Journal of Language and Literature
Vol. 25 No. 2, October 2025, pp. 592 – 608
DOI: 10.24071/joll.v25i2.12372
Available at https://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JOLL/index
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Deontic Obligations in Anti-Sexual Harassment Policies in Tertiary Institutions: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Approach

Bernard Ayine[1], Cornelius Fuumaale Suom-Kogle[2], Benjamin Amoakohene[3*], Osei Yaw Akoto[4]
bamoakohene@uhas.edu.gh
[1]Department of English and Communication, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon, HONG KONG
[2]Department of Humanities, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, USA
[3]Department of General and Liberal Studies, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, GHANA
[4]Department of English, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, GHANA

Abstract

Sexual harassment in higher education is a pervasive issue that carries serious implications for both institutional reputation and the well-being of victims. To address this, universities have developed anti-sexual harassment policies to guide in managing such incidents. However, the language of these documents can sometimes hinder victims' willingness to report perpetrators. This study examined the use of deontic modalities in the anti-sexual harassment policies of three major Ghanaian universities: the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. The dataset comprised three official policy documents totaling 21219 tokens and 2675 word types, which were compiled into a specialized corpus. Using LancsBox software, we categorised the modal verbs into three deontic obligations (necessity, advisability, and possibility) and analyzed them from both institutional and victim/complainant perspectives. The findings revealed the presence of 580 modal verbs across the corpus. Deontic necessity was the most prominent, accounting for 55% of occurrences, followed by possibility (33.1%) and advisability (11.9%). Within the context of deontic necessity, institutional perspectives dominated (84.6%), framing universities as the primary agents of responsibility in combating sexual harassment, while victim/complainant perspectives were less emphasized (15.4%). Possibility and advisability were used more flexibly, offering discretionary or optional courses of action, though these too were largely framed from the institutional standpoint. By demonstrating the dominance of institutional responsibility and the limited framing of victims' agency, this study highlights how policy language shapes institutional responses and reporting behavior. These findings contribute to the understanding of how linguistic

Article information

Received: May 16, 2025

Revised: October 7, 2025

Accepted: October 8, 2025

choices in legal-institutional discourse influence power relations and victim engagement.

***Keywords**: sexual harassment; modality; obligation; possibility; necessity; advisability*

Introduction

Sexual harassment in higher education has become a widespread issue with the potential to significantly impact individuals, groups, and institutions (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2020). This phenomenon extends beyond educational institutions to multiple sectors of human endeavour. Consequently, establishing rules governing sexual behaviour in institutions has become imperative. Tavares and Wodon (2018) note that while laws governing sexual conduct exist in nine (9) out of ten (10) countries globally, six (6) out of ten (10) countries lack established frameworks addressing sexual harassment specifically within educational institutions. Even in cases where such frameworks or policy documents are in place, Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) claim that these institutional structures often contribute to the perpetuation of sexual harassment in higher education.

The United States Department of Education (USDOE) (2020) defines sexual harassment in educational institutions as any form of unwanted sexual behaviour that creates a hostile environment. This definition underscores the destructive impact of sexual harassment through the creation of hostile conditions for victims (Brown et al., 2023). Sagrestano et al. (2019) argue that victims of sexual harassment face a high risk of low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, academic problems, and suicidal thoughts. Despite such negative repercussions, sexual harassment in educational institutions continues to be prevalent (Konlan and Dangah, 2023). Cantalupo and Kidder (2018) report that faculty members have sexually harassed 1 in 10 female research students at major research universities.

The negative implications of sexual harassment cases for institutions are extensive. Jacobson and Eaton (2017) report that $106 million was paid to 26000 victims of sexual harassment who filed claims with the Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in the United States in 2014. Similarly, $35 million was recovered from 6862 resolved cases. Beyond these financial losses, institutions risk losing productive hours while addressing sexual harassment cases, not to mention the potential for long-term reputational damage. Such risks have driven organisations to develop clearly defined protocols and policies for managing cases of reported sexual harassment (Eaton and Jacobson, 2017). Among these policies, those built around zero tolerance for sexual harassment have proven effective in reducing sexual harassment incidents within various institutions (Anton, 2015).

In Ghana, sexual harassment presents a pervasive challenge across various contexts, significantly impacting women's safety and institutional integrity. According to a 2022 UN Women report, one (1) in four (4) Ghanaian women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, while 30% face sexual violence at least once in their lives. In tertiary education institutions, studies by Norman et al. (2012) and Sualihu et al. (2024) highlight the prevalence and consequences of sexual harassment. Norman et al. (2012) found that 61% of victims in public universities and professional institutions were women, reporting trauma, academic decline, and distrust in authorities. Despite high policy awareness, Sualihu et al. (2024) noted a low reporting rate (4%) of sexual harassment cases in colleges of education. Both studies advocate comprehensive anti-harassment policies having clear definitions, reporting procedures, sanctions, and regular reviews to ensure accountability and foster safer environments. This accentuates the urgent need for the implementation of strict policies to combat sexual harassment in educational institutions. The sexual harassment policy document presents itself as a unique genre because of its

specialized vocabulary, especially with the use of modal verbs.

The use of modalities in discourse is indispensable, given that all languages use modalities (Rani et al., 2022; Palmer, 2007) to fulfil the interpersonal metafunction (Bedu, 2017; Suhadi, 2011; Halliday, 1994). Modalities are used to express the attitude or judgement of a speaker towards a particular proposition (Suhadi, 2011; Simpson, 1993). Fairclough (2003) adds that modalities can be used to signal a degree of certainty, obligation, factuality, necessity, or even permission. When modal verbs are deployed in texts, there is always a distinction between epistemic and deontic modal verbs (Bedu and Ashira, 2023; Palmer, 2007; Cruse, 2004; Saeed, 2003). Epistemic modal verbs concern the "linguistic expression of what the speaker knows, has evidence for, believes, etc." (Bedu and Askira, 2023, p.48). However, deontic modal verbs are used in discourse to encode "a statement of obligation" (Bedu and Askira, 2023, p.48) and are heavily "dependent on some kind of authority, often the speaker" (Palmer, 2007, p.70). Winiharti (2012, p.538) asserts that to determine "whether a proposition expresses deontic or epistemic modality, the context in which the proposition exists must be considered". Thus, the use of deontic modalities presupposes the existence of a hierarchy of authority, usually between a superordinate and a subordinate. In this case, authority rests with the superordinate who has the power to impose obligations on the subordinate. But it must be noted that "for the event to be carried out, the speaker or writer must grant permission" (Rani et al., 2022).

