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**A Semantic Investigation into the Use of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in the Manifesto of a Ghanaian Political Party by Mark Nartey**

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**Mark Nartey**<sup>1</sup>

Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

Mark Nartey is a post graduate student of Linguistics at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway. He has published in a couple of peer-reviewed international journals. His research interest areas include Applied Linguistics, Discourse Studies, Academic Writing/Communication, and English for Specific Purposes.

Email: [narteynartey60@gmail.com](mailto:narteynartey60@gmail.com)

**Ferguson Ebo Yankson**<sup>2</sup>

Ferguson Ebo Yankson recently graduated from the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana and is currently a Teaching and Research Assistant in the Department of English. His research interest areas include English Studies, Communication Studies and Discourse Analysis.

Email: [yeboferguson@yahoo.com](mailto:yeboferguson@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

Political election manifestos are public declarations of political parties, in which they explicitly stipulate their policies in a bid to win over the electorate. This study explores, *in situ*, the semantic underpinnings of modal auxiliary verbs in the 2012 manifesto of a popular Ghanaian political party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and demonstrates perceptibly that modal auxiliary verbs have the propensity to reveal very subtle and nuanced meanings of the nature of political discourse. The study is rooted in a content qualitative research paradigm, and the analysis reveals that modal auxiliary verbs are used extensively in the NPP 2012 political manifesto to give the message a sense of intention, promise, obligation and necessity in a conscious and strategic attempt to persuade the electorate. To this end, we avow that political rhetoric is conditioned by specific aims and exact themes. The findings of the study bear implications for pedagogy, the theory of modality, text construction and/or composition and further discourse analytical studies on political speeches, particularly on political manifestos.

**Key words:** manifesto, modal auxiliary verbs, NPP, political discourse



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**1.0 Introduction**

The prominent role of language in the life of every human and the society as a whole cannot be under-estimated or over-emphasized. Language is used as a medium of tranquillity, persuasion and progression on one hand, and a medium of uproar, anarchy and retrogression on another hand.

Sapir (1939) considers language as a purely human and non- instinctive method of communicating emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Language is given expression in different contexts, amongst which include media, religious familial or domestic and societal settings. The use of language gives rise to the term ‘discourse’, and discourse is textualized in varying mediums, sometimes referred to as ‘genre’. The present study focuses on an essential and a notable form of political discourse, the election manifesto.

Johnson and Johnson (2000) explain political discourse analysis as a field of discourse analysis which focuses on discourse in political forums (such as debates, rallies, speeches and manifestos) as the phenomenon of interest. Van Dijk (2001) also avers that political discourse can be narrowed down to the set of activities politicians engage in. To him, the study of the structures of political discourse (topics, coherence, lexical style, disclaimers, and rhetorical features) may reveal much about the unique character of this discourse.

A persuasive rhetorical unit, the political manifesto is a keystone text in political discourse. Political election manifestos are public declarations of political parties in which they outline their policies and tell electors how the country would be governed if they are given the mandate to assume office and wield power (Klingeman et al., 1994). Given its persuasive objective, political manifestos are replete with modal auxiliary verbs that seek to espouse diverse ideologies and underscore particular interests of a political party. As Quirk et al. (1973) demonstrate, a modal auxiliary verb is used together with a main verb to express differing attitudes towards a proposition: possibility, certainty, permission, intention, among others.



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Given this, we hypothesize that writers of political manifestos do find modal auxiliary verbs a very useful persuasive strategy to deploy in an attempt to forcefully and cogently transmit the campaign message of their party to the electorate. In what follows, we explicitly articulate the chief objective of the paper.

**2.0 The Present Study**

**2.1 *The Rationale of the Study***

Quite a number of studies have investigated the language of political discourse; for example, Mihas (2005), Bista (2009), Maks and Vossen (2010) and Fraser (2010). Most of these studies, however, focused attention on how indirection is evinced in political communication, thereby foregrounding elements such as euphemism, metaphor and hedging in political communication. Mihas (2005), for instance, considered the use of euphemisms and metaphors in political campaigns in America. Bista (2009) also researched into the syntactic and semantic properties of “Yes We Can” as used by Barack Obama, president of the United States and Fraser (2010) examined the use of hedging in political discourse. The semantic implication of modal auxiliary verbs in political discourse, in general, and political manifestos, in particular, though important, remains relatively under-researched in the literature, albeit such verbs have the propensity to reveal very subtle meanings of the nature of political discourse. Besides, we know of no African study that paid particular attention to modality as it is evinced in Ghanaian political manifestos. Given the paucity of studies on modality in political discourse, particularly in political manifestos, the present study sets out to fill this niche.

