

Analysis of Guterres' Inaugural Speech from the Perspective of Modality System

Weixuan Shi, Wanwan Zhong*

English Department, Foreign Language School, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China

DOI: [10.36348/sjhss.2020.v05i09.007](https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2020.v05i09.007)

| Received: 15.09.2020 | Accepted: 23.09.2020 | Published: 26.09.2020

*Corresponding author: Wanwan Zhong

Abstract

Nowadays, the analysis of interpersonal meaning in political discourse has attracted more and more attention from academic circles. As the ninth UN Secretary General to take office in 2017, to a great degree, Guterres is actually a symbol of authority, justice and fair, therefore his words have profound impact on the UN and the world. Therefore, based on the theoretical framework of interpersonal function in Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, this article focuses on the discussion of Guterres' inaugural speech from the perspective of modality system. By means of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this article analyzes the high-valued modal operators, the median-valued modal operators and the low-valued modal operators in Guterres' inaugural speech, hoping to find out Guterres' speech style and also explains how he realized the interpersonal meaning in his inaugural speech with the help of different values of modal operators. Furthermore, it also can reveal the relationship between the choice of language mode and the meaning to be expressed, so as to better understand the deep meaning in the speech.

Keywords: inaugural speech, interpersonal function, modality system.

Copyright @ 2020: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use (NonCommercial, or CC-BY-NC) provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more and more scholars pay attention to political speech, and their focus is also placed on interpersonal meaning analysis. There is no doubt that a good political speech can not only shorten the distance between the speaker and the audience, but also win the support and trust of the audience. A prominent feature of political speech is its strong political tendency, logicity and persuasiveness. Generally speaking, the purpose of political speech can be divided into three parts: persuading the audience to take some action; completely changing their attitude or belief in something; strengthening or weakening their attitude or belief in something. In order to achieve these goals, the political speech has to attract, persuade, motivate or move the audience [1]. In Guterres' inaugural speech, as the ninth Secretary General of the United Nations to take office, his words have profound influence on the United Nations and the world. Therefore, this article takes the interpersonal function in Halliday's systemic-functional grammar as the theoretical framework, and intends to analyze the modal operators with different value from the perspective of modality system, so as to study the interpersonal meaning of Guterres realized in his inaugural speech.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 1970, British linguist M.A.K. Halliday proposed that language has three functions: experiential function, interpersonal function and textual function. Interpersonal function is used to determine, establish and maintain the social relationship between people. It expresses the role of the speaker in the speaking situation and the speaker's personal views and evaluation of the social relationship between himself and the hearer [2]. The realization of interpersonal function mainly depends on mood, modality system and evaluation system. Modality system is a semantic system to express the speaker's judgment and evaluation of things. Chinese scholars focus on the study of interpersonal function theory including mood system and modality system, and use modality system theory to analyze different texts [3]. In a broad sense, modalization includes modulation; modalization refers to information, while modulation refers to goods-and-services [4]. In English, the modal auxiliary is the main form to express modal meaning. Therefore, most linguists use modal auxiliary verbs as a formal of basis to explore modal meaning [5]. According to Halliday [6], modality is a domain of meaning between yes and no, i.e. it is the polarity between positive and negative

meaning. Then, Halliday classified the different values of modal operators, they are high value (such as must, ought to, need, has to, is to) used to express demand ; median value (such as will, would, shall, should) used to express suggestion; low value (may, might, can, could) used to express permission. The research result of Sun&Zhao [7] scholars shows that political speeches have distinctive characteristics of adapting to social environment and personal intention. The choice of modal operators may not be conscious, but it is this unconsciousness that shows the real intention of the speaker. So, it's important to analyze the different value modal operators to explore speaker's interpersonal meaning from the perspective of modal system.

