

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

A Systemic Study of Modal Auxiliary and Lexical Verbs in Nigerian Political Manifestos

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Abstract:

Political manifestos state the objectives of political parties through diverse linguistic strategies. These linguistic strategies are paramount in the expression of varied intentions found in manifestos. Therefore, the research paper explored the use of modal and lexical verbs employed by politicians in conveying their political manifestos. The paper highlighted the use of modals to state various intentions, possibilities, promises, obligations and predictions. Data was collected through the 2015 and 2019 on-line manifestos of People Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC). The researchers also drew insights from the Systemic Functional Linguistics by analyzing the data functionally and structurally using the SPCA/MHQ formulas in Systematic Functional Linguistics. It was discovered that the political parties employed diverse modal auxiliary verbs to state their intentions, promises, obligations and possibilities. The findings also portrayed that the lexical verbs were utilized to state different resolutions and to make salient assertions. Therefore, the researchers discovered that the modal verbs had several semantic functions in the manifestos. It was concluded that, manifesto portrayed various types of claims, predictions, intentions, volitions, possibilities and obligations. They were employed by political parties to show political commitment and will.

Keywords: Manifestos, promises, politicians, systemic, functional, linguistics

1. Introduction

Political manifestos are powerful tools employed by candidates to highlight their intentions, programmes and policies during political campaigns. Parties present varied promises and philosophies to citizens to solicit for their support. The promises and ideologies overtly and covertly reveal the objectives a political party or candidate has in mind. Thus, Ashworth (2000) asserts that political manifestos provide a sound basis for local political accountability. They are significant in measuring different schemes. They are tactical documents written by politically sophisticated party elites with different objectives in mind (Laver & Garry, 2000). They also provide a compendium of valid party positions for campaigns (Eder & Muller, 2017). Since manifestos are pivotal in electioneering, selecting appropriate language and diction in writing them becomes crucial.

In political discourse, language and particularly lexis are forcible weapons manipulated by individuals to advance certain leadership styles with the intention of attracting massive support (Adurodola and Ojukwu, 2013). Through the use of language, manifestos are ingenuously crafted to persuade the electorate for political support (Ehineni, 2014). Opebi (2009) observes that the relationship that exists between language and politics is symbiotic because the support some citizens have for politics is determined by what they say and how they say it. To achieve political relevance, politicians adopt linguistic and rhetorical strategies that enable them to communicate successfully with their audience (Kamalu and Iniworikabo, 2016).

The language of political campaign, embodied in propaganda and rhetorical, is persuasive and politicians employ rhetorical devices to embellish their words in order to cajole the electorate (Omozuwa and Ezejideaku, 2009). Sometimes, perceptible oddities are found in manifestos. Some politicians utilize alluring and contrived language in manifestos. Sometimes, some manifestos are unrealistic and unreasonable. Language portrays the bizarreness and farce in manifestos. Through the language use in manifestos, some citizens are trapped in the unnatural policies and stratagem of political parties. It has also been observed that politicians tactfully manipulate language to gain absolute support from the electorate.

Therefore, Taiwo (2009) asserts that language is the conveyer belt of power which moves people to vote, debate or revolt. Conversely, some other politicians succinctly use language to capture certain messages, convey promises, reflect

beliefs and foreground political ideologies (Ehenini, 2004). No matter how good a candidate's manifesto is, no matter how superior political thoughts and ideologies of a political party may be, they can only be expressed and translated into social actions through the use of language (Ayeomini and Akinkuolere, 2012). Hence, language is a symbolic system which functions in the construction of political reality (Kamalu and Iniworikabo, 2016). It has also been observed that most manifestos are prescriptive since they are declarations of intentions which portray a catalogue of conjectures or presumptions. Some of the presuppositions, intentions, and assertions vividly contain a lot of modal auxiliaries. Thus the politicians employ the modal verbs to convey the presuppositions and intentions.

Ehenini (2014) asserts that politicians use the modal verbs in manifestos to give their promises and to demonstrate their political commitment to the electorate for persuasion. Modals are also utilized to state different kinds of claims, like assertions, possibilities, (opinions, hypothesis and speculations. (Cameron, 2001) Furthermore, Ehenini (2014) sees the use of modals in manifestos as both linguistic devices and ideological tools.

This paper, therefore seeks to examine the modals used in expressing catalogues of claims, promises, and assertions in manifestoes. It also highlights other forms of lexical verbs employed by politicians while artistically writing their manifestos.

