

# Exploring Interpersonal Meaning Through Linguistic Analysis: A Study of President Duterte's Political Speech

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**Abstract**—This paper analyzes President Rodrigo Duterte's inaugural State of the Nation Address (SONA) through the lens of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to elucidate the generation and transmission of interpersonal meaning. Specifically, the research meticulously explores the nuances of mood and modal auxiliary structures employed by Duterte in his address. Through a comprehensive analysis of the distribution and usage patterns of mood and modal auxiliaries throughout the speech, the study uncovers how these linguistic elements collectively serve to articulate and amplify the speaker's interpersonal intentions and meanings. The findings underscore Duterte's strategic utilization of diverse moods and modal auxiliaries as instrumental tools for effectively communicating his messages and ensuring clarity and resonance with his target audience. This linguistic analysis not only sheds light on the intricate mechanisms of interpersonal meaning construction in political discourse, but also highlights the pedagogical potential of SONAs and similar political speeches, as valuable resources for language educators. These speeches can serve as enriching teaching materials for educators aiming to impart knowledge and facilitate understanding of complex grammatical concepts such as mood, modal auxiliary, and interpersonal meaning in language classrooms. Thus, the study advocates for the incorporation of political speeches into language teaching curricula to enhance students' linguistic competence and analytical skills.

**Index Terms**—interpersonal meaning, mood, modal auxiliary, SONA

## I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking effectively is a vital means of connecting and engaging with an audience, serving both as a tool for understanding and a medium for conveying ideas. Ramelan (1999) emphasizes the importance of language in human communication, asserting that it enables cooperation and understanding among people. This research analyzes President

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Rodrigo Duterte's first State of the Nation Address (SONA), concentrating on his language usage to clarify the interpersonal metafunction, an essential component of communication.

Political speeches like the SONA, delivered on significant, formal occasions and often broadcasted, aim to inform the public about the nation's current economic, political, and social landscape. They also provide a platform for the President to highlight achievements and outline future plans for governance.

Language plays various roles in social communication, as emphasized by the functionalist approach, encompassing ideational, interpersonal, and textual dimensions, known as the "metafunctions" of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This study concentrates specifically on the interpersonal metafunction in Duterte's speech, which reflects the nature of relationships and influences personal and social interactions (Morley, 2000; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

The interpersonal metafunction facilitates the expression of opinions, judgments, and relationships between the speaker and the audience (Halliday, 2007; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). It conveys a speaker's attitudes, evaluations, and role relationships with the reader, as well as the writer's perspective on the subject matter (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Eggins, 1994).

Language also serves an interpersonal function, allowing speakers to express comments, attitudes, and evaluations while establishing communication roles such as informing, questioning, greeting, and persuading (Halliday, 2007). Hu Zhuanglin (1988) observes that the interpersonal function covers all language applications for articulating social and personal connections, frequently using modality and mood to communicate these interpersonal significances.

This study analyzes Duterte's speech to uncover the interpersonal and textual meanings conveyed through his use of interactional and interactive discourse resources. Ayoola (2013) proposes that the interpersonal metafunction in speech relates to the speaker's use of language to form and sustain connections with the audience, shaping their actions through the expression of perspectives.

With the preceding enunciation, the present study, therefore aimed at exploring how interpersonal meaning is achieved with particular emphasis on mood and modal auxiliary. Particularly, it sought to answer these questions:

1. How are interpersonal meanings expressed in the speech concerning:
  - a) Mood
  - b) Modal auxiliary
2. What are the implications of the analysis of interpersonal meanings in language teaching?

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), pioneered by Michael Halliday in the 1960s, offers a viewpoint on language that emphasizes its functional elements over solely structural ones. SFL is based on a social semiotic perspective of language, seeing language as a "web of linked systems for generating meaning" (Pertiwi, 2011). Unlike traditional grammar, which concentrates on word categories like nouns and verbs within individual clauses, SFL emphasizes the role of language in conveying meaning.

Gerot and Wignell (1994) describe functional grammars as frameworks that consider language as a tool for meaning-making, emphasizing the analysis of language in real-world contexts. This grammatical approach, originating from J.F. Firth's work and expanded upon by M.A.K. Halliday, emphasizes the functional aspect of language.

Halliday (2000) identified three primary meta-functions of language within SFL: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The interpersonal function focuses on establishing and maintaining social relationships and clarifying communication roles (Halliday, 2002). Language serves various communicative purposes, such as influencing attitudes, providing information, explaining viewpoints, and prompting actions (Thompson, 2000; Simon, 1997).

