


## Modality in the Independence Day Speeches of John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo

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### Abstract

This study examines the deployment of modality in Ghanaian Independence Day speeches as a strategic linguistic resource for constructing authority, negotiating interpersonal relations, and mobilizing national sentiment. Drawing on eight Independence Day speeches delivered by two Ghanaian presidents, John Dramani Mahama (JDM) and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (NADAA), the eleventh and twelfth presidents of the Fourth Republic respectively, the study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as its theoretical framework, with a particular focus on the interpersonal metafunction. Using Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca's (1994) four-way classification of modality (epistemic, agent-oriented, speaker-oriented, and subordinating modality), the study systematically analyses how modal expressions encode stance, commitment, obligation, and persuasion within this underexplored genre of political discourse. The analysis reveals that epistemic modality is the most frequently employed modality type, enabling the presidents to project confidence, certainty, and authoritative knowledge in their propositions. Agent-oriented modality is strategically used to express obligation, necessity, ability, and desire, thereby assuring citizens of presidential commitment to national development and democratic responsibility. Speaker-oriented modality functions to issue directives, admonitions, permissions, and optatives, reinforcing presidential authority while simultaneously fostering inclusivity and civic engagement. Subordinating modality, though least frequent, serves an important rhetorical function by invoking hypothetical and conditional scenarios that encourage patriotism and collective responsibility. A comparative analysis further shows that while NADAA's speeches are characterized by assertive, obligation-driven modality that emphasises authority and decisiveness, JDM's rhetoric exhibits a more aspirational and emotive orientation, relying on hypotheticals and motivational appeals to inspire national cohesion. The study demonstrates the analytical strength of SFL in examining commemorative political speeches and highlights modality as a central interpersonal resource in political discourse.

**Keywords:** Independence Day speeches; Interpersonal metafunction; Modality; Political discourse; Systemic Functional Linguistics.

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## 1. Introduction

Language serves several purposes. Its use in various fields and discourses reflects several worldviews and mental conceptualizations. In political discourse, Ekawati (2019) maintains that language is fundamental to all political actors. This assertion is made on the premise that though an abstract concept, political power, ideological representations, and (de)legitimization of assertions are reflected and achieved through language use. Fairclough's (1995) idea of power conceptualization further strengthens the positions made by Ekawati (2019) on the role of language in political discourse. To the former, power is established between groups in a discourse event and is mainly demonstrated through language. Fowler (1985) also holds language as being vital and crucial for consolidating and determining various concepts and human interactions such as power relations, control, and the expression of one's belief to a stated proposition. Through political speeches, language use can (de)legitimize addresses, debates, and assertions (Saville-Troike, 2003; Thomas & Wareing, 2003).

Kiratli (2016) asserts that the projection of power and ideological representations is fundamentally dependent on certain linguistic features and expressions. These linguistic expressions, such as modality, have projected authority and authenticated assertions in political speeches (Ekawati, 2019; Kareinen, 2019). Bramley (2001) and Narrey and Yankson (2014) show, through their studies of political texts and interviews, that politicians use modality, along with other linguistic resources, strategically and pragmatically to persuade electorates. The expression of power relations and ideologies through modality has also been highlighted in critical discourse analyses of speeches by various American presidents such as Barack Obama (Pham, 2010; Shayegh & Nabifar, 2012; Wang, 2010), and by civil rights leader Martin Luther King (Sipra & Rashid, 2013).

One major linguistic approach that political figures use to (de)legitimize assertions is modality (Bramley, 2001; Ekawati, 2019). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) suggest that modality is a linguistic tool that allows speakers to express degrees of certainty, possibility, and obligation. It helps to navigate the gray area between absolute truth and complete uncertainty. In essence, modality enables speakers to qualify their statements, and to indicate the extent to which they believe something to be true or likely. Halliday views modality as the speaker's judgment about the factuality, or lack thereof, of a proposition. In political discourse, modality reflects the viewpoints of political actors and shows the degree of obligation and responsibility attached to the message they deliver in their speeches. Through political speeches, politicians present themselves to reflect their political goals of gaining dominance and also to project their confidence, boldness, tenacity, abilities, and commitment to a national course (Kantorgorje, Israel & Mwinwelle, 2021; Zeng & Wang, 2019).

Language researchers have shown extensive interest in exploring various linguistic features of political discourse using speeches. These have included campaign speeches (Koutchade, Akpaca & Awoyodo, 2020; Naaikuur & Akapule, 2024), State of the Nation Addresses (Agbesi, Sarpong & Ashon, 2023; Botchwey, Duah & Adade, 2023; Sikanku, 2022; Quarshie, Davies & Otoo, 2021), manifestos (Anning, 2020; Kareinen, 2019; Narrey & Yankson, 2014), victory and concession speeches (Fordjour & Sikanku, 2022; Iweldi, 2024), and inaugural addresses (Jannatussholihah & Triyono, 2020; Kantorgorjie et al., 2021; Koussouhon & Dossoumou, 2015; Owuye & Idowu, 2019). Little attention, however, has been given to commemorative speeches, specifically Independence Day speeches. Independence Day celebrations are critical venues and times for the symbolic (re)production of the country and the state. They are the result of a special form of public festival in recognition of the nation or state (Elgenius, 2005), delivering "condensed moments of nation-building...[and] state-making" (Lentz & Becker, 2013, p. 1). Gabriel, Lentz and Konstanze (2016) assert that most African countries mark national days to commemorate their independence from colonial domination. Presidential speeches delivered during these occasions offer the current administration the opportunity to validate its claims of representing and protecting the country's ideals. Alameda-Hernández (2008) argues that commemorative speeches can be analyzed through a functional linguistic lens to reveal the speaker's

commitment to national identity and their persuasive strategies. This offers insights into how presidents mobilize their audiences and inspire collective action.

