

THE SEMANTICS OF MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS IN THE 2018 SECOND TERM INAUGURAL SPEECH OF GOVERNOR WILLIE OBIANO IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the semantics of modal auxiliary verbs in the 2018 Second Term Inaugural Speech of Governor Willie Obiano in Anambra State. The objectives of the study are to identify the modal auxiliary verbs that are frequently used in the second term inaugural speech of Governor Willie Obiano and to identify how the semantic meanings of these modal auxiliary verbs have contributed to the overall message conveyed in the inaugural speech. The design of the study was both quantitative and qualitative. The study reveals that modals such as *will*, *shall*, *must*, *can*, *would*, among others were used by the Governor in his second term inaugural speech to make promises, declare his intentions, prove theoretical possibility, demonstrate political will/commitment, solicit for further support and solidarity and emphasize the obligation before him and the people of Anambra State to do things right. Thus, '*will*' is the most preponderantly used modal verb in the speech representing 35.6% of the total number of modals. This reinforces Quirk et al.'s (55) stance that '*will*' indicates intention or promise. It can be considered intentional and strategic given that by bombarding the people with a lot of realistic promises, a political leader is likely to be given full support and acceptance by the people. Significantly, this paper provides semantic insight into the peculiar uses of modals in political speeches and affirms positively that modals are not just linguistic elements, but most importantly ideological tools used for persuasion in political discourse.

Key words: Semantics, Inaugural, Speech, Auxiliary, Modals

INTRODUCTION

Language is everywhere: in our thoughts, actions and even in our dreams. Language is a tool for social existence. The primary function of language is for the purpose of communication. Man is distinct from other animals since he communicates through language. The famous Linguist,

Edward Sapir defines language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols” (17). These symbols are in the first instance auditory and they are produced by the so-called organs of speech. Chomsky sees language as “the human essence, the distinctive qualities of mind that are so far as we know unique to man. “Language is a means of understanding ourselves and our society and everybody around us and of resolving some of the issues and tension that arise from human interaction. The use of language gives rise to the term discourse” (27), and discourse is textualized in varying mediums. Sometimes, it is referred to as ‘genre’. The present study focuses on an essential and notable form of political discourse, an inaugural speech. Graber observes that political discourse crops up “when political actors in and out of government communicate about political matter for political purposes” (165). The success of a political discourse will be determined by how effective politicians utilize the channel opened up by language.

The concept of political speech could be said to have originated from the rhetorical works of Greek philosophers like Sophist, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle therefore describes it as a faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion in reference to whatever subject” (Agbogun in Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere 461). It refers to the use of language by the government or political parties to either convince, persuade, entertain, promise, enlighten or to inform the people. Language serves as the link to people’s hearts in politicking.

The inaugural speech, a persuasive rhetorical unit, is the first speech someone gives when starting an important new job. It is a speech given by political leaders during an inauguration ceremony which informs the people of their intentions as leaders. Given these objectives, therefore, inaugural speeches are replete with modal auxiliary verbs that seek to espouse diverse ideologies and intentions of a political leader. As Quirk et al demonstrate, a modal auxiliary verb is used together with a main verb to express differing attitudes towards a proposition to depict possibility, certainty, permission, intention, etc. (52). Halliday refers to modal assessment as a semantic domain extending across more than one grammatical environment (613). According to Eyisi, modal auxiliary verbs express the mood of the verb (34). Murthy sees modals as verbs used to express various moods and mental attitudes like hope, expectation, possibility and futurity (128).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study primarily seeks to identify the modal auxiliary verbs that are frequently used in the second term inaugural speech of Governor Willie Obiano and to identify how the semantic meanings of these modal auxiliary verbs have contributed to the overall message conveyed in the inaugural speech.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Which modal auxiliary verbs are frequently used in the second term inaugural speech of Governor Willie Obiano?
2. What meanings do these modal auxiliary verbs bring to bear on the overall message conveyed in the inaugural address?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The major aim of this study is to explore the concept of modality in political discourse. For this reason, the synthesis of literature on how the variables of the study connect with each other is hereby provided. According to Baldeh “modals are verbs which are used with other verbs to effect a change in meaning” (56). To him, the use of modal auxiliary verbs is imprecise. That is to say, we use modal verbs to give the ideas of possibility, impossibility, necessity, willingness, certainty, uncertainty and expectation. Quirk et al identify nine types of modal auxiliary verbs: *can/could, may/might, shall/should, will/would, must*, (52-57). Halliday rightly points out that the grammar and the semantics of modal auxiliary verbs in native English have engaged scholarly attention for a long time. Modal auxiliary verbs pose a complex problem as far as linguistic description is concerned. Classifying modal auxiliary verbs is by no means unproblematic, since individual modals may function in more than one category. Baldeh for instance explains that *can/may* convey possibility in the sentence: *Even professors can make mistakes*; *may* convey characteristics in the sentence: *She can be stubborn at times*; sensation in the sentence: *I can hear you from the back of the class*; and willingness in the sentence: *Can you pass the salt, please?* Because of the multiplicity of meanings that could be derived from a particular modal verb, Branford emphasizes that “it is possibly better to avoid labeling any modal too specifically (e.g. can = ability)” (144).

