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An Appraisal of Epistemic Modality in Selected State of the Nation Addresses

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Abstract: Qualitatively, the study adopted a content analysis approach. There were eight State of the Nation addresses that the Ex-President John Kufour delivered during his tenure of office but only two of them are analysed in this study. The purposive sampling approach was used to select two State of the Nation addresses samples. The State of the Nation addresses of two years were picked for the study. The years are: 16th February 2001, and 14th February 2008. The qualitative data was analysed by the use of the interpretative technique based on the themes arrived at during the content analysis of the two speeches delivered by ex-president Kufour. Selective coding was used to code the occurrence of the categories of the epistemic modality expressions in the data. The epistemic modal elements as well as the sentences in which they occurred were then manually copied for further verification. These processes made the frequency count faster, more effective and more accurate. The data shows the relevant clauses or sentences containing modal expressions sampled within the contexts of epistemic meanings in the texts. The study has made it apparent that the expression of certainty is predominant. The data also indicates that the Ex-president has a greater tendency to use more modal adjuncts followed by the other modal auxiliary verb categories in expressing certainty in the selected State of the Nation Addresses during his State of the Nation Addresses. One question that arises is, why the Ex-president had a greater tendency to express more certainty in his State of the Nation Addresses. The answer is that Ex-president was fully sure and convinced of the information on the nation's development and future programmes captured in the addresses. Thus, he appeared a confident, trustworthy and knowledgeable leader. Furthermore, the use of epistemic modality in the State of the Nation Addresses is neither haphazard nor coincidental. Instead, it is informed by reason of specific communicative intent. It is recommended that Public speakers and politicians should take the epistemic markers into consideration when writing the State of the Nation Address or any other texts in order to clarify shared opinion. It is also recommended that the Faculty of Language of the University of Education of Winneba should consider the concept of epistemic modality as a course of study in all various Language Departments including the Department of Communication Skills.

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1. Introduction

The idea of a State of the Nation Address dates back to the British practice of opening Parliament with a speech from the Throne. It was later adopted by the United States of America where President George Washington delivered the first message before a joint session of Congress in New York on January 8, 1790 [1]. Many countries including Ghana have since adopted this 'State of the Nation Address' and have actually enshrined it in their respective constitutions as a presidential requirement. The State of the Nation Address is the account or evaluation of the condition of a country and the future programme for the said country [2].

Generally, some of the themes of concern in the various State of the Nation Addresses in many countries appear to be similar, depicting the common aspirations and challenges confronting societies across the globe. For example, as one of his State of the Nation Addresses presented before the Parliament on 24th May 1994, in South Africa, the late President Nelson Mandela of South Africa stated, among other things, “We look forward to the private sector as a whole playing a central role in achieving the significantly high and sustainable rates of economic growth” [3]. Mandela’s statement resonates well with what Ex-president Kufour also stated in his sessional address some fourteen years later on 14th February 2008, thus, ‘Mr. Speaker, on assumption of office, I declared the ushering in of the Golden Age of Business, hence the critical focus on the Private Sector which inherently generates more employment than the Public Sector [4].

In Ghana, Article (67) of the 1992 constitution which is the supreme law of this country states, “The President shall, at the beginning of each session of Parliament and before a dissolution of Parliament, deliver to Parliament a message on the state of the nation.” This means that once the president delivers the State of the Nation Address, he has lived up to expectations and has fulfilled fully that constitutional provision. The State of the Nation Address is a constitutional requirement of the president to account to Parliament the ‘state of the nation’ and plans for the future. The State of the Nation Address was first introduced under the administration of the second President of the third Parliament of the Fourth Republic of Ghana Ex-president John Agyekum Kufour. Records show that in 18 years at the helm of Ghana, his immediate predecessor, ex-president Jerry Rawlings did not deliver a single State of the Nation Address [5]. So far, there have been fifteen State of the Nation Addresses delivered to Parliament by various presidents as required by the national Constitution of Ghana. Usually, after the presentation of the address, there is a legislative duty in debating the address of the president. Also, there are reactions from the political parties both represented in and outside Parliament, civil society and the general public.

Apart from the State of the Nation Address, other political speeches such as Inaugural addresses, Independence Day Speech and Campaign speeches have also been delivered in Ghana. For example, Ex-president Kufuor’s second Inaugural address was overwhelmingly dominated by assertive [6]. The present study focuses on a notable form of political discourse – the epistemic modality of two selected state-of-the-nation addresses of Ex-President John Agyekum Kufuor who was the second President of the Fourth Republic of Ghana. His presidency spanned from 2000 to 2008. In all, he gave eight State of the Nation Addresses during his tenure of office. His victory over the late President, John Atta Mills, after the end of former President Jerry Rawlings’ second term, marked the first peaceful democratic transition of power in Ghana since the country’s independence in 1957 [6, 7]. The State of the Nation Address often informs Parliament subcommittee decisions and votes [8]. Therefore, it appears successive presidents, since its inception, have learned to use this occasion as an appeal to the nation because the message has evolved from being a report to Parliament to a direct address to the Ghanaian people. It is now a platform from which the president announces, explains, and promotes his legislative agenda [9]. Furthermore, the State of the Nation Address, as a political discourse, is a “very powerful tool with a considerable influence.” In this case, the President can use such an occasion to persuade the public to adopt his political agenda, stance or political ideology [10].

