

## *Original Paper*

# Language as Action: A Discourse-Stylistic Analysis of Mood Features in Michelle Obama's Final Speech

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper aims to examine the stylistic effect of the mood features in Michelle Obama's final address to the Americans. Anchored on Systemic Functional Linguistics and Discourse Stylistics, it basically focuses on the mood structures and the modality types registered in the speech. The findings disclose that the then U.S. first lady relies more on declarative mood and deontic modality to convey her message. The study thus infers that in her final message to her country citizens, Michelle Obama concentrates on action clauses and behaves as advisor towards women and men, as well as young and adults.*

### ***Keywords***

*discourse stylistics, interpersonal meaning, modality, mood, Systemic Functional Linguistics*

## **1. Introduction**

According to Halliday (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), language is used to perform two main functions: (i) to set social relations between interactants, i.e., language as action; and (ii) to reproduce our experience, i.e., language as reflection. The present study sets out to demonstrate how language is organized to fulfil the first function. Concretely, it undertakes an inquiry into mood features in/of a (political) discourse, namely that of the U.S. former first lady, Michelle Obama's final speech to the Americans. The research essay majorly seeks to look at how language, as a realization, expresses the way of speaking of participants and their roles, judgements and attitudes in specific discourse contexts. In view to reaching that objective, it is deemed convenient to apply Systemic Functional

Linguistics (SFL), and more precisely, the discourse-stylistics aspect of it, to the investigation. The choice of this linguistic approach stems from the fact that it serves to examine what is communicated (i.e., discourse) and how it is communicated (i.e., stylistics). Beforehand, it is of utmost importance to touch on the theories referred to in the frame of this study.

## 2. Theoretical Assumptions

The focal theory the current research work revolves around is, as earlier stated, the discourse stylistics. To showcase how this theoretical framework manifests itself in the speech acts deployed by Michelle Obama, it is assumed suitable to apply the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to her address. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a few pieces of information on the tenets about those two theories.

### 2.1 The Discourse Stylistics Approach

As can be guessed from the wording of the compound noun Discourse Stylistics, there is a dialectical relationship between Discourse and Stylistics. As a matter of fact, while Discourse indicates communication or speech, Stylistics is viewed as the study of the pattern and style of what is communicated. However, in order to better work out the meaning of the concept Discourse Stylistics, it is suitable to seek to understand the deep meaning of each of its two constituent components. Indeed, discourse can be thought of as the linguistic message addressers construct for addressees to be interpreted. Drawing on this, G. Brown and G. Yule (1983, p. 1) argue that “the analysis of **discourse** is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use” (authors’ emphasis). As for B. Paltridge (2012, p. 2), he elaborates and maintains that discourse analysis considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It follows from this two views. First, discourse production and interpretation varies according to the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. Second, while carrying out an analysis of a given discourse, one is committed to investigating the way “language is maneuvered to make meaning” (L. Zequan, 2003). This entails then that a discourse analyst can be interested in analyzing the stylistic features of language.

Though multifariously defined by scholars, **Stylistics** is commonly likened to the study of style. In that sense, G. Leech (2008, p. 54) explains that stylistics is the study of style; of how language use varies according to varying circumstances. As for R. Chaptman (1973, p. 21), the linguistic study of styles is called stylistics. Building on this, E. A. Jaafar (2014, p. 239) submits that stylistics can function as a bridging discipline between literary and linguistic courses. In that regard, H. G. Widdowson (1975, p. 3) highlights that stylistics involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests: the “style” component relating it to the former and the “istics” component to the latter.

From the foregoing clarifications, it is crystal clear that the close connection earlier stated between discourse and stylistics appears more than obvious. That’s why, S. C. Opara (2005, as cited in E. Yeibo, p. 198) explains the relationship encoded in the double-barreled model in the following terms:

*Discourse Analysis and Stylistics are broad-based disciplines which deal with the functional aspects of language. While D. A. analyses what is communicated in Discourse, Stylistics analyses how it is*

*communicated. The two disciplines often interact with each other. Thus Discourse-Stylistics is concerned with the analysis of communication to reveal its function, using various tools of interpretation including textual peculiarities. Such analysis enables us to appreciate style.*

It can be inferred from the foregoing statement that doing Discourse Stylistic Analysis or Linguistics Stylistics [to use Halliday (2002)'s terms] entails applying linguistic theories and models to a language use or discourse in order to exude its meaning or function. And the linguistic approach which best suits the current research enterprise is, in our utmost conviction, the systemic functional linguistics because "functional grammar", D. G. Butt and A. Lukin (2009, p. 195) sustain, "is a necessary tool for [discourse] stylistics enquiry". In the following, we shall be providing a glimpse at the linguistic perspective which underpins this scholarly paper.

