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## **Modality and Discursive Strategies in United Nations Security Council Resolutions: A Sociolinguistic Analysis**

**Kuchimova Nilufar Turanbayevna**

*Doctoral student,  
Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages*

**Annotation** *This article examines modality and discursive strategies in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions from linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. The study aims to identify how language functions as a mechanism of authority, regulation, and institutional power in legal-diplomatic discourse. The research material consists of UNSC resolutions and International Court of Justice decisions published between 2015 and 2017. The analysis is based on critical discourse analysis and functional approaches to modality (Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1994). The findings demonstrate that UNSC resolutions are characterized by syntactic complexity, nominalization, passivization, and dense legal terminology. As well as, particular attention is paid to the modal verb shall, which functions as a performative marker of legal obligation and institutional authority. Comparative analysis of English and Uzbek texts reveals semantic expansion and translation transformations in Uzbek renderings. Moreover, the study confirms that UN discourse reflects and constructs global power relations through institutional language.*

**Keywords** *UN Security Council, diplomatic discourse, modality, sociolinguistics, legal language, discourse analysis, performative verbs, nominalization, institutional power*

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## **BMT Xavfsizlik Kengashi rezolyutsiyalarida modallik va diskursiv strategiyalar: sotsiolingvistik tahlil**

**Kuchimova Nilufar Turanbayevna**

*Doktorant,  
Samarqand davlat chet tillar instituti*

**Annotatsiya** *Ushbu maqola Birlashgan Millatlar Tashkiloti Xavfsizlik Kengashi rezolyutsiyalarida modallik va diskursiv strategiyalarning lingvistik hamda sotsiolingvistik xususiyatlarini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotning asosiy maqsadi huquqiy-diplomatik diskursda tilning hokimiyat, nazorat va institutsional ta'sir vositasi sifatida qanday ishlashini aniqlashdan iborat. Tadqiqot materiali sifatida 2015–2017-yillarda e'lon qilingan BMT Xavfsizlik Kengashi rezolyutsiyalari hamda Xalqaro Sud qarorlari tanlab olindi. Tahlilda tanqidiy diskurs tahlili yondashuvi va Fowlerning nazariy qarashlaridan foydalanildi (Fowler, 1991). Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, rezolyutsiyalar murakkab sintaktik qurilmalar, nominalizatsiya, passiv konstruktsiyalar va yuqori terminologik zichlik bilan tavsiflanadi. Ayniqsa, "shall" modal fe'li majburiyat va huquqiy kuchni ifodalovchi asosiy performativ vosita sifatida namoyon bo'ladi (Halliday, 1994). Tadqiqot shuningdek ingliz va o'zbek matnlari o'rtasidagi semantik kengayish hamda tarjimaviy transformatsiyalarni ochib beradi. Natijalar xalqaro huquqiy diskursda tilning hokimiyat va ideologiyani shakllantirishdagi rolini tasdiqlaydi.*

**Kalit so'zlar** *BMT Xavfsizlik Kengashi, diplomatik diskurs, modallik, sotsiolingvistika, huquqiy til, diskurs tahlili, performativ fe'llar, nominalizatsiya, institutsional hokimiyat, ko'p tillilik diskursi*

## **Модальность и дискурсивные стратегии в резолюциях Совета Безопасности ООН: социолингвистический анализ**

**Кучимова Нилуфар Туранбаевна**  
*Докторант,  
Самаркандский государственный  
институт иностранных языков*

**Аннотация** *В данной статье рассматриваются модальность и дискурсивные стратегии в резолюциях Совета Безопасности ООН с лингвистической и социолингвистической точек зрения. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении того, каким образом язык функционирует как инструмент власти, регулирования и институционального воздействия в юридико-дипломатическом дискурсе. Материалом исследования послужили резолюции Совета Безопасности ООН и решения Международного суда ООН, опубликованные в 2015–2017 годах. Анализ основан на методах критического дискурс-анализа и функциональной теории модальности (Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1994). Результаты показывают, что резолюции характеризуются сложными синтаксическими конструкциями, номинализацией, пассивными структурами и высокой терминологической плотностью. Особую роль играет модальный глагол *shall*, выражающий обязательность и юридическую силу решений. Исследование подтверждает, что дискурс ООН отражает и формирует глобальные властные отношения.*

**Ключевые слова** *Совет Безопасности ООН, дипломатический дискурс, модальность, социолингвистика, юридический язык, дискурс-анализ, номинализация, институциональная власть*

### **Introduction**

After the end of the Second World War, the international community increasingly sought mechanisms to ensure peace, security, and cooperation among states. In this context, the United Nations (UN) was established together with its six principal organs: the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the Secretariat, the Security Council (UNSC), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). These institutions were created to maintain

international stability and prevent violations of international law.

