

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Modals in Nigerian Political Manifestos

Taiwo Oluwaseun Ehineni

Fulbright Scholar, Indiana University Bloomington

E-mail: [tehineni@indiana.edu](mailto:tehineni@indiana.edu)

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## Abstract

This paper critically analyses the ideological uses of modals by Nigerian politicians especially in their electioneering campaign manifestoes designed to elicit favourable political support from the electorate. Methodologically, the data were collected from political manifestoes of Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party (LP) and Barr. Rotimi Akeredolu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) used during their campaigns for the 2012 gubernatorial election in Ondo State. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study pinpoints the ideological underpinnings of the modals used by the politicians. The study reveals that modals such as 'will', 'shall', 'must', 'can', etc. are used by the politicians in both manifestoes for persuasion, obligation, to make promises, demonstrate political will/commitment, and solicit public support and manipulation. Significantly, this paper provides critical insight to the peculiar uses of modals in political contexts and avers that modals are not just linguistic elements, but most importantly, ideological tools.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis, Modals, Political manifestos, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

In the political setting, especially during election periods, political parties compete to secure political posts and offices. As a result, the electorate is often bombarded with several barrages of campaigns, speeches and presentation of political manifestoes. It has been established that Nigerian politics especially is chaotic where political election is likened to warfare and violence has become the order of the day (Alo, 2008). Thus, election periods often present a quintessential tug-of-war situation between political parties battling for political supremacy over political offices. The politicians are usually the political actors and players on the stage striving to navigate their way into power. Political manifestoes, therefore, have become part of the political strategy of achieving this aim. These manifestoes are often ingenuously designed and intelligently crafted to persuade the electorate for favourable political support through the use of language. It has been noted that language is a veritable tool of communication. Language has also been defined as:

Language is a means of communication, a means of presenting and shaping series of beliefs. Language is not something, somehow different from the ideas it contains, but the way language is used says a great deal about how the ideas have been shaped.

(Beard, 2008: 18)

Thus, language is used to uniquely convey personal ideas and intentions. Accordingly, in the political terrain, language is used to capture certain messages, convey promises, reflect beliefs and foreground political ideologies. This study, therefore, explores the critical political uses of modals in the selected manifestos. Due to the predominant significant uses of modals in Nigerian political manifestos and speeches by politicians seeking public support, this study aims to examine very critically through CDA the political and ideological underpinnings underlying these modals. Significantly, this helps to provide relevant insight to the peculiar uses of modals in political contexts. Hence, the following objectives are used to achieve the aim of this study.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- i) To analyse the data through critical discourse analysis.
- ii) To identify the modals used in the manifestoes.
- iii) To explain the ideological underpinnings of the modals.

## 3. Methodology

Data were collected from the political manifestos presented by Barr. RotimiAkeredolu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of Labour Party (LP) during their electioneering campaign for 2012 Ondo state Gubernatorial Election, Nigeria. Basically, the study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for data analysis. First, CDA will be used

to explain how the modals have been politically used in the manifestos. Also, it will be used to unravel the ideological motivations/intentions underlying the use of the modals.

#### 4. Literature Review

##### 4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) explores the use of language to represent social and ideological realities. CDA is a critical approach to the analysis of discourse aimed at unfolding critical hidden meanings embedded in texts. Joseph (2006: 149) explains that CDA focuses on uncovering propagandistic language in political discourse. Thus, it investigates how language is deployed to mirror the society. Also, Critical Discourse Analysis starts with the assumption that 'language use is always social' and that 'discourse both reflects and constructs the social world' Rogers (2004: 5). He further claims that discourses 'are always socially, politically, racially and economically loaded'. (2004: 6) CDA therefore aims at analysing discourses to account for certain uses of language in both social and political contexts they occur. Patridge (2006: 179) posits critical discourse analysis may include a detailed textual analysis and move from there to an explanation and interpretation of the analysis. He further explains that it deals with tracing underlying ideologies from the linguistic features of a text, unpacking particular biases and ideological presuppositions underlying the text, and relating the text to other texts and to people's experiences and beliefs (2006: 179). In addition to the critical analysis of ideology, other concerns of CDA include the relations between discourse and power, language and social relations (Fairclough, 1989).