The use of deontic verbs in discourse is often characterised by three key obligations: necessity, permission (possibility), and advisability (Bedu and Askira, 2023; Warchał, 2015; Suhadi, 2011). The deontic obligation of necessity specifies the highest degree of obligation on the interlocutors. It is often associated with the use of definitive verbs such as *must* (Carr, 2016; Suhadi, 2011; Saeed, 2003) and other forms of modal auxiliaries that go with the semantic operators *not* or *to* as in *cannot* and *have to*, respectively. The deontic obligation of advisability signals a median obligation often associated with the verbs "should and ought to" (Suhadi, 2011, p.174). This form of deontic obligation offers advice or gives recommendations to the interlocutor. In this case, the illocutionary force is framed as a suggested action to make the ultimate decision rests with the participant involved. The last form of deontic obligation, possibility, is characterised by modal particles such as *may*, *might*, and *can* (Wang et al., 2022; Suhadi, 2011). This form of deontic obligation expresses the common possibilities associated with a particular action.

The three deontic obligations relate to "the degrees of strength of the directives illocutionary point" (Kravchenko et al., 2021, p.169). As Austin (1962) noted, illocutionary points relate to the intended purpose of speech as conveyed by the speaker. In this context, the use of deontic obligations in speech serves three primary purposes, ranked in order of importance from highest to lowest. In this way, the deontic obligation of necessity represents a high position on the illocutionary scale, advisability on the medium, and possibility on the low. These ideas extend to manifest in discourse, especially in institutional settings. To this end, the following research questions guide the present study:

1. How are deontic modalities employed in anti-sexual harassment policy documents of Ghanaian universities, and what institutional and victim/complainant perspectives do they reflect?
2. To what extent does the predominance of particular deontic obligations influence the framing of institutional responsibilities and victims' willingness to report sexual harassment in tertiary institutions?

Review of Related Studies

Research on sexual harassment shows that language is not neutral but actively shapes how harassment is understood, normalized, resisted, or obscured. Scholars have drawn on a range of linguistic and discourse-analytic methods (e.g., critical discourse analysis (CDA), systemic functional linguistics (SFL), multimodal analysis, transitivity frameworks, and feminist CDA) to reveal how texts encode power and agency. In popular media, for

example, Halffield (2017) examined the discourse of dialogue and narrative structure of five teen movies (*Sixteen Candles, Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Revenge of the Nerds, Superbad, and Easy A*) to demonstrate that the genre in general routinely portrays sexual assault as humorous or inconsequential, rarely punishing perpetrators and often sidelining or blaming victims. This blurs our traditional understanding of sexual assault as bad (Halffield, 2017). Lityaningrum (2021), on the other hand, combined SFL with multimodal analysis to analyze emojis. It was found that emojis intensify obscene Instagram messages and transform ambiguous statements into explicit harassment and strengthen their evidentiary value (Lityaningrum, 2021). Applying Halliday's functional grammar and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to autobiographical blogs, La Causa (2025) reveals how Egyptian women's first-person testimonies both narrate victimization and linguistically construct empowered identities. The researcher argued that survivor blogs served as spaces where women linguistically construct "empowered victim" identities, blending passive depictions of harm with active accusations against abusers (La Causa, 2025).

Institutional and policy research deploys similar frameworks. Brunk et al. (2023) applied feminist discourse analysis to English university policies, while Ali (2024) used Fairclough's CDA to examine U.S. policies. Both studies found that university policy documents often depersonalize victims and obscure systemic power dynamics. Ali (2024) reported that policies often use milder terms such as "misconduct" and offer less severe sanctions to staff compared to students. This created a disparate discourse on sexual harassment, depending on the persons involved. Dalton (2019), using feminist CDA of public statements and media reports in Japan, argued that political leaders normalized harassment and reinforced gender stereotypes. As such, the study recommended that sexual harassment be seen as a structural form of violence against women in politics (VAWP) to make meaningful changes (Dalton, 2019). Still within the media space, albeit using a different framework, SFL transitivity analysis, Situmorang et al. (2025) examined Indonesian opinion columns of *The Jakarta Post*. The findings revealed that material processes (37.85%) and relational processes (33.48%) dominated the texts, emphasizing actions/events and identity construction. Mental and verbal processes added insights into perception and communication, while existential processes were rare. Participant roles were led by the actor (28.24%), highlighting the prominence of perpetrators' actions, while location was the most frequent circumstantial element, grounding harassment cases in specific places and times. They argue that the heavy use of material and relational processes foregrounds perpetrators' agency and institutional responsibility (Situmorang et al., 2025).

Cross-cultural and educational contexts reveal yet another layer. Tyler and Boxer (1996) combined surveys with qualitative narrative analysis to explore miscommunication between U.S. students and international teaching assistants' perceptions of verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Findings reveal that cultural expectations and/or orientation shape what behaviors are read as harassment. U.S. undergraduates, particularly women, were more likely to interpret certain behaviors, such as unsolicited compliments, unannounced visits, or physical contact, as inappropriate, while ITAs often judged them acceptable (Boxer, 1996). Still on the verbal aspect of sexual harassment, Yusri et al. (2025) used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to analyze the discourse of 128 documented instances of verbal sexual abuse reported by 30 female students, with a focus on the language features, symbols, and illocutionary acts. Linguistic analysis showed perpetrators most often used expressive and assertive speech acts. Quantitative results indicated that students, particularly male students, tended to view sexual gestures as more socially acceptable than other forms of verbal abuse. This complicates issues of sexual harassment further as gender becomes a factor for differences in perception.

Despite this rich international scholarship, Ghanaian higher education remains underexamined from a linguistic-policy perspective. Existing Ghanaian studies focus primarily on victims' experiences and

the social impact of harassment (Nyarko Adu et al., 2024; Konlan & Dangah, 2023; Doodaa et al., 2022; Norman et al., 2013, 2012; Agyepong et al., 2011) rather than examining the language of institutional response. Yet Ghanaian universities, guided by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), have drafted anti-sexual harassment policy documents that are themselves key discursive sites of power. How these policies deploy deontic modal auxiliaries to assign or soften obligations, grant discretion, or limit institutional accountability has not been systematically analyzed. Building on the global pattern of linguistic/discourse-analytic investigations of sexual harassment, the present study addresses this gap by examining the use of deontic modalities in anti-sexual harassment policies from three leading Ghanaian public universities.

