

# A Study on Interpersonal Meaning in President Xi Jinping's Remarks at Session 1 of the G20 13th Summit

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## Abstract

Halliday's theory of modality has provided points for scholars to analyze interpersonal meaning in various types of discourse. This paper analyzes how interpersonal meaning in economic speech delivered by president Xi Jinping at session 1 of the 13th G20 Summit is achieved through modality system with the expectation of helping the addressers of economic speech to understand the right use of modality.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal meaning, Modality system, Economic speech.

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## INTRODUCTION

Systemic-Functional Linguistics is one of the main linguistic schools around the world. The linguistic theories proposed by its founder M.A.K. Halliday have great influence in linguistics field. Among these theories, three metafunctions of language have received great attention. Interpersonal metafunction, as the approach to build and maintain social relationship among people, is used most in interaction activities. It is mainly achieved through mood and modality system.

Many scholars have analyzed the interpersonal metafunction of various discourses from the point of modality system. Zhu [21] claims that person and mood system in English advertising discourse are important approaches of manipulations of readers. Yang [10] finds that the use of modal verbs in law discourse differs from that in academic discourse, which shows that different discourse uses different modal verbs to express interpersonal meaning. Zhou [11] holds that metaphor of modality can achieve particular discourse express effect and provide ways to analyze discourse. Halliday [1] claims that the main types of metaphor of modality, including explicit subjective and explicit objective, serve to different type of discourse. However, there are few studies on interpersonal meaning in economic speech. So this paper selects a speech delivered by Chinese president Xi Jinping at session 1 of the 13th G20 Summit to study how the interpersonal meaning is realized in economic speech with the theory of modality system.

## Interpersonal Metafunction

Interpersonal metafunction means that people can use language to interact and communicate with other people so as to establish and maintain appropriate social relationships with them. According to Halliday and Geoff Thompson, this metafunction is mainly achieved by mood and modality system. Mood system mainly indicates the role of the speaker and the listener in the speech situation, which can reflect the closeness between them. It has two basic components: subject and finite. Sometimes it includes modal adjunct which is employed to express the speaker's attitude or judgement towards the fact. Modality is the space between 'yes' and 'no'. It is used to convey the speaker's judgement and attitude towards the fact.

## Modality system in systemic-functional grammar

Modality system is the significant way to achieve interpersonal metafunction. It is classified into two types according to the exchange content. If the information is exchanged, the modality is called modalization. On the other hand, if the goods or services are exchanged, the modality is called modulation. These two types can also be classified into more detailed aspects. In the first type, probability and usuality can be classified. Probability refers to how likely the information is to be true, and usuality refers to how frequently the information is true [2]. In the second type, obligation and inclination can be classified. Obligation means that the speaker commands others to do something, and inclination means that the speaker has the willingness to fulfill the offer [2].

What's more, modality system also has other two variables: value and orientation. According to Thompson [2], finite modal operators have three different value which are high value, median value and low value. Different value represents the speaker's different responsibility for the attitude being expressed. The higher of the value is, the more responsibility for the attitude the speaker should take.

Halliday holds that modality can be expressed through finite modal operators and modal adjuncts. In this paper, the analysis of interpersonal meaning in president Xi Jinping's remarks at session 1 of the 13th

### The value of finite modal operators

**Table-1: Different Value of Finite Modal Operators**

Value	Number	Percent
High	9	26.5%
Median	23	67.6%
Low	2	5.9%
Total	34	100%

From this table, the finding can be concluded that the finite modal operators of median value are used most and the finite modal operators of low value are used least. The result shows that president Xi Jinping tends to use finite modal operators of median value. According to Thompson's theory, using finite modal operators of median value indicates that the speaker is trying to avoid express extreme attitude towards the fact, which can protect the speaker from being criticized. However, in some cases, the speaker must to

G20 summit will be conducted from the perspective of modality type and modality value through analyzing finite modal operators and modal adjuncts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Finite Modal Operators

Finite modal operators are regarded as the vital way to realize interpersonal meaning. Here the value and type of finite modal operators will be analyzed respectively. And the number and frequency of them will be listed.

express his attitude or stance expressly and firmly or is confident highly in the accuracy of the information, then the speaker is inclined to use finite modal operators of high value. Besides, referring to things with little chance to occur, the speaker is apt to adopt finite modal operators of low value.