While existing scholarship has extensively explored the role of modality in political discourse—particularly in genres like campaign speeches, State of the Nation Addresses, and inaugural addresses—using frameworks such as critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine power, persuasion, and ideology, two significant gaps remain. First, Independence Day speeches, a sub-genre of political discourse, have been largely overlooked in linguistic analyses, despite their strategic importance in legitimizing authority and mobilizing collective action (Elgenius, 2005; Lentz & Becker, 2013). Second, while modality has been studied as a tool for ideological positioning, prior work has not systematically applied Halliday's SFL to interrogate how modality constructs authority, solidarity, and national identity in these speeches. This study addresses these gaps by employing SFL to analyze the use of modality in Ghanaian Independence Day speeches, offering the first functional linguistic examination of how presidents leverage modal markers to negotiate interpersonal meaning (communicative functions) in a genre that blends historical reflection, celebration, and calls for civic engagement. This paper centers an understudied speech type, advances a functional methodology, and expands the scope of political discourse analysis beyond Western contexts and conventional genres. The objectives of the study are in two-fold. They aim to:

- i. identify the types of modality in the presidential Independence Day speeches.
- ii. examine the communicative functions of modality types in the presidential Independence Day speeches.

Independence Day speeches of two Ghanaian presidents, John Dramani Mahama (JDM) and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (NADAA), the eleventh and twelfth presidents of Ghana respectively, are the corpus of analysis. Given their prominent roles in Ghanaian politics, these personalities have become significant figures in the study of political discourse. Their speeches provide a rich corpus for analyzing language use and its impact on public opinion. The next section highlights systemic functional linguistics as the selected theoretical framework for the present study. This is followed by an explanation of the concept of modality and a review of some related previous studies. The methodology adopted for the study is explained in a separate section, followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings. Conclusions are finally made based on the findings.

## 2. Literature Review

This section establishes the intellectual context within which the study is situated. It begins with a review of the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis, after which it examines the theory of modality and synthesizes relevant empirical studies that inform and justify the present investigation.

### 2.1 Theoretical framework – Systemic Functional Linguistics

This study is hinged on Halliday's SFL theory. Language, according to Halliday (1994), is systemic and functional. According to him, language is a matrix of interconnected systems or a collection of possibilities for producing meanings. Rather than treating language as a set of rules, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) present it as a meaning-making resource, where meaning emerges from systemic patterns of choice. SFL examines language usability along with the way it is organized to be used. Additionally, SFL considers meaning to be social and that social meaning influences linguistic choices. In SFL, the primary function of language is to perform a social function. Language is viewed by Halliday (1994) as pragmatic and a way of communicating meaning. To him, this method looks beyond the formal systems of language and considers the context in which language is utilized. Halliday (1994) employs three register variables to explain the context of a situation: field, tenor, and mode. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), a text cannot be adequately dealt with unless the setting in which texts emerge and are to be comprehended is considered. Field, as explained by Halliday (1994), refers to the complete occurrence within which the text is working, coupled with the speaker's or writer's purposeful action; it, therefore, encompasses the subject matter as one component in it. It depicts the social

engagement in which the individuals are involved. This is highly important in the context of the researcher's usage of the text, i.e. the Independence Day speeches of NADAA and JDM. He further explains that the field might be technical or non-technical. To Halliday (1994), non-technical issues are those that we discuss daily, whereas technical themes are those that are employed in specific subject areas such as languages, philosophy, chemistry, jurisprudence, pharmacy, and so on. SFL outlines three sets of semantic systems that produce meanings of a similar type. This is referred to as metafunctions of language. They are ideational, textual, and interpersonal metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). While the ideational function concerns how language represents our understanding of the world, the interpersonal function focuses on social relationships and the exchange of attitudes and perspectives. The textual metafunction, as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), focuses on the structural organization of language. It ensures that a text is cohesive and coherent, allowing for the smooth flow of ideas and the effective transmission of meaning. This study centers on the interpersonal metafunction, examining how language is used to establish and maintain social relationships, persuade, and influence.

## **2.2 Modality**

Modality is a semantic domain that includes a broad spectrum of modal proposition semantic fields. Lyons (1977) defines modality as a speaker's or writer's viewpoint or attitude toward the proposition represented by a phrase or the scenario depicted by a proposition. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985), modality is the mechanism through which the interpretation of a statement is enhanced to mirror the speaker's judgement on the possibility of the statement it expresses as being factual. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 176), "The speaker's judgement, or request of the judgement of the listener, on the status of what is being said... What the modality system does is to construe the region of uncertainty that lies between 'yes' and 'no'". Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) view modality as the judgement of the factuality or otherwise of a proposition. Similarly, Saeed (2016, p. 134) describes modality as a cover term for all linguistic devices "which allow speakers to express varying degrees of commitment to, or belief in, a proposition."

The theory of modality has been taxonomized into many categories. The traditional division is made between epistemic and deontic modalities. Other categories include the notion of root modality to encompass both deontic and dynamic modality, modalization and modulation. For the purpose of the present study, Bybee, Perkin, and Pagliuca's (1994) four-way categorization: epistemic, agent oriented, speaker-oriented, and subordinating modality is adopted as the analytical framework. Their categorization not only provides a way to evaluate the speaker's belief in a proposition but also clarifies whose belief is being assessed, whether the speaker's or that of another subject or referent. Epistemic modality is described as the usage of a modality depending on the speaker's assessment and evaluation in connection to the degree of confidence in a proposition's knowledge (Bybee et al., 1994). The term agent-oriented modality also alludes to situations in which the clause's agent is affected in some way in carrying out the action indicated in the clause. They further explain that speaker-oriented modality denotes instances where speakers issue an order or authorizes someone to undertake an activity. Again, to them, subordinating modality is based on the existence of a modal operator such as purposive or concessive in the subordinate clause.

