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Discourse Functions of Modal Verbs in President Muhammadu Buhari's 2018 Budget Speech

IFEOMA A. UMEH (PhD) & UCHE V. UZOH (PhD)

Department of English University of Jos, Nigeria, ifyumeh288@gmail.com; St John of God Secondary School Awka, Anambra State, uzohuche128@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores modal expressions in the 2018 budget speech of President Muhammadu Buhari. The theoretical framework of the analysis is based on Halliday (2004) Systemic Functional Theory and Norman Fairclough's analytical model. The study made use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The aim is to analyse the frequency of occurrence, distribution and functions of the modal verbs used in the budget speech. Thus, the paper views modalized utterances as political statements and offers a tentative suggestion of how modality seen as epistemic version of deixes can be a tool in interpreting political statements in budget speeches. The study strongly affirms that modal auxiliary verbs have persuasive and manipulative connotations in budget speeches. It found that the President's high use of median value modal verbs especially 'will' together with the first person plural pronoun 'we' to create identities of partnership with his administration as well as the entire people of Nigeria in the speech under study is basically to reinforce the exact objective of apolitical discourse: for political success, to earn trust, acceptance, further support, solidarity and confidence. Thus, 'will' is strategically deployed by President Buhari to reassure the people of Nigeria of a greater economic recovery and development if given maximum support and cooperation.

Keywords: Functions, Discourse, Modal Verbs, Budget, President

Introduction

This study focuses on the 2018 budget speech given by President Muhammadu Buhari on Tuesday 7th November, 2017 in Abuja. The audience of a presidential speech is large and wide including those that are present at the speech situation, those watching it on television, those streaming it on the Internet and those reading about it and watching it in the media.

The use of language in politics is for unique purposes and functions. The numerous functions performed by language in the field of political discourse have drawn the attention of several scholars in recent times. Perhaps, that is the reason Beard (2002) opines that looking at the language of politics as an occupation is important because it helps us to understand how language is used by those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power. The essence of power in the governance and affairs of the people can never be swept under the carpet; this makes the people in control of power to be the subject of attraction and they are as important as the language used by them. Wardhaugh (2010, p.113) argues that speakers will adjust their language to accommodate the needs and expectations of their audience. This view is supported by Van Djik (2006,p.128) who states that within a political speech, 'practically each word is chosen as a function of its ideological and communicative presuppositions and implications. According to Fairclough (1992), discourse is a broad term with various definitions and over lapping definitions and it integrates a whole palette of meanings, covering a large area from linguistics through sociology, philosophy and other disciplines. It refers to the whole process of interaction of which a text is just a part (Titscher et al., 2000, p.77). Through discourse, a speaker expresses his/her ideological content in texts as does the linguistic form of the text. Political discourse as a sub-category of discourse in general according to Schaffner (1996,p.202) is based on two criteria: functional and thematic. It is functional because it can fulfil different functions due to different political activities. It is thematic because its topics are mainly related to politics such as

political activities, ideas and relations. Choice of modal verbs is one of the discourse markers in the political discourse and one of the weapons used by politicians to achieve their goals. The use of modal verbs in political discourse especially budget speeches has always had a great impact on people because it emphasizes what people should, must, ought to, and have to do.

Theoretical Framework

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar is the framework adopted in this research work to unravel the deep meaning of discourse and to understand and interpret its semantic and stylistic features. Functional linguistic choice deals with structures which derive from the options created by encoding rules. Functional language is a tool for interactions based on the idea that language forms are inevitably specified by the functions or uses that they provide (Huzhunghn, 1988,p.307). According to Halliday and Hassan (1989,p.10) a text, in the general term, is "language that is functional" meaning written and verbal language which conveys social meaning in a specific and real situation. Indeed for Halliday the texts serve as the study of meaning and use of phrases and words rather than just the union of words and sentences. It takes into account two perspectives concurrently such as text as a product and text as a process. Halliday's basic idea is that language is established meta-functionally and it has three kinds of semantic units: ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function. Therefore, systemic functional grammar and critical discourse analysis complement each other and benefit each other. Fairclough (1995) proposed three dimensional analytical model – including textual description, interpretation and explanation. The relationship between discourse and generative process of discourse is focused on the interpretation level.