CORPUS COLLECTION AND METHODS RESEARCH

The corpus selected in this article is Guterres' inaugural speech in 2017 [8]. Guterres is Portuguese, so his inaugural speech is bilingual, i.e. English and Portuguese. And this article only analyzes its English version. Besides, Guterres' inaugural speech can be easily found from internet. The reason for choosing Guterres' inaugural speech is that Guterres, as the Secretary General of the United Nations to take office, his words have a profound impact on the member states of the United Nations. In addition, the Secretary General of the United Nations is not only a diplomat but also a spokesman, a civil servant and a chief executive officer. As a symbol of the ideal of the United Nations, the Secretary General is for people all over the world,

especially the poor and vulnerable groups, which is fully reflected in Guterres' inaugural speech. With AntConc corpus retrieval software and Qualitative analysis method, this article mainly discusses the modal operators of different value in Guterres' inaugural speech from the perspective of modality system, so as to explore what interpersonal meanings Guterres, as the Secretary General of the United Nations to take office, wants to achieve.

MODALITY SYSTEM ANALYSIS OF GUTERRES' INAUGURAL SPEECH

One of the important parts of interpersonal meaning is the speaker's judgment on the success and validity of his own proposition, or the obligation he demands from the other party in the order, or the personal willing to be expressed in the proposal. And this part of interpersonal meaning is realized by the modality system of grammar [9]. As mentioned above, Halliday divides the generalized modality system into two parts: modalization and modulation, and classifies the modalization into three modal operators with different values which are high, median and low. Then the speaker can express his thoughts and feelings through some modal operators. In Guterres' speech, he mainly expressed his thoughts, feelings and judgments of things through modal operators, so as to realize his interpersonal meanings. Table 1 is the statistics of the amount of modal operators in Guterres' inaugural speech.

Table-1: The Distribution of Modal Operator in Terms of Value

Value	Modal Operator	Number	Total	Percentage
High	must	11	18	56.3%
	need	6		
	has /had to	1		
Median	will	6	13	40.6%
	would	4		
	should	2		
	is/was to	1		
Low	might	1	1	3.1%
Total			32	100%

With the help of AntConc corpus retrieval software, frequency of modal operators in table1 are only counted the total frequency of modal operators in Guterres' inaugural speech, and does not distinguish the positive sentence from the negative sentence. From table 1, it can be seen that modal operators have been used 32 times in Guterres' inaugural speech, among which high-valued modal operators have been used 18 times, accounting for 56.3%; median-valued modal operators have been used 11 times, accounting for 40.6%; low-valued modal operators have been used only once, accounting for 3.1%. What's more, it is clear that Guterres uses the highest proportion of high-valued modal operators, followed by the median-valued modal operators, and the lowest proportion of low-valued

modal operators. Besides, from table1, it can be seen that the frequency of using low-valued modal operators in Guterres' inaugural speech is very low, because low-valued modal operators always convey the meaning of great uncertainty, which not only makes the speaker less persuasive, but also makes him give the audience an unreliable feeling, so low-valued modal operators are rarely used in Guterres' inaugural speech.

High-valued Modal Operators and Their Interpersonal Meaning

It can be seen from table 1 that the high-valued modal operators "must" is most significant, which totally appeared 11 times, followed by "need", totally appearing 6 times, and the least one is "has / had to",

appearing only once. The following examples are used to explore the interpersonal meaning of the modal operator “must” in Guterres’ inaugural speech which is accounted for the largest number of high-value modal operators.

Example 1: It must focus more on delivery and less on process; more on people and less on burnout.

Example 2: The United Nations must be ready to change.

Example 3: Finally, management reform must ensure we reach gender parity partner rather than later.

In example 1, Guterres stressed that the work focus of the United Nations must be on deliverables, not procedures. In example 2, Guterres pointed out that the United Nations System needs to be changed. In example 3, Guterres argued that management reform must ensure that they achieve gender parity as soon as possible. Three examples show that Guterres pointed out that there are still many problems to be solved in the United Nations. He used the high-valued modal operator “must” to convey the urgency, necessity and firm confidence of solving the above problems.

Example4: This must involve leadership, coordination, delivery and accountability.

Example5: We must also bring the humanitarian and development spheres closer together from the very beginning of a crisis to support affected communities, address structural and economic impacts and help prevent a new spiral of fragility and instability.