Modality, a linguistic resource being examined in this study, is a linguistic element belonging to the interpersonal metafunction domain. Flowerdew (1998, p. 543) puts it: "The interpersonal function is concerned with the writer's attitude to the message and is typically realized through modal verbs (e.g. should, may) and various types of modal adjuncts (e.g. probably, obviously)". Modality, irrespective of the semantic approach adopted to its typology, is examined within the domain of interpersonal metafunction. It is a feature of the interpersonal metafunction because it (modality) expresses speakers' or writers' varied attitudes to a stated proposition. Hyland (2013), in his metadiscoursal framework, opines that modality is classified as an interactional category which focuses on a speaker's level of commitment and confidence to a proposition. With the use of boosters and hedges, for instance, Hyland (2013) avers that epistemic value is assigned to speakers' utterances as they [speakers] reduce or

heighten the force behind their statements. In studying modality in academic discourse, Ngula (2015) also concluded that writers use various linguistic elements of modality to project their stance and hold their argumentations. His conclusions affirm modality as a feature of interpersonal metafunction.

### **2.3 Previous Studies**

Modality and its communicative functions have been explored extensively in the literature. This includes observation of the linguistic item as a persuasive tool through stance-marking. Notable among these studies is Sharififar and Rahimi (2015), who highlight the persuasive effect of modal items and their ability to reduce the distance between speakers and their audience. They argue that the frequent use of 'will' and 'can' encourages citizens to trust in the presidents' ability to steer the country through present and future challenges. Xu's (2015) cognitive-functional approach to studying modality affirmed that modality reveals the conceptualization processes of discourse production, showing how modal markers were employed by presidents to persuade and manipulate their audience. This is achieved through stance expression. Political actors taking some position on their propositions is a genre feature of political discourse. This, according to Reyes (2014) and Lillian (2008), is employed to persuade an audience. For example, Reyes (2014) reported that Presidents Obama and Bush shared their expertise knowledge, authority, and command to convince and manipulate their audience. Lillian (2008) similarly concluded that the high use of deontic modals, for instance, is a linguistic feature of propaganda and manipulation as found in Canadian conservative discourse. The following modal markers were found in her study: 'will', 'have to', 'must', 'may', 'can', 'could', 'would', 'should', and 'ought to'.

Additionally, Xu (2015) found stance-taking acts of modality (knowledge, value and emotion-based stances) as both a function of persuasion and (de)legitimization. It is adopted to delegitimize other's views and enact a negative other-representation. Simon-Vandenberg (1996) shared that modality is a linguistic intellectual power used to build a positive self-image. According to her, modality is used in political interviews to emphasize cognitive certainty. This builds a desirable image for politicians and gives them persuasive power. This finding supports previous research by Yunisda and Firmansyah (2019) which showed that President Donald Trump used deontic modality to build positive self-presentation. Marin-Arrese (2011) corroborated research on stance-taking acts as a persuasive function of modality. She discovered that affective and effective stance-markers in the discourses of Obama, Blair, and Aznar were used to persuade their audience. This was primarily effective as the speakers laid claim to their true knowledge of events and presented their propositions as morally upright. Cheng (2017) also found that modality in Chinese political discourse (presidential debates) was purposed to persuade electorates and solicit support. She averred that politicians used modal verbs and other modal expressions to encode their ideologies, state their obligations and make promises. This is also consistent with Yunisda and Firmansyah's (2019) observation that Donald Trump used modality in his Riyadh Summit 2017 to persuade his audience. He achieved this by delegitimizing 'their' bad act. Additionally, the president mostly used the deontic modality of obligation and permission.

Modality, according to Cheng (2017), is a discursive strategy used in framing politicians' arguments to gain the support of the electorates. The modal markers found included 'will', 'can,' 'may', 'willing' and 'dare'. Using the 2017 inaugural address of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Owuye and Idowu (2019) similarly reported that the president used modality to persuade Ghanaians by expressing his high-level commitment and selflessness to his propositions. This included, in ascending order, the president's use of 'will', 'must', 'can', 'should', 'shall', 'may', 'could' and 'would'. The findings of Owuye and Idowu's study are consistent with those of Aning (2020) who studied modal verbs in the 2016 manifesto of the NDC party in Ghana. The latter found that the predominant use of modal verbs in the political text enacted a sense of intention, necessity, purpose and promise. Nartey and Yankson (2014) made similar observations in the 2012 political manifesto of the NPP of Ghana. The strategic use of these linguistic items was to convince and persuade electorates. In accordance with previous results, the study of Kantorgorje et al. (2021) demonstrated that high values of epistemic modality dominated the inaugural speeches of fourth Republican Ghanaian presidents. Modal verbs such as 'will', 'must', 'can',

‘may’ and ‘shall’ were used to persuade Ghanaians by projecting the presidents as confident, bold and forthright in their discourses. These studies agree that while modality is a stance-marker and functions differently in stance-taking acts (Reyes, 2014; Lillian, 2008; Xu, 2015; Marin-Arrese, 2011), they also carry persuasive function in political discourse (Cheng, 2017; Owuye & Idowu, 2019; Aning, 2020; Nartey & Yankson, 2014). These studies accentuate the persuasive function of language in political discourse (Chilton, 2004).

Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) bring an interesting and different perspective to the study of modality in political discourse. They analyzed modality as communicating varied degrees of politeness in presidential speeches. They found that modal expressions for median politeness were preponderant in these discourses. This included the use of ‘will’, ‘would’, ‘should’ and ‘shall’ for positive politeness and their negated forms for negative politeness. Boicu (2007) had earlier found in Ashley Mote’s political speeches that modal verbs were used to enhance the illocutionary force of face-threatening acts. This affirms the assertion that political discourse constitutes the ideal use of language for varied functions, including politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

### 3. Methodology

The study was generally a descriptive qualitative approach even though some statistical presentations were introduced. Primary data for the study were eight (8) presidential Independence Day celebrations’ speeches downloaded from the official website of the President of the Republic of Ghana. The selected speeches were those that were delivered during the first tenure of the presidents. It included four (4) speeches by JDM (2012 to 2016) and four (4) speeches by NADAA (2017 to 2020). The speeches included the 56th, 57th, 58th and 59th Independence Day celebrations speeches delivered by JDM and those delivered by NADAA at the 60th, 61st, 62nd and 63rd Independence Day celebrations. To ensure consistent identification, each speech was assigned a unique code. For instance, ‘56IDC’ refers to the 56th Independence Day Celebration. This coding system allowed for easy reference and analysis. Speeches delivered by JDM were coded as 56IDC, 57IDC, 58IDC, and 59IDC, while those delivered by NADAA were coded as 60IDC, 61IDC, 62IDC, and 63IDC. The total word count for the speeches is 21,770, with 964 sentences (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Textual space of speeches**

	Speech	Code	Word count	Sentence count
JDM	56 <sup>th</sup> Independence Day Speech	56IDC	2,198	94
	57 <sup>th</sup> Independence Day Speech	57IDC	2,609	145
	58 <sup>th</sup> Independence Day Speech	58IDC	1,963	85
	59 <sup>th</sup> Independence Day Speech	59IDC	1,584	73
NADAA	60 <sup>th</sup> Independence Day Speech	60IDC	2,971	130
	61 <sup>st</sup> Independence Day Speech	61IDC	4,634	202
	62 <sup>nd</sup> Independence Day Speech	62IDC	3,051	115
	63 <sup>rd</sup> Independence Day Speech	63IDC	2,760	120
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>21,770</b>	<b>964</b>

Analysis of the data was guided by the theory of modality under the interpersonal function of language according to SFL. The speeches were read and analysed manually according to Bybee et al.’s (1994) classification of modality. Their account of the scales of modality guided the grouping of the markers. It includes epistemic modality (certainty, probability, and possibility), agent-oriented modality (obligation, necessity, ability, and desire), speaker-oriented modality (directives, prohibitions, imperatives, permissions, admonitions, and optatives), and subordinating modality (supposition). This was done after careful assessment of other classification types. Bybee et al.’s (1994) categorization was

adopted because it provides a semantic/pragmatic approach to the study of modality. Their categorization not only provides a way to evaluate the speaker's belief in a proposition but also identifies whose belief is being assessed, whether that of the speaker or another subject or referent.

#### 4. Result

##### 4.1 Modality types in the speeches

All four modality types were found in the speeches. Table 2 provides the occurrence of the modality types in the speeches

**Table 2: Modality types in the presidential speeches**

	Epistemic modality	Agent-oriented modality	Speaker-oriented modality	Subordinating modality
JDM	110(47.0%)	82(35.0%)	38(16.2%)	4(6.4%)
NADAA	161(55.1%)	95(32.5%)	36(12.4%)	--
Total	271(51.5%)	177(33.7%)	74(14.1%)	4(0.7%)

The highest occurring type of modality in the presidents' speeches was the epistemic modality. Similar observations had been made by Setiawan and Fitriani (2019) who studied the 2018 Independence Day speech of President Joko Widodo. JDM and NADAA used epistemic modality to give their subjective assessment of their propositions by indicating the various degrees to which these propositions are possible to be materialized. Palmer (2001) explains that epistemic modality reflects the speaker's assessment of, and confidence in, the truth value of a proposition. The following extracts are given to illustrate the presidents' use of epistemic modality:

- (1) "All of us have contributed to our collective history and *would* be a critical factor in whether we succeed or fail as a nation." [58IDC]
- (2) "At independence, the popular slogan was to seek first the political kingdom and all other things *would* be added...We assumed and, indeed, we expected that rapid economic development would follow the political freedom that we had won." [60IDC]

In extract (1), the modal marker 'would' expresses possibility. This is the degree to which JDM assessed the factuality of his proposition. The utterance of NADAA in extract (2) expresses the idea of probability and certainty. Using the modal marker 'would', he stated the likelihood of the country obtaining all that comes with independence when the political system of democracy is instituted. He further used the modal marker 'indeed' to state his sureness of how the country had assumed and expected development to be a sure thing after attaining independence. Bybee et al. (1994) hold that when speakers indicate their assessment in connection to the degree of confidence in the knowledge of a proposition, they use epistemic modality. In extracts (1) and (2), JDM and NADAA express confidence in the country's progress toward political and economic freedom. Both presidents express their knowledge and sureness in what the country could achieve. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Kantorgorjie et al. (2021) and Marin-Arrese (2011), who indicated that epistemic modality dominates political discourse. Both authors asserted that an epistemic stance in political discourse legitimizes propositions of politicians. It projected them confident about the knowledge they hold to their assertions.

The second highest occurring modality type in the presidential speeches was the agent-oriented modality. This modality type, according to Bybee et al. (1994), expresses situations in which the clause's agent is affected in some way in carrying out the action indicated in the clause. In the Independence Day speeches, the presidents conveyed their personal convictions regarding the propositions they advanced. They expressed their readiness, willingness, and role in the happening of the proposals communicated in their speeches. Researchers such as Nartey and Yankson (2014), Aning (2020), Kantorgorjie et al. (2021)

and Sharififar and Rahimi) found that the modal will has predominantly been used in political discourse to show the forthrightness of politicians. This modal marker expresses the conviction of speakers to their assertions. In the present study, agent-oriented modality showed the presidents' personal views, their conviction and readiness to perform a certain action (Bybee et al., 1994). The following utterances are picked from the dataset:

- (3) "These are not just nice statements to stand here and say; these are goals—realistic goals—that we *must* strive every day to meet... We *cannot* afford to leave any of our citizens behind." [58IDC]
- (4) "We *must* fight against the new domination. And we *must* fight with the weapons of today, constitutional, determined, persistent, unflinching, unceasing, until the goal of freedom is attained." [60IDC]