In addition, Halliday (2004) believes that the use of language has three functions: to convey the conceptual function of the speaker's inner world and the outer world, to reflect the interpersonal functions that reveal the relationships among people and to organize the language into context article features. Modality refers to the speakers opinion or attitude towards the true value of the proposition in the sentence because the speaker asks the other party to take an obligation in the order or express his/her own will in the proposal (Hu, 2005).The modal value of different modal verbs are usually different. Halliday divides modal verbs into high, median and low grades which reflect the severity of the speakers' tone. High value modal verbs are *must*, *ought to, need* and *have to*. The median value are *will, would, shall* and *should*. Low value include: *may, might, can* and *could*. Different modal verbs can express different modal meanings and show the speaker's role orientation. Modality is generally defined as the grammaticality of speakers' attitude and opinions. This position is further corroborated by Palmer (1986,p.14) who describes modality as the expression of the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding "the contents of the sentence"while Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p.172) refer to it as "the speaker's judgment, or request of the judgment of the listener, on the status of what is being said". Modality assesses the degree of probability or obligation attached to a proposition and constructs a wide range of possible choices that exists between positive and negative polarity to express it. With modality, speakers are able to express non-categorically their stance, dispositions, attitudes and judgments towards a subject matter.

A modal auxiliary verb is a type of auxiliary verb that is used to indicate modality: that is, likelihood, ability, permission and obligation, among others. Modal auxiliary verbs give more information about the function of the main verbs that follow them. They give a great variety of communicative functions. These range from possibility (may) to necessity (must). Within these two ranges, Drowing and Locke (1992,p.332) identify two functional divisions namely: epistemic and deontic modalities. Lilian (2008, p.5) points out however that classifying the modals is by no means unproblematic since individual modals may function in more than one category. To this effect,

Quirk et al. (2000) adds that 'shall' can be contextually used to express willingness, intentions, insistence, legal and quasi-legal injunction. Eyisi (2011) associates functions such as future prediction intentions and conjectural future event with 'will' and reveals that 'would' can be associated with future intentions in the past, tentativeness in polite requests, probability, and natural propensity.

Furthermore, Quirk et al. identify the following functions with 'can': ability, less formal permission, implicational willingness, theoretical possibility, impossibility (when used in the negative sense). The functions of 'could' are past ability, present or future permission, present possibility, or ability in unreal conditions. 'Must', they explain, expresses obligation or compulsion in the present tense, future obligation, prohibition, and logical necessity. 'May' expresses permission, and possibility, while 'might' is rarely used to show permission, and possibility (theoretical or factual). Thus, the present analysis will focus on the discourse functions of modal verbs, its systems of orientation and values.

Review of Related Literature

Some scholars have examined different political speeches through different linguistic perspectives. Jegede (2018,) studied the interpersonal meaning in Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Victory speech. He adopted Halliday's systemic functional grammar and discovered that declarative clauses were used more frequently than imperative and interrogative clauses because an acceptance speech gives the speaker the opportunity to give his listeners as much information as possible. Agbedo (2008) focused on a speech act analysis of political discourse in the Nigerian print media. He subjected the utterances of two journalists, Bayo Onanuga and Mr Yakubu Mohammed, to speech act analysis using Austin's (1962) Felicity conditions and Grice (1975) co-operative principles. His findings show that illocutionary acts deriving from their individual speech acts fail to meet Austin's felicity conditions. Their infelicitous speech acts equally fail to meet Grice's co-operative principles which participants in any communicative events are expected to adhere to. Agbedo concentrated on the study of speech acts analysis of political print media while the present study is focused on the analysis of discourse functions of modal verbs in President Muhammadu Buhari 2018 budget speech.