Wodak (2001: 2) underscores that CDA essentially deals 'with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language'. This implies that CDA is concerned with the link between language and society. It views language as a form of social action. It explicates the function of language in foregrounding social relations and beliefs. Patridge (2006: 179) identifies a number of principles for critical discourse analysis described by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) which include:

- i. Social and political issues are constructed and reflected in discourse
- ii. Power relations are negotiated and performed through discourse
- iii. Discourse both reflects and reproduces social relations
- iv. Ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse.

Essentially, CDA is a critical study of discourses identifying the uses of language to reflect social relations and ideological underpinnings. It is the deconstruction of texts to explore the construction of social realities through language. This paper deploys the model of CDA in the critical analysis of the selected manifestoes to identify the ideological uses of the modals by politicians. Thus, this study examines how linguistic elements such as modals are used by politicians to influence their audience, persuade the electorate and accomplish their political goals.

#### *4.2 Use of Language in Political Discourse and Texts*

Language use in political discourses including speeches, manifestos and other political texts has been identified to be associated with different rhetoric and figurative strategies like circumlocution, irony, symbolisms, innuendos, euphemisms, and metaphors (Yusuf, 2003; Linfoot-Ham, Kerry. 2005; Carver and Pikalo, 2008). Also, the language used in this discourse is that of indirect language by politicians to gain political and interactional advantage over their opponents (Obeng, 1997). Thus, use of language in political texts is uniquely different from other discourses. A few works have examined the use of language in political texts.

Taiwo (2010) examined the use of metaphors in selected Nigerian political discourses deploying Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphors. He explains that metaphors play a central role in public discourse, most especially, political discourse, which according to him is mostly persuasive and rhetorical in nature. He further stresses that they help to shape the structure of political categorization and argumentation which is instantiated through conceptual mappings. Basically, Taiwo (2010)'s work examines Nigerian political discourses from the view of metaphors and how the politicians realize their political goals and aspirations through the deployment of these metaphors.

Also, Nartey and Yankson (2014) in their study, examined the semantic underpinnings of modals in the manifesto of a Ghanaian political party (New Patriotic Party NPP) in 2012. Basically, their study reveals that modal auxiliary verbs are able to unravel the divergent shades of meaning typical of political discourses. They note that modals are deployed in manifestos to indicate 'a sense of intention, promise, obligation and necessity in a conscious and strategic attempt to persuade the electorate' (Nartey and Yankson 2014: 21).

While this present study may relate to these works mentioned above in terms of political discourse analysis, it is uniquely different. First, Nartey and Yankson (2014)'s study is based on Ghanaian political discourse or manifesto while Taiwo (2010)'s study, which is also based on Nigerian political discourse only discusses the use of metaphors in Nigerian political manifestos. This therefore reveals a gap that this study aims to fill by exploring, very critically, the use of modals in Nigerian political manifestos. Modals are engaged in Nigerian political discourse to reinforce specific aims and themes conditioned by the politicians.

#### *4.3 Database of the Study*

This study is based on the written texts of Barr. Rotimi Akeredolu and Dr. Olusegun Mimiko's manifestoes during the 2012 gubernatorial election in Ondo state. During this campaign period, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko was the incumbent governor of the state elected in 2008 under the Labour Party, and sworn in 2009 after a judgement delivered by the Election Petition Tribunal favoured him. He was seeking re-election into a second term. In lieu of this, he has to contest with other political candidates from parties such as ACN, ANPP, CPC, PDP etc. However, ACN tends to be very strong opposition among others. So, the manifesto is necessitated by the need to outwit other gubernatorial candidates in this political race

Barr. Rotimi Akeredolu (SAN) hails from Owo area in Ondo state. He is a well-known legal

luminary and even rose to the position of the Senior Advocate of Nigeria in 1997. He was also an ex-president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA). So, he is a stalwart in the legal profession. However, unlike Mimiko who had served as Minister of Housing and Urban planning (2003-2006) and Secretary to the state government (2006-2008), he had not held any public office. Hence, his manifesto is of great importance in winning the election. Also, the ACN has seen Ondo state (ruled by the LP) as a state-to –capture, so that the state can join its growing political colony in the south west. Thus, the manifestoes of these political aspirants are crucial to their campaigns.

