



MODALITY IN PAKISTANI SUPREME COURT LEGAL JUDGMENTS: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Judicial language is an effective interpersonal tool that judges use to create authority, impose obligations, and establish epistemic certainty. Though it has been of immense importance, modality in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments is barely tapped. This research uses Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory to analyze the use of modals as interpersonal resources in five criminal judgments issued by the Supreme Court of Pakistan from 2020 to 2025. The analysis involves the identification, the classification and the interpretation of modal expressions by type (modalisation vs modulation), value (high, median, low), and orientation (subjective, objective, explicit, implicit). Results show that the distribution is genre-sensitive: obligation predominates in the dispositional sections (with high value obligation markers: shall, must), leading to the creation of binding directives and institutional authority; conversely, the mode of modalisation is found in the evidential reasoning sections, for the purpose of building evidential certainty and caution. This makes a contribution to the field of legal linguistics and SFL theory by examining how modality enacts institutional power in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments.

Keywords: *Criminal Judgments, Deontic Modality, Epistemic Modality, Legal Discourse, Pakistani Supreme Court, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Language is the main way that legal institutions enact, voice out, and oversee their power. When it comes to legal discourse, it is no longer merely the recording of the legal action, but in fact, the action itself manifested and enacted. Judges render judgments through the code of words, assign rights and obligations, evaluate evidence, invoke precedent, and serve as an embodiment of the institutional power of courts. Among the various linguistic resources available to judicial writers, modulation is in a special position. It allows judges to show their opinion on a proposition, indicating different levels of likelihood or certainty, and also indicates legal mandate or permission. Moreover, it enables judges to assess how reliable testimony and evidence are to various degrees of epistemic commitment.

In order to examine this aspect of judicial language, the most productive theoretical framework adopted is from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1985, 1994), and more elaborately developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2014). As per SFL, language is understood as being situated in a social semiotic system that can operate simultaneously across three metafunctions (ideational, textual and interpersonal) and the interpersonal metafunction is the location of modality. Halliday (1994) assumes that modality exists between the categorical positive and negative poles, and it realizes the speaker/writer's attitude, evaluation and estimation of the probabilities or obligations of the statement. SFL breaks modality types down to modalisation (marked with expressions of probability and usuality) and modulation (marked with expressions of obligation and inclination); and modality types further differ with respect to value (high, median, low) and orientation (subjective, objective, explicit, implicit). The multi-dimensional analytical architecture allows SFL to capture the functional complexity of the modality of institutional discourse, which is embedded and integrated in choices of grammatical structure with social and legal consequences.

Over the last 20 years, modality in legal and judicial discourse has grown by leaps and bounds in the scholarly research of modality, leading to a large amount of research that utilizes empirical data and has contributed to the current knowledge of modality expressions in legal and judicial discourse continuously. Cheng and Sin (2011) proposed a sociosemiotic approach to modality in legal contexts. They argued that judicial judgments function as institutional acts in which modality simultaneously conveys institutional validity, epistemic commitment, and the exercise of institutional power. In an innovative corpus-driven study, Cheng and Cheng (2014) found judges in Hong Kong and Scotland largely used 'modality value' and 'orientation' as deliberate, systematic approaches to consider the available evidence when handing down civil judgments. Cheng and Wang (2017) advanced this idea, concluding that there were institutional ideas, and

not individualized language features, in the distribution of the modality in legal texts. Lately, Su, Liu, and Cheung (2023) verified, based on comparative corpus research, that epistemic modality in court judgments is indeed systematically determined by genre and socio-cultural context, and that the object orientation is typical of the structuring of judicial authority.

In the Pakistani legal context, in particular, one would come across some recent literature by scholars that focuses on the uniqueness of the judicial writing of Pakistan. Hybrid legality in Pakistani legal documents has posed the idea of the multi-linguistic nature of the law, indicative of the intervention of both Islamic jurisprudence and local law traditions in legal documents that are presented in the English language. Initially, SFL-based studies on the language of Pakistani Appellate Court judgments have highlighted the construction of legal reality and judicial authority through interpersonal and textual moves, while SFL-based studies conducted on the case of Pakistani academic writing have proved that the analysis of Halliday's framework applies to the case of Pakistani institutional language. The modality research literature, however, which exists around SFL and law, does not seem to have paid any heed to criminal judicial language in the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Although it is an essential interpersonal resource in institutional language, there is no systematic study on the analysis of modality in the Supreme Court's criminal discourse in Pakistan. Although there have been interesting studies on judicial modality using SFL theories looking at corpora of civil court judgments from Hong Kong (Cheng & Sin, 2011; Cheng & Cheng, 2014), Scotland (Cheng & Cheng, 2014), and broader comparative cases in other legal systems (Cheng & Wang 2017; Su, Liu & Cheung, 2023), no study has used SFL modality to compare the Supreme Court of Pakistan's Criminal Division and the Supreme Court of Pakistan's Civil Division. This is notable in a number of ways. Judicial discourse in Pakistan is modeled in many characteristics and an intermediate linguistic space between English common law discourse and Islamic jurisprudence.

The local discourse of adjudicating did not fall into obscurity but continued to evolve alongside, adding its own characteristics to the hybrid discourse of judicial discourse in Pakistan. Moreover, criminal judgments constitute the most consequential discursive domain of institutional power: courts make definitive judgment on evidence, decide who is guilty of crimes, determine acceptable evidence standards, and make binding instructions with legal life-changing consequences in these texts. Considering the theoretical and empirical importance of the mechanisms of the Supreme Court's judges in building certainty, imposing obligation and negotiating epistemic commitment in this genre, it becomes clear that there is nothing insignificant about it.

This aspect of the Pakistani criminal judicial discourse cannot be explored without an in-depth corpus-based SFL study. This study directly fills this gap by systematically applying SFL interpersonal metafunction to Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgements.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

This study is aimed at performing the following two aims:

1. To identify, classify and systematically analyze the usage of the two primary modalities (modalisation and modulation) in a corpus of five Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments (2020-25), and to map frequency distribution of the modal expressions in both epistemic and deontic domains in terms of their values (high, median, or low) that are most operative in the above-mentioned judicial genre.
2. To analyze mode type, value (high, median, low), and orientation (subjective/objective, explicit/implicit) of the interpersonal functions of the modality expressions in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments using SFL conceptual framework and explain the mode of construction of evidential certainty, calibration of probability, deontic authority and enactment of institutional power in the distinct rhetorical sections of criminal adjudication discourse (factual recitation, evidential reasoning, and disposition).

1.4. Research Questions

This study is directed towards the following two research questions:

1. What types of modality are used in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments, and how can they be classified according to Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) SFL framework?
2. How do the Supreme Court judges in Pakistan build judicial certainty, duty, probability, and authority in the criminal rulings, using the modality?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study contributes significance to the relationship between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Legal Discourse Analysis (LDA) as it provides an empirically based analysis of modality in one of the authority registers of institutional language, criminal judgments of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP). The application of SFL-based studies of modality to South Asian legal texts is relatively underdeveloped, with very few studies conducted. This application of SFL-based studies of modality has been a relatively unexplored field, with very few studies being done in the South Asian case of legal discourses. The study's emphasis lies on the linguistic constructions of "certainty" and "must" (deontic moods), evidential attitudes, and institutional authority within a corpus covering the years 2020-2025, offering current, context-specific insights into these features. The results offer insight both for legal linguists and for any legal

practitioner, in that they shed light on the systemic linguistic choices through which judicial power is realized and sanctioned. It also has pedagogical relevance for students of law and legal translators dealing with legal documents in the Pakistani context.

2. Literature Review

Modality plays a pivotal role in the linguistic examination of language, especially in institutions and legal discourse where language both communicates and enacts an authority, imposes an obligation, and stipulates the epistemic role of a proposition. Halliday's (1985, 1994) and later Systemic and Functional linguistics, as developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2014), are the most fruitful theories to be applied to this aspect of this research. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language is conceptualized as a social semiotic resource that operates simultaneously across three metafunctions: the ideational (representing experience), the textual (organizing discourse), and the interpersonal (enacting social relationships and negotiating stance). Modality is a central resource within the interpersonal metafunction used to realize. According to Halliday (1994), modality is the intermediate semantic sector between poles of positive and negative used to realize the speaker's judgment of probabilities or obligations. This system presents two types of modality—modalisation and modulation, which express probability and usuality by modifiers like *may*, *might*, *probably*, and *modulation*, which express obligation and inclination by modifiers such as *must*, *should*, and *shall*. The analysis of modality is extended with *value*, *high*, *median*, or *low* and *subjective* or *objective*, as well as *explicit* or *implicit* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The above dimensions form the combined analytical framework for the present study.

In addition to legal language, Yang (2015) has shown that Halliday's modality system is useful in an analysis of English medical research articles written in English. From a perspective inspired by SFL typology (*value* and *orientation*), the study identified an overall abundance of writers' use of *low-value* and *median-value* epistemic modality for making claims with caution, disciplinary authority, and academic objectivity. Further, Yang revealed that the implications of *implicitly objective* and *explicitly objective* were better received in professional academic writing because they helped the writer remove his or her self from the process and involve the reader in believing the concepts or proposals he or she puts forward. The study can be used in the medical sphere apart from the legal sphere, but its findings validate the generalizability of the SFL modality framework over institutional genres and reinforce the focus of the present study on *value* and *orientation*, as key interpersonal resources in Pakistani judicial discourse.