The legitimacy of the UN's authority in matters such as armed conflict, terrorism, disarmament, and human rights protection derives from the UN Charter, which functions as a constitutional framework for international governance. Within this system, the Security Council serves as the executive body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, while the International Court of Justice functions as the judicial organ that

resolves disputes between states according to international law. Given these responsibilities, the language used by the UN must be formal, precise, and authoritative. Legal-diplomatic discourse is therefore characterized by specialized terminology, complex syntactic structures, and highly standardized formulations. Such discourse not only communicates institutional decisions but also reflects and constructs power relations within the international system. (Chilton, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2008).

This study examines modality and discursive strategies in UNSC resolutions from a sociolinguistic perspective. Particular attention is paid to modal verbs, performative structures, nominalization, passivization, and translation shifts between English and Uzbek texts. Through discourse analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate how institutional language functions as an instrument of authority, regulation, and ideological representation.

#### **Literature review**

Legal and diplomatic discourse has attracted considerable scholarly attention in linguistics and discourse studies. Researchers have explored how institutional language reflects authority, ideology, and social hierarchy. (Milliken, 1999; Ilyin, 2012). Alla investigates legal discourse in terms of style, syntax, terminology, and translation strategies. Her research emphasizes the role of the modal verb shall in expressing legal obligation and argues that legal translation requires careful consideration of pragmatic and contextual meaning. Fakhouri focuses on the pragmatic dimensions of legal translation, demonstrating that semi-technical terminology often requires contextual adaptation rather than literal equivalence. His study concludes that legal translators must understand both linguistic and institutional contexts to preserve legal force.

Lisina compares English and Norwegian legal discourse and identifies syntactic complexity and stylistic inconsistency as

defining features of legal language. She suggests that translation strategies should balance legal precision with comprehensibility for non-specialist audiences.

Fowler's theory of critical discourse analysis provides an important framework for the present study. According to Fowler (1991), language reflects social relations and ideological structures through lexical choice, grammatical organization, and discourse strategies. Concepts such as nominalization and passivization conceal agency and contribute to institutional objectivity.

Halliday's functional theory of language also plays a central role in understanding modality within legal discourse. Halliday (1994) argues that modality expresses interpersonal meaning through obligation, certainty, and permission. In UNSC resolutions, modal verbs such as shall and may structure institutional authority and regulate member-state behavior. Searle's speech act theory further explains how institutional statements function performatively. Expressions such as decides, demands, and authorizes are not merely descriptive but enact legal and political decisions. (Searle, 1969). Together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that legal-diplomatic discourse is a highly structured communicative system that reflects institutional power and ideological control.

#### **Methodology**

The data for this study consist of English-language United Nations Security Council resolutions and International Court of Justice decisions published between 2015 and 2017. Fifteen UNSC resolutions and nine ICJ decisions related to armed conflicts and nuclear proliferation were selected from official UN documentation. The research employs a qualitative discourse-analytical framework based on sociolinguistic and critical discourse analysis approaches (Fowler, 1991). Comparative analysis was conducted between English source texts and their Uzbek renderings in order to identify

lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic transformations.

The analysis focused on several linguistic dimensions:

- modality and performative structures;
- nominalization and passivization;
- lexical density and terminology;
- discourse sequencing and clause organization;
- translation shifts between English and Uzbek texts.

Fowler's critical discourse analysis framework was used to examine how institutional authority is encoded through language. Halliday's functional theory of modality and Searle's speech act theory were also applied to interpret the performative and directive functions of modal constructions. This methodological approach allows for an integrated analysis of legal-diplomatic discourse as both a linguistic and sociopolitical phenomenon.

### Results

The findings demonstrate that UNSC resolutions exhibit a high degree of syntactic complexity, dense terminology, and standardized formulaic organization. Long subordinate clauses and nominalized constructions contribute to the formal and impersonal tone of the discourse. One of the most significant findings concerns the use of modality. Modal verbs such as shall, may, must, and can structure institutional authority and encode different levels of obligation and possibility (Halliday, 1994). Among these forms, shall functions as the dominant performative marker of legal obligation.