In example 4, Guterres firmly believed that leadership, collaboration, delivery and accountability must be emphasized in the process of institutional reform of the United Nations. In example 5, Guterres took a clear stand in regard to the humanitarian issue as the top priority of the issues to be solved by the member states of the United Nations. By using the high-valued modal operator “must” in example 4 and example 5, Guterres demonstrated his leadership as Secretary General of the United Nations and his firm political views.

Example 6: We need more accountability, on the level of each individual agency carrying out its mandate, but also its contribution to the work of the United Nations system and of the system as a whole.

Example 7: We need to create a consensus around simplification, decentralization and flexibility.

Example 8: We need a substantial reform of our communications strategy, upgrading our

tools and platforms to reach people around the world.

In Guterres’ inaugural speech, the high-valued modal operator “need” is also frequently used. In example 6, Guterres pointed out that humanitarian response, sustainable development and sustaining peace are three sides of the same triangle, and they are indispensable. Therefore, member states of the United Nations need to increase accountability at these three levels. In Example 7, Guterres called on member states to reach consensus on simplification, decentralization and flexibility of administration. In example 8, Guterres asked member states to better publicize the work of the United Nations in a way that everyone understood. In his inaugural speech, Guterres used the high-valued modal operator “need”, which indicates that Guterres, as the Secretary General to be appointed, proposed to unite member states and put forward practical measures to solve the shortcomings of the United Nations System.

Example 9: With their professionalism, expertise and dedication, they are the United Nations’ most important resource, a resource that has to be cared for, developed and used efficiently, and whose voice needs to be heard.

In Guterres’ inaugural speech, he also used the high-valued operator “has to”. Because “has to” make the tone of sentence tough, so it is used only once in his speech. In Example 9, Guterres used the high-value modal operator “has to” to indicate the unique importance of women in the United Nations, and emphasize the significance of women’s role in the United Nations. In a word, by using the high-valued modal operators in his inaugural speech, Guterres conveyed the interpersonal meaning as he expected. In other words, as the Secretary General of the United Nations to take office, Guterres has the responsibility and obligation to urge and require member states to take actions to change the situation.

Median-valued Modal Operators and Their Interpersonal Meaning

In Guterres’ inaugural speech, the proportion of median-valued modal operators is not as high as that of high-valued modal operators, but the proportion is also as high as 42%. Among them, “will” appeared six times, “would” appeared four times, “should” appeared two times, “is / was to” appeared once. The following examples are used to analyze Guterres’ interpersonal meaning with median-valued modal operators in his inaugural speech.

Example 10: We will reposition development at the center of our work, and engage in a comprehensive reform of the United Nations

development system, at Headquarters and country levels.

Example 11: We will build on the outcome of the recent discussions among Member States.

Example 12: We will build on existing efforts and implement the recent initiatives that were approved.

In example 10, Guterres planned to put development back at the center of work and to carry out a comprehensive reform of the United Nations Development System at the headquarters and country levels. In example 11, Guterres pointed out that member states discussed leadership, coordination, delivery and accountability in the process of United Nations Reform, and would make efforts to the results of the discussion. In example 12, Guterres proposed that during his term in office, he should build on existing efforts and implement recent initiatives. From examples 10, example 11 and example 12, it can be found that in Guterres' inaugural speech, on the one hand, the use of "will" can avoid the discomfort of the audience caused by excessive use of high-value modal operators, so as to give his own suggestions tactfully, therefore make member states easy to accept. On the other hand, the use of "will" can shorten the distance with the audience, and easily arouse the audience's resonance in the problems and solutions discussed, so as to win the audience's support and trust.

Example 13: I will do my best to serve our common humanity.

In example 13, Guterres used "will" to assume the responsibilities of the Secretary General of the United Nations and to spare no effort to fulfill his mission, which gives member states a sense of reliability and trust. In addition, Guterres also uses the median-valued modal operators "should" and "would".

Example 14: Our human and development efforts would be designed without the active involvement of Member States and the contributions of civil society, international financial institutions, private investors and even financial markets.

Example 15: we should have the family to acknowledge the essential role of other actors while maintaining full awareness of our unique consulting power.