Theoretically, the use of this framework with respect to legal discourse was supported by Cheng and Sin (2011), who published their proposal entitled “A Sociosemiotic Interpretation of Linguistic Modality in a Legal Context” in a journal called *Semiotica*. Analyzing actual Hong Kong court judgments, they have shown that formal

and semantic analysis of modality cannot explain the sophistication of modality meaning within legal texts and have suggested that in judicial discourse, modality is a sign system that contains three layers of meaning, related to legal validity, institutional power, and epistemic commitment. This reformulation was pivotal and marked a shift towards the investigation of modality from the grammatical sphere to the functional realm, inspired by corpus research methodologies, and laid the groundwork for further research into judicial modality. This reformulation was critical, initiating a shift from the grammatical toward the functional investigation of modality and paving the way for further research into judicial modality per the corpus methodology.

Most influential empiricist studies include the work of Cheng & Cheng (2014), analyzing the use of epistemic modality in civil court judgments from Hong Kong and Scotland by employing a corpus-driven approach published in *English for Specific Purposes*. On both orientation and value, they discovered that both subjective and objective epistemic modalities are systematically used by judges to create legal facts and to establish evidentiary probability in different proportions, and that the distribution of modality value assigns the judges to the respective modes in such a way that it corresponds to the operational standard of proof of both jurisdictions.

Finally, their analysis confirmed that objective epistemic expressions supported judges to render legal conclusions in an institutionalized and evidence-supported way instead of personally asserting them, which strengthened the impersonal tonality of judicial utterances. On this basis, Cheng and Wang (2017), in an attempt to examine the modality verb distribution phenomenon from a legal perspective, employed a corpus-based sociosemiotic approach and concluded that the distribution of frequencies of the modalities of *May*, *shall* and *must* is not a matter of personal preference but ideological and institutional conditioning of legal language. Their conclusion underlined that modality verbs in courts' texts can be considered socially regulated semiotic resources that are distributed differently based on legal communicative authority, genre and institutional purposes. These studies together form the important basis for the conclusion that in judicial discourse, modality is an interpersonally organized resource, that, being systematically organized, is genre-specific, jurisdiction-specific, and dependent on the institutional authority, which has direct implications for the analytical perspective. The findings of the above-mentioned studies put together mean that modality as a resource in judicial discourse is interpersonally organized, and this organization is systematically organized and is different about genre, jurisdiction, and institutional authority, a conclusion that is directly relevant to the analytical perspective adopted in this study.

Forensic linguistic scholarship has also taken notice that the functions of the institution and the evidential role of legal language are realized by highly structured language selection, in addition to the functions of modality. Coulthard, Johnson and

Wright (2017) contend that law is not simply descriptive in nature, but one that is performative in function, operating as a specialized register of evidence interpretation, legal meaning formation and judgment realized in law. By signaling the importance of language analysis in the comprehension of the judicial and courtroom language in establishing legal reality, their work again highlights the value of interpersonal and modality analysis in legal discourse studies.

The ideas of Daniel and Unuabonah (2021), who studied stance and engagement strategies in a selection of Supreme Court judgments, also lend a hand in the interpersonal analysis of judicial language. Their research found that judges heavily employed stance resources compared to engagement features, indicating a greater tendency for authorizing position and evaluative power in judicial writing. The researchers also noted that the use of directive expressions served as key engagement tools that courts used to establish, negotiate and evolve institutional authority and legal obligation. While the analysis did not rely heavily on the SFL modality theory, their conclusions were very supportive of the analysis of interpersonal judicial discourse, which aimed to show how judicial language constructively portrays authority, certainty and institutional identities.

Neither the interpersonal aspect of modality has been addressed in legal texts alone, but also in other academic and professional genres, such as those used in literature and other fields. In a pioneering study, Hyland (1996) investigated the evolution of hedging in academic forms of writing, showing that the strategies of epistemic modality (modality verbs, adverbs and cognitive adjectives) are among the main ways by which academic writers control certainty, avoid conflict with opposing arguments and establish authority in the knowledge field. While the work of analyzing legal language within the SFL framework is largely pre-dated by other existing legal scholarship, Hyland's notion of epistemic hedging as an interpersonally motivated scalar resource closely anticipates the modality value analysis that has been used in the analysis of judicial language for the analysis of the manner in which levels of certainty are expressed when faced with the demands of evidence.

Goźdz-Roszkowski (2011) focuses on the specific field of judicial discourse analysis to investigate the characteristics of one genre of judicial texts, what she calls appellate judicial writing, through examining formulaic modality patterns in judicial opinions from federal courts in the United States: obligation and epistemic commitment are genre-constitutive features of the U.S. judicial domain. The study found that modalities in court judgments are not variable in style but are constrained rather due to rhetorical needs of the court genre and reflected SFL's status-quo theory of modality choice in the sense that it is socially rather than individually motivated. Also, Bhatia (1993) offered a groundbreaking introduction to genre-oriented description of legal discourse, and showed that the rhetorical quality of legal discourse is reflected in its marked usage of obligatory

modality structures like shall and must, which serve to give the performative and institutionally binding nature of legal acts. Bhatia's genre perspective is not exclusively based on SFL but complements the interpersonal perspective of Halliday and has helped in the analysis of judicial modalities since then.

Studies in comparative law have also enhanced the compass of the scholarship. Mazzi (2010) demonstrated that in judgments rendered by judges who appeal to a court of higher jurisdiction in Britain, a variety of epistemic devices are used to establish authoritative legal conclusions and as a means for consciously consulting with various degrees of uncertainty regarding evidence. The study also showed that the epistemic stance of judges' writing is a genre-specific feature as it is influenced by the institutional need of the common law tradition, which has a direct relevance to the target of the present study and is thus directly investigated in Pakistani Supreme Court discourse. Flowerdew and Wan (2010) looked at another genre of writing, a genre closely related to the genre of the question they studied, namely the genre of the audit report, as a more extensive comparison, and identified the same type of modality architecture as they found in considering judicial texts: that is, co-deployment of institutional obligation and epistemic hedging as strategies used for the construction of professional authority.

In more recent studies, Alemi and Rezanejad (2021) investigated the frequency of epistemic and deontic modality in Iranian legal opinions, and consequently, they reported that the deontic modality was more frequent than the epistemic modality in Iranian legal corpus in general, and the high value obligation markers were systematically distributed in the dispositional parts of legal opinions while the epistemic ones were mostly located in the reasoning parts of legal opinions. Although taking place in a non-common law environment, the results of this study regarding the distribution of modality types strongly also support the results of the present study, and the suggestion that modality patterns in judicial texts are genre architecturally conditioned is corroborated in other ways by the results of the present study. In isolation, Farrelly's research (2015) on the language of judicial persuasion in the Supreme Court judgements in Ireland reveals that modalities, such as must, should and may, serve as means of thinking about and handling the balance between legality and flexibility of interpretation in the judicial framework, which is a similar phenomenon in Pakistani SCs' criminal discourse.

Pakistani law has, in recent times, seen the beginning of scholarship in attracting a focus on the unique linguistic aspects of the judicial world. Studies on hybrid legality in legal discourse in Pakistan have identified characteristics of blending common law conventions and Islamic jurisprudential vocabulary to create a register that offers lawyers a considerable degree of institutional and cultural complexity. The SFL approach showed how the interpersonal dimension of these texts constructs legal reality and brings to life judicial authority and modality-based studies in the institutional dimension of Pakistani

discourse proved the methodological feasibility of the application of the multi-dimensional framework of functional grammar in the Pakistani context.

First, these contributions reveal a wider context of legal language in Pakistan, while also demonstrating a much-needed gap – not a single research work has dealt explicitly with Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgements with the intent of applying the SFL Framework in its modality analysis. This is a gap that is both academic in nature and has substantive implications in the area of Pakistan's criminal adjudication procedure, where certainties, obligations, probabilities, and authorities are conveyed in modality constructions with the most significant legal and social implications. This study explicitly aims at this.

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Modality

The present study's theoretical basis is the aforementioned theoretical approach. The analytical categories that have been used in data analysis are drawn from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), based on the model, modulation, modality value, and modality orientation. For this reason, the framework is not only used to explain the modality but also in the coding, classification, and functional analysis of the modality expressions selected from the corpus. So, it is not only used to interpret modality, but the framework also guides the coding, classification, and functional analysis of the modality expressions extracted from the corpus of Supreme Court criminal judgments selected from Pakistan.

The framework of SFL (Halliday 1985, 1994) and developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2014) considers language to be a social semiotic resource that is used to perform three metafunctions: ideational (construing experience), textual (organizing discourse), and interpersonal (enacting social relationships and negotiating stance). This study is concerned primarily with the interpersonal metafunction and is therefore the convention at which the analysis gets focused.

According to Halliday (1994), modality is the space in between positive (assertion) and negative (denial) categorical poles in semantic space. It enables speakers and writers to express intermediate degrees of probability, usuality, obligation, or inclination. There are two main types of modality in SFL: the modality of encoding the probability and the usuality with modalisation, and the modality of encoding the obligation and inclination with modulation. These are then codified on two key dimensions: value (high, median, or low) and orientation (subjective/objective and explicit/implicit). Combined, these dimensions form the basis of the analytical matrix to be used in this study. Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) modality system can be visually represented as follows:

Figure 1: Overview of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) modality system showing the main types, sub-types, value scale, and orientation dimensions applied in this study.