To clarify the aim of the study, we ask the following research questions:

1. Which modal auxiliary verbs are frequently used in the 2012 manifesto of the NPP?
2. What meanings do these modal verbs bring to bear on the overall message conveyed by the manifesto?

Having underscored the *raison d'être* of the study, the rest of the paper is devoted to the theoretical and empirical antecedents of the study, the methodological procedures and the analysis and dissection, whereupon we establish our findings and conclude appropriately.



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**2.2 Conceptual Foundations**

The conceptual thrust of this study is underpinned by the concept of modality. At the outset, we must indicate that modality is a stubbornly contentious concept that eludes precision. For this reason, we make no pretence to provide an avalanche of scholarly trajectories on the subject. Specifically, we shed light on some notable taxonomies and functions of modal auxiliary verbs.

Sometimes called ‘helping verbs’, modal auxiliary verbs are ‘little’ words that precede the main verb of a sentence, and are largely used (across registers) to express a speaker's or writer's "opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973). For this reason, modal auxiliary verbs may be involved in the expression of time, necessity, possibility, permission and obligation as well as such grammatical phenomena as negation, affirmation and questioning.

Erhman (1966:9) explains the meaning of modal auxiliaries as, “That closed class of verbs which may occupy the first position of a verb phrase, which may not be immediately preceded by another verb, which may invert with the subject in interrogation, and which is negated by ‘not’”. In this vein, Erhman intimates that each modal verb has a basic meaning as well as a subsidiary meaning – what she refers to as ‘overtones’. Similarly, Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002:28) consider modal verbs as first verbs in a clause, and are followed by the base form of another verb, usually a main verb.

According to Halliday (1970), the grammar and semantics of modal auxiliary verbs in native English have engaged scholarly attention for a long time; for example, Palmer (1979), Coates (1983), Hudleston (1984), Quirk et al. (1985), etc. Even so, modal auxiliary verbs pose complex problems 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. Palmer (2001: 10), for instance, explains that *can* conveys permission in the structure, “John *can* come in now”, but conveys ability in the sentence, “John *can* speak French”. Given the multiplicity of possible meanings that can be adduced from a particular modal verb, Branford (1967:144-145) points out that, "It is probably better to avoid labelling any modal too



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specifically (e.g. 'may' = 'possibility') but to study each according to the context as one finds it". There is therefore no gainsaying the position that contextual cues are pivotal as far as the most likely interpretation of a modal is concerned: this view is corroborated in the present study.

As regards the classification of modal auxiliary verbs, linguists have approached the English modals in different ways, logically and formally. Halliday (1979: 189-210) 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). Lyons (1977: 792) classifies them into epistemic and deontic while generative grammarians often deal with them as root and epistemic modals. Lyons (p.793), further, characterizes epistemic modals as concerned with matters of knowledge, belief or opinion, rather than facts while deontic modality, according to him, is characterized with the necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents (p.823).

Moreover, Palmer (1974) describes the English modals along two axes: i) the inherent property to express a certain degree of knowledge, a guess or a conjecture about a certain event in the present or past time, and ii) the source of their modality, being the subject of the sentence or one of the interlocutors in the discourse. Accordingly, Palmer observes a distinction along two parameters: a) epistemic/non-epistemic (i.e. passing judgment on the proposition of the utterance, or not) and b) orientation (subject or discourse-oriented). Given the lack of stringency of the classification of modals in terms of orientation, Palmer (1979) modified his earlier binary classification of modals into a ternary framework of modals, viz. deontic (pertaining to moral obligation or duty), epistemic (i.e. passing judgment) and dynamic (activity). This new format cuts across two central degrees of modality, namely, possibility and necessity. To these a tertiary degree is added relating to *will* and *shall*.