Having explained the idea of the State of the Nation Address, I would now like to turn to the concept of epistemic modality. Epistemic modality connotes how much certainty or evidence a speaker has for a proposition expressed by his or her utterance. Epistemic modality, therefore, deals with a speaker’s evaluation or judgment of what he says, whether it is true or not. The linguistic strategies, especially epistemic modality, can reveal perceptions, nuances, attitudes, confidence, political ideology, cultural identity, social status, covert intentions and priorities of a politician [11].

Epistemic modality is about the speaker's judgment about whether what he or she says is true. For example, "You may be right". "That *must* be the worst book ever written." "Non-epistemic modality, on the other hand, refers to actual facts or events. Epistemic modality deals with a speaker's perception, evaluation or judgment of, degree of confidence in, or belief of the knowledge or reason upon which a proposition is based" He adds that "the category of epistemic modality concerns the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he or she is saying whilst in non-modelized declarative sentences, a speaker is fully committed to the fact of the utterance made [11].

1.1. The Study of Epistemic Modality in the State of the Nation Address

Epistemic modality in particular has a propensity to reveal the very subtle attitude and nuance of the president as a politician and can indicate his sense of intention in his conscious and strategic attempt to persuade and win people to his side [12]. Indeed, the importance of modality in language is summed up by Bally when he says: "modality is the soul of the sentence. There is no utterance without modality" [13]. Indeed, "epistemic modality and content of speech interact to influence citizens. It influences the ability to form evaluations about the president's character, shape perceptions of his incivility, and alter judgments of political trust and message credibility. It can even be used as a means by a politician to "manipulate public perceptions about his performance in government" [14]. For instance, in the expression: 'That must be Uncle Ben,' though the speaker expresses an epistemic notion of less certainty, the fact still remains that there is a commitment to the truth of the proposition.

The purpose of the State of the Nation Address by the president was to report on conditions in the country, recommend programmes and present his views or vision for the present and future. Some studies have investigated modality and the language of political discourse. Most of the studies on Ghanaian modality studies focused attention on modality in general, thereby neglecting the specific study of such sub-types of modality as epistemic modality as used in presidential speeches [15]. The purpose of this study was to examine Epistemic Modality in Selected State of the Nation Addresses delivered by Ex-president John Agyekum Kufour of Ghana on 16th February 2001 and 14th February 2008 respectively. The study was guided by this research question - What communicative purposes do the epistemic modality have on the State of the Nation address in Ghana?

1.2. Nature of Epistemic Modality

Modality is subjective and concerned with utterances of a non-factual kind because it expresses the opinion and attitude of the speaker. In a general sense, modality is related to the speaker's or writer's "opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes" [16]. Epistemic modals as "concerned with matters of knowledge, belief, or opinion rather than facts while deontic modality with the necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents [16]. One can identify epistemic or non-epistemic expressions. In this sense, an epistemic expression passes judgment on the proposition of the utterance, or not. The second refers to a statement which is factual and that does not involve notions, evaluation or speculations. For example:

- Evans **can't** have gone to school yesterday
- Evans **couldn't** go to school yesterday.

Both utterances express past events. However, **couldn't** in the second example, indicates the inability of the subject to perform the act. The modal itself is marked for past tense; it is, therefore, non-epistemic whereas the first one is viewed from the interlocutor's point of view and it is the proposition, **go** (going to school), not the negative modal **can't** that is marked for past tense. **Can't**, therefore, serves as an epistemic modal verb

designating the non-actuality of the action in the past. That the second example is past is adduced by the conjoined past time specifier 'yesterday' and the perfective aspect as well [11].

Furthermore, epistemic modality can be expressed within a range of commitments of the speaker to a proposition. For example, one can express an idea of possibility, which may indicate the lowest commitment on the part of the speaker to the fact that a proposition may be true, as in example (1) below. Then there could be expressions of probability that indicate a greater commitment on the part of the speaker, as in (2). There could also be expressions indicating much stronger commitment, which strongly implies that the speaker has reasons to suggest the proposition is true, as in (3):

- Evans **can** be leaving. (possibility)
- Evans **may** be leaving. (probability)
- Evans **must** be leaving. (stronger commitment or inferred certainty) [17].