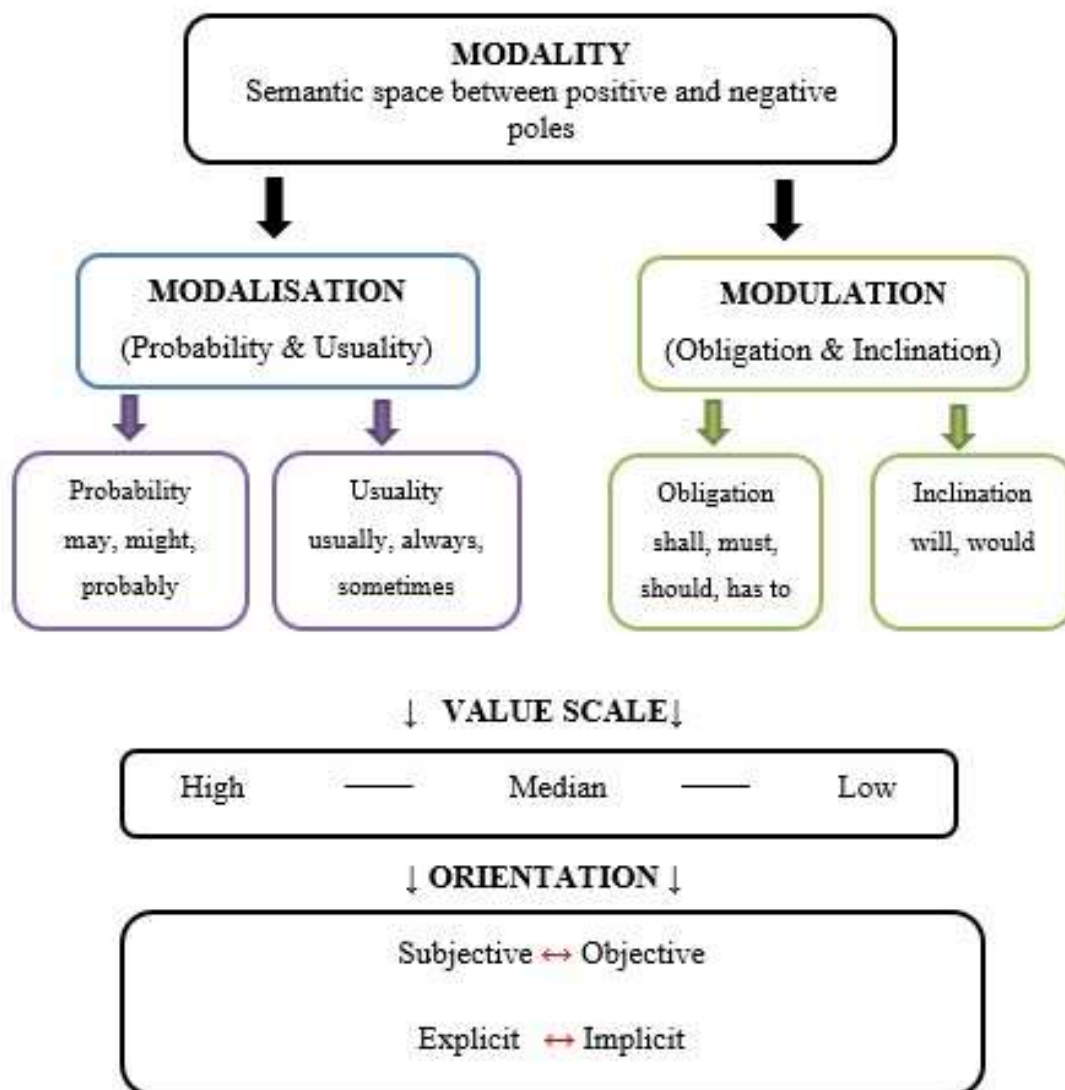


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This is a framework that has subsequently been tested and extended by scholarship in different institutional genres. Yang proved its significance in Medical research articles (2015). In the legal domain, Cheng and Sin (2011), Cheng and Cheng (2014), and Cheng and Wang (2017) demonstrated that SFL’s multi-dimensional perspective is well-suited to capture judges’ construction of institutional authority, epistemic commitment, and legal validity via the use of modality. The present study has similarities with the aforementioned

research, but takes Pakistani Supreme Court criminal rulings to explore the cross-cultural and cross-jurisdictional descriptive utility of the framework, as it has been applied to a new genre and jurisdiction, criminal judgments, that has not yet been examined.

2.2. Research Gap

While the literature on SFL-based approaches to judicial modality surveyed above is far from insignificant, empirical studies have focused on Hong Kong (Cheng & Sin, 2011; Cheng & Cheng, 2014), Scotland (Cheng & Cheng, 2014), and the United States (Goźdz-Roszkowski, 2011), and more recently on British appellate, Irish, and Iranian contexts (Mazzi, 2010; Farrelly, 2015; Alemi & Rezanejad, 2021). Within this literature, criminal judicial discourse at the South Asian legal system's top level has not received any critical attention and there is no study that has utilized Halliday's multi-dimensional SFL modality system in the analysis of judicial discourse in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Conceptually, this is significant because judicial discourse in Pakistan is driven by a series of rhetorical conventions of the English common law alongside the more traditional Islamic jurisprudential framework and local adjudicative traditions, each of which is a particular mode whose architecture cannot be determined from an extant model in other parts of the world. The present study fills this gap by systematically and corpus-based analyzing the category of modality in criminal judgments in the Pakistani Supreme Court, thus stretching the scope of this legal discourse scholarship into an underrepresented but pivotal South Asian judiciary context.

3. Theoretical Considerations and Applicability of the Framework

There has been some criticism of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) modality approach for interpersonal meaning in institutional discourse from the perspective of SFL, but it is not all negative. There is a pragmatic and cognitive linguistic tradition in criticism of SFL which has focused on the strong grammar and lack of attention to dynamic speaker-hearer negotiation in context (Martin & White, 2005). However, its typological, orientational and valential micro typological distinctions offer much for the systematic study of institutional genres of written discourse like a judicial opinion.

In addition to the SFL approach, other theories like Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010) might provide further insights into how the relations of power and ideology are manifested in judicial discourse. Complementary to this, Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) provides a further perspective on evaluative language. The main method used for this study is the SFL modality because it is able to describe the linguistic choices certainly and precisely and to be able to map the logical relationship of linguistic choices to interpersonal functions.

Importantly, this study also assesses the Applicability and Culture-Specificity of the modality system of Halliday in a non-Western and hybrid legal context. The judgments of Pakistan's Supreme Court are a blend of the common law traditions of England and the

jurisprudence principles of Islam. The present research utilizes categories derived from SFL to examine this bi-juridical context and adds to the discussions regarding universalization versus cultural adaptability of some of SFL's constructs in various legal discourses.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The current study adopts a qualitative and quantitative research design and uses both techniques to analyze the modality in the contextual analysis of Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments. To identify, classify and quantify patterns of distribution of modality expressions across the corpus, a quantitative analysis was done for modality expressions. A quantitative analysis of modality expressions was performed to identify, classify, and count the patterns of distribution across the corpus. Qualitatively, these expressions have been analyzed in their judicial contexts to understand their interpersonal meaning and function in the legal reasoning.

4.2. Data Collection

For this purpose, five Supreme Court of Pakistan judgments were taken from the years 2020 to 2025. These judgments have been retrieved from the web pages of the Supreme Court of Pakistan at Supreme Court of Pakistan. The official repository was chosen as the only data source since it delivers legally accepted, publicly available and authentic interpretations of judicial decisions with a high trust level and no possibility of alteration to ensure a valid and reliable corpus.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select judgments that met the following criteria: (1) the cases were related to criminal adjudication; (2) the judgment was in the English language; (3) the judgments included substantial reasoning rather than just being limited to procedural orders; (4) the full text was publicly available through the Supreme Court's official database; and (5) the study period was within 2020 – 2025. Judgments that were purely procedural directions, or very short orders, or very repetitive factual reports were eliminated since they provided little material for modality analysis.

The following is a selection of the judgments:

Table 1: List of Selected Supreme Court Criminal Judgments

Case Number	Year	Judicial Genre
Criminal Appeal No. 199 of 2023 (CrI. A. 199/2023)	2023	Criminal Appeal
Criminal Intra-Court Appeal No. 1 of 2025 (CrI. I.C.A. 1/2025)	2025	Criminal Intra-Court Appeal
Criminal Petition No. 607 of 2020 (CrI. P. 607/2020)	2020	Criminal Petition
Criminal Petition No. 647 of 2023 (CrI. P. 647/2023)	2023	Criminal Petition
Criminal Petition No. 498 of 2024 (CrI. P. 498/2024)	2024	Criminal Petition

The Supreme Court's selection of judgments is supplied with a theoretical and methodological legitimization due to the fact that the Supreme Court is at the top of Pakistan's judicial hierarchy. Its decisions set precedent for lower courts, provide an authoritative interpretation of the criminal law and have the supreme judicial say. Supreme Court judgments are, therefore, an especially fruitful opportunity for examining modality, in that they are instances where evidence is being evaluated, standards of proof are being negotiated, legal argument is being justified and instructions directed are to be enforced. The communicative requirements engender the status of modality as a key linguistic element of the genre.

Moreover, the chosen term (2020 – 2025) was chosen to make sure that the corpus is in contemporary judicial language and present judicial practice. A limitation of the time period may add consistency within the corpus and ensure the patterns of judicial modality in the Pakistani criminal discourse are representative of the present times. The number of texts is purposefully small, limited to approximately the quantitative scale of qualitative SFL, where a detailed functional analysis of authentic texts is more important than a well-generalized statistical one. The corpus hence offers an adequate depth to discuss the role of modality as an interpersonal means in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments.

5. Data Analysis Procedure

The methodology used in this study is systematic with four stages: it is systematic to ensure the methodological rigor of the study and systematic to keep the theoretical fidelity with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. Each judgment was analyzed at the clausal level, and interpersonal meanings were identified in relation to modal expressions.

To begin with, the five court cases that were selected were all reformatted from PDF to plain text, which resulted in a small specialized corpus consisting of 8,511 tokens of text. In order to analyze the corpus, the corpus was exported to AntConc 4.2.0, a corpus analysis program. Key modality lemmas and expressions, such as shall, must, may, might, can, could, should, will, would, shall, or have/have to, were searched for using concordance searches (KWIC), as well as high-frequency epistemic phrases “it is well settled”, “it is evident”, and “it is clear”. By using this tool-assisted approach, all possible modality instances have been exhaustively retrieved throughout the entire corpus.