We specifically adopted a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis approach to facilitate a systematic analysis of how lexical choices help frame issues on sexual harassment. The use of a corpus approach in a study "extends the methodological paradigm by integrating techniques commonly associated with qualitative discourse analysis in order to understand the discourse in question and its context as much as possible (Jaworska, 2016, p.9)." It enables the revealing of recurring linguistic patterns in our case, deontic modalities and their collocations at a faster and precise rate, thereby strengthening the methodological rigor and explanatory power of the study. As rightly pointed out by Jaworska (2016), incorporating a corpus approach enables the studied phenomenon to be further contextualised by considering and examining its historical context (be it social or political). Scholars (see Partington, 2014; Taylor, 2014) also add that this approach allows researchers to take a comparative approach in their studies. This study leverages this element of comparison to conclude how the policies from the three universities differ or converge in their use of deontic modalities. While corpus tools (and by extension corpus linguistics) enable the identification of recurring patterns of modality, Critical Discourse Analysis provides the interpretive lens to explore how these linguistic resources construct power, authority, and agency in institutional discourse (Fairclough, 2010, van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). As argued by Nartey and Mwinlaaru (2018, p.4), "the synergy between CL and CDA responds to limitations of both fields". Consequently, we combined these two approaches to move our analysis beyond the mere description of modal verb frequencies to interrogate how anti-sexual harassment policies ideologically privilege institutional authority while constraining the agency of victims and complainants.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach by employing both elements of qualitative and quantitative designs. The qualitative method of inquiry facilitates an in-depth textual analysis (Bonsu et al., 2023). This approach is particularly sensitive to "personal experience and its meanings, respect for cultural diversity and contextual factors, hypothesis generation, deep analysis of the issues, and others" (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 1590). This research design fosters innovation in data analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and enables researchers to interpret data with heightened sensitivity to contextual variables that may explain a given phenomenon. By adopting this approach, we analysed the implications of various deontic modalities used in anti-sexual harassment policy documents. This method allowed us to uncover how specific modalities shape the interpretation of policies from the perspectives of both victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, this approach helped us understand how these modalities may serve as deliberate mechanisms to introduce flexibility in the interpretation of acts of sexual harassment.

The quantitative component involved frequency counts using the corpus-based software LancsBox (Version 5.5.1)(Brezina & Platt, 2025), as detailed in Section 3.3. By integrating a corpus linguistic approach, this study was able to uncover patterns in the use of deontic modal particles within the data. Bhatia (2002) has indicated that corpus-based procedures are particularly effective in revealing the intricacies of lexical usage within specific genres or domains of discourse that

may not be easily discernible through other methods. The approach adopted in this study enabled a comprehensive analysis, interpretation, and contextualisation of deontic modal particles, not merely as functional grammatical units but as semantic operators.

Table 1: Profile of corpus

Name	Details
Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy documents	3 files
Number of Universities	3
Token type	2675
Token count	21219

It is worth pointing out that we adopted a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) approach. As noted earlier, this approach combines the systematic and quantitative strengths of corpus linguistics with the interpretive depth of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The choice of CACDA is justified by the dual aim of this research: (i) to systematically analyse the distribution and frequency of deontic modal verbs in anti-sexual harassment policy documents of Ghanaian universities, and (ii) to critically interpret how these linguistic choices construct power relations, institutional authority, and victims' agency.

Data

We collected anti-sexual harassment policy documents from three public Ghanaian universities: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the University of Cape Coast (UCC), and the University of Ghana (Legon). These documents were obtained from the official websites of the respective universities. The anti-sexual harassment policy of KNUST was published in 2019, while that of the University of Ghana was published in 2017. However, the revised policy of the University of Cape Coast, which is considered in this study, was published in 2014. We then built a corpus using these three policy documents. The corpus comprised 21219 tokens representing 2675 types of tokens. The profile of the specialised corpus is presented in Table 1 above. The three universities selected for this study are the largest in Ghana by student population (Adu et al., 2024). Their significant size and diversity create an environment where instances of sexual harassment are more likely to occur, thus making them ideal for examining issues of sexual harassment and how institutions position themselves to manage incidents of sexual harassment when they occur.

Analytical Procedure

In the present study, CDA provides an interpretive lens for understanding how policy discourse positions institutions and individuals within hierarchies of obligation and responsibility. The analysis follows Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model: 1) Textual analysis which involves examining the use of deontic modalities in the policy texts; 2) Discursive practice which is considering the production and circulation of these policies as authoritative documents and; 3) the interpretation of how the linguistic framing of obligation reflects broader ideological struggles around gender, power, and accountability in higher education (social practice).

We analysed the corpus by using LancsBox (Version 5.5.1)(Brezina & Platt, 2025), which was developed by Lancaster University. LancsBox provides an automatic tagging of data functionality, and as such, the corpus for this study was automatically tagged. All modal particles were automatically tagged with the Part of Speech (POS) tag *MD* in LancsBox. We then searched for all instances of the use of modal particles in the corpus by searching for the POS tag *MD* in the Keyword in Context (KWIC) search bar. The results yielded all instances of the use of modal particles in the corpus. An illustration of the search output is shown in Figure 1 below. Based on the output, we then extracted all modal particles to examine their frequency of usage.

File	Left	Node	Right
Corpus.txt	would be considered criminal and	shall	be grounds for disciplinary action
Corpus.txt	this anti -sexual harassment policy	shall	provide guidelines and code of
Corpus.txt	overt forms of sexual harassment	shall	usually be obvious, more subtle
Corpus.txt	person is not acceptable and	shall	render the individual responsible liable
Corpus.txt	and visitors.	shall	establish a multidisciplinary committee that
Corpus.txt	and visitors.	shall	offer support mechanisms for survivors
Corpus.txt	of equal opportunities for all,	shall	regard sexual harassment as a
Corpus.txt	this policy and its procedures	shall	prevent members of staff and
Corpus.txt	but the last two offenses	shall	be determined by the committee,
Corpus.txt	of these deliberations and recommendations	shall	be made known to all

Figure 1: KWIC search of deontic modalities

To examine the deontic obligation of the various modality particles, we grouped the modal particles into three main groups: necessity, advisability, and possibility (Suhadi, 2011), representing the three levels of deontic obligations. In grouping the modal particles into the various deontic obligations, we had an initial challenge of determining the appropriate deontic obligation of each modal particle. This challenge emanates from the conflicting views on the deontic obligation of each modal particle. For instance, Carr (2016) and Wang et al. (2022) classify *should* as a modal that indicates the deontic obligation of necessity. Meanwhile, Suhadi (2011) classifies *should* under the deontic obligation of advisability. Upon further discussions and deliberations, we agreed to use the model provided by Suhadi (2011) as the basis for our grouping since Suhadi's (2011) model provides a reference point for all three deontic obligations, an aspect lacking in other studies.