1.2.1. Effects of the use of Epistemic Modality

Political discourse lends itself to studies of epistemic modality because one of the characteristics of the genre is the frequent use of hedging and possibility which are notions in the expression of epistemic modality [18, 19]. Again, the expression of ability and modification of statements appropriately such as conveying the degree of certainty in claims or propositions is very relevant to political speech. It is a skill, therefore, that political figures need to master while the listeners need to figure out the implicit meaning of such epistemic devices [19].

1.2.2. Types of Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality can be put into two subtypes. These are a modality of evidentially and judgment modality. Evidentially, which is the indication of the source of the information upon which a proposition is based, is a subtype of epistemic modality, while judgment modality is a subtype which is based on the speaker's own judgment [20]. Some linguists, however, feel that evidentially is distinct from and not necessarily related to modality and that some languages even mark evidentially separately from epistemic modality [11]. The semantics of epistemic modals consists of an evidential component which signals a source of information and an epistemic component which reflects the speaker's assessment of the source of information. This may assist in understanding the speaker's choice of epistemic modals in an utterance and the difference in strength between epistemic ally modelised sentences and unmodulated ones. For example:

- I doubt that it rained yesterday (judgment of information source)
- I heard that it rained yesterday (identification of information source)

In the first example, the speaker does not establish any premises for his assertion. He merely expresses his doubt about the rain having fallen yesterday. In the second statement, the speaker expresses his knowledge of the rainfall yesterday based on his information about it from someone else [21].

1.2.3. Levels of Epistemic Modality

Having dealt with the types of epistemic modality, it is important to look at the levels of epistemic modality. Modality has a wide variety of communicative functions, and these functions can be related to a scale ranging from possibility 'may' to necessity 'must'. He adds that epistemic modality is concerned with the theoretical possibility of propositions being true or not true, including likelihood and certainty. Deontic modality, on the other hand, is concerned with possibility and necessity in terms of freedom to act, including permission and duty [17]. Research studies epistemic continuum scales: 'absolute

certainty', which refers to a stated unambiguous indisputable conviction or reassurance and 'uncertainty' 'high certainty,' that is, high probability or firm knowledge defined as hesitancy or stated lack of clarity or knowledge, 'moderate certainty', which is an estimation of an average likelihood or reasonable chances. Finally, there is 'low certainty,' representing a distant possibility. It can be argued that some of these dimensions are doubtful. For example, in the case of 'absolute certainty', it suggests that there is complete certainty, and this may represent the absence of epistemic modality. Indeed, epistemic modality is about a proposition, whether it is possible, probable or necessary. It is about matters of knowledge, belief, or opinion of a speaker rather than facts [22].

1.2.4. Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality

Modality is the expression of the speaker's mental attitude but not the second/third person's attitude. Secondly, the speaker's attitude is at the time of utterance, but not at past or future time [23]. Epistemic modality can be said to be the expression of the speakers' extent of certainty or commitment to the truth of their statement or the assessment of the likelihood of something being, or having been the case [24]. Epistemic modality is the speaker's assessment of probability and predictability. It is external to the content, being a part of the attitude taken up by the speaker: his attitude, in this case, towards his own speech role as 'declarer' [25]. Epistemic modality indicates the status of the proposition in terms of the speaker's commitment to it [11]. This suggests that epistemic modality deals with inference based on the known or afore-knowledge of the speaker.

A study posits that it concerns itself with "human judgment of the likelihood and unlikelihood of what is to happen' [26]. This means that epistemic modality has something to do with the speaker's or users' belief with regard to the truth of a proposition. A similar study makes an assertion that epistemic modality expresses the speaker's assumption or assessment of possibilities showing his/her certainty or uncertainty in the truth of a proposition. Epistemic assessment results in deduction and conclusions drawn by the speaker [19].

Epistemic is a clausal-scope indicator of a speaker's commitment to the truth of a proposition" [17]. It is argued that epistemic modals must be analysed as evidential markers. This argument is further explained that epistemic modality in natural language marks the degree and /or source of the speaker's commitment to the embedded proposition [23]. According to this view, the proposition expressed by the utterance in (1) can be paraphrased by (2), and the modal force of the utterance indicates that the speaker entertains the embedded proposition with a low degree of commitment:

- Stephen may be in school.
- Stephen is in school.

A small number of auxiliary verbs also termed modal auxiliaries (**can, could, may, might, must shall, should, will, would**), are regarded as the prototypical morphological realization of epistemic modality [23].

