

**(Grammatical) Modality Choices and Functions in President Muhammad Buhari's
Address on the Extension of Corona Virus Pandemic Lockdown**

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Abstract

This study explores the discourse functions of grammatical modality choices in President Muhammad Buhari's address on the extension of Coronal virus Pandemic Lockdown. The study is motivated by the dearth of work that exclusively focuses on the Nigerian presidential address on the Coronavirus (Covid-19 pandemic) pandemic most especially from the purview of modality features and functions as an aspect of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It utilised data from President Muhammadu Buhari's address on the extension of Covid- 19 pandemic lockdown given on Monday 13th April 2020. The data was collected from the newspaper publication and analysed using insights from the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) tool of modality. Given the communicative intention of the president and the context in which the modal auxiliaries are used in the address, three categories of modal auxiliaries namely; prediction, possibility and necessity

are found to characterise the data. Prediction modals “will” and “would” are used to perform the discourse functions of informing, acknowledging/appreciating, assuring and persuading/encouraging Nigerians. The possibility modal “can” is used in the functional context of acknowledging and warning. The necessity modal “must” is used in appreciating, instructing/directing, warning and pacifying/encouraging. The study has the potency of complementing existing works on presidential addresses as a genre of political discourse in general. It equally adds to the growing literature on the Covid-19 pandemic discourse in linguistic scholarship. The study concludes that an understanding of modality choices and their discourse functions in the presidential address on the Covid-19 pandemic discourse will enhance a better understanding of the discourse.

Key Words: *Covid-19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Presidential Address, Modality, SFL*

1.0 Introduction

Coronavirus also known as the Covid-19 pandemic is a global health challenge that shook almost all the countries in the globe to their bone marrow. There is no gainsaying the fact that the outbreak of the pandemic has far-reaching effects on virtually every facet of our life including our use of language as new words, terminologies, coinages and expressions keep on coming into a global linguistic landscape (cf. Dada et al, 2021). In a bid to contain the spread of the virus, governments of nations across the globe, following the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) laid down precautionary measures, have adopted quite some strategies aimed at suppressing the spread of the highly contagious virus. Prominent among these are various public announcements given by presidents of countries across the globe to enlighten the public on the novel virus and how to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. All these, among others, constitute the discourses on the pandemic.

Extant literature on Covid-19 pandemic-related discourses reveals that scholars have interrogated the discourses from a wide range of scholarly perspectives using varying approaches and paradigms namely; medical (Bao-Liang et al, 2020, Chaolin, et al, 2020; Kuldeep et al, 2020); epidemiological (Akanbi et al 2020); epidemic psychological (Bisiada 2022); politico-gender (Dada et al., 2021) and linguistic perspectives (e.g. Anyanwu, 2020). Available literature reveals further that within the purview of linguistics, for example, Covid-19 pandemic discourses have

been explored using varying linguistic paradigms namely; discourse analytical (Beach, 2020); Al-Khayyat and Anber, (2020); critical discourse analytical (Kranert et al., 2020); Yeşilyurt (2021), Dezhkameh, Hadidi and Layegh (2021); multimodal critical discourse analytical (Gill and Lenon, 2022), cognitive semantics (Rafał and Ewelina, 2020); cognitive linguistics (Sarfo-Kantankah, Agbaglo and Mensah (2021) cross-cultural linguistics (Ali Khalfallah and Keprianto 2021); pragmatics (Anyanwu and Abana, 2020); Ugoala and Israel (2020)); corpus-based linguistics (Kim Hua, 2020); stylistics (Anyanwu, 2020); metadiscoursal perspective (Aroge and Olayinka, 2020); sociolinguistics (Piller et al. 2020); Applied linguistics (Yeşilyurt, 2021), Neologism and Onomasiology (Asif et al. (mimeo)). Presidential addresses or public speeches on the Covid-19 pandemic have been scarcely studied especially from the purview of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Little works on this discourse are Aroge and Olayinka (2020), Anyanwu and Abana (2020) and Dada et al (2020). Although these studies are somehow related to the present study in terms of data, they are, however, markedly different in certain respects. First, in terms of the theoretical approaches adopted, they are different. Second, while Anyanwu and Abana's (2020) work is a speech act analysis of presidential public speeches, Dada et al (2020) adopt political and gender perspectives in their analysis. Besides, the present study focuses exclusively on the Nigerian presidential address on Covid -19 pandemic while the earlier related studies focus on presidential public speeches around the world. This creates a vacuum in linguistic scholarship (most especially in Nigeria) given that Covid-19 pandemic discourses have been scarcely studied from the purview of modality choices and functions aspects of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Motivated by this vacuum, the present study, therefore, analyses the modality choices and their generic compliant functions in President Muhammad Buhari's address on the extension of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown to reveal President Muhammad Buhari's peculiar ways of using language occasioned by the pandemic ridden communicative situation that he found himself as the president of the country and the need to acquaint the populace of the various measures being put in place to alleviate the problem.

