

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EPISTEMIC SUBJECTIVE MODAL EXPRESSIONS IN RADIO INTERVIEW DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** This article examines epistemic subjective modal expressions in radio interview discourse. The study focuses on the linguistic means by which speakers express their attitudes toward the truth, reliability, and probability of information. The theoretical section discusses the nature of epistemic modality, its relationship with subjectivity, and its pragmatic role in interview communication. The analytical section classifies examples selected from Russian, German, and English radio interviews into four semantic categories: probability, supposition, certainty, and doubt. The findings show that epistemic modal expressions help speakers soften claims, convey personal evaluation, indicate limited knowledge, strengthen credibility, and maintain a natural conversational tone.

**Keywords:** epistemic modality, subjective modality, radio interview discourse, probability, supposition, certainty, doubt, hedging, discourse analysis.

### Introduction

Interview discourse is a communicative genre in which information, evaluation, personal experience, and public opinion interact. Unlike purely factual texts, interviews often include spontaneous responses, hesitation, self-correction, subjective assessment, and indirect formulations. For this reason, epistemic modality occupies an important place in interview language. Through epistemic modal expressions, speakers indicate whether they consider a proposition certain, probable, doubtful, or based on personal assumption.

This article examines epistemic subjective modal expressions in three radio interviews: the Russian interview “Русский Старт” (“Russian Start”), the German interview on “Eichsfeldwelle” with David Gregoritsch, and the English radio interview “The Resident”. The purpose of the article is not only to identify modal units, but also to explain how they function in discourse and how they shape the speaker’s epistemic position.

The analysis is organized around four major semantic categories: *probability, supposition, certainty, and doubt*. These categories make it possible to compare how similar epistemic meanings are expressed in different languages through *adverbs, modal verbs, mental verbs, predicative structures, syntactic constructions, and intonation*.

**The Concept of Epistemic Modality.** Modality is a linguistic category that expresses the relation between a speaker, a proposition, and reality. In general, modality may indicate possibility, necessity, obligation, permission, ability, or evaluation. Epistemic modality is a

specific type of modality connected with knowledge and belief. It shows how confident the speaker is about the truth of a statement.

For example, the English sentence “He is at home” presents information as a direct statement. However, “He may be at home,” “I think he is at home,” or “He is probably at home” do not present the same information with the same degree of certainty. These forms mark the statement as possible, assumed, or probable. Thus, epistemic modality modifies the truth status of a proposition according to the speaker’s cognitive assessment. Epistemic modality is closely connected with subjectivity because it reflects the speaker’s personal viewpoint. Even when a speaker refers to facts, they may choose a modal form to show caution, distance, confidence, or uncertainty. This is especially common in interviews, where speakers often respond immediately and may avoid categorical claims.

**Epistemic Subjectivity.** Epistemic subjectivity refers to the speaker’s personal involvement in evaluating information. It appears when the speaker presents information not as an absolute fact, but as something filtered through personal knowledge, belief, perception, or inference. Expressions such as “I think”, “I believe”, “мне кажется”, “я думаю”, “ich glaube”, and “aus meiner Perspektive” are clear markers of epistemic subjectivity.

Subjective modal expressions are important because they help speakers manage the strength of their statements. A speaker may soften a claim by using a probability marker, strengthen a claim by using a certainty marker, or show intellectual honesty by admitting a lack of knowledge. In this sense, epistemic modality performs both semantic and pragmatic functions.

**Linguistic Means of Epistemic Modality.** Epistemic modality may be expressed by different linguistic means. In the selected interview materials, the following groups are especially important:

*Adverbs:* probably, maybe, definitely; наверное, возможно, вероятно; natürlich.

*Modal verbs:* may, might, could; kann, können, muss.

*Mental verbs:* I think, I believe, I know; я думаю, я знаю; ich glaube, ich weiß.

*Predicative and syntactic constructions:* может быть, может оказаться, you never know, man kann sagen, aus meiner Perspektive, auf keinen Fall.

*Prosodic means:* pauses, hesitant intonation, rising or falling tone, and cautious delivery.

These linguistic means differ in form, but they share a common function: they indicate the speaker’s epistemic evaluation of the information being expressed.

### **Pragmatic Functions in Interview Discourse**

In interviews, epistemic modal expressions are not used randomly. They perform several pragmatic functions. First, they help speakers avoid overly categorical claims. Second, they allow speakers to express opinions diplomatically. Third, they signal the limits of knowledge and reduce the risk of misinformation. Fourth, they make speech sound natural and spontaneous. Finally, they help speakers balance personal responsibility and communicative politeness.