We further categorised the deontic obligations into two to clarify the direction of the obligation. Specifically, we sought to determine whether the obligation was associated with the institution or the victim/complainant. To achieve this, we manually analysed the use of deontic modalities across the corpus using the KWIC search function. For example, the deontic obligation of necessity was further divided into institutional and victim/complainant perspectives, with each perspective reflecting a common context of the use of the deontic modalities. The institutional perspective includes deontic modalities linked to institutional actions or responsibilities, while the victim/complainant perspective encompasses modalities associated with actions directed toward the victim, complainant, or offender. Our use of "victim/complainant" refers to individuals affected by or involved in the sexual act.

A code was assigned to corpus evidence to ensure that the extracts used were traceable to their originating institution. To that end, extracts from the anti-sexual harassment policy documents of the three Ghanaian universities were each assigned a unique code, such as KNUST001, UCC001 and UG001 to reflect the source institution.

While corpus analysis established quantitative patterns of modality usage, CDA enabled the interpretation of these findings in

relation to institutional power and victim positioning. Consequently, our combined analytical procedure was in four steps.

1. Extraction of all modal verbs from the corpus using POS tagging in LancsBox.
2. Classification of modal verbs into three deontic obligations (necessity, advisability, possibility) following Suhadi (2011).
3. Categorisation of obligations into institutional and victim/complainant perspectives based on the actor assigned responsibility.
4. Critical interpretation of the findings using CDA, focusing on how the distribution of obligations reflects broader ideological and power relations within Ghanaian tertiary institutions.

Results

Overall Distribution of Deontic Modal Verbs

The results, as presented in Table 2 below, revealed the presence of ten (10) types of modal verbs in the anti-sexual harassment policies of the three Ghanaian Universities.

Table 2. Modal verbs in the three anti-sexual harassment policy documents

Modal Verb	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Shall	182	31.3
Will	130	22.4
May	111	19.1
Should	69	11.9
Can	23	4
Could	16	2.8
Must	16	2.8
Would	16	2.8
Cannot	10	1.7
Might	7	1.2
Total	**580**	**100**

As shown in Table 2, the most common deontic modal verb identified in the anti-sexual harassment policy documents is *shall*, which occurred 182 times, representing 31.3% of all instances of deontic modal verbs in the corpus. This was closely followed by *will*, which was recorded 130 times (22.4%). The modal verb *may* was also frequently used throughout the anti-sexual harassment policies. It accounted for 19.1% of all deontic modal verbs, while *should* was recorded 69 times (11.9%). Other deontic modal verbs were less favoured in the anti-sexual harassment policy documents. These include the modal verbs *can* (4%), *could* (2.8%), *must* (2.8%), *would* (2.8%), *cannot* (1.7%), and *might* (1.2%).

1. Deontic obligations in anti-sexual harassment policies

This section offers discussions on the deontic obligations of the various modal auxiliaries used in the anti-sexual harassment policies. By drawing examples from the corpus, we show how deontic obligations differ from institutional and victim/complainant contexts. However, we do not intend to create two distinct polarities between the two perspectives but rather to show how the same obligation may hold different implications when taken from the institutional perspective, on one hand, and the victim/complainant perspective, on the other hand.

Table 3. Deontic obligations in the three anti-sexual harassment policy documents

Degree of Obligation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Necessity (*cannot, shall, must, will*)	319	55
Possibility (*can, may, could, might*)	192	33.1
Advisability (*should*)	69	11.9
Total	**580**	**100**

As evident in Table 3 above, we grouped the various deontic modal auxiliaries into three main obligations: necessity, advisability, and possibility (Carr, 2016; Suhadi, 2011; Palmer, 2001, 2013; Lyons, 1977). These deontic classifications correspond with the "degree of obligation" denoted by the overt modal operators (Suhadi, 2011, p.173). As shown in Table 3, the most dominant deontic obligation in the anti-sexual harassment policies is necessity, which accounted for 55% of deontic obligations denoted by the various modal particles used in the corpus. The deontic obligation of possibility occurred 192 times (33.1%), while advisability was 69 (11.9%), making them the second and third most frequently used deontic obligations, respectively.

a. Deontic Necessity

As noted by Suhadi (2011, p.173), "deontic necessity conveys the highest degree of obligation of a command" and was the most frequent form of deontic obligation (55%) in the corpus. It is commonly associated with the modal auxiliary verb *must* (Ninan, 2005). This form of deontic obligation indicates that issues related to sexual harassment are framed as necessities for both institutions and the individuals affected. In other words, certain issues are presented as highly necessary. This is exemplified in UCC001. The use of the deontic verb *must,* in discussing consent, frames the issue as highly necessary in matters involving sexual activities among university students and workers. The verb *must*, considered a strong necessity modal (Carr, 2016), emphasises the idea that the issue of consent should hold in all preferred scenarios (Horn, 1972). Consequently, consent is framed as a prerequisite for any sexual activity involving university students and workers.

1. *In order for consent to be valid, both parties **must** have unimpaired judgment and a shared understanding of the nature of the act to which they are consenting (UCC001).*

2. *The University Council **will** have the overall responsibility for ensuring that the University complies with the Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy (UG001).*

Similarly, the obligation of necessity is evident in extract UG001, which outlines the responsibility of the University Council to ensure that members of the university community comply with all information in the anti-sexual harassment policy document. The use of *will* demonstrates a high degree of commitment and necessity on the part of the university to ensure strict adherence to this policy.