Oluremi (2018) focused on the pragmatic study of pronouns in Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari's 2017 budget speech using Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. Findings revealed that President Buhari adopted preponderance of the nominative case pronoun 'I' and 'We' together with its possessive case counterpart 'Our(s)'. The paper submits that though pronouns may appear insignificant in political discourse, they are persuasive linguistic devices that communicate optimal relevance. This reviewed research is different from the present study in that it adopted pragmatic approach using Sperber and Wilson's Relevance theory while the present study is on discourse functions of modal verbs.

Akinwotu (2013) investigated the role of language in the communication and interpretation of intentions by examining the acceptance of nomination speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief MKO Abiola using insights from J. L. Austin (1962) speech act theory. The study concludes that acts performed in the speeches examined are essentially similar; they were encoded more explicitly by Chief Abiola than Chief Awolowo. Shamdama (2015) examined critically the inaugural speech of President Muhammadu Buhari which was delivered shortly after the swearing into office on the 29th May, 2015 adopting Norman Fairclough's three dimensional analytical models. The study uncovers that an inaugural speech is a revelation of plans and hopes in the new government.

From the literature reviewed above, the work on discourse functions of modal verbs on President Muhammadu Buhari's 2018 budget speech using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Norman Fairclough's three dimensions analytical model is virtually non-existent. This makes the

present work significant and forms the gap which the present study seeks to fill.

Data and Methodology

The data for this paper is 2018 budget speech delivered by President Muhammadu Buhari on Tuesday November 7, 2017 before the joint session of the National Assembly in Abuja. The speech was downloaded from the internet via this link: http//saharareporters.com/2017/11/07. The budget speech has 84 (eighty-four) paragraphs, and it is so numbered. All the modal verbs featured in the speech were drawn for analysis using purposive sampling. The sample was double checked by MS words 'find' function to ensure accuracy. The sample size of 67 modal verbs was then subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis using frequency counts to determine the distribution of each of the modal verbs in the data and to identify the discourse functions of these modal verbs as used by the President in the 2018 budget speech using Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and Fairclough's analytical model.

Data Analysis

In the speech under study, there are a total of 67 modal verbs.

Table 1 below shows the distribution and frequency of modal verbs that are used in the 2018 budget speech by President Muhammadu Buhari:

Modal Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
Can(not)	6	8.95
Would	12	17.91
Must	2	2.98
May	2	2.98
Shall	10	14.92
Will	35	52.23
Total	67	100%

From the table above 'can(not)' occurred 6 times representing a total of 8.95%;'would' occurred 12 times representing a total of 17.91%;'must' and 'may' occurred 2 times each representing a total of 2.98% respectively. 'Shall' occurred 10 times representing a total of 14.92%. 'Will' occurred 35 times representing a total of 52.23% of the total modal verbs used in the budget speech. Therefore, 'will' is the most frequently used modal in President Muhammadu Buhari's 2018 budget speech. The most widely used modal verbs in the speech are the median value modal verbs. According to Halliday (2004), these include: 'will' 53.23%, 'would' 17.91%, and 'shall' 14.92%, which together account for 85.06% of full-text modal verbs. This is followed by the low value modal verbs: 'can (not)' 8.95% and 'may' 2.98%. The least that is used by President Buhari in the budget speech is the high value modal verb: 'must' which is used only 2 times (2.98%).

The Discourse Functions of the Modal Verbs as Used in President Muhammadu Buhari's2018 Budget Speech

Must:

'Must' a high value modal verb and deontic modality occurred 2 times in the speech representing a total of 2.98%. The two uses of **'must'** in the speech are to express compulsion in the present tense and future obligation as opined by Quirk et al. (2000).

Examples:

1. This means we **'must'** all work together to address any grievances through dialogue.
2. We **'must'** therefore all work together to protect and sustain this CHANGE to create a better Nigeria.