## 5. Data Analysis

### 5.1 *The Ideological Uses of Modals in the Manifestoes*

#### 5.1.1 *“Will”*: Political will and Commitment

- a. “I solemnly pledge before you here today is what I **will** strive to give in the next four years”
- b. ‘...so **will** I always stand by you’
- c. “I **will** strive strenuously to develop the infrastructural base of the state....”
- d. “My administration, if elected, **will** endeavour to do more than the current showbiz in the educational sector”
- e. “My administration **will** encourage the establishment of agro-allied industries”
- f. “My administration **will** revive the cultivation of oil palm plantations in the state”
- g. “My administration **will** ensure orderly spatial development”
- h. “I **will** provide leadership that will free our people from this unfortunate hand-out mentality”
- i. “Designated commercial centres **will** be developed and maintained”
- j. “Our efforts **will** provide jobs, create legitimate avenues for trade”

(Akeredolu and Mimiko manifestos, 2012)

The above extracts reveal the use of ‘will’ by the politicians in their individual manifestoes. Significantly, ‘will’ is used in the above to demonstrate political will and commitment on the part of the politicians. They use the modal ‘will’ to reinforce their commitment towards the transformation of the state during their prospective administrations. The modal ‘will’ in (a)-(b) indicates their political will and determinism to stand for the state. In (c) above, the modal ‘will’ is used with the adverb ‘strenuously’ to reinforce the height of their political commitment to the development of the state. The modal ‘will’ is used in (d) – (j) to reflect a sense of responsibility they have to the state in terms of transformational agenda. The politicians deploy ‘will’ in their utterances to reveal their master plans for the state.

### 5.1.2 “*Shall*”: Promises, Pledging and Persuasion

- a. “I *shall* embark on developmental programmes”
- b. “I *shall* embark on policies of transformation”
- c. “We *shall* embark on aggressive and massive agricultural and maritime projects”
- d. “Our government *shall* invest in ICT.....”
- e. “We *shall* embark on the construction of more roads both in the urban and rural areas of the state”
- f. “Our ancient cities such as Owo, Idanre, Ondo, Oke-Igbo, Okitipupa, Ikare, Akure, among others *shall* experience unprecedented transformation in the area of tourism”

(Akeredolu and Mimiko manifestos, 2012)

The modal ‘shall’ is used in the above utterances in (a) – (f) to make promises to the electorate in terms of the provision of the basic needs of the state. In each of the utterances, ‘shall’ is used by the politician to introduce the people to a catalogue of dividends they are set to deliver to the state. Also, the choice of the modal ‘shall’ instead of will is politically significant. It foregrounds some modality implications that accounts for the CERTAINTY and not the PROBABILITY of the promises enumerated in the political manifesto (Quirk & Greenbaun 1973: 48-53). Thus, politicians use ‘shall’ to assure the electorate about the certainty of their campaign promises.

Furthermore, the modal ‘shall’ which is futuristic in function (Quirk & Greenbaun, 1973), is used by the politician to inform the electorate about their prospective plans for the state and as a result, indirectly, persuade and cajole the electorate into voting for them. For instance, the utterance ‘we shall embark on aggressive and massive agricultural and maritime projects’ is futuristic through the use of ‘shall’ and will only be possible if the candidate is elected into power. Thus, indirectly but persuasively, the speaker compels the audience into voting for him in the coming elections. Notably, political manifestoes are quintessential campaign instruments. Hence, modals like ‘shall’ are used by politicians to persuade the electorate by introducing several barrages of flamboyant promises which are to be achieved if they are elected into power.

