

# Semantic Modality in Angkola Language: A Pragmatic-Semantic Analysis of Epistemic and Deontic Expressions

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**Abstract**—This study explores the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of epistemic and deontic modality in the Angkola language, a regional variety spoken in South Tapanuli, Indonesia. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Palmer, Halliday, and Brown and Levinson, the research identifies key modal expressions—*bope* (possibility), *adong* (certainty), *songonna* (inference), *unang* (prohibition), *bole* (permission), and *harus* (obligation)—and examines their roles in natural discourse. The findings indicate that epistemic modality is used to express different levels of belief and to moderate speaker commitment, while deontic modality encodes social norms, authority, and culturally embedded obligations. Modal expressions in Angkola also function as strategies of politeness, allowing speakers to adjust modal strength according to social status, context, and relational goals. Furthermore, modality serves as a reflection of core cultural values such as deference, social harmony, and the *Dalihan Na Tolu* system. By uncovering how modality indexes interpersonal and cultural meaning, this study contributes to the semantic-pragmatic analysis of under-documented languages and enhances understanding of the interface between grammar and culture.

**Index Terms**—Angkola language, semantic modality, epistemic modality, deontic modality, politeness strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

In everyday communication, people do more than convey straightforward information; they also express beliefs, uncertainties, hopes, permissions, and obligations through language. These nuances are not incidental but are shaped by what linguists refer to as *modality* (Chiyah-Garcia et al., 2023; Hart & Marmol Queralto, 2021; Neary, 2015). According to Palmer (2001), modality is a linguistic device used to indicate a speaker's attitude toward the truth or likelihood of a given proposition. Similarly, Lyons (1977) describes modality as a lens through which a speaker's opinions, judgments, or beliefs about events and actions are revealed. In this sense, modality is not only a grammatical category but also a reflection of social relationships, cultural values, and communicative intentions (Chen & He, 2024; Wang & Huang, 2021).

Modality becomes even more significant when viewed in the context of intercultural communication. In English, for instance, modal verbs such as *must*, *may*, or *can* influence the perceived level of politeness, assertiveness, or indirectness in an utterance (Li, 2022; Shan, 2021). Cross-cultural differences in the interpretation of modality often lead to tension or misunderstanding. For this reason, understanding how modality functions across languages including local and minority languages is essential for building a broader awareness of the interplay between language and culture (de Varda & Strapparava, 2022; Durst-Andersen, 2023; Pescuma et al., 2023). Such an understanding not only enhances cross-linguistic pragmatics but also informs applied fields such as translation, language education, and intercultural negotiation.

One such language that is rich in modal nuance yet remains understudied is Angkola, a variety of the Batak language spoken in South Tapanuli, North Sumatra. Angkola demonstrates not only lexical and syntactic richness but also reflects the social and cultural values of its speakers through their expression of obligation, permission, possibility, and uncertainty (Dalimunte, 2024). Despite this richness, formal linguistic studies focusing on the modal system in Angkola particularly from a semantic and pragmatic perspective remain limited. This article seeks to address that gap. By examining both the structural patterns and the social functions of modality, the study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of how meaning is shaped in culturally grounded ways.

Specifically, this study aims to describe the forms and functions of epistemic and deontic modality in the Angkola language. It analyzes the semantic distinctions and pragmatic implications of modal expressions as they occur in everyday communication, with particular attention to their roles in politeness strategies—such as hedged requests, mitigated

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directives, and context-sensitive prohibitions. In doing so, this research contributes to both theoretical discussions in semantic-pragmatics and the preservation of Indonesia's rich linguistic heritage.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of modality has become a central topic in semantics and pragmatics, particularly due to its capacity to express a speaker's stance, belief, or attitude toward a proposition. Palmer (2001) classifies modality into three principal types: epistemic, deontic, and dynamic. Epistemic modality relates to degrees of certainty or probability based on the speaker's knowledge or assumptions, while deontic modality concerns social norms, obligations, permissions, and prohibitions (Rocci, 2017; Zhou, 2022). Dynamic modality, by contrast, refers to the internal capacities or potentialities of the subject engaged in the action.

