-Israel's geopolitical complexity, analyzing modality in LTE can provide insights into the persuasive strategies, ideological positions, and linguistic framing used by Malaysian writers to express their solidarity, support, and opinion regarding the conflict. This analysis could reveal how newspaper readers construct narratives, legitimize viewpoints, or challenge dominant discourses through varying degrees of certainty, obligation, and possibility in their language. Furthermore, exploring this gap could contribute to a deeper understanding of how mass media influence public perception by selecting and publishing LTE that reflect different readers' perspectives.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main focus of this study is to examine and explain the use of modality in the letters to the editorial section of Malay-language newspapers, such as "*Minda Pembaca*" (Readers' Mind) and "*Surat Pembaca*" (Readers' Letter). Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- a) to examine the types of modality in letters to editorial newspapers
- b) to explore the realization of the modality system employed by the writers in expressing their opinions on the conflict after 100 days of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

By achieving these objectives, this study will better understand the use of modality in the letters to the editorial section and how it influences mass media communication in the context of the Malay language.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed the textual analysis method to examine modality in letters to the editor (LTE) from two major Malaysian newspapers, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*. Textual analysis interprets texts by analyzing content, style, structure, and underlying meanings. The selected LTEs focused on Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, a key event in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The two chosen editorial sections, *Surat Pembaca* (*Berita Harian*) and *Minda Pembaca* (*Utusan Malaysia*), were selected due to their broad readership and influence (Abbot, 2011; Muhammad & Adnan, 2013; Ho et al., 2022). While *Utusan Malaysia* is widely regarded as closely connected to Malaysian society (Hizral Tazzif Hisham, 2023), *Berita Harian* serves a distinct readership (Muhammad Raqib & Adnan Hussein, 2013). These newspapers provided a diverse representation of public discourse.

The data consisted of 42 LTEs published online between October 7, 2023, and January 14, 2024—a crucial 100-day period of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. These were obtained from the official newspaper websites (*Utusan Malaysia: Surat Pembaca* and *Berita Harian: Minda Pembaca*). The dataset included 36 letters from *Surat Pembaca* and 6 from *Minda Pembaca*. This sample was deemed sufficient, as prior studies, such as Iqra et al. (2023), analyzed only 30 LTEs. Moreover, data saturation was reached, with recurring themes emerging consistently, ensuring comprehensive insights.

Each LTE was labeled UM1 - UM36 for *Utusan Malaysia* and BH1 - BH6 for *Berita Harian*. Data collection was conducted using IceWeb2 (Weisser, 2017), chosen for its ability to integrate newspaper hyperlinks directly into an editable interface for annotation. The extraction process involved systematically identifying relevant LTEs, inputting the newspaper URLs into IceWeb2, and downloading the letters in chronological order of their publication.

Unlike the comparative studies conducted by Van & Ha (2021) and Iqra et al. (2023), this research does not engage in a direct comparison of modality usage between the two sections. As such, the discussions focus solely on the modality employed within each section rather than contrasting them. The study's findings are presented through tables showing the frequency and percentage of modality usage. The distribution of the frequency and percentage aims to demonstrate usage patterns and explain the results of the analysis of modality distribution. The numerical data will not be discussed quantitatively but will be presented descriptively. To calculate the frequency of modalities usage in LTE in percentage form, the basic formula used is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Frequency}}{\text{Total Number of Frequency}} \times 100$$

For example, the modal word *perlu* (must) appears 52 times in the data. To calculate its percentage, this frequency is divided by the total number of modality occurrences, which is 324, and then multiplied by 100, resulting 16.04 % as the final percentage.

## SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

The data was analysed using the modality system within the Systemic Functional Linguistics theory (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). According to the theory, modality refers to the intermediate meaning between the polarity meanings of 'yes' and 'no' within a clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Matthiessen et al., 2010) and involves the speaker's assessment of a proposition (Halliday, 1994). Speakers use modality to provide or request information through declarative, interrogative, and imperative modes, offer services or goods, and prompt the listener to act upon the utterance (Egins, 2007). Within the modality system, there are four main aspects to consider: types of modality, orientation, value, and polarity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This study focuses on the types of modality, specifically modalization and modulation, used by writers who have written LTE for local newspapers in Malaysia. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), these types of modalities analyzed the interpersonal relationship between the writers and their audience based on the functions of possibility and likelihood (modalization) and obligation and inclination (modulation). Modalization is used in exchanging information, while modulation is used when offering services (Halliday, 1994).