For data, the presidential address given by His Excellency, President Muhammad Buhari on the extension of Covid- 19 pandemic lockdown on Monday 13th April 2020 was collected from the newspaper publication and analysed using insights from the Systemic Functional Linguistic tool of modality. This study is essentially significant in many ways. First, it is valuable in complementing existing works on presidential addresses as a genre of political discourse in

general. The study equally has the potency of adding to the growing literature on the Covid-19 pandemic discourse. While it would extend the frontier of knowledge on linguistic scholarship on presidential speeches, the study equally promises a better understanding of the growing discourses on the global health challenge thus acquitting the populace on the precautionary measures in the era of coronavirus curtailment.

2.0 Presidential Address and Covid-19 Pandemic

Presidential address, within the purview of this study, is conceived as a genre of public speaking which has its origin in classical Greece and Rome where it played a central role in education and civic life (cf. Anyanwu and Abana, 2020:11) As a form of public speaking, presidential address is an address given by the president of a country on matters of public interest. It is used, among others, to review the country's progress, problems and prospects. Through this address, the president of a country who is the head of government also keeps the populace informed of its programmes and aspirations for the country. In a crisis, for example, the president usually takes it upon himself/herself as the statutory responsibility to address the populace especially on what is/are being done to curtail the situation. With this, presidential address plays an important role in the affairs and smooth running of a nation (cf. Ugoala and Peace, 2020: 741).

The outbreak of Coronavirus also known as the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2019 and early 2020 has made it imperative for presidents of countries across the globe to address their citizens to enlighten the citizenry on the nature and severity of the pandemic and the precautionary measures to take to curtail the spread of the virus. This is what Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari has done in the presidential address chosen as data for the present study. Through the address, the Nigerian president, relying on his constitutional power, has deployed language in certain ways to paint a gory picture of the pandemic situation and highlight specific precautionary measures to be adhered to. It is President Muhammadu Buhari's use of language within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic that this study sets out to explore through the linguistic lenses of modality as an aspect of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL). SFL is a theory of language that adopts a sociological and functional-based approach to language study. Considering the sociological and functional interest of systemic grammar, its major concerns, as noted by Berry

(1977:1), are perhaps *behaviour, function and situation*. Systemic Functional Linguistics views language as a form of behaviour which is functional, as something that we do with a purpose or more. This implies that language use is goal-oriented. Besides, it is also interested in language as social semiotics – how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life (Halliday 1978 quoted in Eggins 2004:3). This interest, as noted by Eggins (2004), leads systemic linguists to advance four main theoretical claims about language. These are (i) language use is functional; (ii) its function is to make meanings; (iii) these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged and (iv) the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing. Eggins (2004:3) has summarised these theoretical claims by describing the systemic grammatical approach as a *functional-semantic approach to language*. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is composed of several branches: the concept of language, metafunction, text and context, genre analysis and generic structure potential and its linguistic components. For the present study, we focus on the linguistic components of SFL but with particular attention to modality structure as an aspect of interpersonal metafunction.