Lyons (1977) adds a further distinction by introducing the concepts of subjective and objective modality. Subjective modality reflects the speaker's personal judgment or belief, whereas objective modality presents a judgment that appears to stand independently from the speaker's personal stance. For example, the statement "It may rain tomorrow" can function either as a subjective assumption or an objective conclusion based on scientific data.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), in systemic functional grammar, argue that modality is not only a matter of type but also of value, indicating degrees of certainty, obligation, or inclination. He categorizes modality into high, median, and low values, each of which reflects different levels of commitment to the truth or desirability of the proposition. Modal verbs such as *must*, *should*, *may*, and *might* illustrate these values in varying strength, often influencing the interpersonal meaning of the utterance (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Coates (1980) explores how modal auxiliaries like *must*, *may*, and *can* operate across epistemic and deontic domains, showing how context determines the interpretation of modality. The semantic ambiguity between obligation and logical necessity, or between permission and possibility, illustrates the pragmatic flexibility of modal expressions (Coates, 1980; Melia, 2014; Roca-Royes, 2023).

From a pragmatic perspective, modality is deeply intertwined with politeness strategies. According to Brown (1987), speakers often use weaker modal forms to express negative politeness—respecting the interlocutor's autonomy by softening directives or requests—while stronger modals tend to align with positive politeness by asserting solidarity or urgency (Levinson, 2011; Watts, 2019). The degree to which a speaker mitigates or emphasizes a proposition reflects not only linguistic competence but also cultural values and social relations.

Despite the extensive studies on modality in English and other major languages, little has been done to explore how modality functions in regional and minority languages, particularly in relation to cultural pragmatics. The Angkola language, as a regional language spoken in North Sumatra, presents a valuable yet underexplored domain for examining modality in a linguistically and culturally rich context. This study builds on the theoretical foundation above by investigating epistemic and deontic modality in Angkola, with a focus on their semantic structures and pragmatic functions, especially in relation to politeness, authority, and sociocultural expectations.

## III. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of modality in the Angkola language, with a focus on epistemic and deontic expressions. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring language in its natural context, where meaning is constructed through social interaction. This approach is further supported by Creswell (2013), who emphasizes that qualitative methods enable researchers to interpret the meanings individuals or communities assign to linguistic phenomena.

The research was conducted in several Angkola-speaking communities in South Tapanuli, North Sumatra, Indonesia, where the language is actively used in daily communication. In this context, field-based linguistic inquiry enables the collection of authentic, context-sensitive data, reflecting both the structural and cultural dimensions of modal expressions (Duranti, 2009).

### A. Data Collection

Primary data were obtained through fieldwork, consisting of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and audio recordings of natural conversations. A total of 15 native speakers of Angkola, aged between 30 and 70 years, were purposively selected to represent a range of social backgrounds, including elders, traditional leaders (*raja adat*), educators, and housewives. Informants were observed and interviewed in naturalistic settings, such as traditional gatherings, religious events, and casual family interactions.

Spoken utterances containing modal expressions were recorded and transcribed, yielding a corpus of approximately 120 relevant clauses that demonstrated various uses of epistemic and deontic modality. Ethical approval and informed consent were secured prior to data collection.

### B. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a semantic-pragmatic framework, drawing upon Palmer's (2001) classification of modality and Halliday's (2014) concept of modality value (high, median, low). Each modal expression was identified,

coded, and categorized based on its type—epistemic (e.g., possibility, certainty, inference) or deontic (e.g., obligation, prohibition, permission).

To assess the pragmatic dimensions, the analysis incorporated Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies. Utterances were interpreted in their sociocultural context, with particular attention to the speaker-listener relationship, setting, and intended communicative effect. Modal forms were examined not only for their linguistic function but also for how they were used to maintain social hierarchy, express deference, or avoid confrontation.

### C. Analytical Procedure

The analytical process followed three interrelated steps:

1. Segmentation: Identifying and isolating clauses that contain modal expressions in the corpus.
2. Classification: Categorizing each expression semantically (type of modality) and evaluating its modal value.
3. Interpretation: Analyzing the pragmatic use of modality in relation to politeness, speaker intent, and sociocultural norms.

Through this multi-layered approach, the study aims to reveal the linguistic forms, interpersonal functions, and cultural meanings of modality in the Angkola language, providing an in-depth understanding of how grammar and culture interact in real-life communication.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Epistemic Modality in the Angkola Language

Epistemic modality in the Angkola language serves to express the speaker's degree of certainty, probability, or assumption regarding a particular proposition. Drawing from Palmer's (2001) classification, epistemic modality in Angkola is manifested through linguistic markers that denote possibility (*bope*), certainty (*adong*), and prediction or inference (*songonna*). These modal elements function to position the speaker in relation to the truth value of the utterance.