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) associate modalization with two types of meanings, the degree of possibility and likelihood, as speakers convey their attitudes, emotions, and evaluations toward an utterance. According to Egins (2007), the meaning of possibility allows speakers to assess an utterance by indicating the chance of an event occurring or about to happen. In contrast, likelihood reflects the speaker's judgment regarding the frequency or regularity of a particular condition. Meanwhile, modulation is expressed through obligation and inclination and is signaled by imperative clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In imperative utterances that function as directives, obligation signifies the responsibility or pressure the speaker exerts to ensure the listener complies with the expressed proposition. On the other hand, inclination represents the speaker's desire, preference, or willingness for a specific event or action. Wong (2024) stated that in Malay modality according to SFL, modal expressions such as *harus* (should) and *perlu* (must) are often used to give and assert authority, while *boleh* (can) and *mungkin* (maybe) are employed for critical thinking and enhance the engagement between the speakers and the hearer. Ngongo et al. (2024) examine how the mood system and modality function in Kupang Malay, a variant of the Malay language, within the Gospel of Mark. The study concludes that Kupang Malay employs modal verbs strategically to reinforce religious authority, provide instructions, and engage readers in reflection. The findings contribute to understanding how Malay-based languages use mood and modality in religious texts, aligning with SFL's theory of interpersonal meaning.

In the context of Malay LTE, modality in SFL helps shape and determine how information and personal opinions or judgments are communicated and how the interpersonal relationships between the writers and readers of LTE are organized. For instance, through modalization, the degree of possibility or certainty with modal verbs such as *mungkin* (might) and *akan* (will) reflects the likelihood of occurring events to happen. Meanwhile, modulation conveys obligations and inclinations in persuasive or imperative clauses with *mesti* (must) and *perlu* (should) to urge some actions to be taken by the readers. By examining modality in LTE using SFL, we can learn how

the writers express their arguments to make their letters more persuasive and impactful in public debate by presenting the facts, expressing strong opinions, or urging action.

## FINDINGS

LTE are usually written by members of the general public who read the local newspapers. The primary purpose of writing LTE is to convey and share the writers' views and opinions on a certain issue or matter. The main focus of this study is to analyze the use of modalities employed by the LTE writers to convey their assessments, attitudes, and evaluations towards issues related to the Al-Aqsa Flood. This study documented the percentage of modality usage in LTE as follows.

TABLE 1. Frequency of Modalities Usage in Letters to Editorial

Wording	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>perlu</i>	52	16.04
<i>boleh</i>	48	14.81
<i>akan</i>	44	13.58
<i>dapat</i>	41	12.65
<i>mampu</i>	25	7.72
<i>mungkin</i>	21	6.48
<i>harus</i>	20	6.17
<i>ingin</i>	12	3.70
<i>sentiasa</i>	11	3.40
<i>pasti</i>	9	2.80
<i>mahu</i>	8	2.47
<i>patut</i>	7	2.16
<i>sering</i>	6	1.85
<i>mesti</i>	4	1.23
<i>sanggup</i>	4	1.23
<i>tentu</i>	3	0.93
<i>hendak</i>	3	0.93
<i>wajib</i>	3	0.93
<i>kena</i>	2	0.61
<i>insya-Allah</i>	1	0.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the total number of modalities used in the Letters to the Editorial (LTE). A total of 324 occurrences of modalities have been used by the writers in the LTE published in the "Minda Pembaca" and "Surat Pembaca" sections. The research findings reveal a variety of modalities that have been employed by the writers in the LTE, such as "perlu" (need/must) with a percentage of 16.04%, "boleh" (can/may) (14.81%), "akan" (will) (13.68%), "dapat" (can/able to) (12.65%), "mampu" (capable) (7.72%), "mungkin" (maybe/perhaps) (6.48%), "harus" (must) (6.17%), "ingin" (want) (3.70%), "sentiasa" (always) (3.4%), "pasti" (certainly) (2.80%), "mahu" (want) (2.47%), "patut" (should) (2.16%), "sering" (often) (1.85%), "mesti" (must) (1.23%), "sanggup" (willing) (1.23%), "tentu" (certainly) (0.93%), "hendak" (want to) (0.93%), "wajib" (obligatory) (0.93%), "kena" (must) (0.61%), and "insya-Allah" (God willing) (0.31%).

