
Linguocultural realization of epistemic modality in Uzbek and English: phraseological units, evidentiality, and cultural schemas

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Annotation *This article examines how epistemic modality – the linguistic encoding of the speaker’s level of confidence, doubt, and (dis) belief in a proposition – is realized in Uzbek and English. The analysis combines the functional-semantic perspective of modality with a discussion of the evidential-epistemic boundary and a cultural-conceptual view of language as collective knowledge. The data set is drawn from literary discourse, primarily from the Uzbek novel “Shaytanat” by Tohir Malik and the English novel “The Godfather” by Mario Puzo, supplemented with illustrative examples fitting the genre. The units were categorized into three epistemic fields (certainty, doubt/suspicion, and uncertainty) and compared cross-linguistically. Results show that English typically marks epistemic stance through explicit lexical means – modal verbs, adverbs of manner, and first-person predicates (I think, I guess, probably), while Uzbek often favors indirect, interactionally sensitive strategies such as evidential verb forms, sentence-final particles (shekilli, bo’lsa kerak), and culturally loaded fate-oriented expressions (Xudo xohlasa, nasib qilsa). These contrasts reflect different cultural schemas of knowledge, politeness, and responsibility in communication.*

Keywords *Epistemic modality, evidentiality, phraseology, cultural conceptualization, Uzbek, English, certainty, doubt*

Ingliz va o‘zbek tillaridagi epistemik modallikning lingvomadaniy ifodalanishi: frazeologik birliklar, evidensiallik va madaniy sxemalar

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Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqolada epistemik modallik – so‘zlovchining fikrga nisbatan ishonch, shubha va ishonmaslik darajasini til vositalari orqali ifodalash – o‘zbek va ingliz tillarida qanday namoyon bo‘lishi o‘rganiladi. Tahlil modallikning funksional-semantik jihati, dalilga asoslangan va epistemik chegaralar muhokamasi hamda tilning jamoa bilimi sifatidagi madaniy-konseptual qarashlarini qamrab oladi. Ma’lumotlar adabiy asarlardan, asosan Tohir Malikning “Shaytanat” va Mario Puzoning “Cho‘qintirgan ota” romanlaridan, shuningdek, janrga mos boshqa misollardan olingan. Namunalar uchta epistemik maydon (ishonch, shubha va noaniqlik) bo‘yicha tasniflanib, tillararo qiyoslangan. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, ingliz tilida epistemik munosabat ko‘pincha aniq leksik vositalar – modal fe‘llar, ravishlar va birinchi shaxs kesimlari (men o‘ylayman, taxminimcha, ehtimol) orqali ifodalanadi. O‘zbek tilida esa ko‘proq bilvosita, muloqotga asoslangan usullar – evidensial fe‘l shakllari, gap oxiridagi yuklamalar (shekilli, bo’lsa kerak) va madaniy*

ma'noga ega taqdir bilan bog'liq iboralar (Xudo xohlasa, nasib qilsa) qo'llaniladi. Bu farqlar muloqotda bilim, odob va mas'uliyatga oid turli madaniy qarashlarni aks ettiradi.

Kalit so'zlar *Epistemik modallik, evidensiallik, frazeologik birliklar, madaniy konseptualizatsiya, o'zbek tili, ingliz tili, ishonch, shubha*

Лингвокультурная реализация эпистемической модальности в узбекском и английском языках: фразаология, эвиденциальность и культурные схемы

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Аннотация *В статье рассматривается, как эпистемическая модальность (выражение уверенности, сомнения и недоверия говорящего) реализуется в узбекском и английском языках. Материалом послужили художественные тексты: роман Тохира Малика "Шайтанат" и роман Марио Пьюзо "The Godfather", а также иллюстративные примеры, типичные для данного жанра. Единицы группировались по трём полям: уверенность, сомнение/предположение и недоверие. Сопоставительный анализ показывает, что в английском языке эпистемическая позиция чаще выражается лексически (модальные глаголы, наречия-оценки, конструкции I think/I guess), тогда как в узбекском языке широко используются грамматические эвиденциальные формы, частица-показатели предположения (shekilli, bo'lsa kerak) и культурно маркированные формулы, связывающие результат с волей судьбы/ Бога (Xudo xohlasa, nasib qilsa). Выявленные различия отражают культурные схемы знания, вежливости и коммуникативной ответственности. Кроме того, анализ демонстрирует влияние прагматического контекста и жанровых особенностей на выбор языковых средств, что позволяет глубже понять межкультурные различия в выражении отношения говорящего к достоверности сообщаемой информации. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в преподавании сопоставительной лингвистики, перевода и межкультурной коммуникации.*