## *2.2 From a Sketchy Background Information on SFL to Interpersonal Meaning*

The theoretical model of this study, viz., the SFL, is a general linguistic resource which views language as a potential semiotic system for making meaning. Developed in the 1960s by M.A.K. Halliday and his associates (Hasan, Martin, Matthiessen, Butt, etc.), SFL is a social theory which considers meaning and use as central features of language. For T. Bloor and M. Bloor (2004, p. 3), the *theory of language* followed in SFL involves the idea that a language consists of a set of systems, which offer the speaker (or writer) an unlimited choice of ways of creating meanings. It stands thus to reason that "Halliday's approach to grammar", as M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan (1985/1989, p.ix) put it, "is a semantically driven grammar". This means, in other words, that in the Hallidayan perspective, there is no dissociation of "grammar" on the one hand and "semantics" or meaning on the other. Therefore, S. Suzanne (2004, p. 11) states that the overall purpose of language, can be described as a semantic one, and each text we participate in is a record of the meanings that have been made in a particular context. In that regard, she cogently contends that language use is functional, semantic, contextual and semiotic, before describing the systemic approach as a *functional-semantic* approach to language (S. Suzanne, *ibid*, p. 3).

C. M. I. M. Matthiessen (2009, p. 12) claims that SFL has always been an open dynamic system serving as a **resource** for both **reflection** and **action**. That contention stems, in fact, from M.A.K. Halliday's (1994, 2004) assertion that language is organized around two main kinds of meaning: an ideational meaning or reflection, and an interpersonal meaning or action. Indeed, in Halliday's view, we use language basically to construe experience and to enact social processes. Note, however, that these two functions are completed by a third one, the textual function (or enabling function) which relates to the construction of text. To each function (also called metafunction) is given a label. Thus, language is diversified functionally into three simultaneous modes of meaning: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This study is going to concentrate on only one metafunction, viz., the interpersonal metafunction.

The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the interaction between speaker and listener. According to G. Thompson (2014, p. 45), one of the main purposes of communicating is to interact

with other people: to establish and maintain appropriate personal and social links with them. Taking account of this fact, M.A.K.Halliday and C.M.I.M. Matthiessen (2004, p. 61) argue that the interpersonal metafunction is “clause as exchange” that enacts social roles and relations. Quoting Yuliati (2013, p. 52), L. Koussouhon, K. I. Kouchade and F. Amoussou (2016, p. 157) maintain that the interpersonal meaning is realized in wordings through Mood and modality and is centrally influenced by tenor of discourse.

Apprehended as the organization of a set of functional constituents (Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement, Adjunct) and their configuration, the Mood structure is classified into four main speech functions (statement, command, offer, and question) correspondingly associated with the typical clause Mood of declarative, imperative, modulated interrogative, and interrogative (S. Eggins, 1994, pp. 152-153). It should be emphasized here that in the system of Mood a major clause is either indicative or imperative. If indicative, it is either declarative or interrogative; if interrogative, it is either ‘yes/no’ interrogative or ‘WH’ interrogative (M.A.K.Halliday & C.M.I.M. Matthiessen, 2004, p. 72; R. A. Adejare, 2013, p. 25).

As far as Modality is concerned, L. Fontaine (2013, p. 120) quoting Halliday and Matthiessen (1999, p. 526), writes that it “is a rich resource for speakers to intrude their own views into the discourse: their assessments of what is likely or typical, their judgements of the rights and wrongs of the situation and of where other people stand in this regard”. Simply defined, Modality could be thought of as the space between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ (G. Thompson, p. 69). Expounding on the foregoing, M.A.K.Halliday & C.M.I.M. Matthiessen (2014, p. 691) explain that modality refers to the area of meaning that lies between yes and no—the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity. Modality is generally expressed on two main axes called epistemic modality and deontic modality.

Epistemic modality (also called modalization) has to do with the scales of probability and usuality, while deontic modality (also known as modulation) denotes the scales of obligation and inclination. In the light of the foregoing development on the functional theory, as well as the interpersonal meaning, one can claim to be quite well equipped to appropriately indulge in a stylistics analysis on the text at stake.