The following figure (2a,2b, 2c and 2d presents sample screenshots of the AntConc concordance searches conducted during the data identification stage.

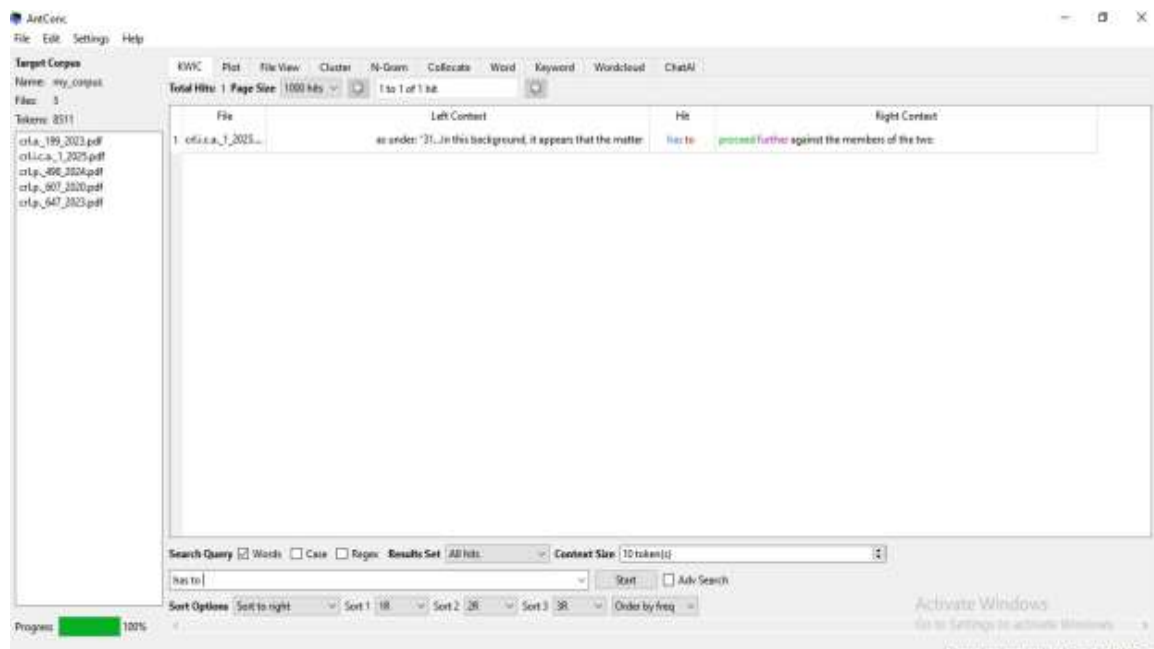


Figure 2(a): AntConc concordance output for the search term “has to”

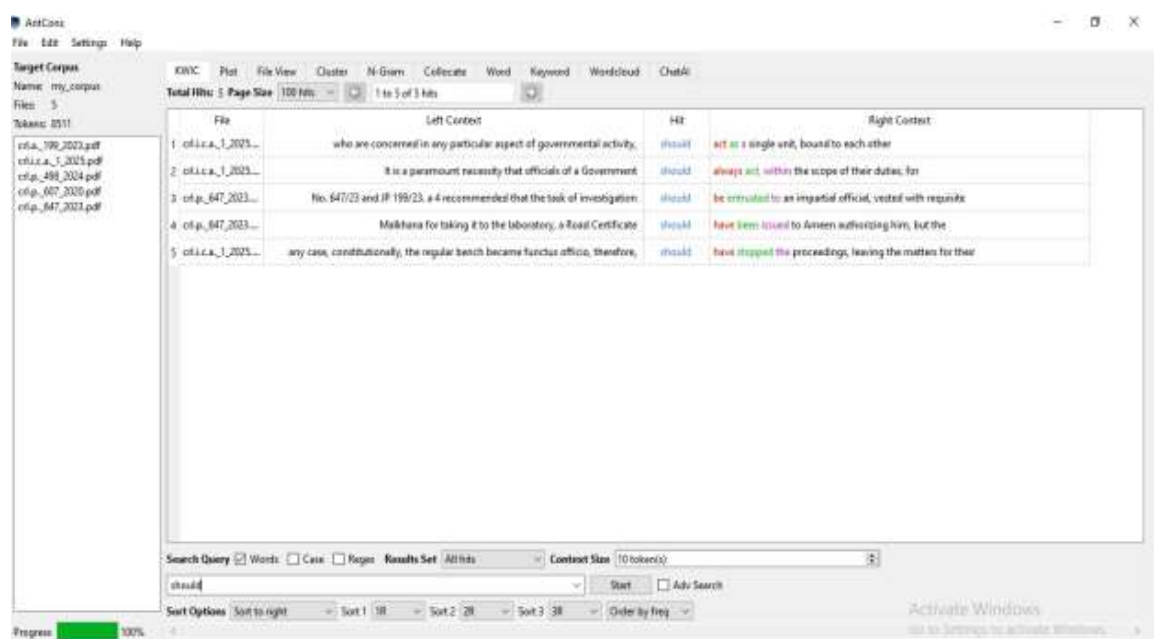


Figure 2(b): AntConc concordance output for the search term “should”

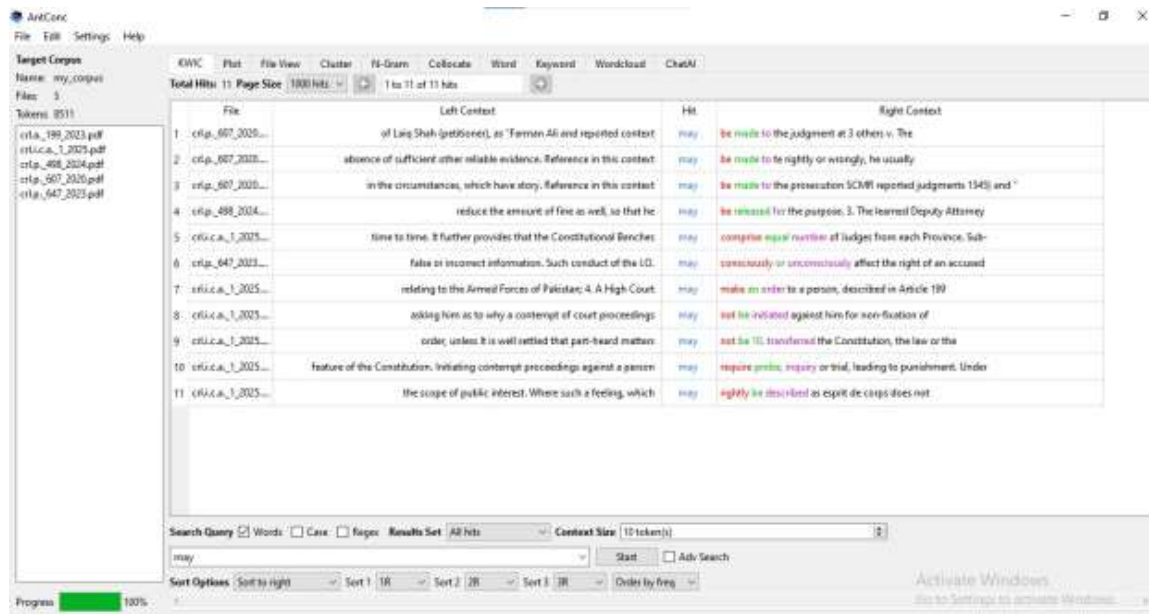


Figure 2(c): AntConc concordance output for the search term “may”

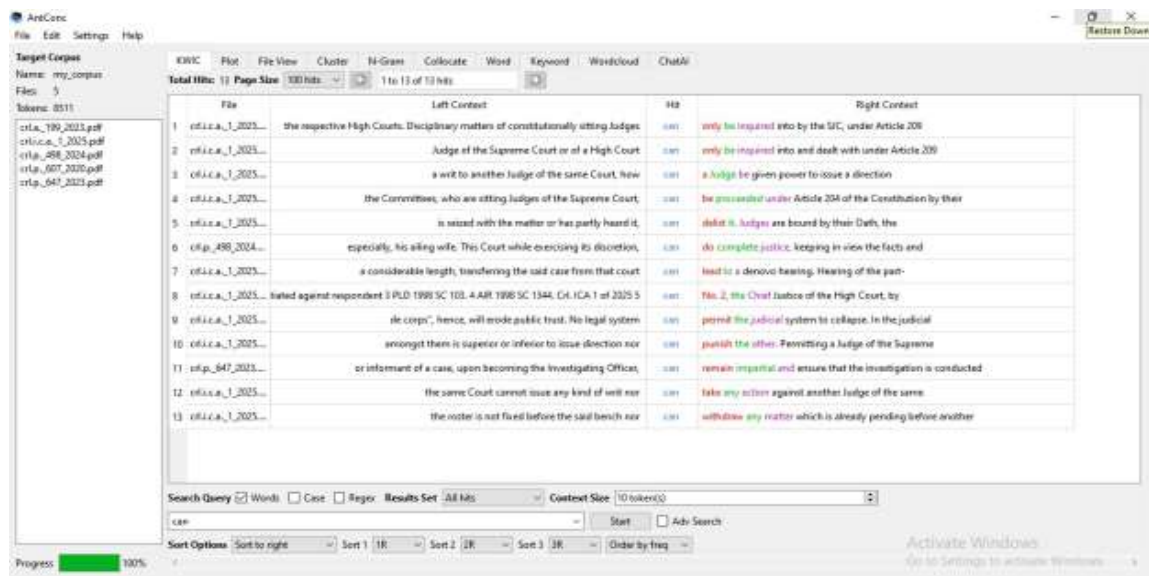


Figure 2(d): AntConc concordance output for the search term “can”

Secondly, the co-text around each concordance hit was visually inspected to supplement the classification of modal expressions and to remove false positives. A coding schema was developed in detail (see Table 2) in accordance with Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). All valid modality instances were coded on four SFL dimensions: the type of

modality (modalisation vs. modulation), the sub-type of modality (probability, usuality, obligation, inclination), the value (high, median or low) and (4) the orientation (of the modality) (subjective vs. objective and explicit vs. implicit). Projection clauses, if present, were also coded.