Ключевые слова *Эпистемическая модальность, эвиденциальность, фразеологизмы, культурная концептуализация, узбекский язык, английский язык, уверенность, сомнение*

Introduction

Modality is commonly treated as a functional-semantic category that links propositional content with a speaker's assessment of reality. Within this broad

domain, epistemic modality is concerned with how speakers encode the strength of their knowledge, inference, or belief: whether an event is presented as certain, probable, doubtful, or unreliable. Closely related is

evidentiality, i.e., the linguistic marking of information source (seen, inferred, reported). Current research shows that evidential devices participate in pragmatic meaning-making across languages and that their contribution to certainty judgments can be experimentally tested (Degen et al., 2019).

This article provides a comparative, linguocultural account of epistemic modality in Uzbek and English. The study pursues two interconnected aims: (a) to systematize the main linguistic resources that encode epistemic stance in both languages (lexical, grammatical, and syntactic), and (b) to show how culturally grounded ways of construing knowledge, politeness, and responsibility surface in phraseological units and routine expressions. The analysis focuses on artistic discourse and uses examples from Tohir Malik's novel *Shaytanat* and Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (Malik, n.d.; Puzo, 1969), where stance marking is especially salient due to dialogic tension and evaluation.

Theoretical Background: Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality

Epistemic modality is usually defined as the semantic-pragmatic encoding of a speaker's commitment to the truth of a proposition. In practical terms, it answers questions such as: How sure is the speaker? Is the statement based on direct evidence, hearsay, or inference? Where does the speaker place the boundary between fact and conjecture? Scholars emphasize that epistemic meaning interacts with evidentiality, yet the two categories are not identical. Evidentiality highlights source of information, whereas epistemic modality evaluates the likelihood or reliability of the proposition; nevertheless, in actual discourse they often co-occur and constrain each other (de Haan, 1999; Kroeger, 2019).

A useful working distinction for the present study is to treat evidential markers as a frequent pathway into epistemic interpretations: reported or inferred information is typically presented with lower

commitment than directly witnessed facts. The pragmatic potential of such devices is precisely what motivates cross-linguistic experimental work on expressions like *definitely* and *maybe* and their counterparts in other languages (Degen et al., 2019).

Linguistic Resources for Epistemic Stance in English and Uzbek

In English, modality is expressed through several interacting layers. At the morphological level, tense and mood forms contribute to real vs. hypothetical readings (e.g., *I wish I were...*, *If I had known...*, *I would have come...*). At the lexical level, modal verbs (*may/might*, *must*, *should*, *can/could*, *will/would*, *ought to*) and stance adverbs (*maybe*, *perhaps*, *probably*) are primary indicators of epistemic force. At the syntactic level, particular clause types and constructions – imperatives as directives, or as *if/though* clauses – frame events as commands, suppositions, or counterfactuals (e.g., *She was talking as if nothing had happened*).

A corpus-based description of English stance adverbials distinguishes several semantic groups: (1) confidence vs. doubt (no doubt, certainly, undoubtedly, perhaps, maybe, probably); (2) actuality and factuality (in fact, actually, really, truly); (3) source of knowledge (apparently, evidently, reportedly; according to...); and (4) limitation of a judgment (generally, mainly, in most cases, typically). Such groupings are important because they show that epistemic stance is not a single scale but a cluster of meanings related to truth, evidence, and generalization.

Uzbek also has rich epistemic resources, but their distribution differs. Alongside lexical predicates and modifiers that express possibility or necessity (*mumkin* 'possible', *kerak/zarur* 'necessary', *shart* 'required') Uzbek widely uses particles and clitic-like elements that soften assertions or mark uncertainty. Especially salient are sentence-final expressions such as *bo'lsa kerak* ('it must be / probably'), *shekilli* ('apparently / it seems'), and *har holda* ('in any case'), which allow the speaker to keep

an appropriate interpersonal distance while still expressing a stance.