Based on Table 1, the modal words representing the modalization of possibility, such as "mungkin" (maybe/perhaps), "akan" (will), "tentu" (certainly), and "pasti" (certainly), convey the writers' assessment of the likelihood or probability that the information being conveyed is true.

The modal words representing modalization of usuality, such as "*sentiasa*" (always) and "*sering*" (often), indicate the frequency of a state or condition occurring, allowing the writers to convey information that is believed to be true and likely to happen again. Meanwhile, the modal words representing modulation of obligation, such as "*perlu*" (need/must), "*boleh*" (can/may), "*akan*" (will), "*dapat*" (can/able to), "*mampu*" (capable), "*harus*" (must), "*patut*" (should), "*mesti*" (must), "*wajib*" (obligatory), "*kena*" (must), and "*insya-ALLAH*" (God's willing), express the writers' assessment of a state or action that the reader needs or can take regarding the information being conveyed. The modal words representing modulation of inclination, such as "*ingin*" (want), "*hendak*" (want to), "*mahu*" (want), and "*sanggup*" (willing), refer to the writers' volition, willingness and desire to do something, which is conveyed through clauses to the reader. According to SFL, these different types of modality used by the writers in the LTE reflect their assessments, attitudes, and evaluations, as well as their attempts to influence the readers' perceptions and actions regarding the issues being discussed.

### MODALIZATION

Through modalization, the speaker uses the meaning of probability to state an assessment of an utterance that indicates the possibility of something occurring or will occur (Eggins, 2007) and also refers to the degree of uncertainty towards the information being conveyed by the speaker (Mohammad Fadzeli Jaafar, 2021). Meanwhile, the meaning of usuality indicates the speaker is assessing the frequency or recurrence of a state of affairs (Eggins, 2007).

### PROBABILITY

The writers have used four modal words of probability dan certainty in expressing their views and opinions on the issue through LTE, namely " *mungkin*" (maybe/perhaps), " *akan*" (will), " *tentu*" (certainly), " *pasti*" (certainly). These modal words represent the modalization of possibility and probability. They convey the writers' assessment of the likelihood or probability that the information they convey is true. By using these different modal expressions, the writers can communicate their evaluations, attitudes, and assessments regarding the issue to the readers. The analysis will focus on how the letter writers use these specific modal words to modalise their statements in reflecting their judgments of possibility and probability.

- (1) *Kanak-kanak mungkin terjejas fizikal, emosi dan psikologi oleh peristiwa-peristiwa mengerikan seperti kehilangan keluarga, luka atau pengalaman keganasan secara langsung. (UM6)*  
"Children **may be** physically, emotionally and psychologically affected by horrific events such as the loss of family, injury or direct experience of violence."
- (2) *Setakat 13 November lalu, dalam tempoh lebih sebulan pembantaian terhadap rakyat Palestin oleh tentera Israel, lebih 11,000 orang warga Palestin di Gaza telah dibunuh, dengan lebih 4,000 orang daripadanya merupakan kanak-kanak, dan angka yang mengerikan ini masih akan meningkat lagi. (UM11)*  
"As of November 13 last year, in the period of over a month of the massacre against the Palestinian people by the Israeli military, more than 11,000 Palestinian civilians in Gaza have been killed, with more than 4,000 of them being children, and this horrifying figure **will** still rise further."



- (3) *Laporan dikeluarkan sangat 'terpilih', kurang berkredibiliti dan tentu sahaja tidak benar namun itulah yang menjadi sajian kepada pembaca.* (BH6)  
“The reports issued are highly 'selective', lack credibility and are **certainly** untrue, yet that is what is served to the readers.”
- (4) *Kita pernah berjaya boikot, pasti kali ini juga boleh.* (UM35)  
“We have succeeded in boycotting before, we can **surely** do it this time as well.”

The use of modality in sentences (1) and (2) reflects the writer's attempt to shape public perception by emphasizing the probability of war related consequences. In (1), the clause "*Kanak-kanak mungkin terjejas fizikal*" is used by the writer to describe the probability of a certain situation occurring. The modal word *mungkin* (probably) conveys an assessment of likelihood, subtly engaging the reader in considering the serious humanitarian impact of war on children in Gaza, which is to cause physical disability in the children in Gaza. This proposition can be considered potentially true because generally, the effects of war can cause severe physical disability to society, especially young children. In this clause, the writer is trying to evoke empathy and concern, reinforcing the urgency of the issues.