Third, quantitative data were tabulated in a way that created frequency distribution and normalized frequencies (per 1000/tokens). Finally, qualitative functional analysis was conducted, which involved reading each modality choice within specific rhetorical sections (i.e., sections of factual recitation, evidential reasoning, and disposition) to gain insight into the rhetorical contributions of each. Lastly, a qualitative functional analysis was performed, wherein their modality choices were read within each of the rhetorical sections (factual recitation, evidential reasoning, disposition) to explore each modality's contribution to the construction of a sense of judicial certainty, deontic authority, and evidential caution.

A manual, context-sensitive coding process combined with computer-assisted searching using AntConc guaranteed comprehensiveness and depth of analysis. To ensure minimization of inconsistency in all coding decisions, these decisions were cross-referenced with Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) classificatory criteria. This led to an authentic quantitative account of the modality frequencies of the five judgments as well as a qualitative approach to interpretation of the data that revealed the manner in which the judges of the Pak Supreme Court use modality as an interpersonal resource in criminal adjudication.

Table 2: SFL Modality Coding Schema (Sample from the Corpus)

Modality Item	Type	Sub-type	Value	Orientation	Example from Corpus
shall	Modulation	Obligation	High	Objective, Implicit	“He shall be released from the jail forthwith unless required to be detained in any other case.” (CrI. A. 199/2023)
should	Modulation	Obligation	Median	Objective, Implicit	“...the task of investigation should be entrusted to an impartial official...” (CrI. P. 647/2023)
may	Modalisation	Probability	Median	Objective, Implicit	“Reference in this context may be made to the judgments reported as...” (CrI. P. 607/2020)
might	Modalisation	Probability	Low	Objective, Implicit	“...the I.O. might confine himself to only look for evidence that proves his own complaint.” (CrI. P. 647/2023)

has to	Modulation	Obligation	High	Objective, Implicit	“...it appears that the matter has to proceed further against the members of the two...” (CrI. I.C.A. 1/2025)
It is well settled that.	Modalisation	Probability	High	Objective, Explicit	“ It is well settled that once a court takes cognizance of...” (CrI. I.C.A. 1/2025)

5.1. Corpus Description

There are 5 complete text criminal judgments of the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued during the period 2020-2025 and include 8,511 tokens. The length of the individual judgments is between 1200 (for shorter) and 2300 (for longer) tokens, signifying the complexity and depth of the judicial reasoning in each case.

The cases are representative of varied types of criminal proceedings, such as charges of murder, constitutional challenges to criminal procedure, contempt of court proceedings, and investigation-related petitions, among others. On one specific note, the corpus covers appeals and petitions over "serious" crimes like homicide, and also issues regarding the misconduct of investigators, issues connected to judicial independence and impartiality. These differences prove significant in making it possible to discuss reforms of the modality use within each category of criminal adjudication while maintaining a focus on the discourse by the TRIP at the apex level.

These were all written by various benches of the Supreme Court, with different justices. Not a single judge has an overwhelming share of work, strengthening the generalizability of the results for judges overall and not just particularly for them. Table 3 below shows a summary of the corpus (modify the existing case table, if necessary, to add up word counts).

Table 3: Description of the Study Corpus

Case Number	Year	Genre	Approx. Tokens	Primary Subject Matter
CrI. A. 199/2023	2023	Criminal Appeal	~1,800	Murder / Criminal Appeal
CrI. I.C.A. 1/2025	2025	Criminal Intra-Court Appeal	~2,300	Constitutional / Contempt & Procedure
CrI. P. 607/2020	2020	Criminal Petition	~1,500	Murder / Evidence Evaluation
CrI. P. 647/2023	2023	Criminal Petition	~1,600	Investigation / Impartiality
CrI. P. 498/2024	2024	Criminal Petition	~1,300	Sentencing / Release
Total	-	-	8,511	

6. Findings

6.1. Overview of Modality Distribution Across the Corpus

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has issued five criminal judgments, which are discussed in a systematic manner. *CrI. A. 199/2023*, *CrI. I.C.A. 1/2025*, *CrI. P. 607/2020*, *CrI. P. 647/2023*, and *CrI. P. 498/2024* — resulted in 87 modal expressions. These expressions were selected with the aid of the AntConc concordance program and subsequently verified by hand, and were categorized following Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) principles from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

The analysis was done on the four SFL dimensions of modality type (modalisation vs modulation), subtype (probability, usuality, obligation, inclination), value (high, median, low) and orientation (subjective/objective and explicit/implicit). A coding schema was used to ensure uniformity, as detailed in Table 2. The overall distribution shows that there is a clear predominance of modulation (68.9% (n=60)) over modalisation (31.1% (n=27)). In this pattern, Pakistani Supreme Court criminal decisions are mainly obligation-oriented documents, where judges prescribe obligations, issue instructions, and build institutional authority by applying deontic modal expressions.

The following table shows the raw frequency distribution of the most important modality expressions found in the corpus.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Modality Expressions Across the Corpus (with Normalized Frequencies)

Modality Expression	Frequency	% of Total	Normalized (per 1,000 tokens)	Modality Type	SFL Category	Value
Shall	24	27.6%	2.82	Modulation	Obligation	High
Must	9	10.3%	1.06	Modulation	Obligation	High
Can	7	8.0%	0.82	Modulation	Obligation/Permission	Median
Cannot	4	4.6%	0.47	Modulation	Obligation/Prohibition	High
Should	8	9.2%	0.94	Modulation	Obligation	Median
May	12	13.8%	1.41	Modalisation	Probability	Median
Might	3	3.4%	0.35	Modalisation	Probability	Low
Would	5	5.7%	0.59	Modalisation	Probability/Usuality	Median

Will	4	4.6%	0.47	Modulation	Inclination	Median
Has to / Have to	3	3.4%	0.35	Modulation	Obligation	High
It is evident / clear that	4	4.6%	0.47	Modalisation	Probability	High
Is required to	4	4.6%	0.47	Modulation	Obligation	High
Total	87	100%	10.22	-	-	-

Note: Normalized frequency = (Frequency ÷ 8,511) × 1,000.

All the modality instances were systematically coded for their orientation as presented in Table 4. Most of the expressions demonstrate objective and implicit orientation, thus adding a lot of impersonal and authoritative impression to the speech of the apex court.

6.2. Modulation: Obligation, Inclination, and the Construction of Judicial Authority

As for the five judgments, modulation is the biggest modality class and amounts to 68.9% (n=60) of all 87 modality expressions. This marked dominance is the natural consequence of the inherently deontic nature of criminal adjudication by adjudicating courts at its highest level, the Supreme Court, which, for the most part, is, through its order, a judge enforcing binding obligations and a legal outcome.

In the SFL context, the mode that occurs with the highest frequency is shall (n=24, 27.6% of the total number of modality expressions). It is an agent of delivering deontic obligation at a high cost and plays the main role in the medium of language as an instrument by which Pakistani Supreme Court judges impose effective judicial commands and build institutional power. It is used very much in the dispositive portions of judgments. Representative example: “He shall be let go immediately if not in any of the other instances” (Crl.) A. If not required to be detained in connection with any other case, they shall be set at liberty forthwith” 199/2023). “Petitioner shall then be subjected to SI for 15 days” (P. 647/2023); and “giving effect to the directions” (Crl. P. 498/2024). In all of these, shall realizes high value, objective, and implicit orientation — presenting the obligation as an impersonal institutional command rather than a subjective judicial preference. This orientation takes full advantage of the power of the directive. The pattern seems to be in line with the findings of Cheng and Wang (2017), which shall, in the legal text, signify the system of ideas and institutions of the court and not a personal value judgment of the writer.

Similarly, must (n=9) renders an obligation of higher value and carries out a complementary function. Shall is the predominant dispositional term, while must is predominant in the reasoning parts for placing obligations on procedural actors and/or the legal framework (procedural and constitutional). In *Crl. I.C.A. 1/2025*, for example, the Court employs must to delineate constitutional boundaries: “the Court where the matter is pending “must stop proceedings, “Judges shall adhere to their Oath...Strict adherence thereof is essential.” The semi-modals is/are required to (n=4) and has/have to (n=3) similarly realize high-value obligation, consistently displaying objective and implicit orientation. These expressions present legal requirements as external, rule-governed necessities rather than personal judicial impositions. Together, these valuable sources of modulation create a compulsory institutional posture where the Supreme Court will be seen as the final interpreter of constitutional and legal requirements.

Should (n=8) differs from shall and must in terms of obligation value and interpersonal function. Whereas shall and must express strong institutional obligation, they should typically convey a recommendation or advisory obligation. Whereas shall and must are applied to express obligations that contain a sense of necessity, and therefore carry institutional force, they should express advisory or recommendatory obligations, and do not necessarily mean that it is an obligation. In *Crl. It is recommended*, reads the Court in its decision *P. 647/2023*, that the responsibility for carrying out the investigation should be delegated to “an impartial official” and that a Road Certificate should have been issued to Ameen.” The first serves to withdraw the deontic force as spoken for — clearly recommending to the addressee that the action is expected — but the second is used to reflect on an unfulfilled institutional obligation in the past, with the past modality should have been. This is a prudent weighting of the amount by which the court obtains a measure of discretion, but retains authority.