Functionally, Abdul-Fattah (2011:57-62) gives us an integrative idea about the anomalous and polysemous linguistic behaviour of the English modals. These modals express a network of multifarious modalities, even with the same modal auxiliary verb, contingent on the different discursal contexts. Among other functions, he demonstrates that *shall* can be contextually used to express futurity (prediction), willingness/undertaking, promise/guarantee,



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threat/warning and insistence (strong volition). He associates functions such as future prediction, conjectured future event, cross-reference, future iteration, timeless truth and reasonable inference with *will* and reveals that *would* can be associated with future intention in the past, future likelihood, future conditional, tentativeness in polite requests, inter alia. And he identifies the following functions with *can*: informal request, generalization, general possibility, suggestion by implication, impossibility (when negated), etc.

As far as *could* is concerned, Abdul-Fattah identifies permission, request, offer, tentative invitation, general possibility, suggestion, among others as its salient functions while *may* and *might* have similar functions like (tentative) future possibility, generalization, general possibility and request, their differential functions notwithstanding. *Must*, he explains, expresses present obligation, future obligation, external obligation, prohibition and logical judgment at pre-present whilst *should*, he maintains, denotes and connotes present obligation, future obligation, past obligation, non-actuality, dynamic necessity/advisability, urge/necessity and invitation/request.

The point to be noted here is that the functions expressed by modal auxiliary verbs in English are by no means exhaustive, thereby lending credence to the intricate and ambivalent linguistic behaviour of the English modal, both grammatically and notionally.

**2.3 Review of Previous Studies**

In this section, we sketch a vignette of the extant literature on political discourse with the aim of situating the present study therein.

Bista (2009) considers the syntactic and semantic properties of ‘Yes, We Can’ as used by US president, Barack Obama. This phrase represents various forms of meaning - challenge, possibility, ability, permission and opportunity - in social, political and linguistics domains alike. A popular repetitive expression in President Obama’s speeches, this phrase, supposedly, highlights his political will, temerity and boldness in addressing an alleged despondent American citizenry in a bid to inspire and motivate them along the tangents of progress and prosperity. The point to be taken cognisance of is that the use of *can* in ‘Yes, We Can’ gives



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the message a serious tone given the senses of promise, possibility and ability that are likely to be elicited by the modal auxiliary verb.

In their study, Maks and Vossen (2010) examine the saliency of deontic constructions in election manifestos. To them, election manifestos have a predominant use of deontic constructions that seem to fit very well the expression of principles, behaviour and policies as advocated in manifestos. Their study shows that the principles and policy measures captured in a manifesto are often linguistically realized with deontic structures of modal verbs and adjectives. This, according to them, is because the message of a political manifesto is intended to be re-(assuring). Hence, the use of deontic modals seems appropriate since such verbs echo a certain level of commitment, zeal and enthusiasm by the political party.

Shayegh (2012) presents a critical discourse analysis of modality in the political discourses of Barack Obama and Martin Luther King. Drawing on a combined framework of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory, Shayegh's study shows that both speakers preponderantly use the modal *will* as a means of insisting on the validity of information in terms of probability and usuality. In a related study, Shayegh and Nabifar (2012) demonstrate that Barack Obama uses modality, among other linguistic resources, to create positive or negative power in his interviews. Again, the potentiality of modal verbs to reflect power and ideology relations is accentuated in Wang's (2010) critical discourse analysis of Barack Obama's speeches.

Boicu (2007) brings a different, but interesting perspective, to bear on studies on modality in political discourse. Analysing Ashley Mote's political speeches, he finds that the speaker's use of modal verbs contributed to the mitigation or aggravation of the illocutionary forces instigated by the speech acts he enunciates. The study therefore amply supports the position that modal verbs, depending on their contextual usage, have the inclination to attenuate or exacerbate the proposition of an utterance. Menezes (2006) also investigates how linguistic expressions of deontic modality act in a sense of making the audience's participation possible in standpoints defended in political speeches, while drawing on a functionalist theory. The



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findings reveal that politicians use *must* to consolidate their obligations, and when necessary, strategically distance themselves from established deontic values.