### **3. A Practical Discourse Stylistics Analysis of Michelle Obama’S Speech**

To begin with, it is paramount to stress that a stylistic enquiry does not only focus interpretation of discourse on “subjective/impressionistic/mentalist judgements”, but it also majorly provides evidences from linguistic data. From this contention, and taking into account the constituents of Mood as explained above, it is reasonable to embark on the present analysis by the Mood types recorded in the speech, before dealing with the Modality types. At last, considering the length of the speech, we purposely decide to make the analysis only qualitative.

### 3.1 Mood Types

#### 3.1.1 Indicative Mood

The two indicative Mood constituents, that is, declarative Mood and Interrogative Mood, are all registered in the discourse.

##### 3.1.1.1 Declarative Mood

Although no specific numerical data are provided, it is obviously discovered in the speech that declarative clauses are typically foregrounded as they are the most predominantly deployed. Instances of declarative clauses are typified below:

DM<sub>1</sub>: These are the fine women, and a few good men.

DM<sub>2</sub>: And I want to start by thanking Terri for that wonderful introduction...

DM<sub>3</sub>: And I want to take a moment to acknowledge a few people who are here.

DM<sub>4</sub>: I want to take this time to thank you both publicly for your dedication and your leadership and friendship.

DM<sub>5</sub>: And all these folks are here because they're using their star power to inspire our young people.

DM<sub>6</sub>: Eric is acting like he's a ham

DM<sub>7</sub>: ...he tries to pretend like he doesn't exist at all.

DM<sub>8</sub>: These individuals, they are brilliant. They are creative.

DM<sub>9</sub>: So we decided to flip the script and shine a big, bright spotlight on all things educational.

DM<sub>10</sub>: Next, we launched Better Make Room.

DM<sub>11</sub>: We doubled investments in Pell grants and college tax credits.

DM<sub>12</sub>: She said, "Mrs. Tchorzynski is my lifesaver".

DM<sub>13</sub>: You see the promise in each of your students.

DM<sub>14</sub>: But with a lot of hard work and a good education, anything is possible-even becoming President. As is obvious from the list above, all the clauses are full declaratives. This suggests that although it is a spoken text, it has all the same been well elaborated as a written discourse. Another striking observation is that each clause provides information about something, which denotes that Michelle Obama chiefly takes on the role of "*information processor and deliverer*" [to use H. Feng & Y. Liu (2010, p. 828)'s terms]. For instance, while the orator is informing the audience in DM<sub>1</sub> that the women and the few good men who came to listen to her final remarks are 'fine', she argues in DM<sub>8</sub> that the people she's just named (Eric, Stephanie, Greg) are 'brilliant' and 'creative'. Notice in the latter clause the particular foregrounding through the use of the demonstrative adjective 'these' + the noun 'individuals', the two items replaced by the person deixis 'they' after a comma.

DM<sub>9</sub>, DM<sub>10</sub>, DM<sub>11</sub> are three clauses about the basic objective the Obamas have set out to achieve, that is winning the war against ignorance through education. Hence, while DM<sub>9</sub> expresses their intention to impact significantly the educational sector, DM<sub>10</sub> and DM<sub>11</sub> respectively exhibit concrete actions carried out, viz., launching Better Make Room (a social campaign to give young people the support and inspiration to complete higher education), and investing more "to make higher education more

affordable”. Notice also here that the logical connector ‘next’ in the beginning of DM<sub>10</sub> proves that although we are dealing with a spoken interaction, the text was previously rehearsed to make it sound like a formal written one.

DM<sub>2</sub>, DM<sub>3</sub>, DM<sub>4</sub> rather highlight the speaker’s intentions about what she’s going to say. This is signaled in each of them by the mental performative verb ‘want’ preceded by the first personal pronoun ‘I’, anaphorically representing the speech deliverer. Syntactically those declarative clauses are characterized by a salient stylistic feature: parallelism. As a matter of fact, all of them are all built on the structure ‘I want to + BV, with BV standing for an action verb.

A perfunctory look at DM<sub>6</sub> and DM<sub>7</sub> exudes a remarkable rhetorical figure, that is, *simile*. According to A. K. Olusola (2016, p. 76), simile is a figurative expression that focuses on direct comparison through the use of ‘as’ and ‘like’. While Eric is equated with ‘a ham’ in DM<sub>6</sub> because of the way he is behaving, Stephanie (anaphorically referred to as ‘he’) is compared in DM<sub>7</sub> to someone who feigns not to exist at all. In both cases, Michelle succeeds in doing the comparison through the use of ‘like’.