Therefore, epistemic modality is not only a grammatical phenomenon. It is also a discourse strategy that helps participants in interviews organize their answers, negotiate meaning, and maintain credibility.

### Research Material and Methodology

The material of the study consists of examples taken from three radio interviews in Russian, German, and English. The Russian material comes from the radio interview “Русский Старт”. The German material is based on the “Eichsfeldwelle” interview with David Gregoritsch. The English material comes from the radio interview “The Resident”. The method of analysis is descriptive and comparative. First, epistemic subjective modal units were identified in the interview texts. Second, they were grouped according to their semantic meaning. Third, each group was analyzed according to its communicative function in context. The examples were classified into four categories: probability, supposition, certainty, and doubt.

### Analysis of Epistemic Subjective Modal Expressions

*1. Probability.* Probability refers to the speaker’s evaluation that an event or proposition is possible or likely, but not fully certain. In the three interviews, probability is expressed through adverbs, modal verbs, predicative constructions, and mental verbs.

In the Russian interview “Русский Старт”, probability is expressed through adverbs such as “наверное”, “возможно”, “вероятно”, “скорее всего”, and “вполне”, predicative units such as “может быть” and “может оказаться”, and mental constructions such as “я думаю”, “мне кажется”, “я предполагаю”, and “я не уверен”.

— Можно ли сказать, что это воспитание так повлияло?

— *Наверное*, ... но я бы не сказал, что кто-то специально привил это во мне.

The adverb “*наверное*” marks the answer as probable rather than categorical. The speaker does not completely reject the interviewer’s idea, but also avoids full agreement. This creates a diplomatic and softened response.

— А откуда такие восточные мотивы в музыке?

— *Может быть*, в прошлой жизни я был восточным человеком.

The construction “*может быть*” expresses probability and introduces a playful, informal tone. The speaker does not present the idea as factual; rather, the expression keeps the statement within the sphere of possibility.

In the German interview, probability is expressed by mental verbs, modal verbs, and syntactic constructions such as “*ich glaube*”, “*ich denke*”, “*kann*”, “*können*”, “*muss*”, “*man kann sagen*”, and “*aus meiner Perspektive*”.

— Wie bewerten Sie die aktuelle Sicherheitslage in Deutschland?

— Die Lage ist angespannt, das kann man so sagen...

The construction “*das kann man so sagen*” softens the statement and presents it as a cautious assessment. The modal verb “*kann*” does not simply express ability; in this context, it

functions epistemically by allowing the speaker to present the evaluation as acceptable but not absolute.

- Gibt es konkrete Bedrohungen für Deutschland?  
— Nachrichtendienste und kriminelle Gruppen können darauf abzielen, unseren Staat zu destabilisieren.

Here, “*können*” expresses a potential development. The speaker describes a possible threat without presenting it as a confirmed fact.

In the English radio interview “The Resident”, probability is expressed by “*maybe*”, “*might*”, “*could*”, “*I think*”, “*I feel like*”, “*I believe*”, and the syntactic construction “you never know”.

- We might get away with it?  
— Well... maybe...

The modal verb “*might*” and the adverb “*maybe*” indicate a low degree of probability. The speaker does not fully believe that the result will happen, but recognizes it as possible.

- ...thinking it's November, we might get away with it.  
— ...it could go anywhere.

The modal verbs “*might*” and “*could*” show that the situation may develop in different ways. They signal openness and uncertainty about the outcome.

- Do people usually respond quickly when you ask them for feedback?  
— Well... you never know, maybe they will message again.

The construction “*you never know*” expresses general uncertainty, while “*maybe*” keeps the possibility open. Together, they show that the speaker avoids making a definite prediction.

2. *Supposition*. Supposition is close to probability, but it is more strongly connected with personal reasoning, assumption, or subjective interpretation. It often appears through mental verbs and phrases that mark the statement as the speaker's own view.

In the Russian interview, supposition is expressed through “я думаю”, “я думаю, что...”, “я предполагаю”, “я не знаю”, “как мне кажется”, and “я не могу сказать точно”.

- Это как так?  
— Я думаю, что в прошлой жизни, вполне вероятно, я был восточным человеком.

The mental verb “я думаю” frames the statement as a subjective cognitive evaluation. The speaker does not claim objective truth; instead, the statement is presented as a personal assumption.