In extract (3), the modal markers 'must' and 'can' are used to express obligation and necessity, respectively. JDM's use of 'must' communicate his idea of compulsion on himself and the people. He expressed that the national goals he reckoned in his speech ought to be realized and all Ghanaians must ensure that this happens. The modal marker 'must' had also been found in the studies of Nartey and Yankson (2014), Aning (2020), Kantorgorjie et al. (2021), Owuye and Idowu (2019) and Lillian (2008). Like the present study, these previous studies showed that the modal marker *must* communicates coercion of some event on speakers/writers. Quirk et al. (1985) share that the modal marker 'must' expresses a strong sense of necessity, obligation, or certainty. Similarly, in using 'can' and the negated form, JDM further showed the idea of necessity. He shared that a collective effort was required to ensure national development. In extract (4), NADAA used the modal marker 'must' to communicate the obligation placed on the president on the people for the actualization of the actions stated in his utterance. He reckoned in his speech that he, together with the people, was obliged to resist any form of new domination. He considered himself an actor in the preservation of the country's democratic freedom. This made him a responsible leader who acknowledged his duty to the country. Aning (2020) and Nartey and Yankson (2014) similarly reported in their respective studies that modality was used to project speakers accountable to their acclamations. Through their utterances, the presidents considered themselves agents responsible for the completion of the actions described in their utterances. This presented them as leaders willing to perform their mandate as presidents. The inclusion of the people also rekindled a sense of togetherness. They acknowledged the need for a collaborative effort in which the citizenry is also a key actor. Rahmawati (2020) and Ekawati (2019) similarly observed that presidents use modality to build social relationships and create a sense of cooperativeness among them and the citizenry.

The speaker-oriented modality type was the third-highest occurring modality in the speeches. According to Bybee et al. (1994), speaker-oriented modality denotes the authorization for performing certain actions. In their speeches, the presidents issued pronouncements that instructed Ghanaians to take specific actions. These pronouncements were instructive and compulsive. They made the following utterances in their speech to illustrate their use of the speaker-oriented modality.

- (5) "All children *must* have access to education, whether they are male or female; whether they live in a village or in a city. Young people *must* be afforded the skills needed in order to find gainful employment. Proper healthcare must be available to all our people." [57IDC]
- (6) "We *must* take pride in our diversity by all means, but the Ghanaian *must* always rise above the ethnic or sectional interest." [60IDC]

In JDM's speech (extract 5), the speaker-oriented modality was used to indicate the president's issuance and expectation of an action being performed by the people. He used the modal marker 'must' to give an admonition. He gave a proper cause of action by acknowledging the need to provide proper care to the youth and children. The admonition was given to a non-definite entity. In extract (6), NADAA used the expression 'must always rise' to give instruction to the citizens. The president gave the admonition that the Ghanaian ought to uphold nationalism and eschew ethnocentrism. JDM and NADAA used the speaker-oriented modality to reckon the need for Ghanaians to be active participants in

national development. Putting forward various propositions, the presidents gave several instructions that they believed could ensure national development. As leaders, they used speaker-oriented modality to exert their power. Discourse, according to van Dijk (2008), is not a neutral means of communication but a crucial site where power is exercised, reproduced and challenged. To him, dominant groups in society use discourse to maintain their power and control over others. This is a characteristic of political discourse where modality is used as a discursive strategy to enact power. Ekawati (2019) avers that modal markers create and sustain fundamental inequalities. Surjowati (2016) has for instance found a relationship between modality and power in social media discourses. Likewise, Yunisda and Firmansyah (2019) claimed that President Donald Trump used modality to enact power in his Riyadh Summit 2017. Modal markers such as ‘must’ are used to compel others towards a certain activity. It communicates strong obligation that shows speakers’ superiority and power (Ekawati, 2019; Quirk et al., 1985; Surjowati, Wirawati, Shalsadita & Achmad, 2024). These studies are, therefore, consistent with the findings of the present study.

The least occurring modality type in the speeches was subordinating modality. Bybee et al. (1994) describe the subordinating modality as the use of a modality within a subordinate clause. The modality marker is embedded in the subordinate clause. Extracts (7&8) are illustrative examples of the presidents’ use of subordinating modality:

- (7) “If we speak success, we envision success, and we work toward realizing that vision, we will achieve it. If we speak and focus on failure, any inspiration to believe, to see, and to create has already been killed.” [57IDC]
- (8) “The truth is that, even if there were no aid fatigue, and with the best will in the world and the most charitable governments in place in the so-called donor countries, there will never be enough aid to develop Ghana to the level we want. Aid was never meant to be what would bring us to the status of a developed nation.” [60IDC]

In JDM’s speech (extract 7), the if-clause expresses a hypothetical statement of certainty. A similar observation is made in extract (8). NADAA’s certainty of external aid not being the solution to the country’s problem is validated through his use of the subordinate clause. He used the subordinating modality, through the subordinate clause, to provide a realistic description and comparison to authenticate his ideas. NADAA, like JDM, used speculations to validate his assertions. Both used conditional clauses to realize subordinating modality. This aided them to link their assertions to what they aspired to or ideal situations.

## 4.2 Communicative functions of modality types

The discursual functions of the modality types are discussed in this sub-section. This was done manually after the speeches had been read repetitively with particular interest in linguistic items that encoded modal meanings.

### 4.2.1 Epistemic modality

Epistemic modality in the presidents’ speeches expressed the following communicative functions: certainty, probability and possibility.