In example 14, Guterres showed his full affirmation for the active participation and contribution of member states. In example 15, Guterres used "should" to express the tone and attitude of equal consultation with member states. And he suggested that member states should humbly recognize the indispensable role of other members and clearly know the unique appeal of the United Nations from time to time. Guterres also used "will" and "would" in his

inaugural speech to euphemistically express the importance of the unity of the member states of the United Nations and the significance of their active participation in United Nations affairs. Although the tone of "would" is more polite than "will", the difference between them is not big in general and the use of "will" and "would" makes Guterres' active advocacy and sense of responsibility more acceptable to the audience.

Example 16: Our duty to the peoples we serve is to work together to move from fear of each other, to trust in each other.

In example 16, Guterres used the median-valued operators "is to" to mildly state his wish that all member states should work together to overcome difficulties. To sum up, the use of median-valued modal operators in Guterres' inaugural speech can make his tone more moderate and his ideas and suggestions more acceptable to the audience, so as to convey the interpersonal meaning he wanted to express.

Low-valued Modal Operators and Their Interpersonal Meaning

It can be seen from table 1 that Guterres only used low-valued modal operator once in his inaugural speech.

Example 17: But, looking at United Nations staff and budget rules and regulations, one might think that some of them were designed to prevent, rather than enable, the effective delivery of our dates.

In example 17, Guterres pointed out that some member states believed that the formulation of certain rules and regulations related to the staff and budget of the United Nations were not to facilitate the effective completion of tasks by member states, but to prevent them from doing so effectively. In his inaugural speech, he only used the low-valued modal operator "might" once. Because of the great uncertainty of "might", Guterres only used the "might" here to euphemistically express the idea that the United Nations System needs to be improved in management, regard for that, he gave his own suggestions. But in order to strike a chord with the audience, Guterres tries to avoid using this kind of uncertain modal operators in his speech. In other words, Guterres mainly relies on high-value and middle-value modal operators to realize his interpersonal meanings.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it can be seen that Guterres used more high-valued and median-valued modal operators in his inaugural speech, and less low-valued modal operators. As the Secretary General of the United Nations to take office, Guterres is going to build a new image through his inaugural speech. Through high-value operators, such as "must", "need" and so on,

Guterres expressed the urgency to solve the problems of the United Nations, and urged member states to take actions to change the status quo. Through the use of median-valued modal operators, such as “will”, “should”, “would” and so on, Guterres could put forward his own suggestions to member states in an equal manner, so as to make his suggestions more acceptable. In addition, as the Secretary General of the United Nations to take office, Guterres expressed his willingness to actively assume his responsibilities and obligations through modal operator “will” in his inaugural speech to make a good impression on the audience. Guterres seldom used the low-valued modal operators which have great uncertainty, so as to avoid the uncertainty of the content to cause an unreliable feeling to the audience. In a word, Guterres successfully realized the interpersonal meaning he wanted to achieve in his inaugural speech by using different values of modal operators.

REFERENCES

1. Huang, Y., & Yang, M. (2008). Interpersonal Meaning of Blair's Speech in the European Parliament [J]. *Journal of Sichuan Education*, 24(3), 55.
2. Dai, W. (2018). *A New Concise Course in Linguistics for Students of English*. [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Education Press, 11-12.
3. Xue, C. (2014). A Review of Domestic Research on Interpersonal Function Theory [J]. *Chinese Journal*, (12), 37.
4. Thompson, G. (2012). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 67.
5. Li, J. (1998). The Study of Modal Meaning [J]. *Foreign Languages Journal of Shanghai Foreign Studies University*, (3): 58.
6. Halliday, M.A.K. (2008). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* [M]. London: Edward Arnold; Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 624.
7. Sun, A., & Zhao, J. (2014). Modality Calculation of President's Inaugural Address [J]. *Journal of PLA Foreign Languages Institute*, (4) 102.
8. Guterres Inaugural Speech. 2017. <http://www.kekenet.com/Article/201701/486583-2.html>.
9. Hu, Z., Zhu, Y., Zhang, D., & Li, Z. (2017). *Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 111.