On top of this, will and would (n=9 combined) tend to occasionally achieve inclination, a subtype of modulation, at a median value. They indicate expected or hypothetical institutional behavior and willingness. For instance, in hypothetical reasoning, would is used to dismiss implausible scenarios: “It would...be illogical to presume that at the end of the investigation, the complainant/informant...would submit a closure report...” (*Crl. P. 647/2023*). Inclinations like this will help to build up deontic authority by offering logical and normative predictions about legal actors and processes.

It is striking that, in overall modulation, the overwhelming orientation will be objective and implicit. Judges tend to use subjective and implicit forms (such as ‘I believe...’ and ‘In our opinion...’) and to provide obligations as external, institutionalized requirements. This uniform direction (orientation) reinforces the lack of personalization and authority in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal discourse.

6.3. Modalisation: Probability, Usuality, and the Construction of Judicial Certainty

The number of modality expressions found in the corpus is 87 modality expressions, with 31.1% (n=27) of them being modalisation. It's mostly focused on the judgment's evidentiary reasoning part, where judges determine the sufficiency, reliability, and credibility of any prosecution evidence and formulate judicial certainty.

Probability is one kind of Modalisation used the most. The most frequent item is may (n=12), which has a median probability value. It is used both epistemically and deontically, epistemically (dominance). May is often used in formulaic hedging constructions like the following by judges: Reference in this context may be made to the judgments... P. 607/2020; CrI. A. 199/2023). Here, usage is used to challenge precedent intentionally, addressing it as a possibility rather than inevitability; a deliberative tone is thus preserved. Might (n=3) registers a low value of probability and extraordinary circumstances as in: “the I.O. might confine himself to only look for evidence that proves his own complaint” (CrI. P. 647/2023).

Another rare but common occurrence in the corpus is the usuality. Patterns of institutional or evidential behavior are generalized by using such expressions as usually, and always (identified by concord search in AntConc). The low to median value usuality markers allow the judges to express their normative expectations on experiences of police investigations and court procedures without making absolute statements.

One of the most sophisticated subtypes is that of high-value epistemic expressions. Modalisation is evident, objective, and explicit in phrases like “it is evident that”, “it is unequivocally clear that”, and particularly “well settled that”. These constructions are an expression of judicial deductions or opinions rendered as institutionally validated laws based on precedent. For instance: “It is an established fact that after a court has taken cognizance of...” (CrI.). I.C.A. 1/2025). These expressions are highly effective in giving epistemic authority, and do so while retaining an impersonal and objective writing style.

Both orientation and projection are important factors in the interpersonal impact of modalisation. The vast majority of all modalisation occurs objectively and implicitly, which effectively depersonalizes the judgment of the judge and makes it conform with institutional judgment. The projection, for example, “It appears the matter will have to travel a step further...” (CrI. Sometimes I.C.A. 1/2025 serves as the exact framing device (1/2025).

When a court takes cognizance of an expression of value like “It is well settled that once a court takes cognizance of...” (CrI.) I.C.A. 1/2025) further emphasizes explicit and objective modelling. These resources enable a judge to express an epistemic stance without taking on the stance of personal commitment and to have a strong institutional voice at the same time.

In the corpus, the verbs 'will' and 'would' will show a dual functionality. They sometimes manifest probability and/or usuality as part of modalisation, but in several

cases they take the form of inclination (a sub-type of modulation), with the expression of hypothetical outcomes or expected institutional behavior (e.g., “It would...be illogical to assume that...” – *CrI.* P. 647/2023). The ability of some of the categories of modes to slide into each other highlights the complex and context-sensitive nature of modality in legal argumentation.

Table 5 below shows a summary of the distribution of Modalisation over the complete SFL dimensions.

Table 5: Distribution of Modalisation by Full SFL Dimensions

Modality Item / Expression	Type	Sub-type	Value	Orientation	Frequency
May	Modalisation	Probability	Median	Objective, Implicit	12
Might	Modalisation	Probability	Low	Objective, Implicit	3
It is well settled / evident	Modalisation	Probability	High	Objective, Explicit	8
would / will	Modalisation	Probability / Usuality	Median	Objective, Implicit	2
Usuality markers (always, usually)	Modalisation	Usuality	Median	Objective, Implicit	2
Total	-	-	-	-	27

6.4. Patterns of Modality Across Judgment Sections

A genre-sensitive analysis of the corpus shows that there is no random distribution of the modes, but there is a systematic patterning according to the rhetorical function that each section in the judgments has. In quantifying this, the instances of the modes were translated into the three principal rhetorical parts: factual recitation, evidential reasoning and disposition.

Table 6: Distribution of Modality Types Across Rhetorical Sections of the Judgments

Section	Modalisation (n)	Modulation (n)	Total (n)	Percentage of Modals	Modal Density (per 1,000 tokens)
Factual Recitation	3	5	8	9.2%	~2.5

Evidential Reasoning	22	12	34	39.1%	~12.8
Disposition	2	43	45	51.7%	~18.5
Total	27	60	87	100%	10.22

Modality is very restricted in the factual recitation parts when judges summarize the case history and the previous court's opinions. Most of the constructions are declaratives and non-modal, reflecting an ideational function, in which facts are being recited.

During the sections of evidential reasoning, there is a high percentage of Modalities that dominate the section, up to 65%. The high epistemic adjuncts (epistemic expressions) may, might, would are heavily concentrated here as well as high-value epistemic adjuncts such as “it is well settled that”, “it is evident that”. These tools prove useful to assess evidence, adjust levels of likelihood, strain or tear down the epistemic believability of the prosecution's case, and afford opportunities for evidential caution when offered.

The dispositional sections are strongly dominated by modulation. Out of 45 modality expressions found in the disposition sections, 43 belong to modulation, showing that these sections mainly use obligation markers such as shall and must to issue binding judicial directives.

In this tri-partite distribution, that is, low modality in factual recitation, Modalisation in evidential reasoning, and modulation in disposition, it is a reflection of the genre architecture of Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments. It shows rhetorically conditioned and functionally appropriate choices of modalities in each part for interpersonal demands. The study offers an extension to Cheng and Cheng's (2014) observations of epistemic modality in court judgments, as it demonstrates that epistemic resources are used efficiently in reasoning parts of Pakistani criminal discourse, whereas deontic modulation is used for performative parts of Pakistani criminal discourse, such as dispositions.

6.5. Interpersonal Meanings and Judicial Authority

In the entire corpus, three parallel meanings of modality can be found, all of which collectively act as the judicial authority of the Pakistani Supreme Court in criminal discourse.

First, the construction of epistemic authority is mainly epistemic modality. The phrases “it is well settled that”, “it is evident that” and “irresistible conclusion” render judicial findings as truths not only based upon the precedents, but additionally well settled and manifest. The aim of these objective and explicitly for ultimate authority mulated constructions is to exclude epistemic alternatives while ascribing to the court an omnicompetence as a supreme decision maker to determine legal security.

Second, deontic authority is realized in a high-level modulation manner. With words like shall and must, judicial rulings turn into enforceable mandates for the State, upon the people and or the enforcement of a constitutional duty.

Third, evidential caution is attained by using the modality language (may, might, would) in the middle and lower limits. These resources enable judges to measure doubt, draw attorneys' attention to evidence that is missing, and afford the benefit of the doubt to the accused, where they deem it appropriate, without sacrificing the institutional voice.

These three modes, epistemic authority, deontic authority and evidential caution, constitute the unique modality structure of Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgements. It shows the way in which language performs at once institutional power, and simultaneously resists and fulfills the epistemic and deontic requirements of the top of criminal adjudication.

6.6. Comparative Analysis Across Judgments and Case Types

Findings from the cross-comparison of the five individual judgments indicate that modality patterns have relatively consistent usage throughout the sentences, implying that the use of modality in the Supreme Court criminal discourse is mostly genre-dependent than personalistic. Shall dominates over all the other modality items, with all five judgments displaying the same general trend in favor of modulation over modalisation. Different counts were used of raw frequencies (e.g., Crl.). It is interesting to note that the proportion of epistemic expressions in I.C.A. 1/2025 is somewhat larger because of the constitutional/contempt-related complexity, but the proportion seems to be rather stable.

Examined by case type, criminal appeals, and intra-court appeals (Crl. A. 199/2023 and Crl. The average percentage of type identified under I.C.A. 1/2025 indicates that there is slightly more use of high-value modulation in the dispositional texts, which, of course, have a final and binding character. Criminal petitions (Crl. P. 607/2020, Crl. P. 647/2023, and Crl. The Judges use marginally more modalisation in the reasoning section of the case when they react to new evidence or issues in procedure (MW 498/2024). The results revealed that there was no significant difference in the diachronic aspect within the period 2020–2025, which represented a remarkable consistency across the five years within which the study was conducted. This is stability that bolsters the institutional character of criminal 'modality behavior' in the Supreme Court.

These conclusions indicate that the rhetorical contexts of the genre, and the particular function of the judgment sections, are systematically conditioning the modality distribution of sentences, rather than the positioning of sentences in any individual judgment section and the individual author/reader's taste and abilities.