In (2), the clause "*angka yang mengerikan ini masih akan meningkat lagi*" expresses the meaning of the probability that the number of Palestinian deaths will increase due to the continuous bombing attacks by the Israeli side. The writer's view on this is based on the contextual situation indicating that the war will not end shortly and can result in even more deaths. The certainty implied in this clause strengthens the rhetorical strategy of warning readers about the ongoing crisis, urging them to recognize the escalating nature of the conflict and its inescapable consequences. Both instances employ modality to construct a persuasive argument, making the situation appear not only possible to happen but highly probable, thereby reinforcing the gravity of the issue and mobilizing public awareness. These two sentences show the writer's confidence in the validity of the propositions being conveyed.

In (3) and (4), modality shifts from probability to near certainty, reinforcing stronger rhetorical claims and calls to action. In (3), the clause "*tentu sahaja tidak benar*" indicates the writer's high commitment to truth, asserting that Western media reports are mostly biased and unreliable. The use of *tentu* (certainly) eliminates doubt, positioning the writer's claim as undeniable and aligning readers with a counter narrative against Western media portrayals. This high value modality strengthens the persuasive impact of the statement, prompting readers to question mainstream narratives and seek alternative perspectives. Similarly, in (4), the phrase *pasti kali ini juga boleh* employs *pasti* (surely) as a modal of absolute certainty, invoking collective historical success to inspire confidence in boycotting Israeli products. In the context of this sentence, the writer is stating their view that the Malaysian people have previously succeeded in boycotting British goods through the "Buy British Last" campaign on October 3, 1981, and the writer is confident that the effort to boycott Israeli goods will also be successful this time. This finding aligns with Martini (2023), who emphasizes that modal expressions link propositions to parameters of possibility and truth, reinforcing the writer's confidence in their claims. Through these varied modality choices, the writer effectively demonstrating how modality serves as a powerful rhetorical tool in public discourse.

#### USUALITY

Usuality refers to the frequency or regularity of a certain state of information (Halliday, 1994). The meaning of usuality refers to the frequency or recurrence of a certain state or situation, and the likelihood of it happening again. The findings show that two words convey the meaning of usuality used by the writer in the letter to the editor, namely "*sering*" and "*sentiasa*" which represent the meaning of "always". For example:

- (5) *Kanak-kanak yang terperangkap dalam mana-mana konflik peperangan sering mengalami kesan psikologi mendalam berterusan sepanjang hayat mereka.* (UM19)  
"Children trapped in any war conflict **always** experience deep psychological effects that continue throughout their lives."
- (6) *Sejak dahulu kita sentiasa berdiri bersama mereka dan mengetahui secara jelas penderitaan dan perjuangan mempertahankan tanah air sendiri.* (BH3)  
"Since the past, we have **always** stood together with them and clearly understood the sufferings and struggles to defend their own homeland."

In (5) and (6), the use of modality that convey usuality are seen to served as a rhetorical strategy to reinforce certainty and solidarity, shaping public sentiment towards empathy and collective responsibility. In (5), the clause *Kanak-kanak yang terperangkap dalam mana-mana konflik peperangan sering mengalami kesan psikologi* uses *sering* (often) to generalize a widely accepted truth, that war has long-term psychological consequences on children. This modality strengthens the argument by presenting the suffering of war affected children as an undeniable reality, encouraging emotional engagement from readers. By framing the proposition as an ongoing and recurring phenomenon, the writer not only highlights the severity of war's impact but also aligns the readers with a humanitarian perspective, urging compassion and advocacy for affected children in Gaza.

Similarly, in (6), the clause *kita sentiasa berdiri bersama mereka* employs the usuality meaning to assert a collective and unwavering national stance on the Palestinian struggle for liberation from Israeli occupation since the past. The writer is expressing his/her assessment that, in general, the majority of Malaysians have always supported the Palestinians and condemned the violence inflicted by Israel on the Palestinian population. The inclusivity of the pronoun *kita* (we) positions the audience as part of a larger, unified movement, fostering national solidarity and moral alignment with the Palestinian struggle to defend their homeland.

## MODULATION

Eggs (2007) explains that modulation refers to how a speaker uses language to convey their evaluation and stance towards a particular action or occurrence. Through modulation, the function of the clause used by the speaker is to communicate a commodity, either by offering something or by proposing a certain state of affairs, depending on the purpose of the utterance.