Halliday views modality as part of the interpersonal constituent of language and subsequently classifies the English modal auxiliary verbs in terms of modality and modulation (i.e. the ideational constituent of language). Modulation refers to the semantic category of proposals, but all modalities are realized as indicative (that is, as if they were propositions) (189-210). Thus imperative ... ‘go home’ according to Halliday when modulated becomes indicative ... ‘you must go home!’. In philosophical semantics probability is referred to as ‘epistemic’ modality and obligation, as ‘ideontic’ modality. To Halliday, the basic distinction that determines how each type of modality will be realized is the orientation. That is, the distinction between subjective and objective modality and between explicit and implicit variants (618). This view is corroborated in the present study.

Functionally, Abdul-Fattah in Narty and Yankson gives an integrative idea about the anomalous and polysemous linguistic behavior of the English modal auxiliary verbs. These modals express a network of multifarious modalities, even with the same modal auxiliary verb, contingent on the different discursal contexts (23). Collaborating this view, Quirk et al. demonstrate that ‘shall’ can be contextually used to express willingness, intention, insistence and legal and quasi-legal injunction (54). Eysi associates functions such as future prediction, intention 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 (55). 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). They identified the functions of ‘could’ as: past ability, present or future permission, present possibility, contingent possibility, or ability in unreal conditions. ‘Must’ they explained expresses obligation or compulsion in the present tense, future obligation, prohibition and logical necessity. ‘Should’ they maintain shows obligation and logical necessity, putative use after certain expression and contingent use in the first person only. ‘May’ expresses permission,

possibility while *'Might'* is rarely used to show permission, possibility (theoretical or factual) (54-57).

The above analysis however expresses that English modal auxiliary verbs are encompassing and this rightly accounts for its intricate and ambivalent linguistic characteristic both grammatically and notionally.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Some scholars have worked on political speeches from different perspectives. Uduma studied the semantic and pragmatic meanings of modals in President Goodluck Jonathan's speech during Nigeria's 50th Independence Jubilee. He discovered that the President made use of the modal auxiliaries *'will'* (intention), *must* (obligation), *can* (ability) more in his speech to prove his good intentions for the wellbeing of Nigeria and the people of Nigeria. Ayoola focused on the critical discourse analysis of a speech by Nigeria President Olusegun Obasanjo. In this he was able to demonstrate the relevance of critical discourse analysis for eliciting political meaning in the use of language. Ayemoni investigated the grapho-syntactic analysis of selected political speeches of some Nigeria Military Heads of State: General Murtala Muhammed, General Ibrahim Babaginda, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi and General Olusegun Obasanjo. Bolarinwa studied the stylistic analysis of language of politics in the acceptance speech of President Goodluck Jonathan. He discovered that politicians are stylists when it comes to convincing their audience (electorates). Abuya examined the pragma-stylistic approach to the meaning of the linguistic acts that manifest in the inaugural speech of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as a democratically elected president. Ofoegbu and Usar worked on the stylistic analysis of the language of General Muhammadu Buhari's campaign speech of 2011. They identified four stylistic levels used in the speech to prove that every speech is stylistically-inclined. These include: graphology, lexical analysis, syntax and semantics.

Ehineni conducted a study on the critical discourse analysis of modals in Nigerian political manifesto. He collected data from political manifesto of Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party (LP) and Barr. Rotimi Akeredolu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) during their campaign for 2012 Gubernatorial Election in Ondo State. He discovered that modals such as will, shall, must, can, etc. were used by the politicians for persuasion, obligation, to make promises and to solicit for public support, etc.

The review of literature above, first and foremost, revealed that studies carried out on modality or the use of modal auxiliary verbs in political speeches are not much. Second, almost all the studies focused on political speeches of Nigerian presidents; such studies on inaugural speeches of state governors in Nigeria are virtually non-existence, hence the justification and usefulness of the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Sentences involving the use of modal auxiliary verbs were extracted from the Governor's second term inaugural speech for analysis. The speech was downloaded from the Internet <https://www.reportnaija.ng>. It is worthy of note that the analysis in this research work was guided by research questions as the researchers picked the various modal auxiliary verbs and emphasized the meanings that could be contextually attributed to them. Efforts were made to

calculate the percentages of each of the modal verbs used by the Governor in his second term inaugural speech. This was done using the Overall Relative Frequency Percentages (ORFPs). The calculation of the modal auxiliary verbs was based on the number of a particular modal auxiliary verb divided by the total number of modal auxiliary verbs in the speech. Example:

$$\frac{\text{Frequency of modal auxiliary verb}}{\text{Total number of modal auxiliary verb in a speech}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

This served as the basis for discussion in the research work.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Research Question 1: Which modal auxiliary verbs are frequently used in the second term inaugural speech of Governor Willie Obiano?