To pursue the study further two research questions are posited:

- What modal auxiliaries are prevalent in the expression of political manifestos?
- What other verbs are evident in political manifestos?

2. Theoretical Framework

The Systematic Functional Linguistics propounded by M.A.K Halliday is the analytical tool employed in this study to examine overt intentions and promises discovered in political manifestos. The theory views language as a resource used by people in accomplishing their purposes and expressing meanings in different situations (Chappelle, 1988). Halliday (2002) asserts that the specific form taken by the grammatical system of language is related to the social and personal needs that language is required to serve and it is essential to focus on both the system of language and its functions at the same time in order to state the theoretical basis for generalizations about how language is used.

Therefore, the Systematic Functional Linguistics focuses on both the structure and the forms in language use. Melrose (1995) asserts that the Systematic Functional theory relates structural analysis to meanings and social contexts. Norquist (2014) states that Systemic Functional Linguistics sees grammar as a meaning making resource and stresses on the interrelation of form and meaning. Halliday (2003) states that systemic theory is a system whose stability lies in its variation and that a language is a "meta- stable" system whose continuity shows constantly in its flux. Thus, language is a semiotic system. Systemic Functional model looks at language as a systemic resource for construing meaning.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The researchers utilized the quantitative and qualitative descriptions to analyze 100 intentions/obligations/promises/assertions in 2015, and 2019 on-line manifestos of People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC).

3.2. Research Sample

Through a purposive sampling technique, the researchers selected 100 intentions/obligations/promises/assertions from PDP and APC on-line manifestos for analysis.

3.3. Research Instrument

The research instrument comprised 2015 and 2019 PDP on-line manifestos and 2019 APC on-line manifestos. These were the manifestos presented by the two parties during their campaigns.

3.4. Method of Data Analysis

Percentages were employed in the quantitative analysis to categorize the frequency of the modal auxiliaries and other verbs employed in the manifestos. The qualitative descriptions were based on the analytical tool of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The manifestoes were described functionally and structurally analyzed using the " α " β ", and SPCA/MHQ formulas in Systemic Linguistics. Thus, the researchers employed the following symbols in Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze the manifestos:

Σ - Sigma

& - Linker

α - Independent Clause or alpha clause

β - Dependent clause or beta clause

/// - Sentence boundary

SPCA

S - Subject

P - Predicator

C - Complement

A - Adjunct

MHQ
 M – Modifier
 H – Headword
 Q - Qualifier
 Others symbols
 a-auxiliary
 v-verb
 p-preposition

4. Results

Modal Auxiliaries	Frequency	Percentage
Will	31	31%
Shall	38	38%
Must	5	5%
Can	4	4%
Would	1	1%
Other lexical verbs	21	21%
Total	100	100%

Table 1: Distribution of Modals in the Political Manifestos

The table shows that the politicians employed different kinds of modals in expressing their intentions, objectives and promises to the electorate. The researchers discovered that the politicians predominantly used the modal 'shall' to indicate their intentions/assertions/predictions/obligations/possibilities. 38% of the modals was 'shall', 31% was 'will', 5% was 'must', 4% was 'can' and 1% was 'would'. 21%, comprised the lexical verbs in the simple present form.

4.1. Some Excerpts from the Manifestos

- The party *shall* uphold the principles of power rotation.
- APC in government *will* conduct a state census of ailing industries.
- We *shall* encourage civil society/whistle blowers in the anti-graft vanguard.
- PDP *will* protect the rights of vulnerable groups in the society.
- APC *will* embark on a comprehensive re-organization of the agricultural industry.
- The party *would* avoid mistakes of the past.
- The country *can* succeed when we have equal rights
- The nation *can* succeed where no – one is above the law.
- Democracy *must* be anchored on the principle /that government derives its powers from people.
- The country *must* learn to choose the honest citizens.
- It *must* be forward looking and it must possess a sense of mission.
- All these *must* be replaced by a new approach to national politicking.
- We *affirm* our belief in the supremacy of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the sovereignty of the Nigeria nation and its people.
- Creating jobs and economic opportunities for the people *will* be vital both for reducing the pool of easy recruits for violent groups and reducing underlying grievance that feed the conflict.
- The improvement of the well-being of Nigerians *is* the ultimate objective of the PDP's economic policy.
- The party *will* devote 25% of the budget to education.
- Our policy document *focuses* on creating jobs and ensuring security, growing business, developing power and water infrastructure, agriculture and education and how we will empower women.
- As a change agent – APC *intends* to cleanse our closet to halt the dangerous drift of Nigeria to a failed state with a conscious plan for post oil economy in Nigeria.
- To achieve this laudable programme, APC government *shall* restructure the country, *devolve* power to the units with the best practices of federalism and *eliminate* unintended paralysis of the centre.
- In sum, we *subscribe* to and *shall* preserve the fundamental principles of state policy as enshrined in chapter 2 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended.
- APC *will* revamp the River Basin Authorities which are the best vehicles for Nigeria's agricultural revival and expansion.
- All teachers *will be* retrained to deliver digital literacy.
- The march away from mono-economy *must* continue with our focus on industrialization.
- In addition, the exercise of political authority *is noted* in the rule of law.
- APC *believes* in the doctrine of social contract between the leaders and the led.
- Our mission is to *construct* and *constitute* a progressive state anchored on social democracy.
- As progressives, we *believe* that Nigeria is greater than any individual or the sum of her federating units.
- We *represent* an agent of change for committed transparent and focused leadership.