Then the number and percent of each value of finite modal operators will be listed.

**Table-2: Number and Percent of Finite Modal Operators with Median Value**

Finite modal operators	Number	Percent
Will	8	34.8%
Should	15	65.2%
Total	23	100%

**Table-3: Number and Percent of Finite Modal Operators with High Value**

Finite modal operators	Number	Percent
Must	3	33.3%
need to	6	66.7%
Total	9	100%

**Table-4: Number and Percent of Finite Modal Operators with Low Value**

Finite modal operators	Number	Percent
May	2	100%
Total	2	100%

## The type of finite modal operators

**Table-5: Number and Percent of Different Types**

Types of Modal AuXi Jinpingliary	Modal AuXi Jinpingliary	Numbers	Percent
Modals of Probability	may	2	33.3%
	will	4	66.7%
	total	6	100%
Modals of Obligation	must	3	12.5%
	should	15	62.5%
	need to	6	25%
	total	24	100%
Modals of Inclination	will	4	100%
	total	4	100%

From the table, the conclusion is that finite modal operators of obligation are often used which takes account 70.6% of the total, and next is finite modal operators of probability which occupies 17.6%

of the total. The last is finite modal operators of inclination which takes account 11.8% of the total. Finite modal operators of usuality are not used in this speech.

**Table-6: Value and Type of Finite Modal Operators**

Value \ Type	Obligation	Inclination	Probability
	High	3(must) 6(need to)	---
Median	15(should)	4(will)	4(will)
Low	---	---	2(may)

The above table shows the distribution of different values and types of finite modal operators in this speech. Among finite modal operators of obligation, median value of finite modal operator *should* are used most, which shows that president Xi Jinping is trying to express his attitude towards the fact mildly to ensure the acceptance of the information. However, there are also high value of finite modal operators *must* and *need to* being used. The reason is that in some circumstances, the speaker holds strong belief and firm stance towards the information he said. Among finite modal operators of inclination, only median value of finite modal operator *will* is used. Among finite modal operators of probability, median value of finite modal operators *will* and *may* are used. Then each type of finite modal operators will be discussed with detailed examples.

### 1) Modal Expression of Obligation

Modal expressions of obligation mean that the speaker wants other people to do something. In this economic speech, president Xi Jinping proposes the action that should be taken and the belief that should be held by using these finite modal operators of obligation.

Among these finite modal operators of obligation, *should* and *need to* occur most which take account 62.5% and 25% of the total respectively. The word *must* occupy the proportion 12.5% of the total.

### Example 1

*We should employ the three tools of fiscal and monetary policies and structural reform in a holistic way to ensure strong, balanced, sustainable and inclusive growth of the global economy.*

### Example 2

*We should continue to support Africa's development by helping Africa with its infrastructure and connectivity building and new industrialization.*

In first example, president Xi Jinping proposes that three tools should be taken to ensure strong, balanced, sustainable and inclusive growth of the global economy. In second example, president Xi Jinping proposes that G20 countries have the responsibility to support Africa's development by various measures. In these two examples, the word *should* not only shows that G20 members should have high sense of responsibility to do something, but also protect the words president Xi Jinping said from being criticized because of too extreme attitude.

### Example 3

*We need to watch out for risks and challenges brought by the application of new technologies, and strengthen the legal and regulatory framework.*

**Example 4**

*Facing various challenges, we must have a stronger sense of urgency, be rational in approach and look beyond the horizon. We must fulfill our responsibility and steer the global economy in the right direction.*

In these two examples, the circumstance being referred is facing various risks and challenges. In this circumstance, it is no doubt that G20 members must watch out and take right measures to prevent risks so as to lead the global economy to develop in a right direction. So president Xi Jinping adopts high value of finite modal operators to make other countries to raise awareness of risk and strengthen confidence.

**2) Modal Expressions of Inclination**

Modal expressions of inclination mean that the speaker has willingness to do something. In this speech, only *will* is used to express this kind of meaning.

**Example 5**

*China will continue to deepen market-oriented reform, protect property rights and IPR, encourage fair competition and do more to expand imports.*

**Example 6:**

*China will continue to improve its business environment, and hopes that all countries will work together for a free, open, inclusive and orderly international economic environment.*

In these two examples, president Xi Jinping expresses Chinese government's will of taking measures to deepen market-oriented reform and improving China business environment through the word *will*.