Away from modality in political discourses, Daubler and Benoit (2013) critically test the notion that political context affects overall length and manifesto content. Using multi-level modelling, the study predicts manifesto length and issue scope in a large number of coded party manifestos covering the post-war period. Essentially, the results indicate that manifesto length and the scope of issue coverage can be largely explained by a combination of political variables related to party size, policy orientation, as well as election-specific factors related to political competition and the timing of elections.

The review of literature above, first and foremost, shows that there is a dearth of studies on modality or the use of modal auxiliary verbs in political manifestos. Second, such studies within an African context is virtually non-existent, hence the justification and usefulness of the present study.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 *The Data***

This section discusses the methodological procedures of the study, viz. the data and procedure of analysis.

As previously mentioned, we used the 2012 manifesto of The New Patriotic Party (NPP), a popular Ghanaian political party and currently the largest opposition party, as the primary data for the study. As an established and recognized political party by the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the NPP was formed in 1992. Its formation was carefully nurtured by major actors who relied heavily on the resilience of the United Party tradition as well as the Danquah-Busia tradition. The NPP is a liberal conservative and liberal democratic party. It is center-right, its leading rival being the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the current ruling party in Ghana, and it subscribes to the motto “Development in freedom”.





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As a political party, the NPP is led by a presidential candidate and a national chairman who heads the National Executive Committee ([www.newpatrioticparty.org](http://www.newpatrioticparty.org)). We obtained the manifesto from the headquarters of the party, with permission from some party executives. The choice of NPP was informed by their current status as the leading opposition party in Ghana, going into the December, 2012 elections, and therefore likely to be more vociferous in their manifesto. And our choice of the 2012 manifesto was hinged on currency.

**3.2 Procedure of Analysis**

The study is essentially a qualitative content analysis. An analytical description, the study is not supported by rigorous statistical material (although some minimal quantitative techniques were used) but by details and illustrations drawn from the data. Content analysis is a key methodological apparatus that enables researchers to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at a meaning, and it facilitates the understanding of the types, characteristics and organizational aspects of documents as social products in their own right as well as what they claim.

At the heart of this approach is coding. Such codes as tags, lines and labels were assigned against the pieces of data in a bid to attach or assign meaning to these pieces of data. Specifically, we employed open coding to summarize the data by teasing out identifiable patterns in order to find conceptual categories in the data. The main function of open coding, in the words of Punch (1998: 210), is “to expose theoretical possibilities in the data”. Our analysis was also guided by our research questions as we culled the various modal auxiliary verbs, and emphasized the meanings that could be contextually attributed to them.

**4.0 Discussion and Results**

*Research Question 1:* Which modal auxiliary verbs are frequently used in the 2012 manifesto of the NPP?

From the analysis, we found that all the nine central modal auxiliary verbs established in the grammar of English (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973), with the exception of *might*, were used in varying proportions in the 2012 manifesto of the NPP. The identified modal verbs include



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*could, can (not), need to, must, shall, should, may (not), would* and *will*. As is evident in the itemized modals, two (*can* and *may*) were used in their negated and their non-negated forms. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the modal auxiliary verbs.

**Table1: Distribution of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in the NPP 2012 Manifesto**

Modal Auxiliary Verb	Frequency	Percentage
Could	1	0.21%
Can (not)	31	6.58%
Need to	8	1.70%
Must	8	1.70%
Shall	16	3.40%
Should	2	0.42%
May (not)	4	0.85%
Would	10	2.12%
Will	391	83.01%
	Total = 471	Total= 100%

It can be interpreted from Table 1 that *will* has the highest frequency of occurrence in the manifesto, occurring 391 times. *Can (not)* follows *will* as the modal with the second highest frequency of occurrence, with an occurrence rate of 31. *Shall* also has quite a number of occurrences, 16 in total. While these three modal verbs are fairly preponderant (as evidenced by Table 1) in the manifesto, modals like *would* (occurring 10 times), *need to* (occurring 8 times), *must* (occurring 8 times), *may (not)* (occurring 4 times), *should* (occurring two times) and *could* (occurring once) are minimally used.