**Table 3: Communicative functions of epistemic modality**

Communicative functions	JDM	NADAA	Total
Epistemic certainty	76(69.1%)	117(72.7%)	193(71.2%)
Epistemic probability	25(22.7%)	38(23.6%)	63(23.3%)
Epistemic possibility	9(8.2%)	6(3.7%)	15(5.5%)
Total	110(100.0%)	161(100.0%)	271(100.0%)

The data indicate that epistemic modality was mostly used to communicate certainty. Bybee et al. (1994) share that this modality type communicates speakers’ assessment of their certainty and

confidence in the knowledge value of their propositions. Kantorgorje et al. (2021) agree with Yunisda and Firmansyah (2019) that politicians use epistemic modality to communicate their confidence in some facts, making them appear bold and firm in their discourse. Xu (2015) labels this as the knowledge-based stance of speakers. In the present study, it is inferred that the presidents expressed their strongest level of confidence based on their understanding of the proposition. It is of the view that JDM and NADAA had been well informed about the facts stated in their proposition and with that knowledge expressed their strongest confidence in the assertions they made. Since the celebration was also about recounting history which could not be distorted, the presidents were assured of their expressions made in respect of the history of the country. The following utterances were for instance made to show epistemic certainty:

- (9) “I am *confident* that we can achieve the dreams of our forebears. I am hopeful that we will be worthy inheritors of this land.” [60IDC]
- (10) “I am *absolutely encouraged* by this show of solidarity by our young politicians on the issue of national unity. Our diversity must therefore, as I said in the State of Nation Address, be a source of strength and not a weakness.” [58IDC]

In extract (9), NADAA appeared confident about the ability to attain the purpose for which our forebears had to fight for independence. In (10), JDM’s certainty about his enthusiasm for the effort of young politicians is evident. He expressed his utmost conviction towards the behaviour of young politicians. As leaders, they certainly could not be naïve about their propositions. They communicated their boldness and confidence by making absolute propositions through their speeches. Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) have reported that politicians through their speeches make absolute propositions to frame themselves as bold and forthright. Simon-Vandenberg (1996) described this as the expression of cognitive certainty among politicians. Thus, epistemic certainty is used by politicians to frame a positive self-image (Cheng, 2017; Yunisda & Firmansyah, 2019).

The presidents also used epistemic probability in their speeches. This, according to Traugot and Dasher (2002), is the expression of median confidence held by speakers to their propositions. Extracts (11) and (12) illustrate JDM and NADAA’s use of epistemic probability.

- (11) “Today, we remember those millions, all of the founding fathers and mothers who organized and sacrificed; the millions of brave men and women who fought and died to give this country and indeed all of Africa, freedom from colonial domination and repression. A greater number will most *likely* remain nameless and faceless.” [56IDC]
- (12) “Our languages *might* be many, and, sometimes, there *might* be mutual frustration at having difficulty in speaking each other’s language, and no one feels that more than I do, when I stand here in Tamale, unable to speak Dagbani, but we have learnt to overcome such difficulties.” [62IDC]

In extract (11), JDM reckoned that some men and women who took part in the struggle for independence would be forgotten. He was inconclusive about this and did not make a definite statement about it. NADAA also acknowledged the likelihood that our language situation could create frustrations among citizens (see extract 12). Both presidents expressed the likelihood of their propositions being materialized. This is contrary to the assertions of Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) who indicated that politicians make absolute propositions as opposed to making inconclusive assertions.

Extracts (13) and (14) also illustrate the presidents’ use of epistemic possibility:

- (13) “Last year, at the 60th independence anniversary, I announced that, on my way here, I had cut the sod for the construction of a National Cathedral, which *would* serve as an inter-denominational place of worship for important national occasions.” [61IDC]
- (14) “We must celebrate and enhance our successes and recognize and minimize our failures. All of us have contributed to our collective history and *would* be a critical factor in whether we succeed or fail as a nation.” [58IDC]

In extract (13), NADAA communicated the possibility of a national cathedral serving as an inter-denominational place of worship. He considered the prospects of the monument being a converging place for Christian worship. In extract (14), JDM also recognized the possibility that each citizen could be a determining factor in advancing, or hindering, national development. His low confidence in this assertion is marked by the modal marker ‘would’. All the extracts indicate the presidents’ lowest level of confidence in their propositions, reflecting either limited knowledge or an awareness of the tentative nature of the issues they addressed.

#### 4.2.2 Agent-oriented modality

The presidents used agent-oriented modality to express the following communicative functions: obligation, necessity, ability and desire.

**Table 4: Communicative functions of agent-oriented modality**

Communicative functions	JDM	NADAA	Total
Obligation	28(34.1%)	41(43.2%)	69(39.0%)
Desire	29(35.4%)	14(14.7%)	43(24.3%)
Necessity	10(12.2%)	25(26.3%)	35(19.8%)
Ability	15(18.3%)	15(15.8%)	30(16.9%)
Total	82(100.0%)	95(100.0%)	177(100.0%)

JDM communicated more desire as opposed to NADAA communicating more obligation. JDM expressed his longing to undertake specific events as the leader and president of the country. Though he considered himself a force for the realization of his propositions, he only indicated his yearning to assume responsibility. NADAA, on the other hand, emphatically expressed his obligation to duty. He acknowledged his responsibility towards the realization of his various propositions.

The presidents, generally, used modal markers to affirm their commitment to advancing national development, achieving economic freedom, and safeguarding democratic freedom. In their speeches, they put forward actions which to them, would contribute to national development and complement the country’s continuous fight for economic freedom. Extracts illustrating the use of agent-oriented modality to communicate obligation include:

- (15) “We *must* work together as a team. We *must* remember that the words we speak matter.” [56IDC]
- (16) “On a day such as this, when we celebrate the official start of our nationhood, we *should* also pay homage to those who have led the fight for individual freedoms.” [61IDC]

The modal marker ‘must’ was used by JDM to express obligation. In extract (15), he acknowledged the duty of himself and the citizenry to work towards national development. He considered himself and the citizens as forces central to the actualization of his proposition. NADAA equally communicated the idea of obligation in extract (16). In this extract, he recognized his responsibility in honouring the efforts of our forebears. Both presidents, in all the extracts, used the pronoun ‘we’ to communicate all-inclusiveness. This projected them as leaders who are ready to work together with the people to attain economic freedom and safeguard the country’s democratic freedom. This result is in line with previous assertions that politicians use language to enact a sense of necessity, purpose and promise (Aning, 2020; Nartey & Yankson, 2014) to persuade their audience (Cheng, 2017; Owuye & Idowu, 2019).