- Значит есть какое-то музыкальное образование?  
— На самом деле нет... я не знаю, как это объяснить.

The expression “я не знаю” shows the speaker's knowledge boundary. It makes the answer epistemically cautious and prevents the statement from becoming a forced explanation.

— Это пока не парк Галицкого.

— Я думаю, что, наверное, не за горами то время, когда мы будем делать что-то подобное.

The combination “я думаю” and “наверное” turns the statement about the future into a supposition. It avoids a firm promise and creates epistemic softness.

German examples

— Wie beeinflusst Ihre internationale Erfahrung Ihre Arbeit in Brüssel?

— Ich glaube, die Europäische Union ist eine Erfolgsgeschichte.

The phrase “*ich glaube*” is a mental verb construction that expresses a subjective assumption. It signals that the statement belongs to the speaker’s personal epistemic position.

— Ist die Europäische Union perfekt?

— Das glaube ich so nicht.

The construction “*das glaube ich so nicht*” expresses cautious disagreement. Instead of a direct rejection, the speaker frames the disagreement through belief and supposition.

English examples

— What is the film about?

— It’s a bit of like a mind game, I think, inside of a sense.

The phrase “*I think*” marks the utterance as a subjective interpretation. It shows that the explanation is based on the speaker’s own perspective rather than an objective definition.

— These things happen unfortunately?

— Yes, I guess these things happen, unfortunately.

The construction “*I guess*” indicates a tentative conclusion. It allows the speaker to agree while keeping the statement less categorical.

— Where’s this film going to be shown?

— It could go to Prime Video, it could go to Netflix, it could go anywhere.

The modal verb “*could*” expresses supposition about future distribution. The repeated use of “*could*” emphasizes that the answer is hypothetical and not confirmed.

3. *Certainty*. Certainty refers to a high level of confidence in the truth of a proposition. In interview discourse, certainty markers strengthen the speaker’s statement and help present information as reliable. However, even certainty can be subjective when it is connected with the speaker’s personal knowledge or belief.

In the Russian interview, certainty is expressed through mental verbs such as “я знаю” and “я уверен”, adverbs such as “точно”, “действительно”, and “на самом деле”, and constructions such as “это точно”, “мы знаем наверняка”, and “это факт”.

- Значит, есть какое-то музыкальное образование?  
— На самом деле нет, нигде никогда не учился.

The phrase “*на самом деле*” strengthens the factual status of the answer. It corrects a possible assumption and presents the speaker’s statement as reliable information.

- Это пока не парк Галицкого?  
— Я думаю, что не за горами то время, когда мы будем делать что-то подобное.

Although “*я думаю*” is often associated with supposition, in this context it conveys a confident personal evaluation about future development. The statement is not an absolute fact, but it is close to a belief based on confidence.

#### German examples

- Sie erwähnten internationale Erfahrungen. Wie sicher sind Sie, dass diese Erfahrungen für Ihre politische Arbeit relevant sind?  
— Ich weiß, dass mir diese Jahre im Ausland ein breites Verständnis vermittelt haben.

The mental verb “*ich weiß*” is a factive epistemic marker. It indicates that the speaker presents the information as something known, not merely assumed.

- Spielt die europäische Ebene für Ihre Arbeit wirklich eine große Rolle?  
— Natürlich — die EU prägt viele politische Entscheidungen.

The adverb “*natürlich*” functions as an intensifier of certainty. It marks the proposition as evident and strongly confirmed from the speaker’s viewpoint.

- Was sollte Deutschland in der Migrationspolitik künftig anstreben?  
— Wir müssen den Zulauf weiter reduzieren.

In this context, “*wir müssen*” is not only a deontic marker of obligation. It also expresses a conclusion based on the speaker’s reasoning. The construction presents the statement as a logically necessary political direction.

#### English examples

- Have you heard any Christmas song yet?  
— Mariah Carey is definitely around and about.

The adverb “*definitely*” expresses a high degree of epistemic certainty. It strengthens the proposition and leaves little room for doubt.

- Where else is Redbank Farm? That rings a bell with me.  
— I know they filmed some scenes for The Bay TV series there as well.

The construction “*I know*” indicates knowledge-based certainty. The speaker presents the information as something personally known and reliable.

- Ruben, how did you get involved?  
— I believe it was through social media.

The phrase “*I believe*” expresses confidence based on personal recollection or belief. It is weaker than “*I know*”, but it still shows a relatively high level of epistemic commitment.