The fact that the use of certain modal verbs is more frequent than others substantiates the point that modal auxiliary verbs are contextually deployed to achieve specific communicative intents and purposes in different registers. Hence, we maintain that the preponderance or otherwise of specific modals in the NPP 2012 manifesto is neither borne out of coincidence nor randomization, but by the specific objective(s) of the manifesto, and the manifesto genre itself.



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To this end, we aver that the use of modal auxiliary verbs can be conditioned by the nature and type of discourse – in this study, political discourse.

Next, we discuss the possible contextual meanings and semantic functions attributed to the modal auxiliary verbs in the manifesto.

*Research Question 2:* What meanings do these modal verbs bring to bear on the overall message conveyed by the manifesto?

Before proceeding with the second phase of the analysis, we must mention that the functions identified and discussed here are by no means exhaustive. The given illustrative examples fit well with the corresponding modality, and could be contextualized at length if it were not for quintessence and space constraints. Our overriding purpose here is not to provide a definitive number of functions of the modals, but to give an integrative idea of the encompassing nature of the English modals, and to demonstrate that these modal verbs can be ‘perspectivized’ to articulate lucidity of attitudinal propositions. We present the functions subsequently.

***Could***

In the manifesto, *could* is used once, representing a percentage of 0.21%. In the one instance of its usage in the manifesto, *could* is used to express a strong possibility, specifically to strongly suggest to the Ghanaian electorate the view that there is a high possibility of the Ghanaian economy becoming a major economic growth pole under the watch of the NPP. The use of *could* in this regard buttresses Quirk et al.’s (1973) assertion that *could* can be used to express a possibility (theoretical or factual).

This finding, however, repudiates Newson’s (2008) position that the traditionally considered past tense forms of modal verbs- *might*, *could*, *should* and *might* convey weaker propositions. This supposed contravention with Newson’s position reinforces our position that the various English modals cannot be generalized in their semantic underpinnings; instead, they are largely influenced by the different contextual indices, discursual determinants and situational factors. Indeed, it would be alarming and altogether puzzling if a campaign promise captured in a party



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manifesto is expressed with a weak tone. The example in 1) illustrates the single instance of the use of *could* in the NPP manifesto.

M1. Recent trends in global market, however, suggest that our horticultural sector *could* become a major economic growth pole, as Ghana is already highly competitive in some horticultural products.

In the example, *could* overtly sends a positive message to the electorate by tacitly suggesting that the already highly competitive nature of some horticultural products in Ghana makes it highly possible for Ghana's economy to see a major economic boom in that area of economic growth. Such a future possibility as expressed by *could*, even if tentative, is likely to elicit a good feeling in the electorate and ultimately culminate into electoral votes, which is what the manifesto sets out to do.

***Can (not)***

*Can* occurs 31 times in the manifesto, representing a total percentage of 6.58. Thus, it occurs quite frequently in the manifesto. As a modal verb in the NPP manifesto, *can* is used to express ability and theoretical possibility. It is used to express ability in the sentences in 2) and 3).

M2. Too many children leave school unable to read, write or count and those who *can* in many cases have a low level of proficiency.

M3. We need a work force that is skilled, creative and *can* "do things" such as skilled craftsmen, artisans and technicians...

In 2), *can* is used to question the ability of the children to read, write and count while *can* in 3) highlights the need for Ghana as a nation to have a skilled workforce, i.e. a work force that has the ability and skill to do things. The use of *can*, as is evident in these two examples, nullifies any form of uncertainty or even possibility, and emphatically presents the propositions as factual and wholly true. Given this, the message put forward is likely to be taken seriously and accepted by the electorate as true. Since the NPP is a party in opposition, the factual proposition advanced by the use of *can* in the two examples is likely to instigate a lack of



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confidence in the ruling government by the electorate. This is because the proposition expressed by *can* in the examples suggest that the ruling government has not succeeded in curbing or eliminating child illiteracy; neither has it been able to produce a workforce of Ghanaians that are creative and skilled and “can do things”. These negative impressions about the ruling government (as can be deduced from the two examples) are presented, not as assumptions, suppositions or mere conceptions, but as facts and hard truths.

*Can*, in the manifesto, is also used to express a theoretical possibility, in which case it gives a strong possibility for an event to materialize and/or be actualized. In the example below, *can* expresses the theoretical possibility for agriculture to be a main avenue for creating jobs, income and wealth for Ghanaians.