Both presidents likewise expressed their desire to undertake various actions towards the realization of their propositions. Though the presidents reckoned the need to act, they merely expressed their longing to undertake such action. Extracts (17) and (18) show the presidents’ use of agent-oriented modality to communicate desire.

- (17) “Since I became President, I have been advocating for a Ghana, indeed, an Africa, Beyond Aid, and I am *keen* to have the support of all of us in this enterprise.” [61IDC]

- (18) “I *would like* to begin by congratulating each and every Ghanaian for your role in ensuring our beloved country’s ability to celebrate another year of independence and liberty, with democracy and the rule of law at the helm.” [59IDC]

In extract (17), NADAA expressed optimism that he could secure broad public support to help make his visions a reality. Using the modal marker ‘keen’, the president revealed his hopefulness and desire for a collaborative effort between his government and the citizens. In extract (18), JDM expressed his appreciation to Ghanaians. He indicated his desire to appreciate the significant role played by all Ghanaians towards the celebration of the nation’s independence. Previous studies have also noted politicians’ use of linguistic markers to enact a sense of willingness and alacrity to achieve a future act (Aning, 2020; Nartey & Yankson, 2014; Reyes, 2014). Xu (2015) describes this as value-based stance-marking that shows speakers’ inclination to their propositions.

Agent-oriented modality was also used to communicate necessity and ability. Extracts (19) and (20) illustrate agent-oriented necessity while extracts (21) and (22) illustrate agent-oriented ability.

- (19) “When 14-year old Abraham Attah won the Independent Spirit Award, he was not just representing this country...This is the pride and the unity we *must* foster every day.” [59IDC]
- (20) “To get to a Ghana Beyond Aid, we *will* have to harness effectively our own resources, and deploy them creatively and efficiently for rapid economic and social transformation.” [61IDC]
- (21) “There is nothing we *can* do better to pay homage to those who fought to free us from bondage than to dedicate this 60th independence anniversary to protecting our environment, and regenerating the lands and water bodies.” [60IDC]
- (22) “If you ask yourself, “Could it have been made in Ghana?” and the answer is “Yes,” then for the love of this country, our country, start thinking of ways that we *can* transform our society and our economy by making it happen.” [57IDC]

#### 4.2.3 Speaker-oriented modality

The occurrence of speaker-oriented modality in the presidents’ speeches expressed the following communicative functions: directives, prohibitions, permissions, admonitions and optatives.

**Table 5: Communicative functions of speaker-oriented modality**

Communicative functions	JDM	NADAA	Total
Directives	14(36.8%)	13(36.1%)	27(36.5%)
Admonitions	9(23.7%)	11(30.6%)	20(27.0%)
Optatives	10(26.3%)	9(25.0%)	19(25.7%)
Prohibitions	3(7.9%)	1(2.8%)	4(5.4%)
Permissions	2*5.3%)	2(5.5%)	4(5.4%)
Total	38(100.0%)	36(100.0%)	74(100.0%)

Directive was the main function for which speaker-oriented modality was used. The presidents used their speeches to issue directives to their audience which were the citizens. They exerted their political power by giving orders. Van Dijk (2008) has shown that political discourse is a crucial site for exerting power. This was seen in the present study through the use of speaker-oriented modality for directives. The following extracts from the data illustrate this:

- (23) “We must continue to be vigilant in our attempts to address the inequalities that face our society. The gap between the rich and the poor *must* be bridged.” [57IDC]
- (24) “Fellow Ghanaians, as a government committed to the growth of the private sector, we believe that the private sector *should* be the critical partner in moving Ghana Beyond Aid.” [61IDC]

JDM orders that the gap between the rich and the poor be bridged. This directive was given without explicitly stating an entity responsible for this act. Using the modal marker ‘must’, he considered it imperative for the action to be executed (see extract 23). NAADA also ordered the private sector to partner with his government to help the country attain financial independence. He used the modal marker ‘should’ to express this directive (see extract 24). Van Dijk (2008) indicates that political discourse is not a neutral means of communication, rather, a medium for enacting power and control. Previous studies have also found modality as a discursive strategy for enacting power (Ekawti, 2019; Surjowati, 2016; Surjowati et al., 2024; Yunisda & Firmansyah, 2019). The present study, therefore, aligns with evidence from the literature on the fact that modality is used to enact power through directives.

The presidents in their speeches also gave gentle warnings (admonitions) to the people. They cautioned the people on the need to uphold national unity, support democratic governance, contribute to national development, and promote economic freedom. As leaders, they made these cautions based on their knowledge and their conviction that these actions are desirable. Simon-Vandenberg (1996) claims that modality is an intellectual power used to build positive self-image. This linguistic resource is used to communicate cognitive certainty to persuade audience (Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015; Reyes, 2014). This was realised in the present study through the use of speaker-oriented modality for admonitions. Some extracts to illustrate the use of the speaker-oriented modality to communicate admonitions are:

- (25) “Those, who have the means to do so, *should* consider it more important to travel around and know Ghana, before they embark on the next vacation to Dubai...I urge those who live in the big cities, in particular, to get around the country a little.” [62IDC]
- (26) “Fellow Ghanaians...*We appeal* to your patriotism and we urge everyone to demonstrate a commitment to collective responsibility.” [56IDC]

Both JDM and NADAA issued subtle orders as cautions to their audience. In (25), NADAA articulated that well-to-do Ghanaians should patronize domestic tourism. He encouraged them to travel around the country and visit rural communities within the country. JDM also admonished his audience in his speeches. In extract (26), he called on the people to be committed and patriotic towards the building of the nation. He attempted to persuade the people to see the need for nationalism.