Within SFL, choices of meaning are said to be organized into three main components namely; the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (cf. Eggins and Martin 1997:238; Montemayor-Borsinger 2003:39). Language performs ideational metafunction when it is used to organise, understand and express our perception of the world and our consciousness. The interpersonal function is performed whenever language is used to enable us to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitudes and judgments (Bloor and Bloor, 2004:9). The textual metafunction entails the use of language to organise the text itself. It is concerned with organising ideational and interpersonal meanings into the text that is coherent and relevant to their context (what we put first, what comes last; how we introduce characters and keep track of them with pronouns; what we leave implicit and what we spell out) (cf. Eggins and Martin *ibid*:239). The choices of meaning are organised into these three metafunctions. As a theoretical model, SFL emphasises the relationship between form and function, most especially concerning the three metafunctions of language, namely, ideational, interpersonal and textual. To be able to read a text, or listen to it effectively and with understanding, Halliday and Hasan (1991:44) argue that we have to be able

to interpret it in terms of all these metafunctions – Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. Metafunction, according to Halliday and Hasan (1991:44), means that part of the system of a language- the particular semantic and lexico-grammatical resources- that have developed to perform the function in question. Halliday and Hasan (op.cit.) note further that in English (as in every other language), each of these metafunctions makes a clear and distinctive contribution to the grammar. Thus, the three metafunctional categorisations manifest in language use as transitivity, mood and modality.

Concerning the interpersonal metafunction and its realisation in modality structure, scholars have noted that language performs interpersonal function whenever it is used to enable language users (speaker and writer) to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitude and judgments (Bloor and Bloor 2004). Interpersonal function is concerned with organising the social reality of people we interact with (by making statements; asking questions; giving commands; saying how sure we are; saying how we feel about things) (Eggins and Martin 1997:239). It is associated with the interaction between speaker and listener; it involves the grammatical resources for enacting social roles in general, and speech roles in particular, in dialogic interaction: for example, resources for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations. Besides, in interpersonal metafunction, language is a way of acting. It deals with people's use of language to relate to their audience. Kondowe (2014:73) notes that when people communicate, they deliver more than just the content or information; they also communicate their role vis-à-vis their partners in the communicative interaction. In English, interpersonal metafunction is realised in many aspects. Among these are mood choices, modal auxiliaries, personal pronouns and so on.

With consideration for modality choices as one of the major grammatical systems of the interpersonal metafunction, it is important to mention that modality in English and other languages has attracted wide and elaborate attention by scholars from variants of disciplines in the last three decades. Among the disciplines that have contributed to the study of modality are philosophy, discourse analysis and linguistics. For our present engagement, we focus on modality from the linguistic approach. Linguistic studies of modality, as noted by Sulkunen and Torronen (1997:45), can be located in a variety of linguistic sub-disciplines, namely, morphology, syntax, and semantics. According to Lillian (2008:2), morphology describes the lexical forms in which modality is manifested in different languages; syntax describes the

complex syntactic configurations in which modality may be manifested; and semantics identifies modal meanings and explores the variety of ways these meanings may be expressed morphologically, syntactically, phonologically and pragmatically.

The concept of modality is generally defined as the grammaticalisation of a speaker's attitude and opinions. Palmer (1986:14) corroborates this position as he describes modality as the expression of the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding "the contents of the sentence"; and Lyons (1977:452) sees it as the expression of the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding "the proposition that sentence expresses." In Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), modality is mainly located in the interpersonal components of the grammar, and choices in this component are independent of grammatical choices in other components, for example, choices of transitivity in the ideational component (Halliday 2002:200). For Martins and David (2003), modality is a way of introducing attitudinal voice to discourse. It is a resource for grading polarity, for setting up positivity and negativity (Martin and David 2003:49). It is said to be expressed through mood and it complements mood in the construction of interpersonal meanings, especially with varying manifestations in clauses. Available literature reveals that modality may be expressed in the clause through certain types of main verbs as well as through adjectives, adverbs and certain nominalisations. Fowler (1985:73) provides a brief list to illustrate these categories of modals. Modality, according to him, is signified in clauses in a range of linguistic forms such as:

- (i) Modal auxiliary verbs: e.g. may, shall, must, need and others
- (ii) Sentence adverbs: such as probably, certainly, regrettably, etc.
- (iii) Adjectives such as necessary, unfortunate, certain, etc.
- (iv) Some verbs and nominalisations are also essentially modal, e.g. permit, predict, prove, obligation, likelihood, desirability, authority etc.

However, for the present study, we consider and conceive of modality strictly as a venture in modal auxiliary verbs. This is because this study focuses on President Muhammadu Buhari's choices of these modal auxiliaries and their functions in the context of the address on the extension of Covid- 19 Pandemic Lockdown. We, therefore, attempt a brief discussion of modal auxiliary verbs and how they express modality in English discourses.