M4. Agriculture *can* be a major avenue for creating jobs, income and wealth.

In this example, the proposition expressed by *can* is theoretically possible. That is, although agriculture has the capacity to create jobs, income and wealth, that is not the practical situation as of the time of instantiation. Such a theoretical position can be considered a persuasive strategy since it suggests that the NPP, theoretically speaking, has conceived and visualized what is supposed to be a brilliant idea. However, since it is not yet in power, that brilliant idea can only remain an abstraction. This proposition expressed by *can* therefore implicitly recommends the NPP to the electorate as very suited for the job of practically bringing the theoretical possibility mentioned above into stark reality.

We must also mention that in almost all instances that *can* is used in the manifesto, it is used as a strong modal verb, and therefore used to make strong and ‘high’ assertions, thereby corroborating Newson’s (2008) assertion that *must*, *can*, *shall* and *will* are strong modals in almost all their uses. The negated form of *can* (*cannot*), conversely, is used in the manifesto to express inability and impossibility as is respectively exemplified by the sentences below.

M5. This means people *cannot* save, *cannot* borrow and therefore, *cannot* invest.

M6. We *cannot* accept economic growth that does not create jobs and employment opportunities.



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*Need to*

Occurring 8 times in the manifesto (1.70 per cent), *need to* is used to express necessity in all instances of its usage in the manifesto. The examples below confirm this position.

M7. We *need to* build a lot more schools and ensure good quality education.

M8. Additionally, we *need to* solve the problem of inadequate health facilities and personnel.

In both sentences above, *need to*, is used to signal a sense of urgency (if not emergency) of the tasks mentioned. A strong sense of necessity and obligation is therefore connoted in the sentences as a result of the use of the modal *need to*. Thus, we observe patently that *need to* contextually indicates to the electorate that it is highly necessary to build more schools and solve the problem of inadequate health facilities. Again, the sense of urgent need brought to bear on the proposition by the modal, we argue, is covertly (but deliberately) used in the manifesto to project the ruling government in bad light (as being insensitive to the important basic needs of the citizenry), thereby implying that if the NPP is given the mandate by the electorate, they would move swiftly and with desperation to expeditiously deal with these very necessary and paramount issues which the ruling government, supposedly, has neglected.

*Must*

A strong deontic modal auxiliary verb (Newson, 2008), *must* is used in the NPP manifesto to express (strong) obligation and/or compulsion and logical necessity. In the two constructions below, *must* is used to express strong obligation.

M9. We *must*, therefore, put a high premium on science, technology and innovation in our education modules to enable us train more scientists and technologists...

M10. Our education policy *must* address the deficiencies in our human resource.

In 9), *must* is used in the manifesto to strongly assert that it is extremely needful, and therefore obligatory for a high premium to be put on science, since such a measure would enable the nation to train more scientists and technologists. Like 9), *must* is also used in 10) to vehemently



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opine that the education policy is obliged to address the deficiencies in human resource. We claim that the compulsive meaning *must* brings to bear on the proposition is deployed by the party to endear itself to the electorate, connoting that the NPP is under future obligation to deliver on these promises if given the opportunity to rule. At the same time, it connotatively suggests that the ruling party has again failed in these areas.

In the manifesto, *must* is also used to express logical necessity as is demonstrated by the example in 11).

M11. We definitely *must* change from a system that reinforces strong men to one that encourages and facilitates strong institutions.

In this example, the use of *must* relates to us the stance that it is logically necessary for a government in power to change to a system that encourages strong institutions, rather than one that encourages strong men. Though a reasonable and a sensible idea, the ruling government, the example above suggests, has not been able to achieve this feat, perhaps, because they lack the mettle and expertise to or simply because the ruling government might have not even recognized the need to effect such a change, albeit plausible. Hence once again, we see the readiness and inventiveness, supposedly, of the NPP as opposed to the ruling government – this is covertly intimated by the use of *must* in the example, i.e. that as a party, the NPP (while even in opposition) has the interest of the nation at heart and has even identified a loophole that logically warrants urgent attention, a loophole they are ready to address once they assume office.