## OBLIGATIONS

In the English language, modality markers that convey the sense of obligation are indicated by words such as "can", "could", "should", "must", and "have to" (Yang, 2021). Similarly, in the Malay language, the meaning of obligation is denoted by words that suggest necessity,

appropriateness, ability, permission, and requirement (Asmah Haji Omar, 2018). This study has found that the writer has used modality that employs obligation meaning in the data. This can be evidenced by the varied employment of terms carrying the meaning of obligational in (7) to (16). In other words, the analysis reveals that the writer has extensively utilized a range of modality markers in the text to convey a sense of obligation, using both English and Malay linguistic devices for this purpose. The study highlights the writer's strategic use of such modal expressions throughout the text.

- (7) *Dalam keadaan sekarang kita **perlu** teguhkan kesatuan umat Islam menentang kezaliman Israel.* (BH3)  
“In the current situation, we **must** strengthen strengthen the unity of the Muslim ummah against the oppression of Israel.”
- (8) *Tidak lama lagi, **insya-Allah**.* (UM34)  
“**Insha'Allah**, it won't be long now.”
- (9) *Sedangkan pemimpin Israel itu **boleh** diheret ke Tribunal Jenayah Perang Antarabangsa.* (BH2)  
“Meanwhile, the leaders of Israel **should** be brought to the International Criminal Court.”
- (10) *Amat tidak masuk akal bagi sebuah negara kecil seperti Israel **dapat** bermaharajalela dengan menindas hak-hak rakyat Palestin selama hampir 70 tahun.* (UM27)  
“It is highly unreasonable for a small country like Israel is **able** to continue oppressing the rights of the Palestinian people for almost 70 years.”
- (11) *Langkah itu sedikit sebanyak **mampu** menjadi bukti iltizam kerajaan Malaysia dalam membantu dan mengurangkan penderitaan yang ditanggung rakyat Palestin.* (UM26)  
“This step, to some extent, serves as evidence of the Malaysian government's commitment to assist and alleviate the suffering endured by the Palestinian people.”
- (12) *Isu Palestin tidak **patut** terbatas kepada perjuangan orang Islam sahaja, malah merupakan perjuangan manusia sejagat.* (UM10)  
“The issue of Palestine **should** not be limited to the struggle of Muslims alone; it is a global humanitarian struggle.”
- (13) *Namun, negara-negara Islam di Asia Barat juga **harus** dipersalahkan kerana mereka tidak boleh bersatu padu untuk membina kekuatan Islam di sana.* (UM25)  
“However, the Islamic countries in the Middle East **should** also be held accountable as they have failed to unite and build Islamic strength in the region.”
- (14) *Umat Islam juga **mesti** tidak terlalu bergantung kepada Amerika Syarikat (AS) dan sekutunya terutama dari segi ekonomi.* (UM22)  
“The Muslim ummah **must** also not overly rely on the United States (US) and its allies, especially in terms of the economy.”
- (15) *Adalah **wajib** bagi kita membantu, melindungi dan menyelamatkan Palestin dengan sekecil cara dan usaha sekalipun, hatta semudah mengucapkan beberapa baris doa untuk mereka seusai solat.* (UM20)  
“We **must** help, protect, and save Palestine in whatever small ways and efforts we can, even as simple as offering a few lines of prayer for them after our prayers.”
- (16) *Pemimpin Islam **kena** bertindak lebih tegas henti kekejaman Israel.* (BH2)  
“Islamic leaders **must** take firmer action to put an end to Israel's atrocities.”

The clause “*kita **perlu** teguhkan kesatuan umat Islam*” in (7) indicates that the speaker uses the word *perlu* (must) to express the necessity of a certain action, signaling a moral and collective duty. The use of *perlu* suggests that unity is not optional but essential, reinforcing a strong call to action. In this context, the speaker states that Muslims in Malaysia need to strengthen their unity

to oppose the oppression of Israel against the Palestinians. This persuasive strategy appeals to religious solidarity, positioning unity as the only appropriate response to Israel's oppression. By framing this necessity within a religious and political context, the writer seeks to mobilize readers toward collective resistance.