Additionally, epistemic modality is also expressed by number of lexical verbs for example, believe, infer, know and, adjectives, such as definite, probable, unlikely, and adverbs such as arguably, certainly, possibly and multi-word units and colligations involving lexis expressing degrees of certainty, for example, call into question, chances are, it seems plausible, and so on. Researchers in their discussion of the relation between Evidentiality and epistemic modality argue and show clearly that the references to the sources of information are linked closely to attitudes about the epistemic status of information because the linguistic markers encoding both domains are often the same [27]. There is an overlapping of modality and Evidentiality as they partly intersect. The interface between the two concepts is then occupied by the evidential value 'inferential'

(or 'inferential Evidentiality'), which he claimed to be identical to the modal value of epistemic necessity [28]. Again, a study pointed out that the diverging opinions as to the relationship between evidentiality and modality are largely due to the empirical fact that in the evidential systems of many languages; the forms marking the source of the information also mark the speaker's attitude towards the reliability of that information [27]. A similar research adds that "the different manner of acquiring knowledge corresponds to different degrees of certainty about the truth of the proposition". He states that modality shades off imperceptibly into several other categories and one of these is Evidentiality [17]. His assertion is in line with a statement that evidential are modals [11].

It is important, however, to note that subsumes modality, hedging, evidentially, consequentiality, intensification, polarity, and attribution within inter-subjectivity [29]. This classification can, in some sense, be justified in the sense that these categories express the stance of the speaker or a shared belief echoed in a speech situation. But the observation is that notions of hedging, evidentially, consequentiality, intensification, polarity and attribution are normally treated as aspects of modality. But the purpose of his work explains why he lumps all these notions together with modality. White's prime motive was to look beyond modality and hedging, and rather look at it from a more dialogic and rhetorical perspective. In this dialogic stance, he suggested that the function of epistemic expressions is tentativeness rather than a commitment to the truth value of the proposition [29].

1.2.5. Coding Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality encodes the speaker's commitment to the expressed proposition and his or her assessment of its probability. While encoding a message concerning a particular state of affairs, the sender expresses certainty, belief or doubt about its actual occurrence - in the past, at the moment of speaking or in the future. The problem is not whether the statement concerning a particular state of affairs and the state of affairs in the real world tally, but how the relation between the two is construed by the speaker [29]. Epistemic modality expresses either possibility or necessity that something is, or is not the case, with epistemic possibility encoding the speaker's lack of confidence in the proposition expressed and epistemic necessity relaying the speaker's confidence in the truth of the statement [11, 24]. This is shown in examples (1) and (2) respectively.

- This may be the doctor
- This must be the doctor

In these instances of epistemic possibility (1) and necessity (2), the speaker asserts that a proposition is possibly or necessarily true, relative to some information or knowledge. If the proposition is only possibly true, the propositional attitude is that of uncertainty; if it is necessarily true, the propositional attitude is that of a high degree of certainty. It should also be noted that the modals **may** and **must** can be used both for situational and for epistemic modality [29]. In her cross-linguistic study of epistemic modality in research articles, identify epistemic modality markers according to the following criteria:

- The marker must explicitly qualify the truth value of certain propositional content (to the exclusion of such verbs as **propose**, which being reporting verbs, contribute to the propositional content and if they qualify it at all, then it is an implicit qualification;
- It must be a lexical or a grammatical unit [14].

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitatively, the study adopted a content analysis approach. There were eight State of the Nation addresses that the Ex-President John Kufour delivered during his tenure of office but only two of them are analysed in this study. The purposive sampling approach was used to select two State of the Nation addresses samples. The State of the Nation addresses of two years were picked for the study. The years are: 16th February 2001, and 14th February 2008. These were chosen for three reasons. The first reason is that both years happened to be diverse political contexts covering a period when the government had just been voted into power for the first time, and just when the Ex-president was about to end his second term of office as per the constitutional requirement. Finally, it affords the researchers diverse scenarios of speech acts involving epistemic modality that reflected the diverse interpersonal usage of those expressions and expressions of stance and judgments through language use in two different political contexts. The qualitative data was analysed by the use of the interpretative technique based on the themes arrived at during the content analysis of the two speeches delivered by ex-president Kufour. Selective coding was used to code the occurrence of the categories of the epistemic modality expressions in the data. The epistemic modal elements as well as the sentences in which they occurred were then manually copied for further verification. These processes made the frequency count faster, more effective and more accurate. The data shows the relevant clauses or sentences containing modal expressions sampled within the contexts of epistemic meanings in the texts.

3. Results and Discussions

This section presents results and discussions on epistemic modality in terms of their meanings and communicative purposes in the selected speeches. The modal categories were analysed with regard to the expression of meanings of certainty, uncertainty and tentativeness. First, the sentences that contain the epistemic elements are all quoted or picked as excerpts from the State of the Nation Addresses. Once the meanings are obtained, deduction and conclusions are drawn depending upon, for instance, the implications of the frequency of occurrence of a category and the semantic implications of the use of those particular structures in the texts. This section also looks at the frequency distribution of the epistemic modality elements in the data.