Among these, *bope* occurs most frequently in daily conversations, reflecting a cultural preference for indirectness and verbal humility.

#### 1) Possibility – *Bope*

The term *bope* in Angkola functions as a modal marker indicating that something is possibly true, though not definitively confirmed. It is comparable to English modals such as *may*, *might*, or *could*.

Example:

*Bope mambaen dia ho marsak do hami.*

(Perhaps because of you, we are now suffering.)

Semantically, *bope* signals an epistemic stance grounded in tentative assumption, allowing the speaker to suggest a cause or reason without full commitment to its truth. This epistemic softness plays a key role in protecting the speaker's face and maintaining social harmony. Pragmatically, this serves to mitigate the speaker's claim, thereby avoiding direct accusation or confrontation—particularly significant in social contexts where politeness and indirectness are culturally valued.

#### 2) Certainty – *Adong*

The marker *adong* conveys certainty or strong belief, roughly equivalent to *must be* or *certainly is* in English. It expresses a high level of epistemic commitment to the truth of a statement.

Example:

*Adong do na mambuat dia i.*

(There must be someone who did it.)

This construction asserts the speaker's strong conviction, often based on inference or observable evidence. Semantically, *adong* represents high-value epistemic modality. In pragmatic terms, it functions to strengthen the speaker's position, especially in contexts that require persuasive or authoritative language.

#### 3) Prediction or Inference – *Songonna*

The modal *songonna* is used to express a logical prediction or inference based on prior knowledge or assumption. It is often used when the speaker wishes to make a probable projection.

Example:

*Songonna do parjolo tu ruma i.*

(He must have been the first to go home.)

Here, *songonna* acts as an inferential marker, signifying that the speaker draws a conclusion from indirect evidence. Semantically, it lies between possibility and certainty. Pragmatically, *songonna* enables the speaker to present a reasoned judgment without appearing overly assertive, allowing space for interpretation or disagreement. Taken together, the three epistemic markers reflect a cultural preference for graded expressions of belief rather than absolute judgments.

These findings demonstrate that epistemic modality in Angkola is both semantically nuanced and pragmatically adaptive. The modal *bope*, for instance, serves not merely to express uncertainty but to mitigate interpersonal risk, a function that resonates strongly with the community's communicative norms rooted in respect, indirectness, and non-imposition. This usage supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of negative politeness, where hedging devices reduce the threat to the interlocutor's face. Interestingly, the prevalence of *bope* in daily interaction suggests that epistemic

markers in Angkola are not only grammatical options but also culturally preferred strategies, used to maintain relational harmony and avoid overt assertion. In this respect, *bope* is less a marker of cognitive doubt than a rhetorical tool of social deference.

Furthermore, the functional overlap between *adong* and *songonna* illustrates the dynamic gradience of speaker commitment in Angkola discourse. While *adong* signals categorical certainty, often tied to evidential inference, *songonna* reflects a subtler form of projected belief—anchored in context, shared experience, or prior knowledge. This distinction supports Coates' (1980) observation that epistemic modality operates along a continuum of assertion strength, shaped by the speaker's intent and audience sensitivity. Cross-linguistically, this kind of gradation has been observed in Japanese (*darou, kamoshirenai*) and Tagalog (*siguro, baka*) (Larm, 2018; Moriyama, 1992), indicating that Angkola shares typological traits with other high-context, relationally oriented languages, where epistemic modality is key to interpersonal alignment. Thus, the Angkola modal system can be seen as a culturally embedded grammar of cognition and solidarity, subtly balancing belief, stance, and social awareness.

While epistemic modality conveys belief and assumption, the next section examines deontic modality, which focuses on socially regulated actions and obligations.

### B. Deontic Modality in the Angkola Language

Deontic modality in the Angkola language is primarily employed to express social obligations, permissions, prohibitions, and moral imperatives. As in other natural languages, deontic modality reflects not only grammatical necessity but also cultural norms and relational dynamics between speaker and listener. The Angkola language uses specific lexical and syntactic structures to mark deontic meanings, with common markers including *unang* (prohibition), *bole* (permission), and *harus* (obligation or necessity). These forms align with Palmer's (2001) typology of deontic modality, illustrating how social authority, ethical judgment, and interpersonal considerations are linguistically encoded.