From the analysis, it was discovered that five out of the nine modal auxiliary verbs established by Quirk et al. (52-57) were used in varying proportions in the governor's second term inaugural speech. These include: *can*, *shall*, *will*, *would* and *must*.

Table 1 below presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the modal auxiliary verbs.

Table 1: Distribution of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in Governor Willie Obiano's Second Term Inaugural Speech

Modal Auxiliary Verb	Frequency	Percentage %
Can	8	17.8
Shall	11	24.4
Will	16	35.6
Would	2	4.4
Must	8	17.8
Total	45	100%

From table 1 above, it could be discovered that *will* has the highest frequency of occurrence in the inaugural speech, occurring 16 times representing (35.6%) of the total number of modal auxiliary verbs. This is followed by *shall* with the second highest of occurrence. It occurred 11 times (24.4%). *Can* and *must* have the same number of occurrence, occurring 8 times with 17.8% respectively. *Would* occurred two times (4.4%) and is minimally used. The fact that the use of certain modal auxiliary verbs is more frequent than others according to Narty and Yankson substantiates the point that modal auxiliary verbs are contextually deployed to achieve specific communicative intents and purposes in different registers (25).

Research Question 2: What are the Meanings of these Modal Auxiliary Verbs as Used in the Inaugural Speech?

In Governor Willie Obiano's second term inaugural speech, *can* occurred eight times representing a total of 17.8%. As a modal verb in the Governor's second term speech, *can* is used to express ability and theoretical possibility. The use of *can* in this regard buttresses Quirk et al.'s assertion that '*can*' can be used to express ability, implicational willingness and theoretical possibility. In the following sentence *can* is used to express ability:

1. I am proud that we have successfully placed our state on the tortuous path of progress and from this rugged valley of hardwork, we *can* all see hope in the distant hills.
2. I told you that the time had come to prove to ourselves that the enterprising spirit for which our people are known all over the world *can* take firm roots at home, and together as one, we *can* be masters of our own house.

In (1) *can* is used to prove the ability of the people, that they were able to succeed through hard work while in (2) *can* highlights the need for the people of Anambra to join hands and work as a team to achieve more progress, given the fact that they are known for their enterprising spirit and the innate ability to succeed in whatever they do. Based on this, the message put forward is likely to be taken seriously and accepted by the electorates as true. Since this is his second term of office, the factual proposition advanced by the use of *can* in the two examples is likely to inspire more confidence in his administration by the people. This is because the proposition expressed by *can* in the examples suggest that his administration has succeeded in making enormous achievement in the past four years. These positive impressions about his administration are presented as suppositions, facts and hard truths. *Can* is also used in the speech to express a theoretical possibility in which case it gives a strong possibility for something to materialize or to be actualized. In the example below, *can* expresses a theoretical possibility for the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) party to win the election at the national level.

3. Think of a better Nigeria, think of APGA, if we *can* do it in Anambra with lean resources we *can* do it in Nigeria with abundant human and material resources. In this example, the proposition expressed by *can* is theoretically possible and can be considered a persuasive strategy. This proposition expressed by *can* therefore implicitly recommends APGA to the electorates as very suited and viable to be voted for at the national level.

MUST: A strong ideontic modal auxiliary verb, is used in the second term inaugural speech to express (strong) obligation, compulsion and logical necessity. In the two sentences below, 'must' is used to express strong obligation:

4. This is why we *must* gird our loins and roll up our sleeves for the next four years.
5. I see joy and laughter for my fellow citizens. But I also see challenges that we *must* overcome to enjoy the liberties of true citizenship.

The use of *must* in the above sentences is to vehemently opine that the people are obliged to support and work with the government as good citizens of the state so as to overcome the challenges facing them. The researchers' claim that the compulsive meaning *must* brings to bear on the proposition is deployed by the governor to endear himself and his administration to the masses, connoting that the administration is under future obligation to deliver on their promises

if given maximum support and acceptance. It connotatively suggests that his administration has not failed in the past four years. There is also the use of *must* in the speech to depict logical necessity.

6. So, I *must* say ‘thank you’ to the newest senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the chairman of my re-election campaign organization, Chief Sir Victor Umeh and his team for running what was largely described as an outstanding election in Nigeria.

7. I *must* also thank all the leaders of the churches and the traders, farmers, and teachers, the Anambra State Association of Town Unions, the women association and other groups whose massive endorsement swayed the votes in favour.