In (8), the use of a modal word conveying permission, is represented by the phrase "*insya-Allah*" meaning "God willing" which introduces a unique obligation modality influenced by Islamic discourse. According to Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat (2005), "*insya-Allah*" originates from Arabic and conveys the meaning "with the permission of Allah." Unlike typical modal verbs expressing certainty or probability, *insya-Allah* functions as a conditional marker of divine will, reinforcing hope and faith in a just resolution. This culturally embedded modal expression resonates strongly with Muslim readers, enhancing the emotional and ideological appeal of the statement.

In (9) to (11) exhibit the variation in the use of modal words conveying ability, such as "*boleh*" (can), "*dapat*" (able to), and "*mampu*" (capable of). In all these sentences, the writers employ modal words to portray that a certain situation has the potential to occur if the conditions are met. For example, in (9), the word *boleh* (can) suggests that the leaders of Israel can be brought to the International Criminal Court for violating international law. In (9), the word *boleh* implies a moral or legal obligation rather than a mere possibility. The choice of modality frames the action as achievable and justified, encouraging international legal accountability for Israel's leaders. This subtle yet powerful modalization functions to shape reader expectations about justice and global intervention, strengthening the persuasive tone of the argument.

The same idea can be observed in (10), which presents a seemingly impossible situation of Israel oppressing the Palestinian people for almost 70 years. In (10), the modal verb *dapat* (can/be able to) is used in a negative polarity, intensifying the argument. The clause suggested that Israel's continued oppression is absurd and unjustifiable. Additionally, the phrase *amat tidak masuk akal* strengthens the evaluative force of the statement, making the argument more impactful and emotionally charged.

The word *mampu* (capable of) in (11) employs the speaker's opinion on Malaysia's government's capability to provide scholarships to Palestinian students, which can be considered as an action that demonstrates the Malaysian government's genuine effort to alleviate Palestinian suffering. The inclusion of the phrase *sedikit sebanyak* introduces hedging, which softens the claim, making it appear more measured and pragmatic rather than absolute. This strategy balances optimism with realism, aligning with diplomatic discourse while still reaffirming Malaysia's moral and political commitment.

In (12), *Isu Palestin tidak patut terbatas kepada perjuangan orang Islam sahaja*, the use of *tidak patut* (should not) introduces a modality of obligation that suggests a recommendation rather than a command. In this clause, the word *patut* is in negated polarity which carries the meaning 'should not' to convey the speaker's opinion that the issue of oppression against the Palestinian people is not limited to the struggle of Muslims alone, but rather a struggle for all humanity in the world. This modality choice reflects an inclusive and diplomatic stance, broadening the Palestinian struggle beyond religious identity to a universal humanitarian cause to encourage non-Muslim readers to align with the cause without framing it as an exclusive Islamic duty.

The clauses in (13) to (16) demonstrate the meaning of necessity and obligation through modal words such as "*harus*" (should), "*mesti*" (must), "*wajib*" (obligatory), and "*kena*" (must). Using these modal words of necessity, the speaker expresses their strong feelings and desires for

the reader to act based on their discourse. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) explain that when using modal words conveying necessity, the speaker expects the reader to perform the desired action. For instance, in (13), the word *harus* (should) conveys a stronger sense of responsibility than *patut* but is still less forceful than *mesti*. This choice allows the writer to assign blame and moral responsibility while maintaining a degree of caution and diplomatic tone. The phrase *mereka tidak boleh bersatu padu* reinforces criticism through negative polarity, subtly emphasizing the internal weaknesses of Muslim nations without completely condemning them.

In clause (14), the speaker states that the Muslim ummah must not overly rely on the United States and its allies because these major countries strongly support the Israeli government's atrocities. In this context, the speaker presents their opinion to the Muslim reader to act by no longer supporting the US economy. The use of *mesti* (must) conveys absolute necessity, framing self-reliance as an essential, non-negotiable obligation. This high value modality suggests that economic detachment from Western powers is not just preferable but an ideological and strategic necessity. In (15), "*Adalah wajib bagi kita membantu, melindungi dan menyelamatkan Palestin*" represents the high value modality through the word *wajib*, aligning the call to action with Islamic religious duty. This religious framing strengthens moral persuasion, making it clear that supporting Palestine is not merely encouraged but a fundamental religious responsibility among Muslims. Through the clause *Pemimpin Islam kena bertindak lebih tegas henti kekejaman Israel*, the word *kena* (must) in clause (16) functions similarly to *mesti* in (14) that emphasizing strong obligation. However, *kena* is a more informal and direct term, making the appeal forceful yet conversational, signaling an urgent demand rather than a distant expectation.