7. Discussion

The data of this research show that modality in criminal judgments of the Supreme Court in Pakistan is not only a grammatical marker but also a critically strategized

interpersonal resource which is articulated by the judges to establish power, elicit certainty, and create institutional authority. Halliday's SFL view of the corpus supports the idea of the deontic nature of criminal adjudication (where the primary communicative act of the Supreme Court isn't a description of the legal world, but of bringing about the world). The huge number of high-value obligation markers (such as shall and must) suggests that Pakistani judges are always working with an objective implicit modality tone, rather than indicating mandatory conditions or requirements imposed by them, but by other people, such as the parties or the court itself. This removal of subjective orientation reinforces the impersonal power of the pronouncements of the Court, and aligns with Cheng and Sin's (2011) suggestion that modality in legal texts is a sign system that conveys institutional legitimacy as opposed to the purely grammatical meaning of the words.

Epistemic modality also characterizes the particular needs of evidential reasoning within the context of criminal adjudication, where a standard of proof (beyond a reasonable doubt) imposes a responsibility on the part of a judge to "measure" uncertainty accurately. Judicial certainty emerges as a collective, precedent-based, and no longer merely individual, making it more in line with Cheng and Cheng (2014), who found that objective epistemic orientation helps strengthen the authority of judges by depersonalizing judgment of evidence. In contrast, low modality in hypothetical structures with might and would serves an interpersonal function to express evidential doubt, which is a linguistically astute move that allows judges to leave room for the accused to gain the benefit of the doubt while upholding the strict and clear tone of the office. This interaction between high-level epistemic confidence and low-level evidential prudence is the unique characteristic of this criminal judicial language in Pakistan, and evinces that modality is not a dichotomy, but is a finely measured scalar quantity dictated by the evidentiary and rhetorical context of each step in the judicial process. Through this study, therefore, one can see how this research has added to the scholarship of law in an SFL framework by providing the modality architecture of Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments, which is an issue unique unto English in nature.

8. Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the modality aspects in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgements based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective to identify its types, realization pattern and its value, and finally, to investigate its interpersonal functions to establish certainty, obligation, probability and institutional authority in the judgements. The evidence as a whole clarifies that in this genre, modality is not merely peripheral but rather is architecturally organized – systemically distributed in the judgment sections, and calibrated according to the demands of criminal adjudication at the topmost position in the state's judicial hierarchy.

The study validates and advances previous research on the basis of SFL, which has shown that the interpersonal metafunction is the place where judges reason, evaluate and command in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The dominance of high-value deontic modulation presents Pakistani criminal judgments as performative institutional texts. In these judgments, the authority of the court is realized not only through the description of legal facts but also through the issuance of binding directives and obligations. In contrast, the use of epistemic modality in evidential reasoning reflects a careful balance between certainty and doubt, demonstrating the influence of both common law traditions and Pakistan's hybrid legal system. These findings provide a genre-specific, jurisdiction-specific flavor to a comparative literature on judicial modality.

9. Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations. First, the corpus consists of only five Supreme Court criminal judgments from the period 2020–2025, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to all Pakistani judicial discourse. Second, the study focuses exclusively on criminal judgments and does not include civil, constitutional, or other legal genres. Finally, as qualitative SFL studies generally prioritize depth over breadth, the findings provide detailed insights into modality use within the selected corpus but allow only limited generalizations beyond the data examined.

10. Directions for Future Research

This study could be extended with the expansion of the corpus involving more judgments from both the Supreme Court and High Court. Comparative analysis of different genres and diachronic analysis of modality patterns over a longer span of time would yield greater insight into the judicial discourse evolution in Pakistan. Also, comparative discussions, undertaken across jurisdictions of other South Asian legal traditions (e.g., India, Bangladesh), would shed light on the impact of interlaced legal traditions on modality usage. Moreover, Ancillary methods like Appraisal Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, when combined with SFL, would enhance the comprehension of interpersonal meaning, ideology of power in the Pakistani legal discourse.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Complete List of Selected Judgments

Case Number	Year	Full Case Title / Citation	Word Count (approx.)	Primary Legal Issues
Criminal Appeal No. 199 of 2023	2023	Lajbar v. The State (Crl.A. 199/2023)	~1,800	Murder / Criminal Appeal
Criminal Intra-Court Appeal No. 1 of 2025	2025	Nazar Abbas Additional Registrar (Judicial) presently OSD Supreme Court of Pakistan v. The State (Crl.I.C.A. 1/2025) [2025 SCP 345]	~2,300	Constitutional / Contempt & Judicial Procedure
Criminal Petition No. 607 of 2020	2020	Laiq Shah v. The State (Crl.P. 607/2020) [2026 SCMR 257]	~1,500	Murder / Evidence Evaluation
Criminal Petition No. 647 of 2023	2023	Abdul Raheem v. The State (Crl.P. 647/2023)	~1,600	Investigation / Impartiality of I.O.
Criminal Petition No. 498 of 2024	2024	Zulfiqar Ali v. The State (Crl.P. 498/2024) [2024 SCP 350 / 2025 SCMR 100]	~1,300	Sentencing / Release Orders

Note: All judgments were retrieved from the official website of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Appendix B: Full SFL Modality Coding Schema

Table B1: Complete SFL Modality Coding Schema Used in the Study

Modality Item / Expression	Type	Sub-type	Value	Orientation	Function in Judicial Discourse
shall	Modulation	Obligation	High	Objective, Implicit	Binding directive / Order
must	Modulation	Obligation	High	Objective, Implicit	Procedural / Constitutional obligation
should	Modulation	Obligation	Median	Objective, Implicit	Recommendation / Advisory
may	Modalisation	Probability	Median	Objective, Implicit	Hedging / Reference to precedent
might	Modalisation	Probability	Low	Objective, Implicit	Hypothetical doubt

would / will	Modalisation / Modulation	Probability / Inclination	Median	Objective, Implicit	Hypothetical reasoning / Expected behaviour
it is well settled that	Modalisation	Probability	High	Objective, Explicit	High epistemic certainty via precedent
it is evident / clear that	Modalisation	Probability	High	Objective, Explicit	Strong epistemic assertion
has to / have to	Modulation	Obligation	High	Objective, Implicit	External necessity

Appendix C: Sample AntConc Concordance Outputs

Figure C1: Sample AntConc KWIC concordance for modality expressions

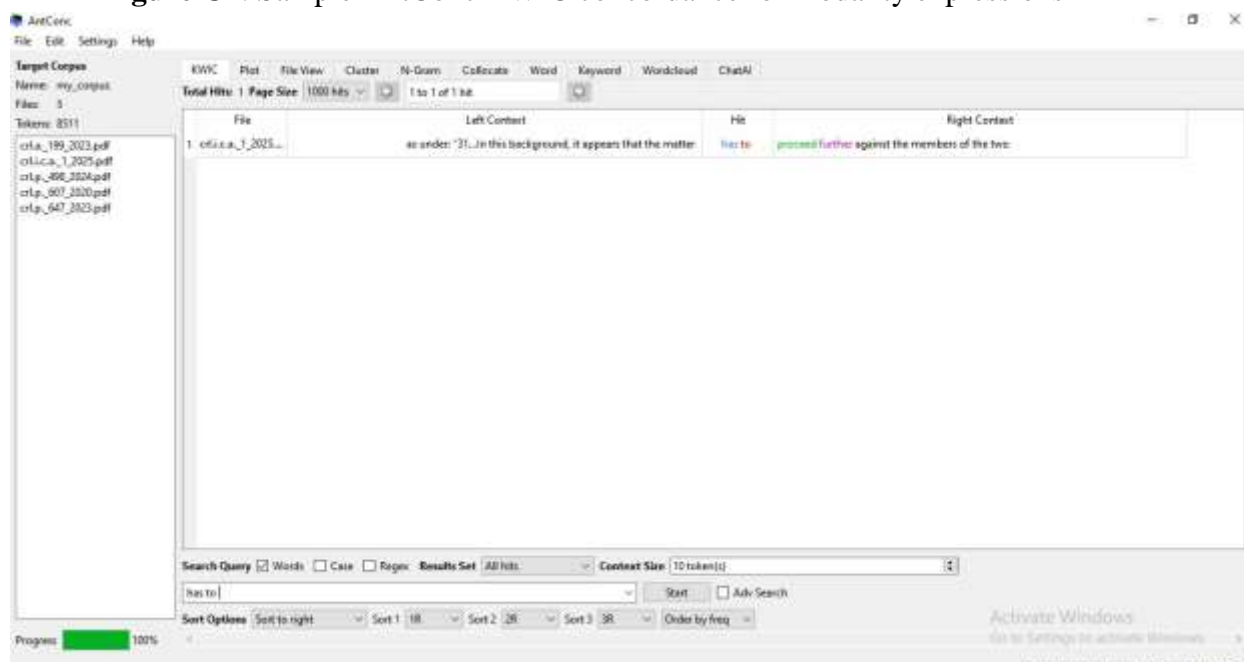


Figure C1(a): Concordance for “has to”



Figure C1(b): Concordance for “should”