Table 4. Deontic obligation of necessity in the three anti-sexual harassment policy documents

Perspective	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institutional	270	84.6
Victim/Complainant	49	15.4
Total	**319**	**100**

When institutional and victim or complainant perspectives are examined on the issue of necessity, it becomes evident that the institutional perspective takes precedence in the deontic obligation of necessity, as shown in Table 4 above. The institutional perspective was dominant, accounting for 84.6%, while the individual or complainant perspective accounted for just 15.4%. The predominance of the institutional perspective of necessity in Ghanaian sexual harassment policies aligns with Ali's (2024) and Brunk et al.'s (2023) observations that university policies frequently privilege institutional authority while downplaying victims' perspectives. This reflects Fairclough's (1995) concept of 'naturalised authority,' whereby ideological power or institutional control, in the case of this study, is presented as common sense to the point that it is no longer questioned. Similarly, Dalton (2019) notes that public discourses often normalize harassment by reinforcing gender hierarchies, a pattern echoed in Ghanaian policies where victims' agency is discursively minimized.

This emphasis is predominantly illustrated through the role of the anti-sexual harassment committees appointed by university authorities, as highlighted in Extracts UCC002 and KNUST001 and 004.

Journal of Language and Literature
ISSN: 1410-5691 (print); 2580-5878 (online)

From the institutional perspective, it beholds the university committee to take steps in reaching out to the offender and inviting the complainant when the committee receives a report of sexual harassment (see KNUST001). Thus, this is the "necessary action" of the university when a report has been made. Similarly, it is also the responsibility of the university to ensure that the right measures are in place to handle issues of sexual harassment, as evident in KNUST001. Although complainant or victim obligations were also evident, as seen in UCC003, they were represented to a much lesser extent. The complainant is also framed with the "necessary action" of requesting the "Sexual Harassment Committee to take further action" where necessary.

3. *The Sexual Harassment Committee **shall** notify the alleged offender that the matter is being taken further, and that it may result in disciplinary action (UCC002).*

4. *The University **shall** establish a multidisciplinary committee that will specifically address any complaint on harassment (KNUST001).*

5. *The complainant **shall** formally request to the Sexual Harassment Committee to take further action (UCC003).*

The predominance of the institutional perspective of necessity is unsurprising, given that anti-sexual harassment policies are designed and implemented by institutions. Consequently, the institution takes the forefront in matters related to these policies, while victims or complainants are only brought into focus when the need arises.

b. Deontic Advisability

Deontic advisability, which accounted for the lowest degree of deontic obligation (11.9%) in the policy documents, conveys "the median degree of obligation of a command" (Suhadi, 2011, p. 174). Actions are, therefore, presented as appropriate, beneficial, or wise but not strictly required. In the corpus, this type of deontic obligation was expressed through advice or recommendations rather than mandatory directives or mere permissions, as illustrated in Extract UCC004.

6. *The University of Cape Coast will not tolerate sexual harassment and will take steps to ensure that it does not occur. If it does occur, the sufferers **should** be free to seek redress without fear of reprisal (UCC004).*

The expression *the sufferers should be free to seek redress without fear of reprisal*, further premodified by the conditional clause "If it does occur," indicates that the action is merely recommended. It suggests that it would be beneficial for the victim to take appropriate actions to seek redress, but it is certainly not compulsory. The victim, based on their own volition, can decide not to pursue the matter further, making the responsibility lies with the victim to seek redress or otherwise.

In Extract KNUST002, the deontic obligation of advisability is placed on the alleged perpetrator, who, in situations where their intentions may have been misunderstood, is advised to explain their actions to the complainant.

7. *In many cases people may feel that their actions have been misunderstood, and that they did not intend to cause Harassment. In that case the alleged Harasser **should** explain their intensions and clearly indicate that the behaviour will not be repeated so that the parties could come to an agreement regarding what is/isn't acceptable (KNUST002).*

Further analysis of the nature of deontic advisability is revealing such that the institutional perspective again overshadows that of the victim or complainant, as shown in Table 5. The institutional perspective accounted for 56.5% of all instances of deontic advisability, while the victim/complainant perspective accounted for 43.5%. This suggests that, in most instances where the deontic obligation of advisability was evident, it was primarily associated with institutional processes and frameworks, with less emphasis on the victim/complainant. The predominance of the institutional perspective is justifiable

given that most instances of advisability from the institutional perspective are related to the operational definitions of actions or behaviours that constitute sexual harassment.

Table 5. Deontic advisability

Perspective	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institutional	39	56.5
Victim/Complainant	30	43.5
Total	69	100

c. Deontic Possibility

The notion of deontic possibility, which was the second most frequent form of deontic obligation (33.1%), expresses permission (Van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998; Lyons, 1977) or the lowest degree of obligation in the context of social norms, rules, or commands (Suhadi, 2011). This form of deontic obligation is typically conveyed using modal auxiliaries such as *may*, *could*, *can*, and *might* (Wang et al., 2022; Van Linden and Verstraete, 2010). In instances where this form of deontic obligation was used, cases of sexual harassment were framed as being dependent on the parties involved in the process. This can be seen in Extracts KNUST003 and KNUST004.

*d. Behaviours that some individuals find acceptable, or even friendly, **may** be offensive to someone else and this should be respected (KNUST003).*

*e. Persons who are accused of Harassment, either under the formal procedure or who are approached informally about their behaviour **could** seek support and advice from the Counselling Centre (KNUST004).*

In KNUST003, the modal auxiliary *may* indicates that different people can interpret the same issue from different perspectives. For instance, what one person might consider offensive may not be viewed the same way by another. This highlights the subjectivity of acceptable or friendly behavior, particularly verbal forms of sexual harassment, which may depend on the sociocultural context of the parties involved. It would be inappropriate to conclude that certain behaviours are acceptable based solely on personal judgment or disposition without the clear consent or indication of the other party. Similarly, in KNUST004, *could* projects the possibility of a person accused of sexual harassment to seek help. This possibility represents a basis, where both the accused and the victim have an equal opportunity to seek support. Thus, a person accused of sexual harassment has an equal right and opportunity to seek support, just as the victim does.

Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of deontic possibility between the institutional and victim/complainant perspectives. It can be observed that the institutional perspective on deontic possibility dominates that of the victim. Thus, there were 136 (70.8%) instances of deontic possibility from the institutional perspective, while the victim/complainant perspective recorded 56 (29.2%) instances.