#### 1) Prohibition – *Unang*

The word *unang* is the prototypical marker of prohibition in Angkola, functioning similarly to English *do not* or *must not*. It serves to instruct, warn, or restrict action and is often used in imperative contexts.

Example:

*Unang ho marroha-roha sude.*

(Don't be so full of yourself.)

Semantically, *unang* expresses a negative obligation, often grounded in moral or social appropriateness. Pragmatically, its use can range from mild advice to stern commands, depending on tone and context. Its frequent use in parental speech highlights its role as a cultural tool for behavior regulation.

#### 2) Permission – *Bole*

The modal *bole* denotes permission and is often used in speech situations where a speaker grants or inquires about the allowance of an action. It parallels the English modal *may* or *can* in its permissive usage.

Example:

*Bole do hami mandok i?*

(Are we allowed to say that?)

In terms of semantic value, *bole* marks low to medium deontic force, often functioning to signal speaker deference or to confirm social boundaries. From a pragmatic standpoint, it reflects politeness strategies, particularly negative politeness, by allowing the interlocutor to maintain autonomy and choice.

#### 3) Obligation or Necessity – *Harus*

Though not exclusively indigenous, the term *harus* has been widely integrated into Angkola usage as a marker of obligation or strong necessity. It denotes moral or practical compulsion and corresponds to English *must* or *have to*.

Example:

*Harus do hami manompak i jolo.*

(We must arrive there first.)

Compared to *unang* or *bole*, *harus* appears more frequently in formal or collective speech contexts such as ceremonies or communal tasks. Its pragmatic strength lies in signaling responsibility, urgency, or non-negotiable expectations. It is commonly employed in situations involving duty, norms, or external requirements.

Deontic expressions like these do not operate in isolation; they are intricately linked to cultural expectations regarding power, authority, and communal order. The next section explores how these modal choices intersect with politeness strategies in Angkola interaction.

The analysis of deontic modality in the Angkola language reveals that modal expressions are deeply embedded in social regulation and cultural expectation, functioning beyond their surface-level grammatical roles. The modal *unang*, for example, is more than a prohibitive marker; it reflects a culturally sanctioned mode of discipline, particularly within familial and intergenerational interactions. Its frequent use in parental discourse indicates its function as a norm-enforcing mechanism rooted in communal values. In pragmatic terms, *unang* carries varying degrees of directive force depending on the speaker's authority and the relational proximity with the listener. This variation supports the claim that deontic modality is relationally constructed, operating as both a linguistic and a moral tool for shaping behavior (Becker et al., 2017; Olajimbiti, 2025).

Moreover, the presence and usage of *bole* and *harus* illustrate a nuanced system of permissions and obligations that are socially contingent and hierarchically negotiated. The choice of *bole* often serves as a politeness buffer, especially in situations involving lower-status speakers seeking approval or avoiding imposition. This reflects the Angkola community's emphasis on relational harmony and deference to authority, aligning with negative politeness strategies as theorized by Brown and Levinson (1987). In contrast, *harus* is typically reserved for contexts that demand communal responsibility or urgent compliance, such as religious rituals or adat (customary) events. Its integration into formal speech contexts suggests that obligation in Angkola is collectively oriented, and that modal expressions are pivotal in sustaining cultural rituals and social cohesion. These patterns indicate that deontic modality in Angkola is not only rule-governed, but culturally ritualized, reflecting deeper social logics of duty, hierarchy, and communal life.

Table 1 shows how modal forms in Angkola operate within distinct semantic categories yet perform overlapping pragmatic functions, such as politeness management, hierarchy negotiation, and norm reinforcement. The epistemic forms are primarily oriented toward belief expression and stance, while deontic forms are geared toward social control and behavioral regulation.