President Buhari made use of **'must'** in the above examples to vehemently assert that the people of Nigeria are obliged to support and work with the government to address any grievances through dialogue. They should also work with the government so as to sustain this change for a new Nigeria. This basically connotes that President Buhari and his administration is under future obligation to deliver on their promises if given maximum support and cooperation. As noted by Halliday in Olaniyan and Adeniji (2015, p.42), deontic modality can be regarded as a "form of

participation of the speaker in the speech event". It plays a significant role in the interpersonal process of negotiation of meaning. Deontic modality pertains to the use of language to express desires, wants, commands, obligations, undertaking and permission. The use of 'must' in the above examples express these functions. Also, the President's use of **'must'** with the first person plural pronoun **'we'** in parallel constructions and repetitions is strategically deployed to make the effect of 'must' in the above propositions strong and positive. And the use of capital letters on the word CHANGE is solely to lay emphasis on the keyword.

'Would'

'Would' a median value modal verb ranked second highest in the total modal verbs used by President Buhari in the 2018 budget speech. It occurred 12 times representing a total of 17.91%. In the following examples 'would' is used as an epistemic modality to express predictions:

3. Specifically, I **'would'** like to bring to your attention to the following key projects and programmes that we are determined to implement in 2018.
4. I **'would'** like to assure investors in the Agricultural value chain that the menace of smuggling will be handled decisively.

In examples 5 and 6 below 'would' is used to express tentativeness in polite requests as opined by Eyisi (2011).

5. I trust that the vast majority of our people **'would'** rather tread the path of peace.
6. This clearly illustrates the abuses that occur in state owned entities as well as their potential for increased independent revenues, if only people **'would'** do the right thing.
7. Mr senate president, Mr speaker, distinguished and honourable members of the National Assembly, this speech **'would'** be incomplete without commending the immense, patriotic and collaborative support of the National Assembly in the effort to move our great nation forward.

Example 7 shows a strong claim by president Buhari that for the fact that the members of National Assembly showed immense patriotic and collaborative support to him during the past years, the use of '**would'** therefore is tactfully deployed to bring the event expressed in the proposition in example 7 to accomplishment.

There are also instances of the use of **'would'** to show appreciation and gratitude:

8. I **'would'** also like to thank the World Health Organisation, the Global Fund and UNICEF, for their continued support during these trying times.
9. I **'would'** like to commend the federal and state ministries of health for their selfless and timely responses to contain these outbreaks.
10. I '**would'** like to thank our friends and partners in the joint OPEC/NON-OPEC Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC).

President Buhari's use of **'would'** in examples 8, 9 and 10 above to show appreciation and gratitude is premeditated and deliberate; hence, it is utilized to ease his mood and make his speech more convincing and acceptable.

'Can (not)'

'**Can (not)**' a low value modal verb occurred 6 times in President Buhari's 2018 budget speech representing a total of 8.95%.11. This administration is doing all it '**can'** to alleviate the embarrassing power situation.

12. We '**can'** consolidate on our exit from recession.

Examples 11 and 12 illustrate the use of '**can'** to express ability. This corroborates Quirk et al.'s stance that '**can'** is used to express ability and theoretical possibility. Menghe and Chenglian (2017, p.221)add that '**can'** generally make the tone of speech soft. There is a kind of consultation tone-doping which narrows the distance between the speaker and the audience. '**Can'** is used to buttress President Buhari's claim as having the ability to alleviate the country from the embarrassing power

situation and also the ability of him and his administration to consolidate on their achievements having succeeded in lifting the country above economic recession. The use of the personal pronoun '**we'** together with its possessive 'our' in example 12 is purely strategic and simply applied to make the people feel the impact of team work.