- June, 2021

These intentions stated in clauses can be represented in tree diagrams.

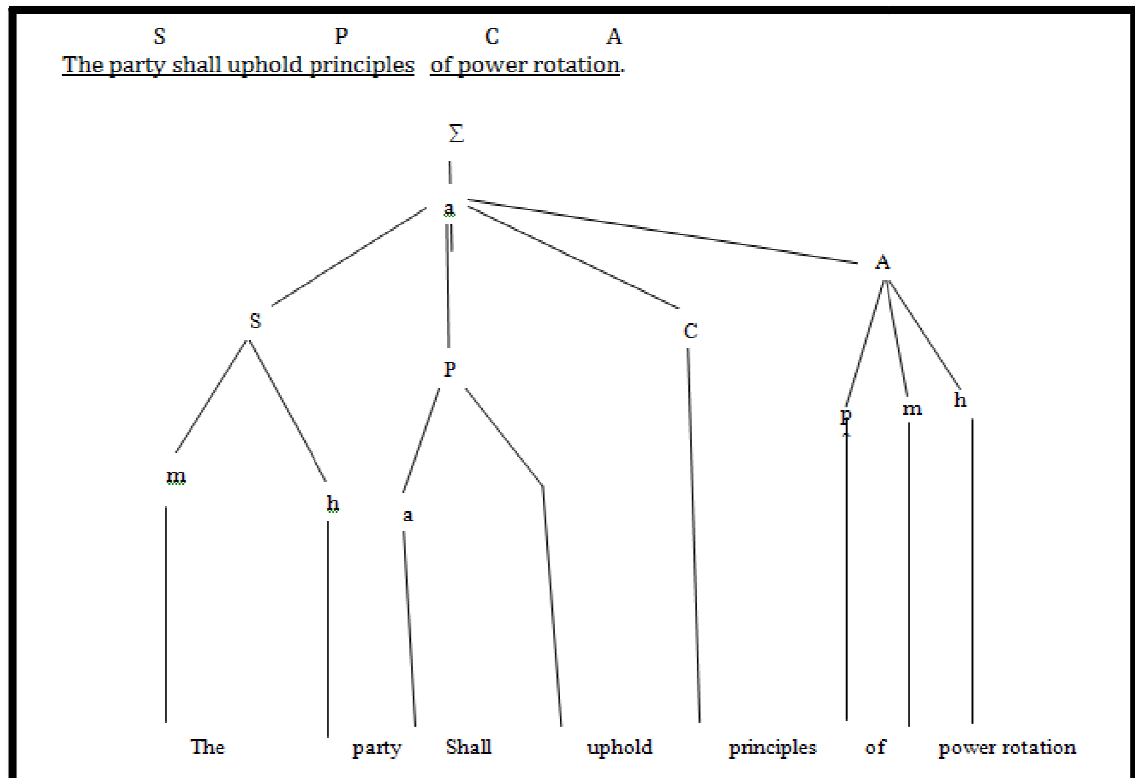


Figure 1

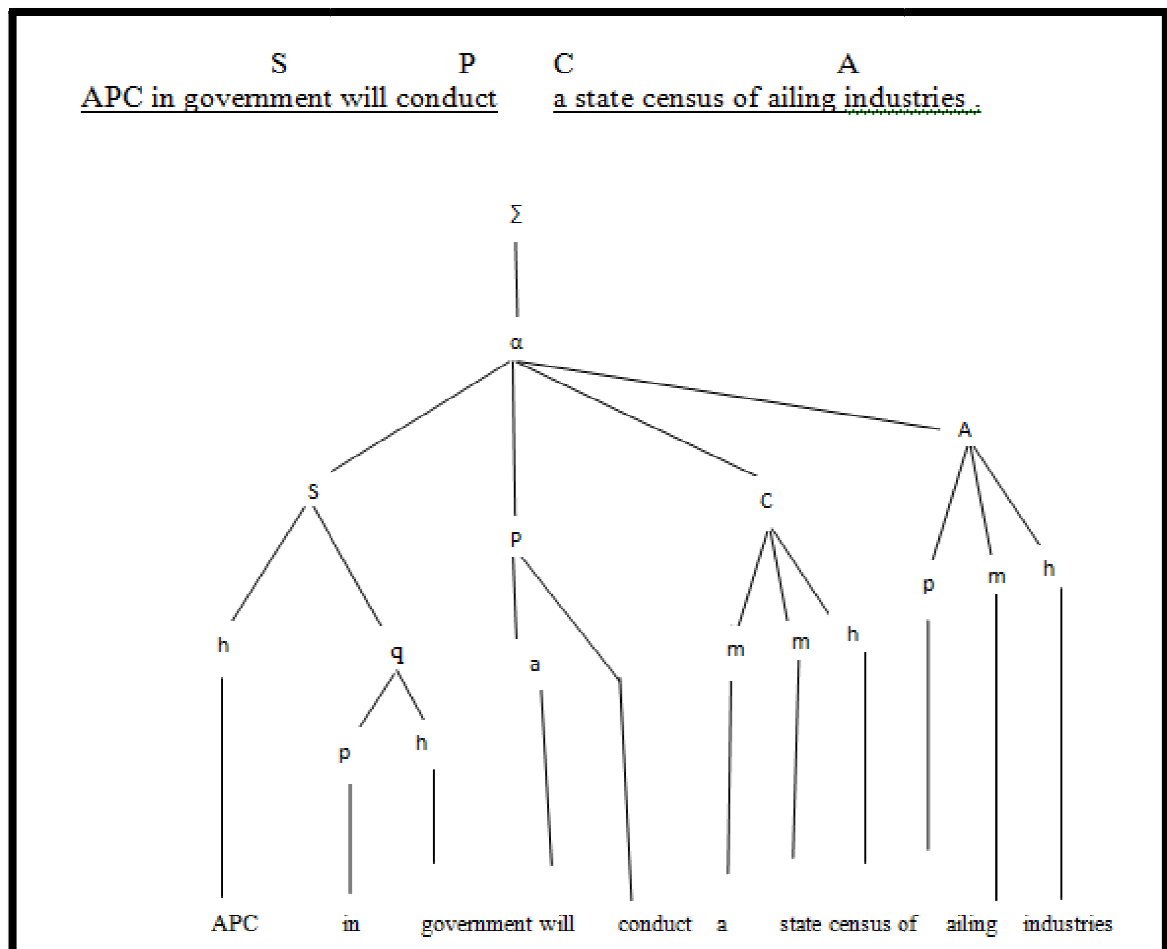


Figure 2

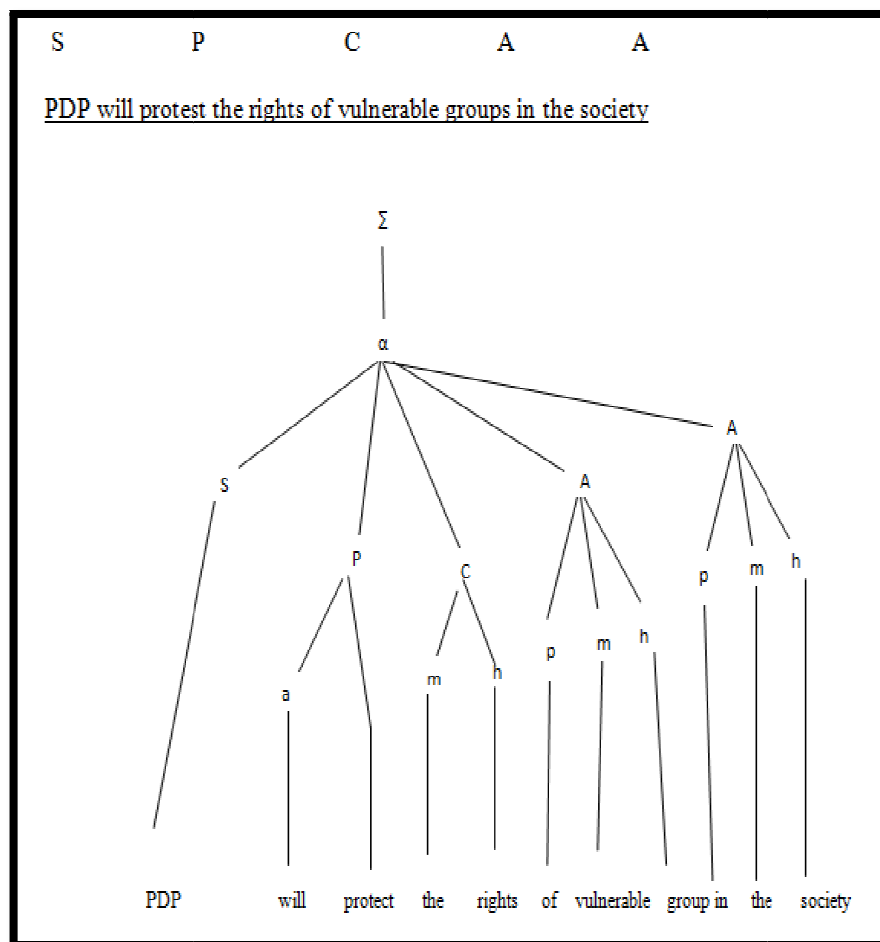


Figure 3

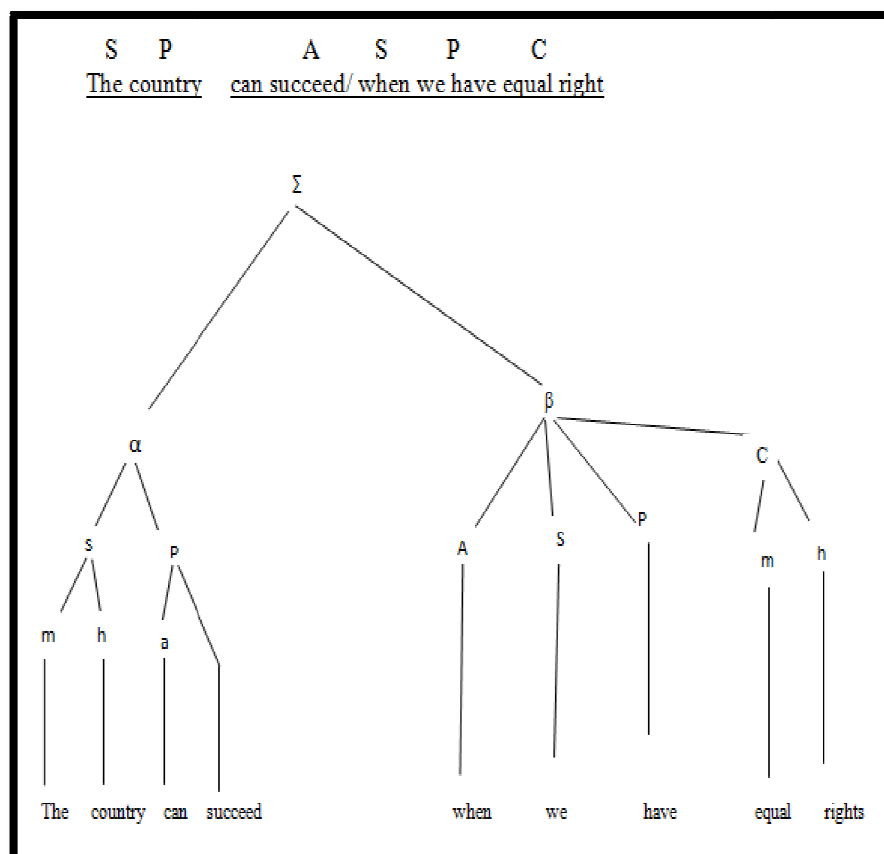


Figure 4

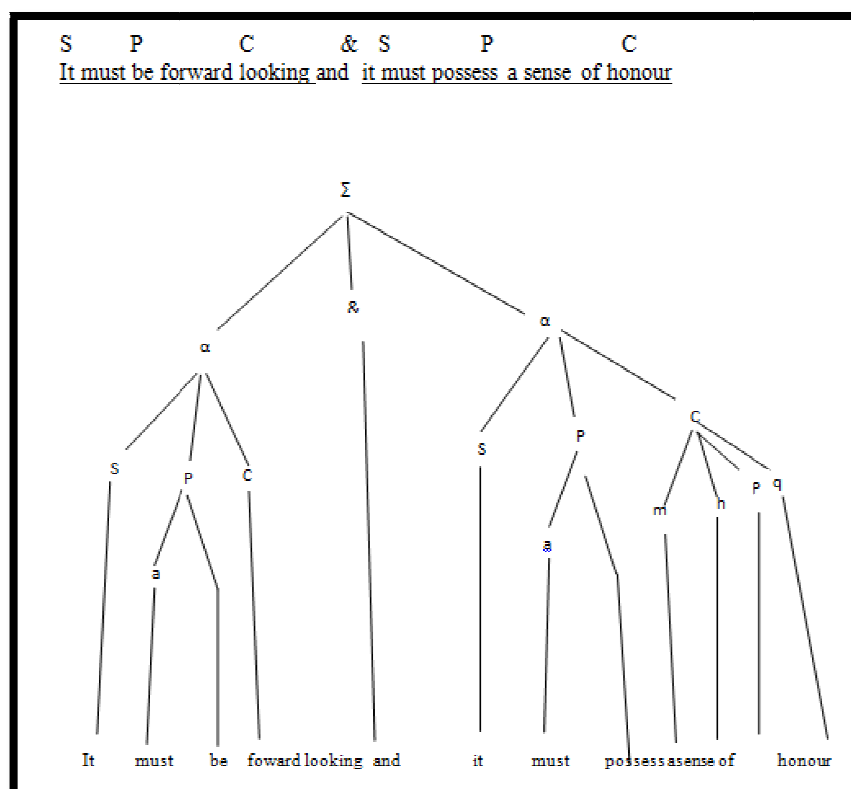


Figure 5

5. Discussions

Modal auxiliaries are employed by politicians when writing manifestos to express different opinions, predictions, obligations, possibilities, necessity, intentions and promises.

The findings show that politicians use 'will' and 'shall' to relay their intentions, make predictions and hypothetical promises. This finding is similar to Aning (2020) who in a study of modal verbs in the 2016 manifesto of a National party in Ghana found that the modal auxiliary 'will' expresses strong intentions, certainly and promises in manifestos and it also reinforces the objectives of a political party. Furthermore, Aning (2020) states that the use of 'will' is intentional and strategic