Table 6. Deontic possibility

Perspective	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institutional	136	70.8
Victim/complainant	56	29.2
Total	**192**	**100**

The frequency distribution of deontic possibility from the victim/complainant and institutional perspectives (see Table 6) implies that deontic obligation of possibility was closely associated with institutional processes or operational definitions of actions that characterise sexual harassment. Extract UG002 reflects the victim/complainant perspective on how sexual misconduct can be addressed. It suggests that the victim/complainant has the right to decide the most appropriate course of action. Specifically, Extract UG002 frames mediation as a possibility by presenting mediation as one of several options for managing misconduct. This framing positions mediation as a suggestion through the deontic obligation of possibility.

f. *A Complainant **may** request through the Committee, that an attempt be made to resolve a sexual harassment or misconduct matter through mediation (UG002).*

Journal of Language and Literature
ISSN: 1410-5691 (print); 2580-5878 (online)

*g. In the case of a serious offence, which shall be determined by the committee of investigation, the Committee **may** go ahead and investigate a complaint even where a Respondent refuses to respond to the allegations or participate in the enquiry process (KNUST005).*

The institutional perspective, from which the issue of a respondent failing to notice a complaint filed against him/her, as presented in extract KNUST005 above, frames this situation as a possible alternative. This means that the anti-sexual harassment committee can pursue an investigation even if the respondent has not responded within the stipulated period. Through this, institutional action is framed as a possibility, ensuring that justice is not denied a complaint.

Discussion

The analysis of the corpus reveals the presence of a diverse range of deontic modalities in anti-sexual harassment policies in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Given that institutional policy documents are framed within appropriate laws, a high frequency of deontic modal verbs is expected (Famina and Osminkin, 2022). These deontic obligations are marked by "overt modal operators" (Suhadi, 2011, p.158) such as *can*, *shall*, *should*, *could*, *might*, *must*, *may*, *cannot*, and *will*, which are often referred to as central verbs (Boginskaya, 2022).

Table 2 indicates the predominant use of modal auxiliaries such as *shall* and *will*, a pattern particularly common in legal genres/registers (Boginskaya, 2022; Krapivkina, 2017; Cooper, 2011; Matulewska, 2010; Bázlik and Ambrus, 2009). As noted by Boginskaya (2022, p.10), "when taking into account a small size of the corpus, it seems possible to say that the modal verb 'shall' is the most used deontic modal in Legal English." Within the context of anti-sexual harassment policies, *shall* presents an interesting phenomenon, as the "lack of precision in using it" (Boginskaya, 2022, p.11) is exploited as a resource to frame decisions by institutional authorities. This lack of precision grants authorities the power to pursue action that is not bound by autonomous commitments. In other words, "the non-autonomy of the sentence subject" (Famina and Osminkin, 2022, p.262) provides greater flexibility for institutional action in instances of sexual harassment.

Similarly, the use of the deontic *will* conveys what Matulewska (2010, p.79) refers to as "conditional duty". In this regard, the action of the authorities is framed based on a sexual act meeting certain conditions that warrant action. As such, the authorities involved may have the liberty to determine these conditions. Therefore, from both institutional and victim/complainant perspectives, these two deontic modals (will and shall) frame actions as non-autonomous decision-making processes, where liberty is afforded to the subjects involved in determining the appropriate course of action.

Other deontic modals, such as *may* and *should,* have also been frequently used in the corpus. However, *may* was more frequently used than *should*, a finding that aligns with that of Boginskaya (2022). The findings further revealed that these deontic verbs (*may* and *should*) convey a weaker sense of obligation on the part of the subject of the sentences (Carr, 2016). Famina and Osminkin (2022, p.253) opine that "in a legal context, *may* is widely used to express deontic permission," a feature shared by the modal verb *should* (Winiharti, 2012). Within the anti-sexual harassment policies, *should* and *may*, while differing in terms of their illocutionary force, present instances where the subjects of the sentences (which may be either the institution or the victim) are open to making decisions. These modals, therefore, empower the subjects of the sentences to act discretionarily. In this regard, sexual harassment is framed as a matter of individual choice, as seen in Excerpt 6, where the person who suffers from sexual harassment is free to seek redress or choose otherwise. The deontic function of *may* and *should* is shared by other weak deontic modals such as *can*, *could*, *might*, and *would*, all of which allow for flexibility in decision-making, granting the subjects the autonomy to decide how to act from institutional or personal perspectives.

The deontic modals *must* and *cannot*, though infrequently used in the corpus, represent strong instances of deontic obligations (Carr, 2016). Following Boginskaya (2022, p.10), we argue that the limited use of these modals "indicates the least prescriptive nature" of the sexual harassment policy documents. Consequently, the anti-sexual harassment policies are framed to carry a descriptive outlook rather than a prescriptive one. This suggests that these documents function more as guidelines for action and offer descriptive rules than definitive prescriptive mandates. This framing can be attributed to the inherent complexity of sexual harassment cases. Since such issues are often context-dependent and vary between individuals, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable. As Famina and Osminkin (2022, p.263) argue, "MUST seems to be triggered by a set of specific contextual parameters. The slightest change in the contextual environment will put an end to this phenomenon." Given that anti-sexual harassment policies are designed to address unique and individualised cases, the less frequent use of strong deontic modals like *must* and *cannot* is justified. These sexual harassment policy documents, by offering flexibility, allow for more nuanced responses that consider the specific context of each case.

Regarding deontic obligations in anti-sexual harassment policies, universities consistently frame actions against sexual harassment as necessary through the deontic obligation of necessity (Suhadi, 2011). While these policies serve as guidelines for managing sexual harassment within an institutional context, they are structured to convey the necessity of certain actions on the part of individuals and authorities when dealing with instances of sexual harassment. These findings align with the assertions of Lillian (2008) and Dontcheva-Navratilova (2009), who argue that most legal documents tend to contain instances of high to medium illocutionary points. Thus, it can be posited that these documents are intentionally designed to draw attention to sexual harassment and deter individuals from behaviours that may be considered sexual harassment. Additionally, the anti-sexual harassment documents seek to empower victims to speak out and address their concerns.

An important observation is the way these modal verbs communicate key issues related to the ideological stance of tertiary institutions, framing both institutional and individual actions as necessary for the effective handling of sexual harassment cases. These modal verbs effectively capture the "ideological point of view which correlates with institutional beliefs and norms of conduct" (Stamatović, 2016, p.134). By emphasising necessity, the policies reinforce the institutional commitment to addressing sexual harassment, reflecting both a commitment to legal compliance and an effort to promote a safe and respectful environment within the university setting.