The negated form of '**can' (cannot**), conversely, is used by President Buhari to express inability and impossibility as is respectively exemplified by the examples below:

13. We simply '**cannot'** go back.
14. We '**cannot'** afford to go back to those dark days of insincerity and vandalization.
15. The key bottleneck now is the distribution network where the substations '**cannot'** take more than 5,000 MW.

According to Palmer(2001), the negative form of **'can'** is used to express the state of affairs that is quite unacceptable, unreasonable and impossible. In the above propositions, the use of first person plural pronominal **'we'** together with **'cannot'** by President Buhari serves as a means of building solidarity with the audience as well as a persuasive tool. Moreover, by associating his predecessor with unfavourable social situations of insecurity and vandalization, President Buhari simultaneously distances himself and the audience from the previous administration. The sole aim of this is to endear himself to the audience. This is not surprising since the goal of every politician is to discredit his opponent. Chilton (2002, p.47) describes this as legitimization of self and delegitimization of others. According to him, delegitimization can manifest itself in acts of negative presentation, acts of blaming, scapegoating, marginalizing, excluding, attacking the moral character of some individual or group, attacking the communicative cooperation of other, attacking the rationality and sanity of the other. In example 15 '**cannot'** is used to express a situation that is not possible given the fact that the transmission and network substations cannot take more than 5,000MW.

'**May'**

President Buhari used '**may'** a low value modal verbs 2 times in the speech representing a total of 2.98% of the total modal verbs used in the speech.

16. In some areas, we have made payments so projects **'may'** be completed; while in others, we are reconciling the liabilities to identify and settle legitimate claims.
17. There **'may'** be a need to consider a review of the fiscal responsibility act and the executive will be approaching the National Assembly on the issue in due course.

In examples 16 and 17 **'may'** is used by President Buhari to express possibility or likelihood. The use of '**may'** here suggests that there is a high possibility that the fiscal responsibility act will be reviewed if the executive meets with the National Assembly. In 17 since payments have been made by Buhari's administration, there is the likelihood that the projects will be completed. Again, it is agreeable that President Buhari projects a positive image of himself and his administration who were able to pay the trillions of naira owed contractors by the previous administration. This agrees with Fairclough (1989) assertion that politicians use speech with the aim of "manufacturing consent" and lifting their image while tarnishing the image of their opponents.

'**Shall':**

'**Shall'** a median value modal verb is used 10 times, representing a total of 14.92%. There are instances of the use of **'shall'** in the president's 2018 budget speech that invariably express intention, thereby confirming Greenbaum et al.'s (1996) stance that of all the functions that can be attributed to 'shall' the intention function is most predominant.

18. Mr. Senate President and the Right Honourable Speaker, we '**shall**' continue to develop our infrastructure across the country.
19. This project '**shall'** be completed by December 2018.
20. As I mentioned earlier, we are partnering with the private sector to fix the road. We '**shall'** do

the right thing considering.

21. We **shall** meet our counterpart funding obligations. We **'shall'** complete all ongoing projects. And we **'shall'** carry forward all strategic projects that were budgeted for but which we were unable to kick start due to liquidity challenges, late passage of the budget, prolonged contractual negotiations and other matters.

The above intentions are carefully planned and deployed using the modal verb '**shall'** to lure the people into believing that these projects and promises will actually come to fulfilment in the near future. In 20 and 21 '**shall**' is used to express strong obligations, supporting Newson's (2008) claim that '**shall**' is a strong modal verb. Thus, President Buhari considers the commencement and completion of these strategic projects as a duty they are obliged to perform; hence, they have already been paid for. He would want the people of Nigeria to believe that his administration is seriously committed to these obligations as well as doing the right thing without cutting corners, thereby alleviating the fears the people might have as regards the performance of this noble duty. This however helps to foster the spirit of confidence and trust among the populace.