### 5.1.3 “*Must*”: Political Obligation and Manipulation

- a. “We *must* all work towards reversing the unfortunate trend.....”
- b. “I possess deep understanding of crucial socio-economic issues which *must* be resolved for the progress of the state”
- c. “The art of governance *must* not be left in the hands of those whose sole purpose in government is crude acquisition of material wealth”

(Akeredolu and Mimiko manifestos, 2012)

The modal ‘must’ is used in the above utterances to task the audience with certain

responsibilities. In (i), the politician calls the electorate into a collective responsibility of moving the state forward. The speaker obligates the electorate to join hands with him in a transformational agenda needed to salvage the state from the perceived debilitating developmental stasis. In (ii) – (iii), the modal is used to mandate and manipulate the audience into taking urgent action. Hence, the electorate is motivated into taking certain steps.

#### 5.1.4 ‘Can’: *Conviction, Possibility and Appeal*

- a. “I am convinced that I *can* make the difference in the fortune of the state”
- b. “No state *can* run a productive economy on a generator”
- c. “Kolanut *can* flourish in Oke-Igbo, Ondo, Ijare, Ore and generally in forest zone”
- d. “From this we *can* derive corn flour, grit, and maize for domestic and industrial use”
- e. “What justification *can* there be for the relegation of this cash crop to subsistence existence?”

(Akeredolu and Mimiko manifestos, 2012)

The modal ‘can’ is used by the speaker to demonstrate conviction and possibility. In the (a) – (b) above, more specifically, the speaker reveals his personal conviction on certain issues in the state. Also, in the first utterance, apart from using ‘can’ to show personal conviction, the speaker uses the modal to appeal to the sensibility of the electorate of his capability in transforming the state. In this case, the modal ‘can’ is used both to convince and to appeal to the electorate to be given a chance to govern the state.

Furthermore, the use of ‘can’ in the utterances (c) and (d) indicate possibility. The speaker uses the modal to reveal that the cultivation of certain resourceful cash crops is possible in some areas of the state – this is also significantly part of his transformation agenda. Hence, the modal ‘can’ is used for a lot of functions by politicians. These include to show personal conviction, indicate possibility and to appeal to the public.

## 6. Distribution of Modals in the Manifestos

The frequency of modals used in the manifestos is summarized below:

Table 1.

Modals Used	Frequency	Percentage
Will	104	63.4
Shall	39	23.8
Must	6	3.66
Can	15	9.14
Total=	164	100

From the results above on the frequency of the modals used, it is clear that the modals ‘will’ and ‘shall’ have more frequency in the selected manifestos. This finding reveals that the politicians both deployed these modals (*will* and *shall*) than any other modals in their campaign manifestos. The preponderant use of these modals in manifestos was also ascertained by Nartey and Yankson (2014). In their work which was based on the analysis of a Ghanaian political party manifesto, they identified the modals *will* and *shall* as being most frequently used by the politicians. Significantly, the preponderant usage of these modals instantiates that campaign manifestos are, most often than not, designed to indicate political will and commitment, give pledges and promises to the public. Furthermore, since these manifestos are essentially campaign instruments, the promises and pledges are used by the politicians to lure and persuade the electorate into voting them to power.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has carried out a critical discourse analysis of modals in political manifestoes. It is discovered that while all modals such as ‘will’, ‘shall’, ‘must’, and ‘can’ are generally used by the politicians in the electioneering campaign manifestoes, the modals *will* and *shall* are more predominantly used. Essentially, these modals are deployed in the manifestos to indicate political will and commitment, promises, pledging and persuasion, political obligation and manipulation, personal conviction, possibility and appeal. Politicians often use modals to reinforce their individual political ideologies, communicate their political ideas and elicit public support.

Also, the preponderant use of the modals *will* and *shall* is established in the fact that these manifestos are essentially campaign manifestos of the politicians and these specific modals are more easily used to introduce pledges and promises to the public with the ultimate view of persuading them to vote for the politicians.

Finally, this study avers that modals are not just linguistic elements, but most importantly, political devices and ideological tools in political discourses. They are used to accentuate specific aims and themes in Nigerian political rhetoric.

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