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

A modal auxiliary verb is a type of auxiliary verb that is used to indicate modality that is, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation etc. Modal auxiliary verbs give more information about the function of the main verbs that follow them. They have a great variety of communicative functions. These range from possibility (“may”) to necessity (“must”). Within these two ranges, two functional divisions have been identified, namely, epistemic and deontic modalities.

Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality refers to the type of knowledge the speaker or writer has about what he is saying or writing. It deals with what the speaker or writer knows about the world. Besides, it implies that the speaker ‘assesses’ the probability that the proposition is true in terms of the modal certainty, probability or possibility (Downing and Locke 1992:332). Seven modal auxiliary verbs that are used to convey epistemic modality meanings are *can, could, may, might, need, will, would*. Specifically, epistemic modality expresses possibility (e.g. may), likelihood, (can, could, might); necessity (e.g. must, should-compulsion, have to); prediction (e.g. will, would), certainty (will, would-weaker certainty); probability (e.g. may, might etc.). Examples below can be considered.

- (i) She can go (ability).
- (ii) You may go (permission).
- (iii) You should go (obligation).
- (iv) You must go (strong obligation).

Deontic Modality

This is concerned with the possibility and necessity in terms of freedom to act (including ability, permission and duty). Deontic modality means more specifically that the speaker or writer ‘intervenes in the speech event by laying obligations or giving permission’ (Downing and Locke 1992:332). Some examples are:

- (i) One *must* look into this matter in detail.
- (ii) *Shall* we negotiate peace now? or
- (iii) This experiment *should* be repeated.

(Downing and Locke 1992:332).

As noted by Halliday (1970:335), deontic modality can be regarded as “a form of participation of the speaker in the speech event.” It plays a significant role in the interpersonal process of

negotiation of meaning. Deontic modality pertains to the use of language to express desires, wants, commands, obligations, undertaking and permission. In other words, deontic modality expresses permission (e.g. *may, can*; *may* is more formal in English than ‘*can*’); obligation-necessity (e.g. *must, should, ought to, have to*); expectations (e.g. *ought to*); advisability (e.g. *ought to*); volitions-desirability (*should, would*) and prohibition (e.g. *must, must not*). It tends to share a great deal with performatives. Palmer (1986:56) points out that “by uttering a modal, a speaker may give permission (*may, can*) and make a promise or threat (*shall*) or lay an obligation (*must*).”

Having conceived of modality strictly as a venture in modal auxiliary verbs in this study, our analysis of modality in the data (presidential address on the extension of covid-19 pandemic) focuses on the speaker’s choices of overt modal auxiliaries and their functions in the presidential address as a genre of political discourse.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Our discussion of the discourse functions of modality choices in the data shall be done for the functions that these modal auxiliaries are used to perform based on the context of use and the communicative intention of the president in giving the address. After all, context plays an indispensable role in text and/or discourse production, consumption and interpretation (cf. Olaniyan, 2019: 81). Three categories of modal auxiliaries are found to characterise the data, namely; prediction modal, necessity modal and possibility modals. These are observed to have been engaged by President Muhammadu Buhari to perform variants of functions necessitated by the communicative situation in which the speaker (i.e. the president) found himself before and during the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. In discussing the modality choices deployed by the president while delivering the speech, we, in the first place, conceptualise each of the modality choices and then pair the modality choices and the functions and these are discussed as follows.

4.1.Prediction Modal(s)

Prediction modals are those modal auxiliaries such as *will* and *would* that express the semantic implication of futurity in the performance of their communicative functions. An example of these modals that are found in the data is ‘*will*’ (prediction modals). In the presidential address on the extension of covid-19 pandemic lockdown, “*will*” is found to have been used generally in the functional contexts of informing Nigerians of the government's efforts towards curbing the

spread of the virus; acknowledging, appreciating, assuring and persuading/ encouraging the Nigerian populace in the wake of the pandemic. These are discussed as follows.

4.1.1 Prediction Modal(s) Explicating Informing Function

As our data reveal, “will” is found to have been used by the president in the functional context of informing. As part of the statutory responsibilities of the president and given the exigency of the covid-19 pandemic and its attendant health risks, President Muhammad Buhari deems it fit to inform the populace of various measures being conceived and intended to be put in place by the government to curb the spread of the pandemic knowing fully well that it would alleviate the fear being entertained by Nigerians. After all, a presidential speech is very important in the affairs and smooth running of a nation (cf. Ugoala and Israel, 2020: 741). In the address, the president informed the populace of the government's decisions, among others, to extend the lockdown and the effects that it would have on the generality of Nigerians and non-Nigerians resident in the country. The extract below is an instance.