4. *Doubt*. Doubt expresses uncertainty, lack of knowledge, hesitation, or skepticism toward a proposition. In interviews, doubt is often used to avoid false certainty and to show that the speaker cannot fully explain or verify something.

In the Russian interview, doubt is expressed through evaluative words such as “*странно*” and “*непонятно*”, verb constructions such as “*я не знаю*”, “*я не могу объяснить*”, “*я не видел*”, “*никто не может объяснить*”, and syntactic forms such as “*что это — непонятно*”.

— Как это всё уживается в одном человеке?  
— Ну... странно, но так получилось.

The predicative unit “*странно*” shows that the speaker finds the situation difficult to explain. It expresses epistemic doubt through evaluation and surprise.

— Как ты объяснишь, откуда приходят мелодии?  
— Я не знаю, как это объяснить, это просто приходит.

The phrases “*я не знаю*” and “*не могу объяснить*” directly mark the speaker’s lack of knowledge. They make the answer honest and epistemically cautious.

— Так что же это было?  
— Мы показывали многим людям — никто не может объяснить, что это.

The construction “*никто не может объяснить*” generalizes the uncertainty. It does not only show the speaker’s personal doubt, but also presents the phenomenon as unexplained by others.

— Это было что-то конкретное?  
— Что это — непонятно, но это точно было не самолёт.

The construction “*что это — непонятно*” places uncertainty at the center of the utterance. At the same time, the phrase “*это точно*” shows that doubt may coexist with partial certainty.

#### German examples

— Ist die Europäische Union aus Ihrer Sicht vollkommen oder fehlerfrei?  
— Auf keinen Fall. Wir müssen weiterhin an Verbesserungen arbeiten.

The construction “*auf keinen Fall*” expresses strong rejection. From an epistemic point of view, it shows that the speaker has no confidence in the proposition that the European Union is perfect or error-free.

#### English examples

— What could it be?  
— I don’t know what it is.

The construction “*I don’t know what it is*” expresses personal epistemic doubt. It is based on the speaker’s admission of insufficient knowledge.

— Have you heard any Christmas song yet?  
— I don’t think I have, you know, I don’t think I have.

The repeated form “*I don’t think I have*” shows uncertainty and hesitation. It weakens the answer and indicates that the speaker is not fully confident.

The comparison of Russian, German, and English interviews shows that epistemic subjective modality is a universal feature of interview discourse, although each language realizes it through different linguistic resources. In Russian, epistemic modality is frequently expressed through adverbs, mental verbs, predicative units, and intonation. The Russian examples show a wide range of lexical markers such as “*наверное*”, “*может быть*”, “*я думаю*”, “*я не знаю*”, “*странно*”, and “*непонятно*”. These forms often create a conversational and emotionally nuanced style. In German, epistemic modality is strongly represented by mental verbs, modal verbs, and syntactic constructions. Expressions such as “*ich glaube*”, “*ich weiß*”, “*kann man sagen*”, “*können*”, “*muss*”, “*aus meiner Perspektive*”, and “*auf keinen Fall*” show the speaker’s position clearly while preserving a formal and diplomatic tone. In English, the interview “*The Resident*” demonstrates frequent use of modal verbs and mental constructions: “*might*”, “*could*”, “*maybe*”, “*I think*”, “*I guess*”, “*I believe*”, “*I know*”, and “*you never know*”. These expressions make the speech natural, spontaneous, and open to different interpretations. Across the three languages, the most common functions of epistemic modal expressions are softening uncertainty, expressing subjective evaluation, showing the boundary of knowledge, strengthening certainty, and avoiding categorical claims. Thus, epistemic modality helps interview participants maintain both credibility and flexibility.

## Conclusion

Epistemic subjective modal expressions play a central role in radio interview discourse. They allow speakers to express different degrees of confidence toward the information they provide. The analysis of Russian, German, and English interviews shows that probability, supposition, certainty, and doubt are expressed through a variety of lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and prosodic means.

The category of probability is mainly realized through markers that keep statements open and non-final. Supposition is expressed through mental verbs and constructions that show personal interpretation. Certainty is marked by forms that strengthen the reliability of a statement. Doubt is expressed through negative knowledge constructions, hesitation, and evaluative units that indicate uncertainty or lack of explanation. The study confirms that epistemic modality is not only a linguistic category, but also a communicative strategy. In interview discourse, it helps speakers avoid excessive directness, present personal views carefully, and construct a balanced relationship between fact, belief, and uncertainty.

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