3.1. *The Expression of Certainty in the Selected Speeches*

Certainty is said to be “the expression of full commitment to a statement” [30]. In short, certainty refers to an absence of doubt. This part of the study presents the analysis of certainty markers and other epistemic meanings as they are expressed by the two modal categories of modal verbs and modal adjuncts. It should be noted, however, that in modality, certainty may not necessarily refer to ‘absolute absence of doubt’ which may suggest complete certainty, without a modal marker. Quite clearly, most of the modal elements employed in the State of the Nation Addresses expressed the notion of certainty with a higher degree of frequency than other meanings. For example, it is observed that the auxiliary verbs and the modal adjuncts are primarily used to express ‘certainty’. Out of the total of 23 occurrences of the modal elements, more than half of them (i.e.14) express the sense of certainty. Moreover, one can observe that the specific modal auxiliary verb such as **would** has the highest frequency of 4, followed by **may**, **will** and **might** with the ratio 3, 3 and 2 respectively. These modal verbs are mostly used to express certainty and tentativeness by the Ex-president.

The occurrence of other auxiliary verbs such as ‘**can**’ and ‘**shall**’ and ‘**must**’ that were present in the speeches were mainly used to express deontic and dynamic modality notions, and so they are not analysed since they are not the focus of this work., one can observe that the modal **could** occur once while the modal **should** also occur once

respectively in the expression of certainty. They, therefore, are negligible. Below are the discussions and illustrations of the epistemic modal elements in the expression of certainty.

3.1.1. Expression of Certainty through Modal Verbs

There are 7 occurrences of modal auxiliary verbs, out of the total of 23, express certainty, Of course, in the data, modal adjuncts have a higher frequency of occurrence than modal verbs. They have a total of 89 instances in the data. Some examples of the modal auxiliary verbs that express certainty in the speeches are presented for illustration:

1. *Mr Speaker, smaller dams are to be constructed on the Ankobra, Tano and Pra rivers, and negotiations are ongoing with the contractors on the Bui project towards that end. I am confident that the successful implementation of the policy **will** provide the country's energy requirement for Industrialization [4].*
2. *Mr Speaker, under the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, it is to be noted that no office, appointive or elective, **may** be encumbered forever by any one person [4].*
3. *Currently, the government's policy is towards value-addition and is therefore welcoming both local and foreign investors into the sector. It **may** prove to be a long-awaited opportunity to transform and modernize the rural economy through mechanization [31].*
4. *Still, within the limits of the law, political parties **may** run their campaign in any manner that they choose [4].*
5. *Mr Speaker, in future, the House **might** consider preparing a comprehensive budget of its needs for funding in the same way as the Judiciary does [31].*
6. *I dare say they **might** do better if they focused more on what they would do differently if they received the people's mandate [4].*
7. *In offering this advice to the House, I am tempted to say it is because "I care for you". The reason **should** be obvious because I was twice elected to the House [31].*

In excerpt 1, the Ex-president uses the modal **will** to express certainty with the reinforcing word 'confidence', by saying that successful implementation of the Bui project policy would "provide the country's energy requirement..." It has just 1 occurrence in the data for expression of certainty. This expression shows that he was committed to the truth of the statement and was sure of his promises, plans and expectations. Conversely, the use of '**would**' in any of these contexts would have indicated that he was unsure or uncertain about the truth of his propositions.

Some scholars have even pointed out that the meanings of modal verbs are, sometimes, reinforced by other modality elements such as modal adjectives and modal adverbs. This is commonly called 'modal harmonization' or 'modality harmonic' [16].

This explains how the modal auxiliary and other words express nearly the same degree of modality in the clause. In an earlier work, a researcher calls two harmonic forms as 'mutually reinforcing' [25]. Some examples of modal items that reinforce **will** in conveying certainty meanings are listed as follows: 'confident', 'certainly', 'never', 'continue,' and so on.

When this happens, the speaker assumes a posture of certainty in the proposition he or she makes. It can be observed from the data that **will** combine with other modal items to reinforce the modality of 'certainty'. It must be pointed out that the certainty of a speaker of an assertion can also be identified contextually when one is able to identify the commitment of the speaker to the proposition. In sum, the modal **will** express the Ex-president's attitude toward the factuality of the situation (i.e. the fact that implementation of the smaller dams' policy could provide energy requirements for industrialization). He indicates the likelihood or certainty that smaller dams' policy would be able to provide the country's energy requirement. Modal **will**, therefore, expresses the notion of certainty.

In excerpt 2, the Ex-president reminded the Parliament that per the Constitution, no political office of any form could be held forever by any one person. In this case, a modal

may be used to express a level of certainty of such a situation. The use of **may**, therefore, leaves room for other possible situations. For example, there could be a case where a citizen is appointed as a permanent representative to the United Nations or a constitutional amendment to that effect could be possible. Politicians use this strategy so that they are not found unreliable should a situation change with time or context.