Deontic possibility was the second most prominent deontic obligation in the anti-sexual harassment documents. This form of deontic obligation implies that different perspectives can exist regarding the same issue, and as a result, different actions may be taken in response. According to Lyons (1977), the deontic obligation of possibility highlights acts performed by morally responsible agents, suggesting that there are multiple potential courses of action regarding sexual harassment. It also exposes the reality that individuals may interpret the same situation differently. This underscores the importance of seeking clarity in cases of potential sexual harassment, as illustrated in KNUST004.

On the other hand, deontic advisability frames issues of sexual harassment in terms of advice. Here, the subject of the deontic obligation receives indirect guidance, with the ultimate responsibility for action resting with the victim/complainant. Given that victims of sexual harassment often experience challenges such as low self-esteem and stigmatisation (Sagrestano et al., 2019), they may be hesitant to pursue a formal complaint. Therefore, it is crucial to allow victims to process their situation and weigh the potential consequences of their actions before deciding how to proceed. The corpus further revealed that deontic advisability was less emphasised in the anti-sexual harassment policy documents. This implies that tertiary

institutions prioritise framing both institutional decisions and individual actions as necessary to reduce sexual harassment cases. This focus on necessity reflects the belief that clear and decisive action is essential in addressing sexual harassment cases. This means that tertiary institutions tend to prioritise framing their decisions and that of individuals as necessary to ensure fewer instances of sexual harassment, while noting the role of intentionality, on issues surrounding sexual harassment. Nielsen et al. (2017, p.128) note that the "difference between intentional and unintentional sexual behaviours creates various dilemmas". Hence, sexual harassment policies present different deontic obligations aimed at capturing the nuances of the act and the complexity of processes involved in classifying and adopting actions towards the act.

Taken together, these findings confirm a wider global trend where institutional discourses on harassment obscure victim agency and normalize institutional authority (Ali, 2024; Brunk et al., 2023; Dalton, 2019). Taken critically, we argue that Ghanaian sexual harassment policies reproduce the same ideological structures, embedding hierarchical relations through modality choices. This aligns with Fairclough's (2003) and van Dijk's (2001) view that institutional texts function as elite discourse, shaping social practice by privileging the voices of powerful actors while marginalizing those of victims

Conclusion

This study has examined the forms of deontic modals used in anti-sexual harassment policies of three tertiary institutions in Ghana. The results of the study from the corpus-assisted analysis of 21,219 specialised corpora of anti-sexual harassment policy documents show the predominance of the deontic obligation of necessity, which frames the decision-making process right from what constitutes sexual harassment to institutional frameworks that make decisions on issues relating to sexual harassment. We have also discussed how these deontic modalities are used to frame the discourse on sexual harassment.

While we have been able to present a detailed discussion of the deontic modals used in anti-sexual harassment policies, we must indicate that our analysis was largely limited to the collocates of the various modal verbs. As such, we could not give a detailed account of deviant cases where other deontic obligations may be related to a particular modality. Thus, we, therefore, recommend that further studies be conducted to give a fuller account of the uniqueness of each deontic modality. For example, such a study can examine the uniqueness of the deontic modality *shall* and how and how it is used differently in some contexts of anti-sexual harassment policies

References

Agyepong, F., Opare, J. A., Owusu-Banahene, N. O., & Yarquah, J. A. (2011). The typology and magnitude of sexual harassment of female students in Ghanaian senior high schools. *Research in Education*, *86*(1), 61–73. https://doi.org/10.7227/RIE.86.6

Anton, C. M. (2015). The effects of persuasive communication on knowledge and attitudinal outcomes of a sexual harassment training program. *Social Psychology*, *16*, 117–128.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford.

Bázlik, M., & Ambrus, P. (2009). *Legal English and its Grammatical Structure*. Wolters Kluwer Česká Republika.

Bedu, A. M. (2017). Semantico-pragmatic interrelation of editorials and their headlines in English-speaking Nigerian newspapers. https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/handle/20.500.12812/263980

Bedu, A. M., & Askira, M. G. (2023). On some pragmatic functions of modality in Hausa

newspaper discourse. *Inquiry in African Languages and Literatures*,*16*, 46–56.
Bhatia, V. K. (2002). Applied genre analysis: A multi-perspective model. *Ibérica, Journal of the European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes*, *4*, 3–19.
Boginskaya, O. (2022). A corpus-based study of deontic modality in legal discourse. *Rasprave: Časopis Instituta za hrvatski jeziki jezikoslovlje*, *48*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.31724/rihjj.48.1.1
Bondestam, F., & Lundqvist, M. (2020). Sexual harassment in higher education–a systematic review. *European Journal of Higher Education*, *10*(4), 397–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2020.1729833
Bonsu, E. M., Afful, J. B. A., & Hu, G. (2023). A corpus-based genre analysis of letters of regularization: The case of land institutions in Ghana. *Ibérica*, *45*, 215–241. doi.org/10.17398/2340-2784.45.215
Brezina, V. & Platt, W. (2025) *#LancsBox X* [software], Lancaster University, http://lancsbox.lancs.ac.uk.
Brown, C. S., Biefeld, S. D., & Bulin, J. (2023). High school policies about sexual harassment: What's on the books and what students think. *Journal of Social Issues*, *79*(4), 1411–1430. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12505
Cantalupo, N. C., & Kidder, W. C. (2018). A systematic look at a serial problem: Sexual harassment of students by university faculty. *Utah Law Review*,3,1–117. https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2018/iss3/4
Carr, J. (2017). Deontic modals. In *The Routledge handbook of metaethics* (pp. 194–210). Routledge.
Carrera-Fernandez, M. J., Guàrdia-Olmos, J., & Pero-Cebollero, M. (2013). Qualitative research in psychology: Misunderstandings about textual analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, *47*, 1589–1603. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s11135-011-9611-1
Cooper, P. K. (2011). Is there a case for the abolition of 'shall' from EU legislation? *Riga: Riga Graduate School of Law*, 1–92
Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th Ed.). Sage.
Cruse, A. (2004). *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Mitthögskolan.
Dontcheva-Navratilova, O. (2009). "Words must be our force": Exploring modality markers in political speeches. *Topics in Linguistics*, *4,* 13–19.
Doodaa, V., Osei-Owusu, B., Kyei, E., Eshun, I., & Esther, O. (2022). Sexual harassment against female students in senior high schools in the Techiman Municipality of Bono East Region of Ghana. *American Academic Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences*, *86*(1), 131–142.
Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research.* Routledge
Fairclough, N. (2010). Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language. London: Routledge
Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Routledge.
Fairclough, N. (1992) Discourse and social change. Polity
Famina, N. V., & Osminkin, A. I. (2022). Modality in legal discourse. must, can, may, will and shall: Between obligation and permission. *Современное педагогическое образование*, *4*, 251–265.
Horn, L. R. (1972). *On the semantic properties of logical operators in English* (Doctoral Dissertation). University of California, Los Angeles.
Jacobson, R. K., & Eaton, A. (2017). How organizational policies influence bystanders likelihood of reporting moderate and severe sexual harassment at work. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, *30*, 37–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-017-9309-1
Konlan, K. D., & Dangah, M. M. (2023). Students' experiences of sexual harassment: A descriptive cross-sectional study in a college of education, Ghana. *Heliyon*, *9*(4).