Optatives were also issued by the presidents. The speaker-oriented modality was expressive of desire or wish. The presidents expressed various wishes of goodwill to the people. As they joined the people to commemorate independence, the presidents used the occasion to state their good wishes to the people and plead for blessings for the country. Extracts (27) and (28) illustrate this.

- (27) “*May* God bless each and every one of you. May God continue to bless our beloved homeland, and may Ghana remain free forever.” [59IDC]
- (28) “God bless us all, God bless Mother Africa, and God bless our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong.” [61IDC]

The least communicative function of speaker-oriented modality was permissions and prohibitions. This modality type was least used to authorize actions or deny the performance of such acts. It was, however, used to recount the authorization and proscription of events within historical contexts. The modal marker ‘could (not)’ was used to communicate these functions. Extracts (29) and (30) illustrate speaker-oriented modality for permission and prohibition, respectively.

- (29) “You did not have to wear a European-cut suit to be a scholar, you could wear a fugu, kente and above all, a locally woven fabric, and still be an educated person, he argued.” [60IDC]
- (30) “They could not attend the same schools, receive treatment at the same hospitals or eat at the same tables as their white fellowmen. They could not even vote.” [57IDC]

#### 4.2.4 Subordinating modality

Subordinating modality was used to communicate wishes and hypothetical situations. This was observed only in JDM’s speeches.

**Table 6: Communicative functions of subordinating modality**

Communicative functions	JDM	NADAA	Total
Wish	1(25.0%)	--	1(25.0%)
Condition	3(75.0%)	--	3(75.0%)
Total	4(100.0%)	--	4(100.0%)

Suhadi (2011) explained that conditional clauses, which mostly mark subordinating modality, typically express likelihood through hypothetical propositions. JDM used this modality to present a hypothetical situation. He presented an ideal situation for which he believed Ghanaians should work towards. He also described the result of certain actions premised on the performance of another. These extracts illustrate this argument:

- (31) “Government can, and will provide the necessary social infrastructure and incentives, but *unless we take collective ownership of challenges that face us; unless we demonstrate a strong desire and an unflinching commitment to be part of the solution*, most of our efforts will come to nothing.” [56IDC]
- (32) “Watching a popular television station’s news programme yesterday, people were asked what their opinions were about 58 years of independence...This was followed by a lady who said we had cause to celebrate because we have chalked some successes and *if we continue to work together* we can build on those achievements.” [58IDC]

JDM, in extract (31), spoke about the need for national commitment being a premise for which our efforts will be sustained. He provides the condition under which the country could sustain its efforts. In extract (32), he also provides the condition for building a better Ghana. He mentioned that collective effort and shared responsibility were the premises for national development. He reechoed these as the views shared by a citizen as he [the president] had heard on television.

## Conclusion

The results showed that all four types of modality presented by Bybee et al. (1994) were evident in the texts. Foremost among the findings is the dominant use of epistemic modality, with NADAA significantly surpassing JDM in its deployment. This suggests that NADAA’s rhetorical strategy is grounded in projecting epistemic authority; confidence, knowledge, and decisiveness. His repeated reliance on epistemic markers signals an assertive persona who seeks to appear unwavering in conviction. In contrast, JDM’s relatively lower usage implies a more cautious or balanced tone oriented toward inclusivity and rhetorical modesty. Both presidents, however, oscillate between epistemic certainty and probability, indicating awareness of the limits of political foresight. In terms of agent-oriented modality, NADAA again leads, particularly in expressions of obligation. This reflects a strong sense of personal and institutional accountability embedded in his public rhetoric. His emphasis on duty and compulsion to act suggests a governance model hinged on performance legitimacy and results-driven leadership. On the other hand, JDM’s use of agent-oriented modality leans more towards expressing desire and collective aspiration. This contrast shows a deeper communicative difference: NADAA appeals to action through necessity and responsibility whereas JDM emphasizes motivational appeal and national longing, projecting a more emotionally resonant discourse. Speaker-oriented modality use was nearly equal, but its communicative function warrants scrutiny. Both presidents exercised this modality to issue directives and exert presidential authority. Yet, the use of admonitions and polite reminders indicates an awareness of the rhetorical need to balance authority with approachability. Their deployment of optative structures also reveals a shared concern with portraying benevolence and hope. Nonetheless, the overall balance in this modality type suggests that both leaders understand the performative function of presidential speech as a site of power and moral exhortation. The subordinating modality, employed solely by JDM, is a notable point of divergence. Its incidence indicates JDM’s

unique rhetorical engagement with hypotheticals and idealized futures. His use of this modality type shows a discursive tendency toward visionary rhetoric grounded in the subjunctive projection of what Ghana could become. This contrasts with NADAA's absence in this area, which reflect a more pragmatic or present-focused communicative stance. JDM's use of subordinating modality thus constructs a forward-looking narrative that is speculative and aspirational. This serves as a soft persuasive tool to galvanize nationalistic sentiment.

Generally, the analysis reveals that NADAA's rhetoric is marked by assertiveness, obligation, and decisiveness, pointing to a leader who invokes modality to enforce authority and confidence. Conversely, JDM's modality profile is characterized by a more emotive, aspirational, and hypothetically rich discourse, positioning him as a leader who mobilizes rhetorical softness, vision, and motivational appeal. These differences are not merely linguistic variations but signify divergent political personas and leadership philosophies.

This study contributes to the understanding of the potency of modality as an interpersonal metafunction. Generally, the findings affirm the potency of using a functional model to examine commemorative speeches and idea conceptualizations in language use. The evidence from this study suggests that Bybee et al.'s (1994) typology of modality can be operationalized to analyze power dynamics, persuasion and interpersonal relationships in political discourse.

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