In terms of interpersonal communication, Halliday (2009) highlighted the significance of elements like mood, modality, and key. He also explored the role of pronoun systems, attitudinal modifiers, and rhythmic features in conveying interpersonal meaning. Eggins (2004) noted that examining the relationship between linguistic systems and speakers' discourse choices offers insights into the construction of interpersonal meaning, reflecting factors like intimacy, familiarity, attitudes, and judgments.

In any communication, particularly in speeches, the primary goal is effective engagement with the audience to foster interaction and connection. Within the context of speeches, SFL examines how speakers craft utterances and discourses to express their intended meanings (Lin & Peng, 2006).

## III. METHODS

### A. Sampling

The study analyzed at President Rodrigo Duterte's first State of the Nation Address (SONA), which was delivered on July 25, 2016, a Monday, at the Batasan Pambansa in Quezon City. It was one hour and thirty-two minutes long and included 10,251 words in total. According to Article 7, Section 23 of the Philippine Constitution of 1987, the SONA is an obligatory yearly practice. The President of the Philippines presents a report on the current state of the nation, the government's goals for the upcoming year, and legislative initiatives that Congress should consider during this event (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines). After winning the election on May 9, 2016, President Duterte

delivered his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) at the Batasang Pambansa Complex in Quezon City on July 25, 2016. The Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines website has the complete 2016 SONA transcript.

*B. Research Design*

Discourse analysis was employed in the study. According to Abrams (Nur, 2015) discourse analysis centers on the study of language, either spoken or written, within a specific situational context involving the interaction of the speaker and the addressee.

*C. Analytical Framework*

The analysis made was anchored on Halliday’s (2000) Systemic Functional Grammar. According to Huckin (Widhiyanto, 2004), there are three levels of analysis. The analysis should start from the text as a whole, then sentence level, and lastly phrase or word level. Given the foregoing, there are three units of analysis: the text as an aggregate, clause-complex (sentence level), and appraisal potential (word or phrase level).

The present study made use of clause-complexes as units of analysis in analyzing President Duterte’s first SONA. Hence, it focused mainly on the major features of interpersonal metafunction: mood and modal auxiliary.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In our interactions with others, language serves a variety of purposes, such as making requests, giving orders, apologizing, inviting, and more. Halliday (2000) suggests that the primary objectives in any communication exchange involve either giving (and receiving) or requesting (and being provided with) something of value. He further categorizes these valuable exchanges into two types: "information" and "goods and services". Based on this classification, Halliday (2000) identifies four primary speech roles. Table 1 presents these foundational speech roles as outlined by Halliday (2000):

TABLE 1

Commodity		
Role	Goods-Service	Information
Giving	Offer	Statement
Demanding	Command	Question

(Halliday, 2000)

Generally, declarative clauses convey statements, interrogative clauses pose questions, and imperative clauses express commands or requests. These primary speech functions are linked through the grammatical framework referred to as the Mood network. In Functional Grammar, a clause’s mood is defined by its subject and finite verb. Eggins and Slade (1997) indicate that the arrangement of the subject-finite within a clause sets apart these speech functions. This distinction is essential for understanding the interpersonal significance of the clause in conversation, revealing the social roles and identities of the individuals engaged in the discourse.

As depicted in Figure 1, the examination of subject and finite identification reveals that over two-fifths of the clauses belong to the indicative-declarative mood. Specifically, out of 784 clauses analyzed, 637 were declarative, making up 81.3% of the speech; 117 were imperative, representing 14.9% of the speech; and 30 clauses (3.8%) exhibited an indicative-interrogative structure.