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF EPISTEMIC AND DEONTIC MODALITY IN ANGKOLA LANGUAGE

Modality Type	Modal Form	Semantic Function	Pragmatic Function	Typical Context
Epistemic	<i>bope</i>	Possibility	Hedges assertion; softens claim	Expressing uncertainty, avoiding confrontation
	<i>adong</i>	Certainty	Asserts strong belief; persuades	Logical inference, emphasis in explanation
	<i>songonna</i>	Inference/Prediction	Projects reasoned judgment without overcommitment	Indirect assumptions, reasoned speculation
Deontic	<i>unang</i>	Prohibition	Directs or restricts action; can vary in force	Parental instruction, social sanctions
	<i>bole</i>	Permission	Requests/grants allowance; respects autonomy	Seeking approval, offering polite options
	<i>harus</i>	Obligation/Necessity	Commands or expresses collective duty	Rituals, formal speech, shared responsibility

### C. Modality and Politeness Strategies

Building upon the semantic and pragmatic features of epistemic and deontic modality, this section examines how these forms operate as vehicles for politeness in Angkola discourse. In this language, modality is not only a marker of speaker stance or obligation but also a powerful strategy for managing social interaction and maintaining interpersonal harmony.

Following the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987), Angkola speakers employ modal forms to enact both negative politeness—which emphasizes respect and avoidance of imposition—and positive politeness, which highlights solidarity and social cohesion.

#### Epistemic Modality and Negative Politeness

Epistemic modals such as *bope* (possibility) and *songonna* (inference) are frequently used to soften assertions and reduce the risk of face-threatening acts. This is especially common when expressing opinions, assumptions, or critiques in sensitive social situations.

Example:

*Bope ho do na mangalahon i.*

(Maybe you are the one who caused it.)

In this usage, *bope* not only conveys uncertainty but also signals caution and deference, allowing the speaker to express doubt or blame indirectly. This aligns with the broader cultural expectation in Angkola society to prioritize harmony over confrontation.

#### Deontic Modality and Authority Dynamics

Deontic modals like *unang* (prohibition) and *harus* (obligation) are highly sensitive to social hierarchy. A speaker may express the same imperative differently depending on the interlocutor's age, status, or familiarity. When used toward someone of higher rank or outside the speaker's peer group, deontic modals are often mitigated or combined with epistemic forms to reduce directive force.

Example (direct):

*Unang ho manjalang marhusip!*

(Don't speak arrogantly!)

Example (mitigated):

*Bope unang pe diujari nunga lam tu hauma.*

(Maybe it's better not to say that here.)

The addition of *bope* in the second example represents a layered politeness strategy, blending deontic and epistemic modality to cushion the prohibition.

#### Modal Value and Contextual Calibration

Speakers in Angkola frequently adjust their modal expressions to reflect degrees of politeness and urgency. Low-value modals (*bope*, *bole*) are generally more polite and indirect, whereas high-value modals (*adong*, *harus*) convey certainty

or strong obligation. This gradient enables speakers to tailor their utterances to context, relationship, and communicative goals, reinforcing modality as a pragmatic tool of social alignment.

While politeness strategies shape individual utterances, they are also grounded in deeper cultural logics that define acceptable behavior. The final section turns to these cultural foundations to understand how modality reflects the values of Angkola society.

The interplay between modality and politeness in Angkola discourse illustrates a linguistically encoded sensitivity to social roles and expectations. Modal expressions are not only shaped by grammatical categories, but also by relational positioning, where the speaker's linguistic choices are strategically tailored to reflect their awareness of hierarchy, familiarity, and social obligation. For example, the combination of epistemic and deontic markers—such as *bope unang*—serves to mitigate imposition while maintaining the core message, demonstrating what Holmes and Schnurr (2005) describe as “relational work” in speech. In this context, modal forms do more than convey certainty or obligation; they index the speaker's stance toward the hearer and the situation, allowing for flexible, context-sensitive negotiation of face and authority (Holmes & Schnurr, 2005).

Moreover, the use of low-value modals as markers of indirectness reveals a culture of communicative caution, particularly in situations involving criticism, disagreement, or instruction. The Angkola speakers' preference for softening mechanisms aligns with a broader pattern seen in many Austronesian languages, where linguistic indirectness is a valued communicative norm (Kikusawa, 2015; Riesberg et al., 2018). This suggests that the Angkola modal system functions not merely as a grammatical resource but as a means of enacting social etiquette, where speakers are expected to balance clarity of intent with respect for interpersonal harmony. In doing so, modal expressions become vehicles for performing politeness, encoding culturally shared assumptions about when and how obligation, belief, or restraint should be communicated.

#### D. Cultural Values Reflected in Angkola Modality

The strategic use of modality in Angkola is inseparable from the cultural worldview that informs speaker choices. Beyond grammatical convention, modal expressions encode cultural principles such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, and verbal modesty.