It is observed from the data that in most of the instances where a modal **may** be used, it expresses the certainty of the possibility of an action. Similarly, in excerpt 3, the Ex-president shows some level of certainty of possibility about the fact that 'value-addition' could be the welcoming policy that could modernize and transform the economy.

May, in this context, indicates the certainty of the possibility of "value-addition" being able to "transform and modernize the rural economy through mechanization." The use of the expression, "value addition...may prove to belong-awaited opportunity..." can be paraphrased as "It is possible the case that "value addition" could be a welcoming chance ..."

In view of this, the Ex-president indicates that he was certain of the possibility of the situation described above. It is possible to indicate the concept of possibility using the modal verbs **may** and **might** [11]. He illustrates this point with the following sentences:

- He may be hiding somewhere.
- He might be hiding somewhere.

He indicates that the main modal meaning conveyed by the modals in these two sentences is one of possibility even though each sentence is slightly different in meaning. In his own words, "'might' is used exactly as 'may' is. It merely indicates a little less certainty about the possibility." [11].

In excerpt 4, The Ex-president can be paraphrased as saying, 'I am certainty that once political parties will function within the confines of the law, there is a possibility for them to manage their campaign in any way that they choose. This implies that modal **may** be used to imply certainty of the potentiality (limited possibility) or authority to do something. It is observed that in the context of this excerpt 4, modal **may** is frequently the same as qualifying a statement with the word **perhaps**.

In excerpt 5, modal **might** is used to express a low level of certainty. **Might** is used as the past modal form of **may**, which expresses remote possibility. However, **might** is also used in its own right as a present tense modal [26]. A similar study also posits that **might**, for instance, expresses epistemic 'possibility' not just as the past form of **may** [24]. In this excerpt, the Ex-president expresses the idea that he was certain of the possibility in future that Parliament could consider preparing the budget for its needs for funding much the same way as the judiciary did. He uses the modal **might** to indicate the idea of certainty of the possibility of this process or action by Parliament. In excerpt 6, the former president again expresses a low level of certainty when he uses **might** to express his opinion. He said that had the other political parties focused more on what they would do differently if the people voted for them, they could do better (but this never occurred anyway). This expression of this level of certainty hinges on a condition which had not been fulfilled. Therefore, the implication of **might** in this context can also be described as unreal because the situation that could be possible was conditional and had not, in fact, occurred. We use '**might**' to talk about situations which were not real, especially, when we have low certainty towards a proposition that does not come to reality because it first depends on the fulfilment of another condition. In short, modal **might** be used to express an unreal possibility in the past.

In example 7, The Ex-president opined that there should not be any doubt that he was very much concerned with the welfare of Parliament because he was "twice elected to the House." In an epistemic sense, **should** is used to make an assumption about what is probably true, if everything is as we expect. The Ex-president, therefore, was not in

doubt about the proposition and expected so from the House as he quoted the popular “I care for you” mantra to buttress his certainty of the proposition.

3.1.2. Expression of Certainty through Modal Adjuncts

Modal adjuncts include both mood and comment adjuncts [32]. In this study, however, modal adjuncts of temporality, and intensity, which have epistemic notions are the types investigated. Comment adjuncts such as ‘beyond doubt’, ‘no doubt’, and ‘undeniable fact’, which are found in this study are negligible in the data. They are not analysed because they may not have any significant impact worth investigating. Certainty is expressed through modal adjuncts (modal adverbs), with frequency occurrences of 7 in the expression of certainty and 2 cases of uncertainty. The following are examples of modal adjuncts for illustration:

Clearly, the institutions that should have acted as watchdogs to confront the problems of inefficiency and corruption as they arose, failed catastrophically [31].

It has taken us a long and sometimes tortuous route, but by this historic vote, we, as a nation have made that choice. We have tried other options and we have now stated **clearly** what we want. [31]. Ghanaians are displaying a strong yearning to be the best or with the best in Africa, as was manifested **clearly** during the just-ended soccer Tournament [4].

The word **clearly** as used in excerpts 1 and 2 means ‘without any doubt,’ ‘obviously’ or ‘with certainty’. In excerpt 1, the Ex-president expresses the fact that he has no doubt in his mind about institutional failure to prevent ‘inefficiency’ and ‘corruption’ in the system when they emerged, adding that such institutions had failed woefully. He uses “catastrophically” to indicate the abysmal level of failure by the mandated institutions. He uses **clearly**, to express his certainty of the glaring failure of the ‘watchdog institutions’ which should have fought against ‘inefficiency and corruption as they arose’ in the country. Excerpt 2 can also be paraphrased as ‘undoubtedly, we have stated, through the peaceful democratic elections the form of government that we want (i.e. democratic government)

In excerpt 3, the Ex-president expresses his evaluation of the way Ghanaians displayed their willingness to “be the best or with the best in Africa” through a soccer Tournament held a few days earlier. The Ex-president expresses the notion of certainty with the use of **clearly** (i.e. without doubt) his opinion that Ghanaians had always wanted to be their best or with the best in Africa. Thus, to him, this was obvious, without a doubt.