A key contrast concerns the grammaticalization of evidentiality. Uzbek, like many Turkic languages, routinely marks whether information is witnessed, inferred, or reported through verb forms and suffixes such as *ekan* and *-ibdi*. Such markers can convey 'I did not witness this, but I was told' or 'I infer this' without an explicit lexical hedge like *perhaps*. English, by contrast, has no obligatory grammatical evidential system and often relies on optional lexical phrases (apparently, reportedly, I heard that...) or on the speaker's overt self-positioning.

Data and Method

The analysis is qualitative and contrastive. The core examples are drawn from two literary works representing comparable criminal-drama settings: *Shaytanat* (Uzbek) and *The Godfather* (English). These texts provide naturally motivated contexts in which speakers negotiate trust, suspicion, and certainty. The study also uses a limited number of genre-consistent illustrative sentences to

demonstrate idiomatic meaning in a clear form; such examples are explicitly marked as illustrative.

Following a tripartite interpretation of epistemic stance in terms of reliability, uncertainty, and non-reliability, all collected phraseological units were grouped into three fields: (1) certainty (strong commitment), (2) doubt/assumption (intermediate or unstable commitment), and (3) distrust (explicit low credence toward information or a person). Within each field, units were compared across languages with attention to (a) semantic content, (b) metaphoric motivation, and (c) interactional function (politeness, warning, distancing, persuasion).

Phraseological Markers of Certainty, Doubt, and Distrust

Phraseological units are particularly informative for epistemic analysis because they encode culturally conventional ways of evaluating evidence. Table 1 summarizes representative units from Uzbek and English, with short translations and discourse functions.

Epistemic field	Language	Idiom / unit	Approximate meaning	Illustrative context
Certainty	Uzbek	Shubha yo'qki	'There is no doubt that...' (strong certainty)	Narrator/character presents an event as unquestionable (Malik, n.d.).
Certainty	Uzbek	Ishonchi komil bo'lganda	'If he were completely sure...' (conditional certainty)	Used to imply that full proof is lacking; otherwise the speaker would act more decisively.
Certainty	English	Beyond a shadow of a doubt	Absolute certainty	Speaker claims total confidence that an inference is correct.
Certainty	English	Bet your bottom dollar	'You can be sure / count on it'	Warns that an outcome is virtually guaranteed (Puzo-style context).
Doubt / assumption	Uzbek	Gumonim bor	'I have a suspicion'	Speaker admits lack of proof but signals a hypothesis (Malik, n.d.).

Doubt / assumption	Uzbek	Ming xayolga bordi	'Went through a thousand thoughts'	Depicts anxious guessing and multiple possible scenarios.
Doubt / assumption	English	Smell a rat	Sense something wrong; suspect deceit	Intuitive suspicion that a hidden plot exists (Puzo, 1969).
Doubt / assumption	English	Have second thoughts	Begin to doubt a decision	Speaker hesitates and re-evaluates a plan.
Distrust	Uzbek	Quloqlariga ishonmay	'Cannot believe one's ears'	Speaker treats news as hardly credible due to surprise (Malik, n.d.).
Distrust	Uzbek	O'zimga ham ishonmayman	'I don't even trust myself'	Signals extreme suspicion and caution toward others and oneself.
Distrust	English	I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him	Total distrust	Speaker portrays the person as fundamentally unreliable (The Godfather context).
Distrust	English	Take it with a grain of salt	Treat information skeptically	Advice not to accept a claim at face value; invites critical stance.

Table 1.

The certainty field demonstrates that both languages have conventionalized strong-commitment formulas. Uzbek *shubha yo'qki* functions similarly to English *no doubt*, but it can also carry an evaluative narrator voice in literary prose. In contrast, *ishonchi komil bo'lganda* is a strategic 'near-certainty' construction: it does not assert truth directly; instead, it frames certainty as a missing condition ('if I were sure, I would not waste words'), which is a pragmatic way to avoid over-commitment.

In the doubt/assumption field, Uzbek *gumonim bor* foregrounds the speaker's limited knowledge in an explicit yet interpersonally careful form. *Ming xayolga bordi* conceptualizes uncertainty as mental over-activity: the speaker (or narrator) portrays doubt as a sequence of competing scenarios. English idioms in this field often rely on sensory metaphors. *Smell a rat*, for example, maps suspicion onto olfactory perception, implying that deceit can be 'detected' before it is proven.

This aligns with the tendency of English to represent suspicion as an individual's intuitive diagnosis.