'Will'

'Will' a median value modal verb is the most frequent of all the modal verbs used in the 2018 budget speech. It occurred 35 times representing 59.32% of the total modal verbs. According to Quirk et al. (2000) '**will'** is defined as modal of volition and prediction. **'Will'** is predominantly used by speakers to commit themselves to future actions. **'Will'** denote root modality, since promises are essentially deontic. Promises constitute a common and effective tool at politicians' disposal in an effort to enhance the credibility of their administration. The following are instances of the use of '**will'** to express promises in the 2018 President Buhari Budget Speech.

22. I am pleased to inform this distinguished Assembly that the Federal Government '**will'** be launching the First African Sovereign Green Bond in December 2017.
23. We **'will'** consolidate on existing policies and develop new ones to ensure the numerous value chain challenges in the Agricultural sector are addressed.
24. To further support investors and state governments, we **'will'** accelerate the establishment of at least 6 staple crop processing zones in the first phase. This initiative '**will'** develop infrastructure for the production and storage of strategic commodities.
25. We '**will'** complete all critical projects, including the East-West road, which has a provision of about 17.32 billion naira in 2018.

In 23, 24 and 25 above, '**will'** is used with the first person plural '**we'** to represent the whole government as a partnership to indicate strong commitment and promise in a communicative event whose main purpose is to convince the populace, the most assuring commitment to future action will considerably affect the audience's persuasion. These promises are typical of political discourse and interplay of politicians' strategies and audiences' expectation. In an attempt to read political promises in terms of epistemic deixes, one can rightly deduce that President Buhari explicitly commits himself to the convergence of the reference world. To President Buhari, the country is economically recovering in all sectors; he therefore pledges to do more if given maximum support and acceptance.

There are also instances of the use of '**will'** to express determination:

26. We have not and '**will**' not lose sight of the need to lay a solid foundation for the future prosperity of successive generations.
27. Going forward, we '**will'** be working based on facts rather than subjectivity.
28. The menace of struggling '**will**' be handled decisively.

In the following sentences, the president used '**will**' to express intentions.

29. The 2018 Budget '**will**' consolidate on the achievements of previous budgets and deliver on Nigeria's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2018-2020.
30. We are very excited about this development as it '**will**' go a long way in solving many of our energy challenges, especially in the hinterland.

Findings

This paper analysed the discourse functions of modal verbs in President Muhammudu Buhari's 2018 Budget speech. The modal verbs identified in the speech according to Halliday's (2014) classification include: High value modal verbs – **must** 2.98%; Median value modal verbs – **would** 17.91%, **shall** 14.91% and **will** 52.23%; Low value modal verbs – **may** 2.98%, **can(not)** 8.95%. From the overall analysis, it was discovered that President Buhari predominantly used the median value modal verbs with – '**will**' 52.23% ranking the highest followed by '**would**' 17.97% and then '**shall**' 14.92%. President Buhari's use of '**will**' at high frequencies followed by '**would**' in the 2018 budget speech was strategically adopted to ease his mood and to make his speech more convincing and acceptable. Moreover, he used **'would'** mainly to express appreciation and gratitude to everyone who has cooperated and worked hard with him since the beginning of his administration in 2015. The use of '**shall**' vividly expresses the president's positive intentions, obligations and his good will for the people of Nigeria. He uses **'will'** to illustrate his strong commitment, determination and promise to further work to consolidate on the achievements of previous budgets and deliver on Nigeria's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2018-2020. '**Will**' which represents a higher scale of modal commitment signals a higher degree of certainty about the validity of a proposition and further confirms the President's assurance of continuous good leadership and better economic system.

Conclusion

The study strongly affirms that modal auxiliary verbs have persuasive and manipulative connotation in political discourse. Also, the President's high use of the median value modal verbs especially '**will**' together with the first person plural pronoun '**we**' to create identities of partnership with his administration and the entire people of Nigeria in the speech under study is basically to reinforce the exact objective of a political discourse – for political success, to earn trust, acceptance, further support, solidarity and confidence. Thus, **'will'** is used by President Buhari to reassure the people of Nigeria of a greater economic recovery and development if given maximum support and cooperation.

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