The above two sentences are used to demonstrate that politicians are apt to show appreciation to people after victory at the polls.

SHALL: The modal auxiliary verb *shall* is used 11 times representing a percentage of 24.4%.

In all the instances of its usage in the inaugural speech, *shall* invariably expresses intention, willingness, and insistence thereby confirming Quirk et al.’s (52-57) postulation that of all the meanings that can be attributed to *shall*, the intention function is widespread and most prevalent. Examples are:

8. We *shall* drive hard reforms in the education sector to retain our position at the top and make education accessible to everyone to ensure that no child is left behind in our dear state.

9. We *shall* build a state-of-the-art teaching hospital in each of the three senatorial zones to deepen our reforms in the health sector and initiate a medical scheme for people above 70 years of age.

10. We *shall* install ultra-modern CCTV cameras in strategic locations across the state to give us a new advantage in crime detection.

The above sentences lucidly express the governor’s positive intentions, showing his concern for the good and welfare of the people of Anambra State. He used it to prove to the people that the next four years will witness bold efforts to lend roots to the great progress his administration has made in the past four years. These intentions are pre-meditated, and hopefully the governor would expect that such good intentions would get his administration into the good books of the masses for this second term. Though the good intentions expressed by the governor in his second term inaugural speech can be considered as a conjectural future event and therefore could pass off as indefinite intentions of futurity, it still stands to reason that a good number of the masses could accept these intentions as solid promises and subsequently render their unalloyed support and loyalty to the governor on his second term.

WOULD: The modal auxiliary verb occurred two times (4.4%). According to Eyisi, *would* can be associated with future intention in the past (63). Examples are:

11. I have no doubt that when Dim Chukwuemeka Odumuegwu Ojukwu looks down from heaven, he *would* be proud of what you did on November 18, 2017.

12. He *would* be happy that when the people he anointed to preserve his legacy jumped ship, you fought hard enough to keep the political vessel he bequeathed us afloat on the turbulent sea of Nigeria politics.

The above two sentences show a strong claim by the governor that the people voted him into power for the second term. *Would* therefore, is used to bring the event expressed in the proposition above to come to accomplishment.

WILL: The modal auxiliary verb *will* has the highest frequency of occurrence in the inaugural speech. It occurred 16 times representing a total of 35.6% of the total number of modal auxiliary verbs used in the speech. There are several instances where *will* is used to express future prediction, intention and conjectural future event, reinforcing Eyisi's stance that *will* indicates an intention or promise (64). Examples are:

13. It *will* be a city of dreams that *will* announce our ambition to the attentive world! It *will* take a lot of sacrifice and hard work but it can be done and it *will* be done.

Here *will* is used to express certainty.

14. These challenges are not stronger than our collective resolve to take back our happiness. I have no doubt that together we *will* rise against them and together we *will* put them behind us for good. The above expression conveys the use of *will* to express determination.

15. We owe it ourselves to be greater than those who came before us. Ndi Anambra, together we shall carve out a future that posterity *will* be proud of. Here, *will* is used to show promise.

16. Our dream of turning Anambra State into a logistics hub in the South East and South South region *will* come to reality once the Airport city project becomes functional. The use of *will* in the above sentence is to express intention.

From the above analyses, it could be deduced that *will* as a strong modal auxiliary verb is used to express certainty, promise, intention and determination. Most importantly, all the uses of *will* reinforce the exact objective of a political leader – to gain maximum support, acceptance and corporation of the electorates. Governor Willie Obiano is no exception to this rule; hence, consistently, *will* is used in the second term inaugural speech to reassure the masses of a continuous good governance and better economic system. Thus, he has been given the mandate to govern the state for the next four years. The preponderant use of the modal auxiliary verb *will* is not surprising. As a matter of fact it can be considered intentional and strategic given that by deluging the masses with a lot of realistic promises, a political leader is likely to win the hearts of the electorates. Therefore, *will* and not the other modal auxiliary verbs appears appropriate for this kind of discourse.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of the study was to analyze the semantic uses of modal auxiliary verbs in Governor Willie Obiano's second term inaugural speech in Anambra State on March 17, 2018. The analysis was based on the assumption that writers of political speeches do find modal auxiliary verbs a very useful persuasive strategy to drive home their messages. The governor made use of modal auxiliary verbs: *can*, *must*, *would*, and *shall* in varying proportions while *will* is the most frequently used. This was to prove his good intentions for the wellbeing of Anambra State and the people of the State. He also used it to elucidate the obligations before him and the people of Anambra State to join hands and build a state that posterity will be proud of. The modal auxiliary verbs were strategically used to positively project him and his administration before the people of Anambra State while at the same time highlighting the supposed achievements and developments recorded so far by his administration in their first term in office.

All these were purposely deployed to win acceptance without which a political leader cannot succeed.

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