in manifestos since political parties give the electorate a number of promises to give them the chance of being elected. Hence Nordberg (2010) asserts that 'will' is considered as a 'confident' prediction' about something'.

Furthermore, Ahamed, Mahmood and Famkh (2020) state that prediction modal 'will' and 'would' are most frequently used by writers to make predictions. From the results, 'can' is employed by the political parties to express theoretical possibility in the manifestos. The sentences: "The country can succeed when we have equal rights and the nation can succeed when no one is above the law clearly depicting theoretical possibilities.

The propositions expressed by 'can' in these two sentences are theoretically possible. Although, equal rights and not being above the law give room for success, these are not the practical situations as of the time of electioneering. Therefore, these propositions help the politicians in recommending the party to the electorate as being suitable in bringing the desired success needed, that is, bringing these possibilities into reality.

The result too is consistent with Nartey and Yankson (2014) who state that the modal auxiliary verb 'can' portrays theoretical possibility and it is a strong modal used in making strong and high assertions. Nartey and Yankson (2014) consider the use of 'can' as a persuasive strategy which helps politicians to visualize and convey brilliant ideas.

'Must' is utilized to show their obligations towards the citizens. These obligations are actions or plans that should be necessarily fulfilled. Thus Collins (2009) asserts that the use of modals portray different semantic notions such as possibility, necessity, obligation, permission, ability and hypothetical situations. These semantic nations are perceptible in modal auxiliaries found in the different manifestos used for the study.

Since manifestos provide a catalogue of party positions, the writers try to present their ideas using modals auxiliaries. This is to ensure that they capture the semantic notions that modals show. Stubbs (1996) rightly points out that modal auxiliaries are utilized as markers to show the speakers' perspectives. The modal auxiliaries depicted in the manifestos are such markers that show the party's perspectives on different salient proposals. The use of the modals also shows how these politicians embellish their language to give it the force needed in persuading their audience. Therefore, modal auxiliaries have several semantic functions.

6. Conclusion

The language use in manifesto portrays various types of claims, predictions, volitions, intentions, obligations and possibilities. Modals are consciously used by politicians to state their varied opinions and obligations towards people. Anning (2020) states that politicians find the use of modal auxiliaries a very useful strategy which forcefully and cogently

transmit the campaign messages of their parties to the electorate. The modals are employed by political parties to show their political will and commitments.

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