3.2. Expression of Uncertainty by Modal Adjuncts

An expression of uncertainty indicates that the speaker is not sure of his statement, and is not committed to its proposition. There were only 2 occurrences of uncertainty expressed through only modal adjuncts in the data. In the data, there is no occurrence of uncertainty through modal auxiliary verbs. The following are the examples of the 2 instances of occurrence for illustration.

The uncertainty notion is expressed by modal adjuncts alone in the speeches. There was no occurrence of a modal verb that expresses uncertainty in the data. There are only 2 cases of occurrences of modal adjuncts in that direction. Excerpts from the texts are presented below:

1. *The financial sector, **perhaps** the most vibrant, continues to do well, with an influx of many new banks, both local and foreign [4]. Mr Speaker, I was aware at the time of a loan facility of USD 25 million waiting to be utilized. It was only later that I learnt that the loan had been diverted to an **apparently** more urgent purpose by those who secured it [4].*

In example 1, the statement can be paraphrased as ‘the financial sector, (even though I am not quite sure), is the most active and continues to grow, especially, with the emergence of many new banks, both local and foreign. The adjunct **perhaps** is used in the

statement to give an opinion, especially, as the Ex-president does not want to be too definite. This implies that he is not sure that the financial sector was really the most vibrant among all other sectors in the country. He, therefore, expresses some level of lack of confidence in the truth of the statement by using the modal adjunct, “perhaps”.

His statement can also be paraphrased as “it may be true or possible that the financial sector is the most vibrant...” He gave room for other possibilities, knowing too well that there could be a different sector that was rather ‘vibrant.’ In view of this, he used ‘perhaps’ to indicate something that might or might not be true. This shows an expression of uncertainty. In example 2, the Ex-president expressed his uncertainty with the word ‘apparently’, which is used to indicate that he had learnt that a certain loan facility of USD 25 million had been diverted to a more urgent purpose. He expressed a notion of uncertainty because he was not completely sure about it.

3.3. Tentativeness and Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Tentative statements do not make direct, categorical ones. In order to express tentative statements, we use limiting words, modal verbs, and softening or hedging verbs. There were instances where the Ex-president was not straightforward in expressing some statements in the speeches examined. So, in such situations, he was tentative. Among the modality categories investigated, the modal auxiliary verbs were the only category used to express tentativeness with 7 cases out of the total of 23 occurrences as can be seen from Table 1.

Would indicate the past tense form of **will** and past intentions. But it can be used to perform other epistemic functions such as tentativeness as can be observed from the selected speeches. This is what is analysed in the study, and not that of tense past intentions. An example of would expressing past intention of **will** in the study is as follows:

I recall that in my very first Sessional Address, I made a promise that the House **would** be provided adequate resources for its work [4]. Modal auxiliary verbs **would** and **will** be the only modals used primarily to express tentativeness in this work. Previous studies revealed that past forms such as **could** or modal **would** be used to refer to present or future action as a more tentative or more polite alternative to the present tense [33]. The following are examples of tentative expressions for illustrations:

1. *Mr. Speaker, much as I **would** wish not to tread on the prerogatives of either the legislature or the judiciary, I am of the firm conviction that good governance can only be attained if the three arms of government cooperate in the national interest [31]. There are those who **will** want to disturb the peace but we shall not let them kill our dream [31].*

In example 1, the Ex-president would not want to be direct and categorical with his wish as he used a more polite modal verb **would** express this ‘desire’. It is also an observation that the former president used tentativeness to indicate a hypothetical notion. **Would** is used to express a tentative desire in polite requests, offers and invitations. In such uses, hypothetical **would** is often followed by such verbs as ‘like’, ‘want’, ‘love’ and ‘prefer’ [26]. In example 1, the word ‘wish’ can be replaced with ‘want’ or ‘like’, thus, “... I would want / like not to tread on the prerogatives ...” Modal **would** occur 4 times, accounting for 28.58 per cent out of the total occurrences of modal verbs in the sample while there is only 1 modal **will** that expresses tentativeness.

Moreover, the Ex-president wanted to maintain rapport, unity and mutual respect among the three arms of government, he, therefore, said that he would not like to temper the rights of the other arms of government and indirectly appealed for their mutual cooperation for good governance. In order to appear more formal, indirect and polite, a modal **would** be used to express tentativeness in this instance. In example 2, the Ex-president appears hesitant in suggesting that there were still some people who would

want to (or could) bring trouble to society. The expression, “will want...” clearly shows that the Ex-president was not direct but tentative in his stance.