**3) Modals of Probability**

When talking about something that has not happened now and has the possibility to happen in the future, the speaker will adopt modals of probability to refer to how likely the information is to be true. In this speech, *will* and *may* are used to achieve this kind of meaning. Different value of finite modal operators represents the speaker's different degree of confidence in ensuring the information's right.

**Example 7**

*The global economy is embracing the trend of digital transformation, and the new round of industrial revolution will reshape human society in profound ways.*

**Example 8**

*In 2018, the growth of trade in goods may decline by 0.3 percent globally.*

In first example, the median value of modal verb *will* indicates the new round of industrial

revolution will reshape human society in profound ways to a large extent. In second example, the number 0.3% is difficult to ensure, so president Xi Jinping uses low value of modal verb *may* to convey the information which increases the reliability of the information.

**Modal Adjunct**

Modal adjunct is a part of modality system. It is one of the vital approaches to express interpersonal metafunction. So it is worth analyzing modal adjuncts used in this speech in order to understand how interpersonal metafunction is achieved. Modal adjunct has two types which are mood adjunct and comment adjunct.

**Mood adjunct**

Mood adjunct is most closely related to the finite. They express meanings associated with tense, polarity and modality [2].

**Table-7: Number and Percent of Mood Adjunct**

Mood Adjunct	Number	Percent
still	1	25%
yet	1	25%
only	1	25%
obviously	1	25%
total	4	100%

**Example 9**

*Today, the global economy, while maintaining growth on the whole, is still not free from the underlying impacts of the crisis.*

*Still* means that the thing will not be finished until a particular time. In example 6, president Xi Jinping use *still* to highlight that the global economy is still suffering from the impacts of the crisis, which means that all countries should still have awareness of risk and take useful measures to reduce the impact that the risk has exerted on the global economy.

**Example 10**

*Old growth drivers are yet to be replaced by new ones*

*Yet* here means that something has happened. This sentence indicates that the economy driver has changed from old to new because of something. *Yet* here stresses that the change occurs rapidly. From the whole paragraph, we can see that other changes are also happening and these changes are bad, so the listeners can make others realize the urgency of stopping the changes through the word *yet*.

**Example 11**

*Going forward, win-win cooperation is the only choice for us, be it in good times or bad.*

*Only* means that there is no other choice. President Xi Jinping uses the word *only* to show the necessary and importance of going forward and win-win cooperation.

**Example 12**

*Five years ago, when I attended the G20 Summit for the first time, I called for joint efforts to uphold and build an open world economy. Five years on, this has obviously become an even more urgent task for us.*

*Obviously* means that the fact is clear. Here president Xi Jinping use the word *obviously* to highlight the fact that joint efforts to uphold and build an open world economy has become the urgent task for all countries. The listeners can be more firm towards the task.

**Comment adjunct**

Comment adjuncts typically comment on the clause as a whole rather than give circumstantial information about the event, and they are often separated off from the rest of the clause by commas [2].

**Table-8: Number and Percent of Comment Adjunct**

Comment Adjunct	Number	Percent
truly	1	100%
total	1	100%

In this speech, only one comment adjunct *truly* is used.

**Example 13**

*We should protect the development interests and space of developing countries so as to ensure global growth that is truly equitable.*

“*Truly* can be used to emphasize feeling is sincere and genuine or a particular quality or a particular description is accurate or correct” [7]. In this example, *truly* is used to express the speaker’s sincere attitude towards the equitable global growth. The listeners can be inspired and then support the idea of the speaker.

**CONCLUSION**

Halliday’s modality system has provided possibility for analyzing interpersonal meaning in the discourse. What’s more, how interpersonal meaning in economic speech is achieved through modality system is worth analyzing, which can help the addresser to deliver better speech and prevent from misunderstanding and being criticized. Through analyzing president Xi Jinping’s remarks at session 1 of the 13<sup>th</sup> G20 Summit from the view of modality, there are several findings:(1) In economic speech, interpersonal meaning is mainly achieved through finite modal operators. (2) In economic speech, the addresser usually uses median value of finite modal operators to convey information which is taking the acceptance of the information into account. (3) In economic speech, there are a great number of modals of obligation, which maybe is due to the serious risks and challenges that global economy is facing nowadays. (4) In economic

speech, mood adjuncts are used more often than comment adjuncts.

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