Example 1:

...As your democratically elected leaders, we made this very difficult decision knowing fully well it *will* severely disrupt your livelihoods and bring undue hardship to you, your loved ones and your communities.

In the above extract, the president employs modal auxiliary verbs *will* to inform the people of the effect(s) of the lockdown such as the disruption of livelihoods among others. Another instance of the prediction modal ‘*will*’ employed by the president to further inform the populace of the provisions being made towards curbing the spread of the pandemic is resident in the extract below.

Example 2:

Many State Governments have also made provisions for isolation wards and treatment centres. We *will* also build similar centres near our airports and land borders.

The prediction modal ‘*will*’ employed in the above extract is being used to inform the populace of the government’s intention vis-à-vis the provision of basic health facilities to be used in combating the spread of the pandemic. Other instances of the prediction modal used in the context of informing are residents in the data.

4.1.2 Prediction Modal(s) Signifying Appreciating Function

In another context in the address, the prediction modal, ‘will’ is equally found to be used by the president to perform the communicative function of acknowledgement and appreciation. The instances below substantiate this.

Example 3:

I will take this opportunity to recognise the massive support from our traditional rulers, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) during this pandemic.

In example 3 above, the president, through the prediction modal ‘will’ acknowledges the support of Nigerians of various categories most especially, the traditional rulers and religious organisations during the pandemic. Likewise, as the president recognises the roles of Nigerians, he does not fail to appreciate the efforts of the Nigerian populace most especially the health workers. The president further conveys the government’s gratitude to the people with the belief that people would be more motivated in the national struggle against the deadly pandemic. An example of this show of gratitude is resident in the extract below.

Example 4:

You are our heroes and as a nation, we will forever remain grateful for your sacrifice during this very difficult time. More measures to motivate our health care workers are being introduced which we will announce in the coming weeks.

As revealed in the example above, the president does not only express the government's gratitude. He equally, through prediction modal auxiliary verb, ‘will’, informs Nigerians of the planned motivational measures being designed to motivate the Nigerian health workers.

4.1.3. Prediction Modal(s) Showing Assuring Function

Given the severity of the coronavirus pandemic and its attendant health challenges across the globe, the Nigerian government, among the comity of governments of nations, considers it as one of its statutory responsibilities to give the people assurance of its capability to keep the pandemic under control to curb its spread. This assurance which manifests as a promissory note is expressed by the president using the prediction modal, ‘will’ as we have in the example below.

Example 5:

Using our resources and those provided through donations, we *will* adequately equip and man these centres in the coming weeks.

For the president to further assure Nigerians of the government's readiness and capability to contain the virus, the president emphasises further that:

Example 6:

'...But we *will* be ready for all eventualities.

Our findings reveal further that President Buhari does not only assure Nigerians of the government's capability and readiness to keep the virus at bay. He equally expresses an array of hope of overcoming the pandemic if the people could abide by necessary covid-19 protocols. The extract below substantiates this.

Example 7:

Fellow Nigerians, I have no doubt that by working together and carefully following the rules, we *shall* get over this pandemic and emerge stronger in the end.

This assurance and array of hope given and expressed by the president through the prediction modal, 'shall' have not only projected the government as being concerned, sensitive to and compassionate for the welfare of the entire citizens of Nigeria. They have equally been used to put the pandemic situation under control vis-à-vis the life-threatening dimension and the severity of the virus. Given these series of assurances as contained in the above extracts, President Buhari has not only used language to convey the government's readiness to combat the deadly virus but has equally employed it as an instrument of social control (see Hayakawa, 1974:89). With words, Hayakawa (op.cit.) argues that "we influence and, to a great extent, control future events in the society in which we live".

4.1.4 Prediction Modal Explicating Persuading/Encouraging Function

In furtherance of the government's efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the president does not hesitate to encourage Nigerians to support the government by taking up the responsibility of curbing the spread of the virus. This encouragement is resident in the extract below.

