

Study on Interpersonal Function of Modal Auxiliaries in Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address

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Abstract: *This article focuses on Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address to explore the interpersonal function of inaugural addresses by investigating the speaker's use of modal auxiliaries to indicate duty, permission, desire, or confidence to the audience in the social context.*

Keywords: *Interpersonal Function, Modal Auxiliaries, Inaugural Address*

1. Introduction

Halliday established Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) in 1960s, he maintains that his SFG theory is "for purpose of text analysis" (Halliday, 1994). As one of three meta-functions, one of the most significant meanings of interpersonal function is that speakers can make a judgment on the correctness and validity of their speeches. Modality is one of the main systems related to the communication of attitudes through language (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2018). The interpersonal meaning of the utterance is lexico-grammatically realized through modality, which reflects the writer's attitude and notion about a proposition. Simpson (1993) and other researchers, such as Halliday (1994) and Palmer (1986), emphasize modality when addressing the interpersonal meaning of the utterance.

Many studies have been carried out on public speeches, especially in political leaders' public speeches or messages, but relatively, less attentions have been paid to inauguration addresses from interpersonal perspective, and how modality contributes to the interpersonal features of full-length discourse types has remained ignored.

To investigate the interpersonal function of inaugural speeches, this study focuses on Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address through exploring the using of modal auxiliaries to express obligation, permission, desire, or confidence by the speaker to the audience in the social context.

2. Theoretical Framework

In functional grammar, modality is seen as a primary exponent of interpersonal interactions, implying that modality is one of the lexico-grammatical properties used to demonstrate interpersonal function.

According to Halliday, there are two forms of modality: modalization and modulation. Modalization is often applied to exchange information and present the speaker's judgment regarding possibility and usuality. Modulation plays a crucial role in exchange of goods & services, which includes two constituents: obligation and inclination (Halliday, 1994).

Modal operator is the essential part of modality, which conveys the meaning of permission, commitment, obligation, and possibility. According to Andersen (1988), language offers a range of resources for directing attention to the external world, the ego, or the connection between speaker and hearer when it comes to the interpersonal function of modal auxiliary. Modal constructions (for example, in English, must, ought, need, should, can) infuse possibility, need, or obligation into unmodified sentences. A successful political speech mainly depends on the appropriate expression of the speaker's attitudes and opinions.

According to Halliday (1994) and Eggins (2004), modality is categorized into three levels based on the value or degree assigned to the modals: high, middle, and low, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 1 Scale of modals

Value	Probability	Usuality	Obligation	Inclination
High	Certain	Always	Required	Determined
Median	Probable	Usually	Supposed	Keen
Low	Possible	Sometimes	Allowed	Willing

Among the many variants of the different modal operators, Halliday (2000: 362) picked out some most familiar and frequently used modals to demonstrate their values in high, median, and low scales. By employing modality, the speaker expresses his viewpoint and judgement on the effectiveness of his proposition, the responsibility he wants his listeners to undertake.

Table 2 Scale of modals

Scale	Modals
high	must · ought to · need · has to · is to
median	will · would · shall · should
low	may · might · can · could

This article will focus on the modal auxiliaries which are a most important part in modality analysis. Based on Halliday's classification (1994), three types of modal auxiliaries, are identified and studied in this article.

Through descriptive statistics, the lexico-grammaticalized modals employed in Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address are to be described in terms of frequency and percentage and their roles in their functioning interpersonally are interpreted.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

To investigate the significance of modal auxiliaries representing the interpersonal function, the article intends to explain the interpersonal function behind Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address. The study mainly answers the following research questions:

What kinds of linguistic strategies in modality of interpersonal function in Obama's 2009 inaugural address?

And what are the distribution frequencies of modal auxiliaries in the speech?

How are interpersonal function realized by these linguistic strategies in Obama's inaugural addresses?

3.2 Data Presentation

This article conducts a thorough examination of the obtained data, which is divided into three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. The essay will examine the interpersonal function of Obama's 2009 presidential election speeches using quantitative and qualitative methods. The theoretical framework is developed through quantitative research. The qualitative investigation approach is used to define the phenomenon before selecting the essential components and elements. The goal of quantitative analysis is to establish how frequently Obama uses his gadgets and how important the interpersonal function is in Obama's 2009 inaugural address.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis

As is well known, political speeches are often imbued with a sense of authority. Speakers often pose as authority and impose their wills on their listeners. Meanwhile, the speaker will use solidarity

measures to reach an accord. One option is for them to use modal auxiliaries in their speeches to convey a variety of interpersonal meanings. Obama makes extensive use of modal operators in his 2009 inauguration speeches to convey probability and inclination. The following diagram illustrates the distribution of modal operators in his speeches:

Table 3: The Distribution of Modal Operators in Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address

Value	Modal Operator	Modalization		Modulation		Total	Percent	
		Probability	Usuality	Obligation	Inclination			
Low	Can	13				13	19	39%
	Could	1				1		
	May	3				3		
	Might	2				2		
Median	Will	6			13	19	23	47%
	Would	1				1		
	Shall			3		3		
High	Must	4		3		7	7	14%
Total		30		6	13	49		
Percent		61%		12%	27%		100%	

Table shows that the modal operators appear 49 times in his inauguration address in 2009. The median value modal operator "will" accounts for 39% of them, accounting for the highest percentage of all modal verbs. The proportion of "can" is 27 percent, which is the same as the rate of "will." "Must" comes in third position, with a 14 percent share. The remainder modal operators, such as "may", "might", and "would", are employed far less frequently than the top three. Despite being the most powerful leader in his country, Obama chooses to use the language of solidarity, according to the figure.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 "Will" and Its Interpersonal Function