3.3.1. Tentativeness and Politeness

1. *Mr. Speaker, if I **may** now turn briefly to foreign relations; respect for our country shows in the number of international conferences attracted here in recent times [4]. I **would** like to take this opportunity to commend the government’s main social partners – organized labour and employers, for displaying good faith in our relationship over the past seven years [4].*
2. *Mr Speaker, you **will** recall that in this very House, the government announced a programme of five priorities, namely, the following; Vigorous infrastructural development; Modernized agriculture centred on rural development; Enhanced social services delivery, with special emphasis on education and health Good governance; Private Sector development [4].*
3. *Additionally, the country’s dependency on external donor support **would** be reduced, thereby strengthening the self-confidence of the nation and people [4].*

In example 1, the Ex-president appeared to be polite through his use of **may** as he respectfully and formally drew the attention of the House from local issues to “foreign relations.” This formal skill of diverting attention makes him appear not only tentative but also polite, sensitive and sure of communication skills worthy of emulation. In political discourse, politeness is strategically used to substantiate the general objective of legitimizing the political speaker [34]. It follows, therefore, that the Ex-president showed politeness through tentativeness expression in the nation’s addresses in order to receive legitimacy and respect in return.

Example 2, begins with the formal expression, “I **would** like to take this opportunity to commend...” instead of ‘I commend...’ and “the country’s dependency on external donor support would be reduced...” instead of using categorical modal ‘will’ in such a statement. Moreover, most cultures in Ghana require politeness in dealing with certain issues and even personalities [35]. It is likely that this cultural requirement is a recipe for the Ex-president’s use of the epistemic tentative modal **would** from that cultural background.

In fact, the past tense forms “could” and “would” may be used to refer to present or future action “as a more tentative or more polite alternative to the present tense” [33]. Therefore, the likelihood here is that the Ex-president, taking cognizance of this cultural orientation of Ghanaians, though it is a mark of over-generalization, decided to use epistemic **would** as a tentative mode in order to remain in good books of the audience. With this cultural orientation and the political context in mind, for example, straightforward grammatical expressions with the use of **will** appear to be overlooked or disregarded for political and cultural reasons.

The example 3 the tentative contextual use of **will** can be paraphrased as ‘Mr. Speaker, I am sure you **may remember** that in this very House, government announced a programme of five priorities...’ The Ex-president implores the Speaker of Parliament to remember statement with the use of modal ‘will’ tentatively to depict the formal occasion. He reckons that he was appealing to the speaker to recall a statement to buttress his (the latter’s) point, so, he uses **will** to appear uncategory and less coercive. There were situations in which **may** is also used in the speeches but is not used to express a modal notion but a desire or valedictory statement. The following illustrations show a relationship between ‘tentativeness’ explained above and ‘politeness’ in the expression of desire, want or wish:

Mr Speaker, we have an exciting time ahead of us. I urge all well-meaning Ghanaians to join us in moving towards the realization of our common dream of peace, progress and

prosperity. It is within our grasp. **May** God help us all. Thank you [31]. Mr Speaker, I thank you and the House for receiving me. **May** God bless you [4].

In both examples, 1 and 2 above, **may** is used as the formal expression of wish, desire, or valediction, and does not express an epistemic notion. It is a personal farewell after delivering a speech by the Ex-president to Parliament. This has been virtually a ritual after each delivery of a sessional address in Parliament. It is an act of departing politely. Here, “may” is used as a subjunctive verb, and not as a modal auxiliary. There is no permission being asked. This, however, does not fall within the scope of the study.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has made it apparent that the expression of certainty is predominant. The data also indicates that the Ex-president has a greater tendency to use more modal adjuncts followed by the other modal auxiliary verb categories in expressing certainty in the selected State of the Nation Addresses during his State of the Nation Addresses. One question that arises is, why the Ex-president had a greater tendency to express more certainty in his State of the Nation Addresses. The answer is that Ex-president was fully sure and convinced of the information on the nation’s development and future programmes captured in the addresses. Thus, he appeared a confident, trustworthy and knowledgeable leader. Furthermore, the use of epistemic modality in the State of the Nation Addresses is neither haphazard nor coincidental. Instead, it is informed by reason of specific communicative intent.

It is recommended that Public speakers and politicians should take the epistemic markers into consideration when writing the State of the Nation Address or any other texts in order to clarify shared opinion. It is also recommended that public speakers should be cautious to indicate their information sources and how they obtain them. This will help maintain their credibility. It is also recommended that the Faculty of Language of the University of Education of Winneba should consider the concept of epistemic modality as a course of study in all various Language Departments including the Department of Communication Skills. This is to improve documentation such that issues relating to epistemic modality, should be ready or available for studies.

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