Example 8:

I will therefore take this opportunity to urge you all to notify the relevant authorities if you or your loved ones develop any symptoms. I will also ask our health care professionals to redouble their efforts to identify all suspected cases, bring them into care and prevent transmission to others.

In the above example, the president, using the modal auxiliary verb ‘will’, is persuading Nigerians to take up the responsibility of curtailing the spread of the pandemic by taking certain steps.

4.2 Possibility Modal(s)

Possibility modals are modal auxiliaries that perform the communicative functions of expressing the possibility or likelihood of the occurrence of an event, incidence, phenomenon or state of affairs in the world. Considering their context of use, an example of modal auxiliaries that is found to express the semantic implication of possibility in President Muhammadu Buhari’s address on the extension of the Covid-19 pandemic is ‘can’. This, as our data reveal, is used by the president in different contexts of the address to perform functions such as acknowledging, and warning. These are discussed as follows.

4.2.1 Possibility Modal(s) denoting Acknowledging Function

While acknowledging the effect of the prolonged lockdown on the economy and the people of Nigeria, the president, through the possibility modal auxiliary verb, ‘can’ is mindful of the hardship that the prolonged lockdown has caused. An example of a possibility modal used to perform acknowledging function is exemplified in the extract below.

Example 9:

No country *can* afford the full impact of a sustained restriction of movement on its economy...

In the above example, the possibility modal ‘can’ has been used to acknowledge the enormity of the effect(s) of long-term lockdown and its attendant effects on the socio-economic lives of the Nigerian populace.

4.2.2 Possibility Modal(s) showing Warning Function

In recognition of non-compliance with Covid-19 protocols vis-à-vis the dos and don'ts associated with the pandemic most especially the social distancing order by some sections of Nigerians, the President through the possibility modal, 'can' does not hesitate to warn the few irresponsible Nigerians of the danger associated with non-compliance. An instance of this warning is expressed through the modal auxiliary 'can' in the extract below.

Example 10:

Fellow Nigerians, follow the instructions on social distancing.

The irresponsibility of the few *can* lead to the death of the many.

Your freedom ends where other people's rights begin.

Closely related to the note of warning expressed by the president in the above extract is the expression of hope in the efficacy of compliance with Covid-19 protocols as major means of curbing the spread of the virus. This expression of hope as manifested in the data is substantiated through the use of the possibility modal in the subsection below.

4.2.3 Possibility Modal(s) Expressing Hope Function

While emphasising the efficiency and effectiveness of preventive measures such as the cessation of movement, physical distancing and the prohibition of mass gatherings in preventing the spread of the disease, the president is still hopeful that if these measures are sustained, it is possible to control and contain the spread of the disease. This possibility is expressed in the extract below.

Example 11:

...By sustaining these measures, combined with extensive testing and contact tracing, we *can* take control and limit the spread of the disease. (Our Italics)

While citing other countries abroad such as Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, India and so on that have been on complete lockdown, the president emphasises it through the possibility modal auxiliary verb 'can', that Nigeria and Nigerians cannot afford to relax.

4.3 Necessity Modal(s)

Necessity or obligation modal auxiliary verbs express the communicative function of necessity or strong obligation concerning the performance of an action. It equally expresses the certainty of an event, occurrence or phenomenon. *Must* is an example of modal auxiliary verbs that expresses the semantic implication of necessity or obligation. In the data, the necessity modal

auxiliary verb ‘must’ is found to have been used in the functional contexts of directing, appreciating, warning and pacifying or encouraging. These are discussed as follows.

4.3.1 Necessity Modal (s) and Instructing/Directing Function

Given the government's recognition of the increase in the number of confirmed cases of covid-19 most especially in our communities, through a person-to-person contacts as contained in the information made available to the presidency by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the president, through the modal auxiliary verb ‘must’ expresses the necessity of quick intervention towards curbing further spread of the pandemic. This is evident in the extract below:

Example 12:

....So we *must* pay attention to the danger of close contact between person- to -person.

The necessity modal, ‘must’ in the above example has been employed by the president to emphasise the need for Nigerians to maintain social distancing which is believed to be one of the measures that have the potency of curbing the spread of the pandemic.

4.3.2 Necessity Modal(s) Explicating Appreciating Function

The president considers it necessary to show appreciation for the support and cooperation enjoyed by various categories of Nigerians for their sensitisation efforts towards creating awareness for the presence, and severity of the coronavirus and the efforts being made towards curtailing the spread of the disease. The extract below instantiates the context in which the necessity modal, *must*, is used to perform an appreciating function.