#### INCLINATION

Asmah Haji Omar (2018) states that in the Malay language, modal words indicating desires in written form are marked by words that exhibit volition, such as "*mahu*" (want), "*hendak*" (desire), "*akan*" (will), and "*ingin*" (wish). The findings of this research also demonstrate the usage of the word "*sanggup*," which can carry a modal meaning of the speaker's inclination to undertake a task.

- (17) *Paling tidak, ada yang melancarkan tabung sumbangan dan pelbagai lagi usaha, termasuk **sanggup** menawarkan diri untuk mengunjungi Gaza bagi menjalankan misi kemanusiaan.* (BH3)  
“At the very least, some have launched donation drives and various other efforts, including being **willing** to offer themselves to visit Gaza to carry out humanitarian missions.”
- (18) *Tiada sesiapa **mahu** bermusuhan jika semuanya dibahagikan secara adil.* (UM36)  
“No one **wants** to be enemies if everything is divided fairly.”
- (19) *Sebagai seorang Melayu Muslim yang sangat prihatin dengan pelbagai konflik dunia, saya **ingin** berkongsi pandangan tentang Minggu Solidariti Palestin di sekolah-sekolah.* (UM21)  
“As a concerned Malay Muslim who is deeply troubled by various global conflicts, I **would** like to share my views on Palestine Solidarity Week in schools.”

In (17), through the clause "*termasuk **sanggup** menawarkan diri untuk mengunjungi Gaza*", the word "*sanggup*" (willing) aims to provide a service offered to perform a certain action. In the context of this sentence, the speaker is expressing their desire to participate in a humanitarian

mission in Gaza to assist the victims of war. This service offer is a commodity used by the speaker to establish interpersonal relationships with the readers, fostering shared responsibility and solidarity (Eggins, 2007). This clause conveys a strong sense of personal agency and sacrifice. By expressing a willingness to act, the writer appeals to moral responsibility and humanitarian values, positioning involvement in Gaza as an honorable and commendable action. This modality of inclination serves to inspire and mobilize readers, subtly encouraging them to contribute to humanitarian efforts.

Clause (18) demonstrates the use of "*mahu*" (want) in the clause "*Tiada sesiapa mahu bermusuh*". The word "*mahu*" indicates the speaker's attitude towards a situation. In this sentence, the use of modal words appears in the form of negative polarity, showing the speaker's desire not to have conflicts between Palestine and Israel if the available resources in both countries are distributed fairly between them. The use of the modality of inclination in a negative structure presents an idealised condition, reinforcing the argument that hostility is not inherent but rather a result of injustice.

In (19), the clause "*saya ingin berkongsi pandangan tentang Minggu Solidariti Palestin di sekolah-sekolah*" presents an informational offering commodity by the speaker to the readers. The speaker has expressed their desires and intentions to share their opinions about the Palestine Solidarity Week program implemented in primary schools on October 29, 2023. This modality signals a personal desire to contribute to the discourse. This linguistic choice presents the speaker's statement as a polite offer of information, aligning with the cultural norms of politeness and indirect assertion in Malay discourse. Rather than imposing a directive, the writer adopts a collaborative tone, inviting engagement while positioning themselves as a concerned and informed voice in the discussion. The modality of inclination here enhances persuasive effectiveness, as it reduces resistance and encourages open discussion on politically sensitive topics.

## DISCUSSIONS

The use of modality in Letters to the Editorials (LTE) in Malay language newspapers is closely linked to the writers' intended meaning and purpose. The writers strategically employ modal words and phrases to express judgments, opinions, and evaluations, as well as to persuade readers to adopt their viewpoints or take action. The findings showed that the most frequently used modalities include obligation and necessity modals such as *perlu* (must/need to), *boleh* (can/may), *akan* (will/shall), *dapat* (can/be able to), and *mampu* (can/be able to), which help frame their arguments effectively.

To strengthen the analysis of modality in LTE, it is crucial to connect the writers' modality choices to broader implications in discourse studies, public sentiment, and rhetorical strategies. As a predominantly Islamic nation, Malaysia's cultural and political landscape plays a key role in shaping modality usage in LTE. The writers used high value modalities such as *harus*, *wajib*, and *mesti* that carry the meaning of 'must' to emphasize religious and moral duties among Malaysians, especially in discussions of this particular Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This high value of modalities in LETs reflects public frustration or urgency, particularly in discussions on governance, social justice, humanity and ethical concerns, reinforcing a call for action to be taken.