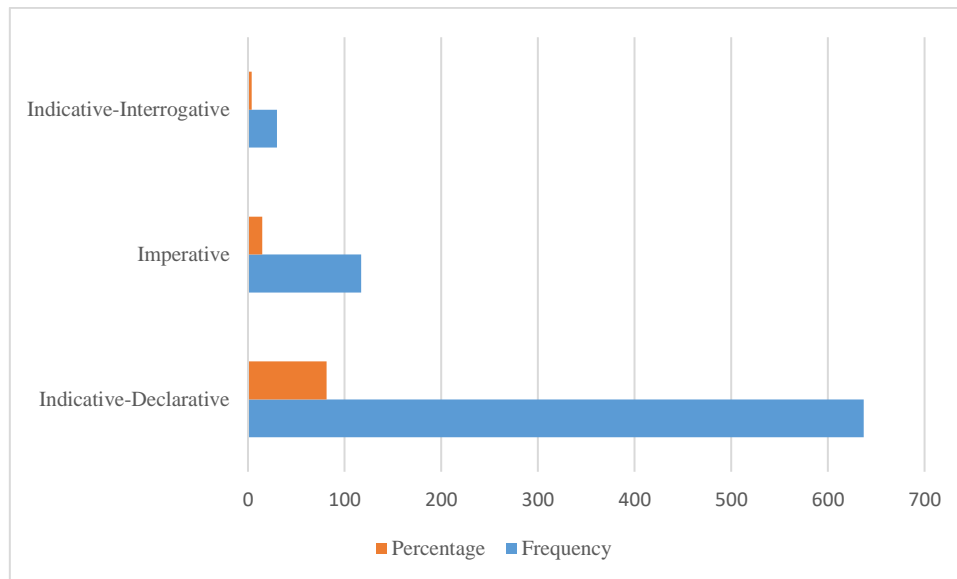


Figure 1. Moods of the Clauses

There are several factors to consider regarding why Duterte adopted this mood pattern in his SONA. According to Nur (2015), the multi-faceted structure of language, as described by Halliday (2004), mirrors the complex nature of human experiences and interpersonal relationships. This complexity is particularly evident in speeches, especially political ones, where effectively conveying information and requesting action is crucial for the speaker to achieve their objectives.

Nur (2015) states: "The speaker attempts to demand and stimulate the audience to feel this and act appropriately. In exchange, he expects to deliver certain signals to the audience indicating his attitude and assumptions. Declarative clauses, therefore, must be prominently displayed in political speeches, followed by imperative and interrogative clauses, in that order.

Considering the aforementioned points, Duterte's speech was made informative and persuasive through his prominent use of declarative clauses. For instance:

(9) *If we let the past drag us back, we will never be able to move forward.*

(10) *Pointing fingers is not appropriate.*

(22) *Back then, I was as committed as I am now, and in a stronger position, to fight against individuals who degrade our legal system and bring misery to each and every one of us.*

(35) *This government does not condone violence and repression of the media.*

Since this is his first SONA, Duterte also employed declarative clauses to make promises to the public as to what his plans are for the country. For example:

(39) *In this quest, I will put at stake my honor, my life, and the presidency itself.*

(42) *An Inter-Agency Committee on Illegal Drugs will be established in order to coordinate activities and fortify cooperation amongst all parties involved.*

(44) *Additionally, we will give drug addicts' recovery top priority.*

(45) *We intend to augment the quantity of residential treatment and rehabilitation establishments around the nation.*

(49) *In order to promote the welfare of our people in the fields of health, education, and access to enough food and shelter environmental preservation, and cultural respect, my administration will apply humane approach to development and governance.*

The imperative clause plays a crucial role in speeches, serving as motivational, empowering, and directive. It can encourage the audience to heed the speaker's guidance, thereby establishing the speaker's authoritative persona through a portrayal of a collaborative relationship (Nur, 2015). Concerning the imperative clauses used by Duterte in his SONA, the President used imperative mood to give advice. For example:

(363) *Gina Lopez and I are just telling you: Follow government standards.*

(367) *Just pay the correct taxes, and follow the standards.*

(513) *Do not add or get anything away from it.*

(544) *Mag-sumbong ka. (Report yourself.)*

(608) *Make use of the computer.*

(647) *Magtiis-tiis lang muna kayo. (Just be patient.)*

(717) *Do not let it remain idle.*

For interrogative clauses, Duterte mainly used them for humor and to ask the audience whether the names of the person he mentioned were present during his speech. For example:

(177) *Sino man nagsuporta sa inyo sa akin dito? (Whoever supported you with me here?)*

(178) *Wala man? (Nothing?)*

- (373) *Nandiyan ba si Ma'am?* (Is Ma'am there?)
- (375) *Secretary Lopez, nandiyan?* (Secretary Lopez, is there?)
- (592) *Wala?* (Nothing?)

Halliday (1994) states that modality represents the middle ground between positive and negative extremes. As Duszak (1997) puts it, the polarity of statements is either positive or negative: either something “is so” or “is not so” depending on the evidence presented. On the contrary, speakers of the language are frequently inclined to somewhere between “yes” and “no”. This middle positioning is what Halliday (Duszak, 1997) termed “the system of modality” which applies to both proposals and propositions. This was further classified as modality of proposals, like that of commands and offers, to modulation, whereas modality of propositions, to include statements and questions, to modalization.