For example: *"Member States shall prevent the supply of arms..."*

In this structure, the modal verb shall establishes a binding legal obligation and positions member states as responsible actors within international law. The analysis also reveals extensive use of performative verbs such as decides, condemns, authorizes, and demands. These verbs function as directive speech acts that not only describe

institutional decisions but also enact them (Searle, 1969).

Another important finding concerns nominalization and passivization. By transforming actions into abstract nouns and using passive constructions, the discourse minimizes direct agency and presents decisions as objective institutional realities. This contributes to neutrality while simultaneously obscuring responsibility (Fowler, 1991). Lexical repetition was also identified as a key strategy for maintaining legal precision. Instead of substituting terms with pronouns or synonyms, resolutions repeatedly use identical expressions to avoid ambiguity.

Comparative analysis between English and Uzbek texts demonstrates that English legal discourse frequently relies on semantic compression through nominalized terminology such as implementation or non-proliferation, whereas Uzbek translations tend to expand these meanings into more explicit descriptive constructions.

### Discussion and Analysis

The findings confirm that UNSC discourse is not merely informative but deeply performative and ideological. Language functions as a mechanism through which institutional authority is constructed and maintained.

#### 1. Modality and Institutional Authority

Deontic modality plays a central role in UNSC resolutions. Modal verbs establish hierarchies of obligation and regulate the behavior of member states. The modal verb shall is particularly important because it encodes binding legal force and transforms linguistic expressions into institutional directives.

Shall → obligation; may → permission ; can → capability.

In contrast, may introduces flexibility and permission, while can and will indicate capability and expected outcomes.

#### 2. Nominalization and Passivization Nominalization and passive structures

contribute significantly to the depersonalization of legal-diplomatic discourse. Through these strategies, agency is minimized and actions are presented as abstract institutional processes rather than subjective decisions.

For example: "The Security Council condemns in the strongest terms the nuclear test conducted by the DPRK." Here, the passive construction shifts attention from the actor to the action itself, reinforcing institutional neutrality.

3. *Lexical Density and Formality UNSC resolutions* are characterized by highly specialized terminology and formulaic expressions. Borrowed Latin and French terms such as *prima facie* and *hereby* reinforce institutional tradition and authority. Complex prepositional constructions such as "with the assistance of" or "for the purpose of" further increase syntactic density and contribute to the formal style of the discourse.
4. *Translation and Semantic Expansion Comparative analysis* reveals important differences between English source texts and Uzbek translations. English discourse often condenses meaning into compact lexical units, whereas Uzbek renderings rely on expanded syntactic explanations. This process enhances accessibility and clarity in Uzbek but may reduce the conciseness and rigid formality characteristic of English legal discourse.
5. *Discourse and Power Relations*. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the linguistic structures used in UNSC resolutions reflect broader global power relations. Institutional authority is enacted through discourse strategies that regulate behavior, establish obligations, and legitimize political decisions. (van Leeuwen, 2008). This, language in UN discourse operates simultaneously

as a communicative medium and as a mechanism of governance.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that the language of United Nations Security Council resolutions represents a highly structured and strategically organized form of legal-diplomatic discourse. Through sociolinguistic and discourse-analytical approaches, the research confirms that linguistic choices within these texts function as instruments of institutional authority and international governance. The analysis reveals that UNSC resolutions are characterized by syntactic complexity, dense terminology, nominalization, passivization, and formulaic organization. These features contribute to the formal, impersonal, and authoritative nature of the discourse.

A central finding concerns the role of modality, particularly the modal verb *shall*, which functions as a performative mechanism for expressing legal obligation and institutional control. Other modal forms such as *may* and *can* establish varying degrees of permission and possibility, creating a hierarchical structure of authority. The study also demonstrates that performative verbs and discourse strategies actively construct political and legal realities rather than merely describing them. Through directive speech acts, the Security Council imposes obligations and regulates international behavior. Comparative analysis between English and Uzbek texts highlights important translation shifts. While English discourse relies on semantic compression and lexical density, Uzbek translations tend toward semantic expansion and explicitness. These differences illustrate how language and culture influence the interpretation of legal meaning.

In conclusion, UN Security Council discourse reflects and reproduces global power structures through highly institutionalized linguistic practices. Future research may further

explore multilingual dimensions of legal-  
diplomatic discourse and the impact of

translation on the implementation of  
international legal norms.

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