DM<sub>7</sub> is a particular clause from the list. It is a statement by someone else, restated by the addressor. It is commonly known as ‘direct speech’, and quotes here the speech or locution by Kyria (referred to by ‘she’) who has witnessed the advantage she gets from education. According to her, Mrs. Tchorzynski, her educator, is perceived as her lifesaver. Needless to underscore the *metaphoric stylistic device* deployed in this clause to achieve the comparison, that is, Mrs. Tchorzynski likened to a lifesaver.

At last, DM<sub>13</sub> indicates one more or less perceptible impact of educational investment on the youth, while DM<sub>14</sub> is uttered to give the audience hope. In fact, through the use of the mental perceptive verb ‘see’ in DM<sub>13</sub> Michelle Obama is directing parents’ attention to the way they realize or picturize, thanks to education, the promising future of their offspring. This ultimately brings her in the last selected clause to assert that “with a lot of hard work and a good education, anything is possible-even becoming President”. Besides the use of those various declaratives, the speaker also employs interrogatives in her address.

### 3.1.1.2 Interrogative Mood

**Table 1. Interrogative Mood in Michelle Obama’s Speech**

WH-Interrogative	Polar Interrogative
IM <sub>1</sub> : What’s going on?	IM <sub>4</sub> : You hear me?
IM <sub>2</sub> : “Well, where are you going to be?”	IM <sub>5</sub> : “Can you come? Can you come here? Can you do this? Can you take that? Can you ask for that? Can you come? Can we trap? Can we sing?”
IM <sub>3</sub> : Where is Eric?	IM <sub>6</sub> : You hear me, Young people?

Like declarative clauses, interrogative Mood is also recorded in the speech. Though interrogative clauses are not so numerous as the previous ones, they are not tiny. Incidences of them are exemplified in the table below:

A cursory look at Table 1 above discloses two types of interrogative mood: WH-interrogative and polar interrogative. As argued by M.A.K Halliday and C.M.I.M. Matthiessen (2004, p. 134), WH-interrogatives function in the speech “to specify the entity that the questioner wishes to have”. And that entity in IM<sub>1</sub> is the thing that is going on, while it refers to the place “these folks” are going to be and Eric is in IM<sub>2</sub> and IM<sub>3</sub> correspondingly.

As for polar interrogatives, they give rise to the answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and are usually of the type F<sup>S</sup>P, with F standing for Finite, S for Subject and P for Predicator. IM<sub>5</sub> lucidly proves this with ‘can’ referring to F, ‘you’ to S and ‘come’/’do’/’trap’/’sing’ to P. It is however of note to underline the intentional *parallelism* in the structure of those successive clauses. As far as IM<sub>4</sub> and IM<sub>6</sub> are concerned, they are atypical clauses as they are declarative clauses phonologically realized as interrogatives, that is, they are of the type S<sup>F</sup>P, with F conflated to P. They are, in R. A. Adejare (2013, p. 30)’s words, called ‘*echo questions*’. All those interrogative sentences are used concomitantly with imperative ones.

### 3.1.2 Imperative Mood

**Table 2. Imperative Mood in Michelle Obama’s Speech**

Positive imperative	Negative imperative
Imp M <sub>3</sub> : Be focused, be determined, be hopeful, be empowered.	Imp M <sub>1</sub> : ...don’t be afraid.
Imp M <sub>5</sub> : You guys, that’s a command-rest yourselves.	Imp M <sub>2</sub> : Young people, don’t be afraid.
Imp M <sub>6</sub> : Keep it down. Keep it together, ladies.	Imp M <sub>4</sub> : Do not ever let anyone make you feel like you don’t matter.
Imp M <sub>7</sub> : So let’s give them a round of applause.	Imp M <sub>5</sub> : Lead by example with hope, never fear.
Imp M <sub>8</sub> : Because let’s be honest	
Imp M <sub>9</sub> : You’ve got to step out.	
Imp M <sub>10</sub> : If you are a person of faith, know that religious diversity is a great American tradition, too.	
Imp M <sub>12</sub> : Empower yourselves with a good education, then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise.	

The last sub-category of Mood structure, i.e., imperative Mood is also counted in Michelle Obama’s address. Contrary to the foregoing Mood type, Imperative Mood are significantly used in the speech. Occurrences of them are epitomized in the table beneath.