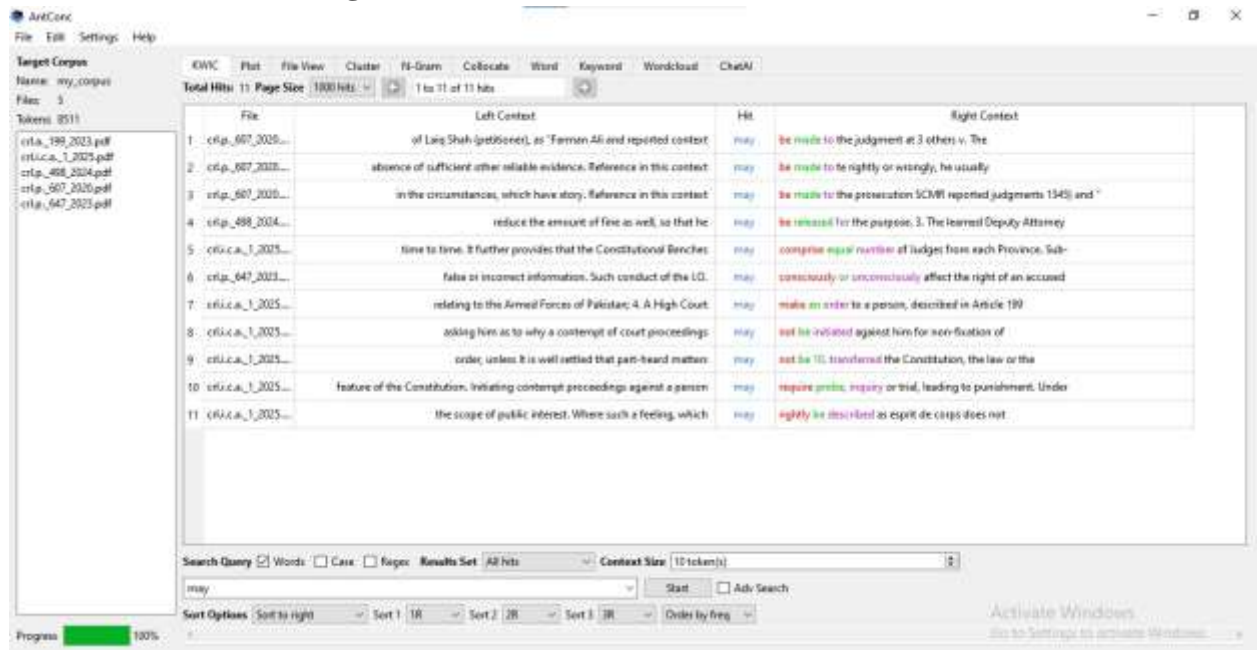


Figure C1(c): Concordance for “may”

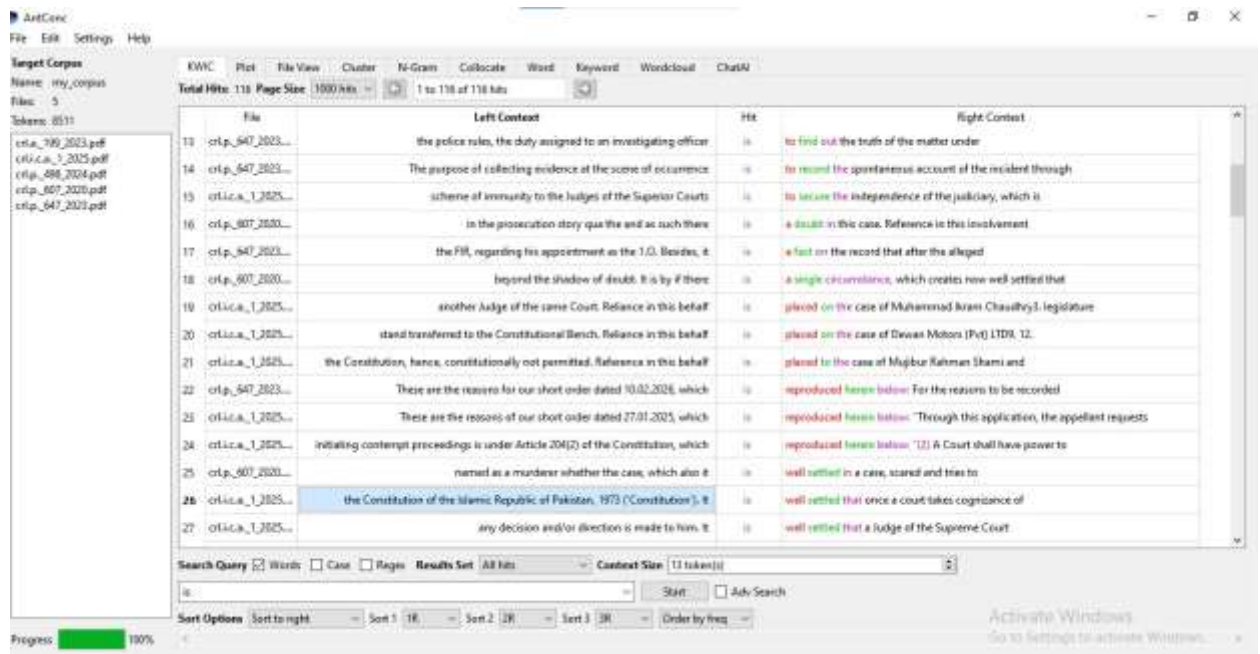


Figure C1(d): Concordance for “is” (showing “it is well settled”)

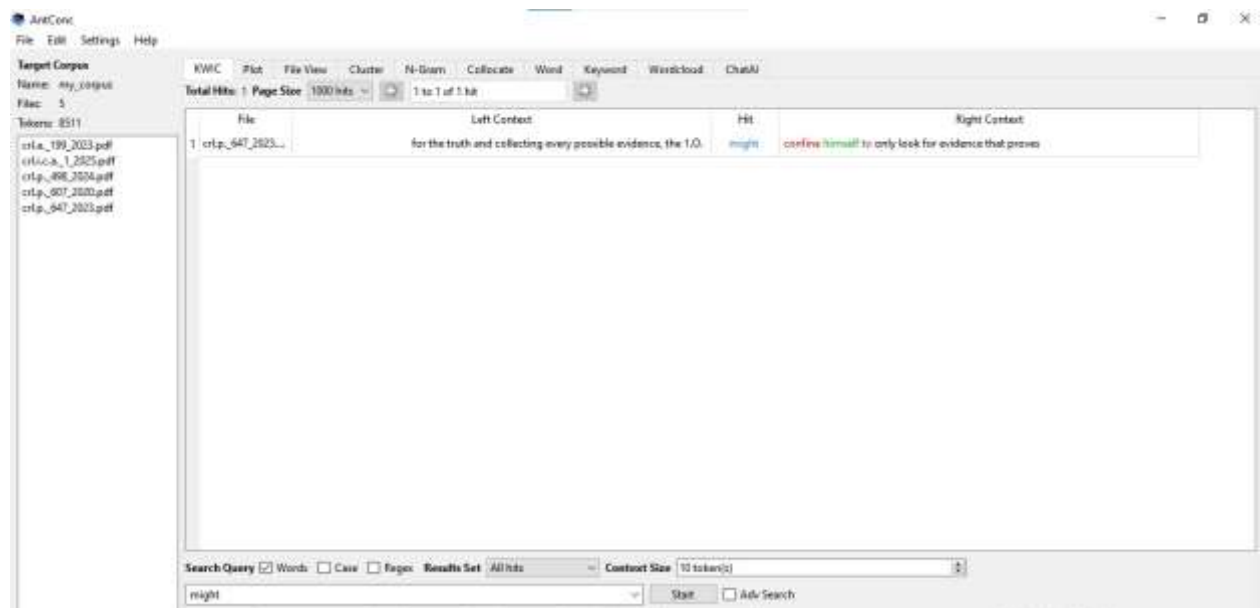


Figure 2(d): AntConc concordance output for the search term “might”

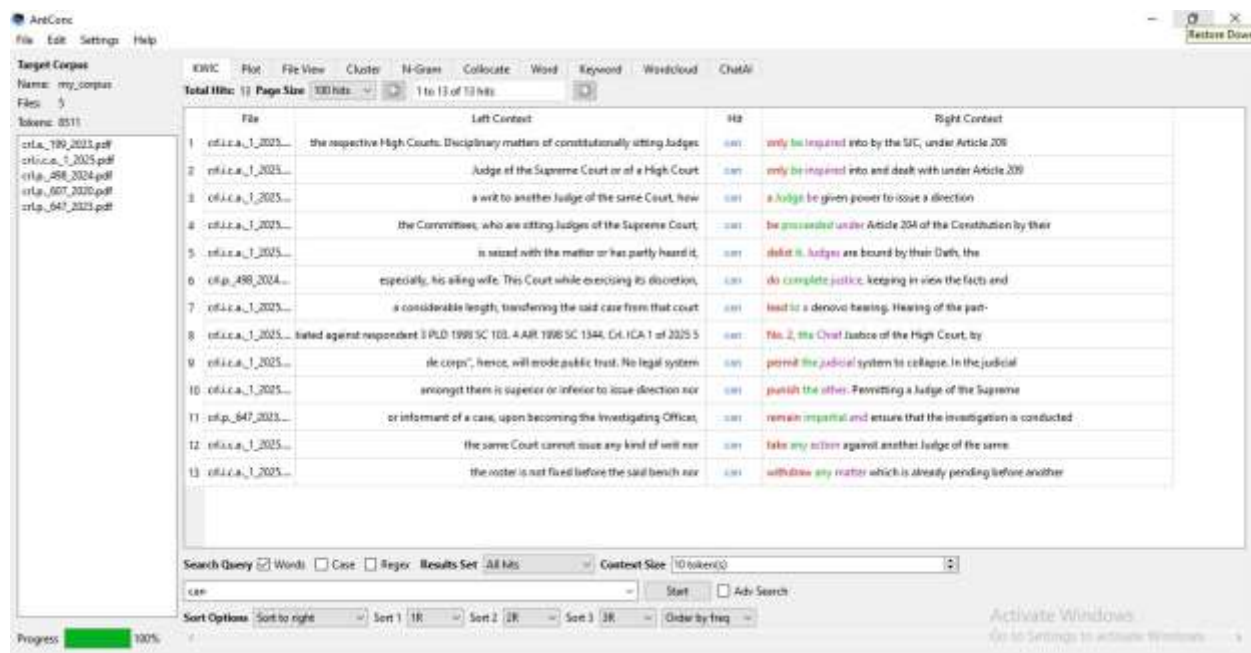


Figure 2(e): AntConc concordance output for the search term “can”