Another notable finding of this study was that writers used median and low value modalities in LTE, such as *mungkin* (probably), *boleh* (can), and *patut* (should) to express their opinions carefully or avoid direct confrontation. This is driven by the desire to maintain social

harmony in this politically sensitive issue and to avoid self-censorship due to media restrictions and regulations in Malaysia. Additionally, the use of low value modalities in LTE was used as hedging strategies, which are employed to maintain politeness and social harmony aligning with Islamic and Malay cultural norms in Malaysia. These modality choices reflect how the LTE writers in Malay language newspapers navigate public discourse, balancing criticism, persuasion, and compliance within the nation's unique socio-political and religious context.

Overall, the study provided valuable insights into public sentiment and discourse surrounding the conflict by examining the strategic use of modality in LTE in Malay language newspapers. The findings revealed how writers frame their arguments to influence readers' opinions, either reinforcing dominant narratives or challenging them through carefully selected modal expressions. This linguistic analysis is crucial for understanding how modality contributes to media influence, as newspapers selectively publish letters that align with or oppose prevailing viewpoints that shape the public discourse. Additionally, modality plays a key role in conflict framing, portraying certain groups or policies as either absolute necessities or open to debate, thereby shaping public perceptions of social and political conflicts. By moving beyond sentence-level analysis, LTE studies can offer deeper insights into how modality shapes public engagement, persuasive discourse, and ideological positioning in media narratives, highlighting its significance in broader discourse studies.

## CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the use of modal words in Malay-language letters to the editor (LTEs) through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The findings reveal a significant variation in modal usage, reflecting the writers' intentions in discussing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict after 100 days of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. Malaysians predominantly use modal verbs of obligation, such as *perlu* (must), *boleh* (can), *akan* (will), *dapat* (able to), and *mampu* (capable), to express their support and solidarity with Palestine. The analysis highlights how LTEs function as a medium for public discourse, fostering interpersonal connections between writers and readers while reinforcing public engagement with socio-political issues.

This study is a preliminary research that attempts to explain the use of modal words in the Malay language. Previous studies on modalities in the Malay language have mostly used political data, such as studies by Mohammad Hisyam & Ab. Razak (2019), Dayang Sariah et al. (2020) and Muhammad Faizul et al. (2022). However, studies on modalities using Malay LTE are still limited. Previous LTE studies have been predominantly analysed using English newspaper data, such as studies conducted by Siti Aiesha & Syamimi (2020) and Huzaifah A. Hamid (2018). This study aims to provide a broader discussion on the meaning and function of modal words in the Malay language by utilizing different data sources.

In addition to its linguistic contributions, this study has practical implications for both readers and newspaper editorial teams. For Malaysian newspaper readers, it underscores the importance of LTEs as a space where individuals can actively participate in socio-political discussions, voice their concerns, and demonstrate support for causes such as the Palestinian struggle. By analyzing the use of modality in these letters, this study highlights how language is employed to persuade, inform, and evoke action, thereby empowering readers to engage critically with the discourse presented in editorial sections. For newspaper editorial teams, the findings

provide insights into how LTEs shape public awareness and contribute to discussions on conflict resolution and peace-building efforts.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enhances the understanding of SFL's interpersonal metafunction, demonstrating how modality serves as a key linguistic resource for expressing public attitudes, persuasion, and ideological positioning in Malaysian discourse. The use of strong modal verbs such as *mesti* (must) and *patut* (should) often reflects public demand for action or policy changes, while weaker modals such as *mungkin* (possible) indicate hedging or uncertainty, reflecting careful positioning within a politically sensitive media landscape. The presence of modality in LTEs not only conveys personal stance but also aligns with the ideological perspectives of the newspapers, subtly influencing public discourse and media framing. Lastly, this study contributes to the literature on Malay modality by offering empirical insights into how modality is used in public discourse, such as LTE. By analysing modality in LTE, this research highlights how Malay speakers express obligation, possibility, and certainty in socio-political discussions, reflecting linguistic patterns unique to Malay media discourse. These findings expand existing studies on Malay modality by offering a discourse based perspective, demonstrating how language choices in newspapers shape reader engagement, persuasion strategies, and public sentiment.

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