Figure 2 displays the occurrence rate of the modal auxiliaries utilized in Duterte's speech. The predominant use of *will* is indicative of his views towards the future as this is his first SONA since his assumption to the office of the president. Also, *will* was used to reassure the audience of his intentions from the beginning as in sentences 13, 27, 35, and 39.

(13) *To avoid any misunderstandings, let me state unequivocally that those who violated the confidence of the public will face consequences and will be given a chance to appear in court.*

(27) *At this point, there are few concerns I wish to convey to all to the end that as I per orate on facts, figures, plans, programs, and solutions, these concerns will not dissipate or get lost along our way.*

(35) *The Office of the President will always back you if you do your job, which is expected of our police officers and other officials.*

(39) *In this quest, I will put at stake my honor, my life, and the presidency itself.*

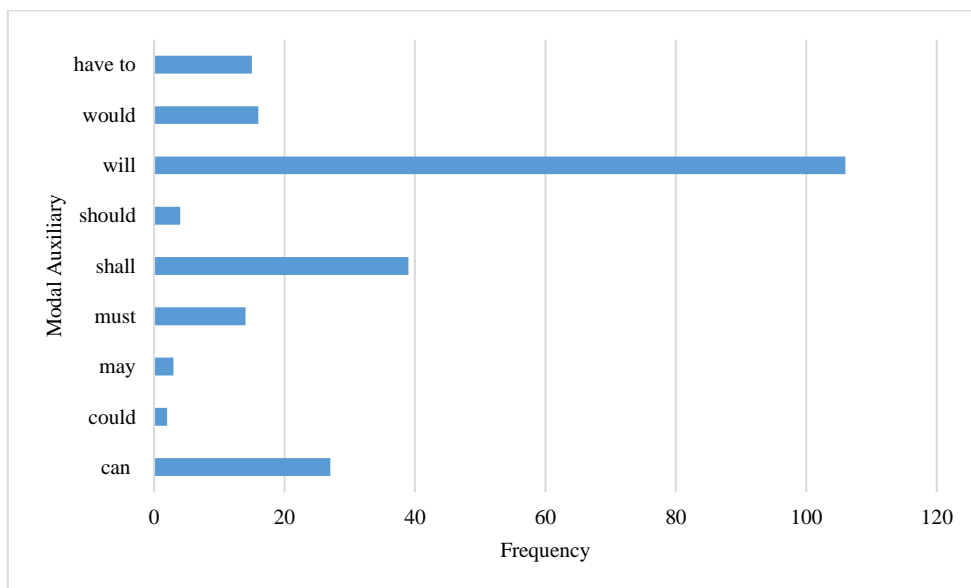


Figure 2. The Occurrence Rate of the Modal Auxiliary

The use of "shall" was observed in proposing solutions to various challenges encountered by the country, as seen in sentences 57, 61, 64, 106, 108, 109, and 110.

(57) *Our first priority will always be addressing global warming, but only in a just and equitable manner.*

(61) *In order to foster better mutual understanding and collaboration, we will intensify security discussions with other countries.*

(64) *The Philippines will remain committed to working with foreign partners to achieve long-lasting peace and national advancement when it comes to the aspect of our peace processes that deal with our relations with the international community.*

(106) *We plan to build additional access roads and tourism gateways to service centers and tourist destinations in the tourism sector.*

(108) *In order to maximize yield through the application of efficient soil rehabilitation and fertilization, we will also carry out a statewide soil analysis to identify regions most suited for rice cultivation.*

(109) *Not only will we encourage backyard and riverside aquaculture, but we will strictly enforce existing fisheries laws, particularly those that deal with illegal fishing.*

(110) *On the other hand, by constructing the Mindanao Logistics Infrastructure Network [applause] and other road network master plans, as well as by enhancing national highways and bridges, we will expedite infrastructure investment.*

Interestingly, *shall* was used in sentence 48 to ensure the audience that the welfare of the Filipino people is at the core of his administration.

(48) *In light of this, my government will prioritize social justice while upholding the rule of law at all times. We will also be mindful of the State's duties to advance, defend, and fulfill the human rights of all citizens, particularly the impoverished, marginalized, and vulnerable.*

*Can* was used constantly to express ability, as in sentence 353.

(353) *Clark Airport can be utilized to shift some operations of our domestic and international airlines.*

Furthermore, Duterte emphasized on the expected outcome of the 4Ps program using *can* in sentence 707.