Example 13:

(a) I *must* also thank the media houses, celebrities and other public figures for the great work they are doing in sensitizing our citizens on hygienic practices, social distancing and issues associated with social gatherings

As President Buhari assures Nigerians of his government's readiness to take necessary measures towards alleviating the suffering that people might be passing through during the Covid-19 pandemic, he equally appreciates the efforts, supports and donations of well-meaning Nigerians during the difficult time. The extract below conveys the government’s appreciation through the necessity modal verb ‘must’.

(b) I *must* also thank the Legislative arm of Government

for all its support and donations in this very difficult period.This collaboration is critical to the short and long-term success of all the measures that we have instituted in response to the pandemic.

In (b) above, the president appreciates the support of the legislative arm of government as a complementary effort towards curtailing the deadly virus.

4.3.3 Necessity Modal(s) Denoting Warning Function

As much as the president (government) recognises the effect of the lockdown on people, most especially ‘those who earn a daily wage such as traders - day workers’ artisans and manual workers and so on...’, the government is equally conscious of the danger which the suspension of the lockdown may pose on the health of the generality of the populace. The awareness is expressed by President Buhari through the necessity modal as he warns them in the extract below.

Example 14:

...But despite these realities, we *must* not change the restrictions.

In consonance with the government's recognition of the danger inherent in suspending the lockdown, President Muhammadu Buhari through the necessity modal ‘must’ reiterates the necessity involved in the sustenance of the lockdown till a time it will be safe to change the scenario. This has no doubt shown the government as a sensitive government that is concerned with the plight of the populace concerning the health hazard associated with the pandemic.

4.3.4 Necessity Modal(s) revealing Pacifying/Encouraging Function

The necessity modal, ‘must’ is used to perform the pacifying or encouraging function in the context of President Buhari’s address in recognition of the hardship being experienced by the Nigerian populace in respect of the Covid-19 lockdown. An instance of this is found in the extract below.

Example 15:

We ***must*** not lose the gains achieved thus far.

We ***must*** not allow a rapid increase in

community transmission. We **must** endure
a little longer.

As the president employs the modal auxiliary verb ‘must’ to pacify Nigerians on the hard time being experienced over the movement restriction imposed, he equally encourages them to endure for a while more as the government is making all efforts to curtail the spread of the virus and alleviate the suffering of the masses.

5.0 Conclusion

The foregoing has analysed the modality choices and functions in President Muhammad Buhari’s address on the extension of Covid- 19 pandemic lockdown. The analysis focuses on the functions that modal auxiliary verbs are used to perform in the context of the presidential address. Three categories of modal auxiliaries, namely; prediction, possibility and necessity modals are found to characterise the data but prediction modals are predominantly used in the presidential address. One variant of the prediction modal *will* is found to characterise the address. Findings further reveal that the prediction modal *will* is used to perform the contextual functions of informing the populace, giving assurance, acknowledging or appreciating Nigerians and persuading and encouraging Nigerians to endure the hardship of lockdown. The possibility modal *can* is used in expressing warning on the danger of contravening the covid-19 protocols; acknowledging the support of Nigerians and expressing hope of ending the pandemic if necessary measures are taken. The necessity modal *must* is used by the president in issuing warnings, giving instructions to and directing the populace on required measures, appreciating the roles of well-meaning Nigerians and finally pacifying and encouraging Nigerians to endure for a while as the pandemic lockdown is extended.

Apart from complementing extant studies on coronavirus in linguistic scholarship in particular and presidential addresses as a genre of political discourse in general, this study contends that knowing the modality choices and their discourse functions in the presidential address of this nature has the potency of enhancing a better understanding of the discourse. Besides, this research has equally provided useful insights into the roles of modal auxiliary verbs in Coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemic-related issues. The analysis of the modality choices and functions in presidential addresses will no doubt orient budding politicians and intending leaders

to the basic kinds of modal auxiliaries required for speech delivery most especially in crisis-ridden situations such as the coronavirus pandemic lockdown. After all, language is an instrument of social control (cf. Hayakawa,1974:89). The study concludes that an understanding of modality choices and their discourse functions will impact positively effective speech delivery.

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