***Shall***

In the manifesto, *shall* is used 16 times, representing a percentage of 3.40. In all the instances of its usage, *shall*, invariably, expresses intention, thereby confirming Greenbaum's (1996) postulation that of all the meanings that can be attributed to *shall*, the intention function is widespread and most prevalent. The use of *shall* to express intention in the manifesto is illustrated below.

M12. We *shall* also examine the feasibility of funding the program through the NHIS...



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M13. Rents collected *shall* go into a revolving fund at the district level for the maintenance and expansion of the housing stock.

These sentences lucidly express the party's positive intentions when voted into power - showing concern for the welfare and needs of the electorate. These intentions are pre-meditated, and hopefully the party would expect that such good intentions would get them into the good books of the electorate. Though the good intentions expressed by the NPP in the examples above can be considered conjectured future events, and therefore could pass off as indefinite intentions of futurity, it still stands to reason that a cross-section of the electorate could accept these intentions as solid promises and subsequently vote for the party.

There is also a single instance where *shall* is used to express strong obligation, supporting Newson's (2008) claim that *shall* is a strong modal verb. The single instance in the manifesto is presented below.

M14. The Housing Agency to be established by the NPP government *shall* be dedicated to developing new communities and townships.

Unlike in the previous examples of the use of *shall*, in 14), the party considers the establishment of the Housing Agency as a duty they are obligated to perform. They would want the electorate to believe that they (the NPP) are seriously committed to this obligation, hence the strength of the obligation. Such a strong obligation, they would want the electorate to believe, should enjoin and/or compel them to perform this task, thereby assuaging any fears the electorate might have as regards the performance of this duty.

***Should***

In the manifesto, *should* is used twice (0.42 per cent), in which case it is put to obligation and putative uses. These two uses are exemplified below.

M15. The NPP believes that every Ghanaian *should* aspire to own a decent home

M16. Consequently, many of our SME's are trading, selling imported goods, and not in production and industry, where they can and *should* be.





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Should is obligatorily and putatively used in 15) and 16) respectively. That every Ghanaian aspires to own a decent home is presented as a worthwhile obligation that every individual SHOULD aspire to and indeed desire strongly to have in 15), while in 16), the use of *should* expresses an ideal situation which is thought to be or is supposed to be, but is not. Together, these two uses of *should* as exemplified above project the NPP in positive light, while at the same time point out the supposed inadequacies of the ruling government.

***May (not)***

*May (not)* is used four times in the manifesto, representing a percentage of 0.85. In the manifesto, *may (not)* is used solely to express possibility and/or likelihood. The examples below are extracts from the data, and they illustrate the possibility/likelihood function of *may (not)*.

M17. In recognition of the fact that a majority of Ghanaians who desperately seek decent accommodation *may not* necessarily be in the position to purchase a house...

M18. ...would encourage the Ghanaians in the Diaspora who *may* or *may not* have acquired other citizenships to bring their skills back home...

In the first example, the use of *may* suggests that there is a high possibility that most Ghanaians are not in a position to purchase a house; hence, the party (when it assumes office) would do its possible best to reverse this situation. Yet again, the NPP projects a positive image of itself, while casting a slur on the image of the incumbent government whom they want to democratically wrestle power from. In the second example, we observe an instance each of negated and non-negated use of *may*. Together, the two forms of *may* present us with the likelihood of Ghanaians who might have acquired other citizenships, and the view that the NPP as a party do have such individuals in mind as far as its developmental agenda for the country is concerned.

***Would***



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Although Newson (2008) posits that *would* is a weak modal verb like *should*, we found the opposite in this study – in all instances in which it is used in the manifesto, *would* is used as a strong verb. Specifically, *would* is used to express willingness and intention. The example in 19) is an instance where *would* is used to express willingness.

M19. Recorded lectures **would** be made available via the internet to be accessed by schools.

This is a strong claim by the NPP that they are willing to bring the event expressed in the proposition above to pass when they are voted into office. *Would* is also used in the manifesto to express future intention. This function primarily conveys the party's intended plans for the electorate when they are voted into office. Examples in this regard are presented below.

M20. ...we **would** encourage the setting up of credit unions for a variety of stakeholders...