(707) *However, the goal is to provide it with additional support so that it can stand on its own two feet.*

In making requests, more formally and politely, *would* was adopted as in the case of sentences 119 and 685.

(119) *Many in the administration realistically believe—and I have to agree—that the deteriorating traffic issue could be rationally addressed if Congress also granted the relevant agencies emergency powers.*

(685) *We need the power and, therefore, the emissions would also be considered.*

*Have to*, a phrasal modal, was used constantly in expressing obligations, like in sentences 464, 629, 789, and 359.

(464) *We have to understand each other, then you have to live with each other, but we will try.*

(629) *We have to adjust to the needs of our people.*

(789) *We have to help each other.*

(359) *I have to protect the country.*

*Must* took on three different functions in the speech, namely: to emphasize strong recommendations, certainty, and necessity as exhibited in sentences 166, 291, and 728, 361 and 419, and 194 respectively.

(166) *You must have a president.*

(291) *Problema nito, and you must agree with me, that the rails are quite aged.*

(728) *While the government is always ready to help you, you must first help yourself.*

(361) *But si Gina pati ako, we share the same paradigm: The interest of the country must come first.*

(419) *This is something that I feel that I must do because it is the right thing to do.*

(194) *They must have a logbook.*

*Should* had a two-way role in the speech for it was adopted to emphasize recommendations, as in sentences 12, 28, and 424. Likewise, it was also used in advising as exhibited in sentence 784.

(12) *Except perhaps to extract a lesson or two from its errors, we should not delay because our focus is on the present and our readiness should be for the future.*

(28) *Therefore, let me inform our religious leaders, bishops, priests, pastors, preachers, and imams that, although I firmly support the idea of church and state separation, I also firmly think that God and state should never be separated.*

(424) *I'm addressing Congress on this one: legislation should be passed to establish the People's Broadcasting Corporation in place of PTV-4, the government-run television channel that is currently trying to resemble foreign government broadcasting networks. This will help handle public information more effectively.*

(784) *But we should not despair.*

In asking for permissions, such as in sentences 96 and 220, *may* was used. Also, *may* was adopted to make a polite request in sentence 588.

(96) *May I continue.*

(220) *May I address again to the Filipino: Ako po 'y nagdo-doble ang pagod para sa inyo, para sa kapakanan ng bayan. (I am doubling the fatigue for you, for the sake of the people.)*

(588) *I may now also ask on Congress to consider drawing up bills consolidating and merging agencies and offices having to do the Overseas Filipino to have a department that shall focus on and quickly respond to their problems and concerns.*

*Could* was used to project the possibility as Duterte discussed the problem of drug addiction in sentence 741. Apparently, *could* was used as well in giving suggestions as in sentence 119.

(741) *It could take the entire resources of this government to fight this war.*

(119) *Many in government opine realistically, and I would have to agree, that the worsening traffic situation could be logically addressed if Congress would also accord emergency powers to the agencies concerned.*

As a whole, the preponderance of *will* in Duterte's speech is indicative of his attitude of his plans for the country, after all, such speech was his first SONA since he became president. Also, Duterte's strong determination to carry out his tasks as president was revealed, particularly in the use of the modal *must* to emphasize strong recommendations, necessity, and certainty. According to Halliday (Nur, 2015) *must* is the highest scale of modal commitment. Boicu (2007) argues that the deliberate and selective use of modal verbs by speakers is crucial in conveying directive speech acts. In political discourse, a speaker's politeness is conveyed through the strategic use of these modal verbs. Similarly, Shayegh (2012) points out that because the aim of political discourse is to reassure, the use of modal verbs is fitting as they reflect a specific level of commitment, determination, and enthusiasm from the political leader.

Furthermore, speeches, like SONA, could be viable language resources among teachers when teaching modal auxiliary. Likewise, these present wide examples for language teachers and learners alike in terms of studying interpersonal meanings.

## V. CONCLUSION

The differences in the distribution of the mood and modal auxiliary in the speech altogether work to exemplify the speaker's interpersonal meanings. Duterte employed a range of moods and modal auxiliaries to effectively communicate his message and ensure comprehension by his target audience. Also, Duterte's position and attitude towards the issues that the country is facing can be gleaned from his will to carry out the tasks placed before him as president. Moreover, pedagogically speaking, the SONA and other political speeches, are viable language teaching materials for teachers in teaching mood, modal auxiliary, and interpersonal meaning in language classrooms.

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