"Will" performs principally two interpersonal tasks in Obama's 2009 speeches as a median value modal operator. On the one hand, "will" typically refers to future occurrences. And the possibility is high, given Obama's objective, prognosis, conviction, and belief. "Will" is a modalization of possibility, according to this concept. On the other hand, the term "will" is commonly used to define Obama's determination throughout his administration to assist the American people. In other words, the term "will" is used in Obama's speeches to refer to his and his people's desire to reconstruct their nation. "Will" is understood in this meaning as a modification of inclination. Two viewpoints on the modal operator "will" are possible: modalization potential and modulation inclination. The following are some examples:

(1) And yet, at this moment a moment that will define a generation it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

In Example 1, the word "will" implies that Obama's forecast that "a moment defines a generation" will occur in the future. By substituting "will" for "a moment" in an attributive sentence, he attempts to heighten the audience's awareness and urge them to maintain a spirit of service at this momentous occasion. Obama now employs the median value modal operator "will" to indicate a single outcome from a list of alternative outcomes, which helps him sidestep certain objections and queries from his listeners or adversaries. Obama does this by making his discourse persuasive and authoritative.

(2) With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet.

In Example 2, "will" refers to Obama's readiness to work with the public and even adversaries to address environmental challenges such as nuclear proliferation and global warming. Even though "will" is a median value modal operator, people can sense his tenacity and desire to address these environmental issues. Additionally, when confronted with grave global crises, Obama, as the authoritative President of the United States, sets aside personal disagreements with his adversaries and demonstrates his kindness and tolerance for working with all people. As a result of his solidarity and generosity, the audience will be affected and will fully endorse Obama's positions.

4.2.2 "Can" and Its Interpersonal Function

Generally, the term "can" is used to denote the most basic of possibilities. By utilizing the negligible "can," the speaker is only presenting these plausible alternatives to his audience, rather than making judgements for them. Obama regularly used the terms "can," "could," and "cannot" in his two inaugural speeches to express his judgment or beliefs and to show his authority without putting excessive pressure on his people. Additionally, the term "can" is often used to refer to the capacity that indicates Obama's leadership abilities and attitude. Additionally, it may convey the idea of permission, while its negative equivalent "cannot" imply to the rejection of permission. The following table illustrates how the modal word "can" was used in each of these three senses during Obama's speech.

Table 4: The Occurrence of Modal Operator "can" in Obama's two Inaugural Addresses

Meanings of "Can"	Can			Could		
	Speculation	Capability	Permission	No Speculation	No Capability	No Permission
Address in 2009	2	8	3	2	2	2

As the data indicates, Obama is more likely to employ the modal word "can" to demonstrate the American people's power and strength in positive sentences. Obama is more likely to use the word "cannot" in the negative phrase to emphasize his rejection attitude: no permission. It is far more courteous than "must not". Here are a few instances from Obama's talk that include the modal word "can."

4.2.3 "Must" and Its Interpersonal Function

As the most subjective modal verb, "must" is used to convey not just the speaker's compelling proposition, but also the speaker's required attitude. "Must" has basically two connotations in Obama's two inauguration addresses: logical necessity and duty. Obama intends to demonstrate his solid confidence in attaining his administration objectives in the future by using the high-value modal operator "must." The alternative meaning of "must" is the responsibility that contributes to the speaker's high social rank and authority. The usage of the word "must" in Obama's inauguration speeches communicates his obligatory mandate and puts proper pressure on his followers to comply. Then, many cases using the word "must" will be examined in depth.

(3) So it has been. So is must be with this generation of Americans.

In Example 3, "it" alludes to people's adherence to their forefathers' model. As is well known, America is one of the world's most developed nations, and the reason for its rapid growth is because the American people have a great conviction in their government, especially during difficult times. In two inverted phrases, Obama seeks to underline the critical nature of trust between citizens and government in order to reclaim popular support. On the basis of his logical understanding and personal experience, he is certain that people will accept their obligations in the same manner that their forefathers did, and that only in this way can the present issue be resolved. Thus, the usage of the word "must" can persuade citizens to have faith in their government.

5. Conclusion

The study establishes formal data from the perspective of Halliday's interpersonal function theory's modality system. Obama used the modal operator "will" in his 2009 inaugural address to demonstrate his unity and to lessen the barrier between himself and the audience. Obama, however, must also utilize the high-value modal operator "must" in his capacity as President of the United States. Obama's speech is more comprehensible as a result of these language adjustments.

Through modal operators, power and solidarity may be achieved. Modalization and modulation are two distinct modes of communication. "Will" is the most often used modal operator in Obama's speech. It is "must," as opposed to "can" or "could." For one thing, power grows in direct proportion to the value. Additionally, a smaller number seems to be more courteous. As a result, Obama communicates his governing concepts of democracy and unity using modal operator values.

The conclusion is provided below in light of the findings. Obama's inaugural remarks begin with a multimodal system, but the way those resources are allocated is peculiar. Obama was deemed to be more inclined to demonstrate unity than power in the study. Second, Obama's choice of language is connected to his political aspirations. His speech is aimed to inspire his constituents to work for a better future and to garner popular support. As a result, when he wishes to establish his authority, he employs

harsh language such as "must." When it comes to demonstrating his solidarity and democracy, he operates in a manner similar to that of many other modal operators.

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