Krapivkina, O. A. (2017). Semantics of the verb shall in legal discourse. *Jezikoslovlje*, *18*(2), 305–317.

Kravchenko, N., Pasternak, T., & Korotka, S. (2021). Deontic modality in epideictic discourse: Speech acts facet (based on COVID-associated texts). *Cogito,13*(2), 167–184.

Jaworska, S. (2016). Using a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach to investigate constructions of identities in media reporting surrounding mega sports events: The case of the London Olympics 2012. In *Critical event studies: Approaches to research* (pp. 149-174). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Lillian, D. L. (2008). Modality, persuasion and manipulation in Canadian conservative discourse*. Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, *2*(1),1–16. http://cadaad.org/ejournal

Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics*. Cambridge University Press.

Nartey, M., & Mwinlaaru, I. N. (2019). Towards a decade of synergising corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis: a meta-analysis. Corpora, 14(2), 203-235.

Nielsen, M. B. D., Kjær, S., Aldrich, P. T., Madsen, I. E., Friborg, M. K., Rugulies, R., & Folker, A. P. (2017). Sexual harassment in care work–dilemmas and consequences: A qualitative investigation. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *70*,122–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2017.02.018

Ninan, D. (2005). Two puzzles about deontic necessity. In J. Gajewski, V. Hacquard, B. Nickel, & S. Yalcin (Eds), *New Work on Modality* (pp.1–27). http://web.mit.edu/dninan/www/

Norman, I. D., Aikins, M., & Binka, F. (2012). Traditional and contrapower sexual harassment in public universities and professional training institutes of Ghana. *International Journal of Academy Research*, *4*, 85–95.

Norman, I. D., Aikins, M., & Binka, F. N. (2013). Sexual harassment in public medical schools in Ghana. *Ghana Medical Journal*, *47*(3), 128-136.

Nyarko Adu, I., Duoduaa Nyarko-Tetteh, A., & Kyei-Frimpong, M. (2024). Uncovering the untold story: Exploring gender disparities in sexual harassment experiences and coping strategies among Ghanaian higher education students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, *16*(3), 862-874.

Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and modality (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139167178

Palmer, F. R. (2007). *Mood and Modality.* World Book Publishing Company.

Palmer, F. R. (2013). *Modality and the English Modals* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Partington, A. S. (2014). Mind the gaps: The role of corpus linguistics in researching absences. *International journal of corpus linguistics*, *19*(1), 118-146.

Rani, N. S. A., Ibrahim, N. A. N., Zahrawaani, N., Jasmin, S. A. W., & Bakar, M. H. (2022). A critical discourse analysis of the use of modal verbs in former prime minister's Speech during COVID-19. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 12*(7), 106–113. http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i7/14008

Saeed, J. L. (2003). *Semantics* (2nd ed). Blackwell Publishing.

Sagrestano, L. M., Ormerod, A. J., & DeBlaere, C. (2019). Peer sexual harassment predicts African American girls' psychological distress and sexual experimentation. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *43*(6), 492–499. doi: 10.1177/0165025419870292

Sambrook, J., & Russell, D. W. (2001). *Molecular cloning: a laboratory manual* (3rd ed.). CSHL Press.

Schneider, J., Whitehead, D., & Elliot, D. (2009). *Nursing and Midwifery* (2nd ed). Oxford University Press.

Stamatović, M. V. (2016). Scaling deontic modality in parliamentary discourse. *Logos et Littera: Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches to Text*, *2*(3), 131–149.

Sualihu, W., Zakaria, M., & Owusu, V. (2024). Sexual harassment in Ghanaian tertiary institutions: Reality or perception. *Universal Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *4*(2), 74–88. https://www.scipublications.com/journal/index.php/ujssh/article/view/1085

Tavares, P., & Wodon, Q. (2018). *Ending violence against women and girls: Global*

and regional trends in women's legal protection against domestic violence and sexual harassment (Ending Violence Against Women Notes Series). Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Taylor, C. (2014). Investigating the representation of migrants in the UK and Italian press: A cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse analysis. *International journal of corpus linguistics*, *19*(3), 368-400.

Van der Auwera, J., & Plungian, V. (1998). Modality's semantic map. *Linguistic Typology*, *2*, 79–124. https://doi.org/10.1515/lity.1998.2.1.79.

van Dijk, T., A. (2001). Multidisciplinary Critical Discourse Analysis: A plea for diversity. In R.Wodak & M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 95-120). London: Sage

Van Linden, A., & Verstraete, J. (2010). Revisiting deontic modality and related categories: A conceptual map based on the study of English modal adjectives. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *43*, 150–163. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.07.031

Wang, Z., Fan, W., & Fang, A. C. (2022). Lexical input in the grammatical expression of stance: A collexeme analysis of the introductory *it* pattern. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.762000

Warchał, K. (2015). *Certainty and doubt in academic discourse: Epistemic modality markers in English and Polish linguistics articles*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

Winiharti, M. (2012). The difference between modal verbs in deontic and epistemic modality. *Humaniora*, *3*(2), 532–539.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (eds.) Methods of critical discourse analysis, pp. 1-33, London: SAGE.