Expressions like *unang*, *bope*, and *harus* are often used in tandem with culturally appropriate forms of address, silence strategies, and non-verbal cues. These modal verbs serve as linguistic proxies for values associated with the Angkola philosophical framework, notably Dalihan Na Tolu, which governs kinship, respect, and social conduct.

Example:

*Bope unang ho martabe i tu hamu.*

(Perhaps you shouldn't talk that way to him.)

In this case, the speaker uses *bope* to mitigate the directness of *unang*, honoring the listener's status and avoiding offense. Such usage reflects relational positioning, a key tenet in Angkola interaction.

Moreover, modal expressions function to reinforce collective norms and expectations. For instance, *harus* is often invoked in ritual or communal contexts, not just to enforce rules, but to reaffirm shared values and social roles. In this way, modality becomes a mechanism of cultural reproduction, preserving not only linguistic structure but also the moral and ethical framework of the community.

From an ethnolinguistic standpoint, this reflects a deep integration of language, thought, and culture. Modal usage in Angkola is thus a vivid example of how grammatical categories—when examined in context—can reveal the internal logic of a society's values, relational ethics, and communicative ideals.

This supports the argument of Duranti (2009) and Wierzbicka (2003) that language is not merely a tool of communication but also a medium for expressing and reproducing cultural knowledge. Modal verbs in Angkola reflect not merely individual speaker choices but also community-sanctioned norms about how, when, and to whom things should be said. The use of *bope* to temper *unang*, or *harus* in ceremonial discourse, illustrates a culturally internalized ethic of balance between speech and silence, assertion and restraint. These patterns reveal that modality is not a universal category applied similarly across contexts, but a culturally indexed system of encoding relational values, where what one *can*, *should*, or *must* say is dictated as much by custom as by logic.

Furthermore, the Angkola system of modality echoes the moral ontology of Dalihan Na Tolu, the triadic value system of Batak culture encompassing *somber*, *kahanggi*, and *anak boru*—roles that carry inherent duties and expectations in communication (Harahap et al., 2023; Hutagaol et al., 2020). Modal forms such as *harus* and *unang* are used in alignment with these roles, reinforcing not just authority but moral reciprocity within kinship and community structures. This finding aligns with linguistic anthropology's broader assertion that grammar can serve as a repository for cultural ideology, and that modality, far from being a neutral syntactic feature, plays a central role in shaping how knowledge, responsibility, and respect are communicated. The Angkola case thus illustrates how modal forms mediate between individual agency and collective cultural identity, acting simultaneously as constraints and resources for maintaining the ethical order of speech.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of epistemic and deontic modality in the Angkola language, drawing on field data and established linguistic frameworks. The findings demonstrate that modality in Angkola is not merely a collection of grammatical markers but a culturally embedded system that reflects and regulates social interaction, hierarchy, and communicative intent. Epistemic modality is primarily expressed through forms such as *bope* (possibility), *adong* (certainty), and *songonna* (inference), each representing a nuanced degree of speaker belief and assumption. These expressions serve not only to convey epistemic stance but also to mitigate assertions and preserve politeness, functioning as key tools in maintaining interpersonal harmony. Deontic modality, encoded through *unang* (prohibition), *bole* (permission), and *harus* (obligation), carries normative force grounded in cultural expectations. These forms are sensitive to social roles and are often modulated in accordance with the speaker-listener relationship, reflecting values of deference, collective responsibility, and ethical conduct.

The analysis further shows that modality in Angkola operates as a strategic component of politeness management. Speakers modulate modal strength to match context—using softer expressions to signal caution or indirectness, and stronger forms to assert solidarity or communal norms. This pragmatically driven use of modality illustrates the community's culturally shaped approach to face management and verbal modesty. Crucially, modality in Angkola also reflects the moral logic of the Dalihan Na Tolu system, reinforcing kinship roles and societal expectations. Modal expressions are therefore more than linguistic devices; they are instruments of cultural continuity and social cohesion.

By revealing how modality intersects with meaning, hierarchy, and values, this research contributes to the broader fields of linguistic typology, pragmatics, and ethnolinguistics. It highlights the importance of minority languages for theorizing the interface between grammar and culture. Future studies could extend this inquiry by examining other modal domains (e.g., dynamic or volitional modality) or by undertaking comparative research across Austronesian languages, thereby deepening our understanding of the cultural grounding of modality.

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