M21. Non- profit community based housing development **would** be encouraged based on successful models in other countries.

In the two examples above, we notice that some actual intentions of the NPP on assuming office are fore grounded by the use of the modal *would*. These futuristic intentions are likely to endear the party to the electorate, given their positive appeal.

***Will***

In the manifesto, *will* is the most preponderantly used modal verb, occurring 319 times (representing 83.01 per cent). In the manifesto, there are several instances where *will* is used to express intention, reinforcing Quirk et al.'s (1973) stance that *will* indicates an intention or a promise. Examples are presented below.

M22. By tackling our leadership and management weaknesses, we **will** unleash the talents of the Ghanaian people...

M23. We **will** implement our 3Rs policy in concert with our teachers through monitored programs and assessments.



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Greenbaum (1996)'s postulation that *will* is used to convey certainty is also made evident severally in the manifesto – this function is illustrated below.

M24. What the NPP is offering is a leadership that *will* deliver.

M25. We *will* lead this country from hopelessness to prosperity.

Again in the manifesto, *will* is used to express determination, as is demonstrated by the example below.

M26. We are committed to and *will* support the passage of the Freedom of Information Act.

Additionally, *will* is used in the manifesto to promise the electorate, as is reflected in the examples below.

M27. New court buildings *will* be constructed to bring justice closer to the people.

M.28 We *will* prioritise maternal and adolescent reproductive health.

Given that *will* is a strong modal verb (Newson, 2008), it is used in the manifesto to express strong intentions, certainty, determination and promise as has been highlighted in the preceding paragraphs. Essentially, all the uses of *will* reinforce the exact objective of a political party – to win elections and form a government. The NPP is no exception to this rule; hence, consistently, *will* is used in the manifesto to reassure the electorate of a better country when they (the NPP) are given the mandate to rule. That the manifesto is replete with the modal auxiliary *will* is not surprising. Indeed, it can be considered intentional and strategic given that by bombarding electors with an avalanche of realistic promises, a political party is likely to be given a chance by the electorate. *Will*, and not the remaining modals, appears most suited for this kind of task.

## **5.0 Conclusion**



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The chief objective of the present study was to examine the semantics of modal auxiliary verbs in the 2012 political manifesto of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), a popular Ghanaian political party. Premised on the assumption that writers of political manifestos do find modal auxiliary verbs a very useful persuasive strategy to deploy in an attempt to forcefully and cogently transmit the campaign message of their party to the electorate, we set out to show in this study that the use of modal auxiliary verbs in political manifestos is neither haphazard nor coincidental. Instead, it is informed by reason of a specific communicative intent.

Given the results of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the nine modal auxiliary verbs identified in the political manifesto of the NPP have varying levels of preponderance; *will* being the most frequently used. Second, the modal auxiliary verbs were strategically deployed and fastidiously instantiated to positively project the NPP before the electorate, while at the same time highlight the supposed inefficiencies and incompetence of the incumbent government and ruling party. To this end, we affirm that modal auxiliary verbs have a persuasive connotation in political discourses, in general, and in political manifestos, in particular. Third, the findings of the study show that modal auxiliary verbs do not have definitive meanings; rather, they are appropriately decoded in a given context and are informed by certain germane situational factors, including type of register. These findings bear implications for pedagogy, the theory of modality, text construction and/or composition and further discourse analytical studies on political speeches, in general, and political manifestos, in particular.

From the discussion above coupled with the fact that there was very little amount of extant literature on political discourses, in general, and political manifestos, in particular, in Africa to review, there is the need for further research. First, similar studies can, for instance, be conducted on the manifestos of other political parties in Ghana in order to ascertain the extent to which the findings of the present study can be generalized. Second, other studies could adopt a comparative approach to examine the manifestos of other Ghanaian political parties in a bid to establish whether or not the use of modal auxiliary verbs in Ghanaian political manifestos is conditioned by party-specific tendencies. Third, it should be possible for future studies to



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compare Ghanaian political manifestos with non-Ghanaian ones. Finally, the present study examined modality in the political manifesto from a general perspective. It would be useful to investigate the specific type of modal (for example, epistemic, deontic or dynamic) that is prevalent in political manifestos and the possible reason(s) behind such prevalence.

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