The distrust field is the clearest site of pragmatic confrontation. Uzbek *quloqlariga ishonmay* frames disbelief as a reaction to unexpected information, while *o'zimga ham ishonmayman* signals a worldview of constant vigilance. English *I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him* is overtly evaluative and socially forceful; it assigns the target a stable negative credibility status. *Take it with a grain of salt*, in turn, performs indirect persuasion: it does not state 'this is false' but instructs the addressee to downgrade commitment.

Cultural Schemas Behind Epistemic Choices

A cultural-conceptual approach treats recurrent stance patterns as reflections of shared cognitive experience and social norms. Language stores collective knowledge, values, and interpretive routines; therefore, epistemic modality is not only a grammatical matter but

also a window into how communities conceptualize evidence, authority, and appropriate interpersonal behavior.

In Uzbek discourse, indicating information source and maintaining respectful indirectness are salient. Evidential verb forms (*ekan*, *-ibdi*) and sentence-final particles (*shekilli*, *bo'lsa kerak*) enable speakers to signal that their knowledge is partial, inferred, or reported. This can function as a politeness strategy: by lowering categorical force, the speaker avoids sounding confrontational, especially in interactions shaped by age and status hierarchies. For instance, in Shaytanat characters often express assumptions without an explicit 'I think' frame, embedding uncertainty into the clause through particles and aspectual forms.

A culturally prominent Uzbek schema also links future outcomes to fate and divine will. Expressions such as *Xudo xohlasa* ('God willing') and *nasib qilsa* ('if it is destined') present the speaker's plan as contingent and deferential. From an epistemic perspective, these formulas encode limited human knowledge about the future and relocate ultimate control to a higher power. In the analyzed contexts, references to divine will soften commitments and transform potentially categorical promises into hopeful projections.

English discourse, in comparison, tends to foreground an individual speaker's epistemic responsibility: assertions are often accompanied by overt markers of personal evaluation (*I think...*, *I guess...*) or by calibrated modal verbs and adverbs (*must*, *might*, *probably*). In *The Godfather*, characters frequently voice their judgments explicitly, which fits a communicative norm where distinguishing fact from opinion is valued. For example, *I think* signals that the clause is an assessment rather than a direct report, while *must* often encodes a strong inference ('He must be good-hearted'; 'He must be dead by now'), presenting the speaker's conclusion as highly probable.

The difference becomes especially visible when similar meanings are compared. English must can communicate a firm inference, whereas Uzbek often prefers a softer construction such as *-sa kerak* ('it seems / probably'). Consider a dialogic fragment where a character hesitates: '*Rom bo'lsa kerak*,' literally 'It is probably timber,' which signals that the answer is tentative and socially cautious. Such choices match a discourse preference for indirectness and face-saving negotiation.

Finally, uncertainty management can be linked to broader cultural patterns. Research on cultural attitudes toward uncertainty suggests that societies employ different resources – rules, technology, religion – to reduce unpredictability. Within the Uzbek worldview reflected in the texts, religious-fatalistic formulas provide psychological comfort and a legitimate way to speak about uncertain futures. In contemporary everyday English, explicit fate-oriented formulas (e.g., *God willing*, *if it's meant to be*) exist but are typically less frequent and stylistically more marked; speakers more often use secular probability markers (*hopefully*, *with any luck*, *we'll see*, *I'm not sure*).

Conclusion

The comparative analysis confirms that epistemic modality in Uzbek and English is structured by both linguistic systems and culturally shared schemas. English tends to externalize epistemic stance through lexical and speaker-centered markers (modal verbs, stance adverbs, first-person predicates), supporting a discourse norm that encourages explicit calibration of certainty. Uzbek, while also using lexical modal elements, often relies on grammatical evidentiality and sentence-final particles that encode indirectness, deference, and interpersonal sensitivity.

Phraseological units in both languages map epistemic meanings onto vivid conceptual domains (*shadow*, *money bets*, *smell*, *salt*, *ears*, *heart*), yet the preferred metaphors and

interactional functions differ. Uzbek data frequently connects uncertainty with respectful distance and fate-based framing, whereas English idioms highlight personal detection, critical evaluation, and direct distrust. These

findings underline that epistemic modality should be studied as an interface phenomenon where semantics, pragmatics, and cultural cognition jointly shape meaning in discourse.

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