Imperatives in Table 2 above are made of two kinds: positive imperative and negative imperative. Positive imperative clauses are of the ‘you’ type (Imp M<sub>3</sub>, M<sub>5</sub>, M<sub>6</sub>, M<sub>9</sub>, M<sub>10</sub>, M<sub>12</sub>), or ‘you-and-me’ type (Imp M<sub>7</sub> and M<sub>8</sub>). They all refer to orders given by the speaker for the performance of specific actions or for keeping a given state of mind. For instance, young people are asked in Imp M<sub>3</sub> to “be focused, be determined, be hopeful, be empowered”. This set of orders give an *aesthetic rhythmic feature* to the speech. The same artistic meaning is conveyed in Imp M<sub>6</sub> where the orator is inviting the ladies to sit down. Notice here that the use of the vocative ‘ladies’ at the end of the clause enhances an equal, or better a friendly relationship between the then first lady and her audience. Imp M<sub>12</sub> is made of three successive orders (“empower yourselves”, “get out there” and “use that education”) linked by an extension relationship introduced by the coordinators ‘then’ and ‘and’. They all function as advice given to youth about the utility education could be for them. As for Imp M<sub>10</sub>, it is an order inserted in a hypotactic clause complex (or dependent clauses) to state that ‘if’ the condition of being “a person of faith” is fulfilled, you have to “know that religious diversity is a great American tradition, too”.

Unlike the clauses thus far studied, Imp M<sub>7</sub> and M<sub>8</sub> imply the commitment of both the addressor and the addressees; that is, Michelle is also concerned with “giv[ing] them a round of applause” and “be[ing] honest”. Such kinds of order are known as *suggestions* or *jussive inclusives* in Osisanwo (2003, cited in E. Yeibo, 2011, p. 201)’s terms. It is however important to emphasize at this stage that the use of the continuity and conjunctive adjuncts (‘so’ and ‘because’ respectively) in the beginning of those clauses is revelatory of the spoken mode of the text at stake.

In Imp M<sub>5</sub>, the directive speech act “rest yourselves” has been foregrounded through the explicit performative clause “that’s a command”, preceded by the vocative “you guys” (a slangy feature which evokes familiarity or endearment). Last but not least in this category of positive imperatives is Imp M<sub>9</sub>, an atypical imperative clause which, on the surface has the configuration of declarative mood type. Indeed, in saying “you’ve got to step out”, the speaker is uttering not a statement, but an order (pragmatically designated under the label ‘indirect speech act’) to make Eric come to her.

Turning to the last category of imperative mood, i.e., negative imperatives, they are of the type don’t + Predicator as disclosed in Imp M<sub>1</sub> & M<sub>2</sub>. In fact, telling young people not to be afraid amount to preventing them from letting themselves to fear. Those clauses serve then to express *prohibition*. Through Imp M<sub>4</sub> youngsters are strictly forbidden to “let anyone make” them believe they “don’t matter” at all, while Imp M<sub>5</sub> is designed to telling them that armed with hope, they must “never fear”. The next subsection will be devoted to the exploration of Modality patterns encoded in the speech.

### 3.2 Modality Types

The two categories of Modality types are all deployed by the orator. As has been done with the mood structure, Modality configuration will be studied starting with the first one dealt with at the theoretical stage; that is, Epistemic Modality.



## 3.2.1 Epistemic Modality

**Table 3. Epistemic Modality in Michelle Obama's Speech**

Degree of probability	Degree of usuality
EM <sub>1</sub> : And, <u>may</u> I say for the last time officially, welcome to the White House.	EM <sub>8</sub> : ...something better is <u>always</u> possible
EM <sub>2</sub> : We <u>couldn't</u> do this without the support of the Department of Education.	EM <sub>9</sub> : his kids...have opportunities he <u>never</u> dreamed of.
EM <sub>3</sub> : " <u>Can</u> you come? <u>Can</u> you come here? <u>Can</u> you do this? <u>Can</u> you take that? <u>Can</u> you ask for that? <u>Can</u> you come? <u>Can</u> we trap? <u>Can</u> we sing?	
EM <sub>4</sub> : ...they <u>can't</u> believe in themselves.	
EM <sub>5</sub> : And when you encounter obstacles- because I guarantee you, you <u>will</u> .	
EM <sub>6</sub> : <u>maybe</u> they, too, <u>will</u> be inspired to rise to their best possible selves.	
EM <sub>7</sub> : <u>I hope</u> I've made you proud.	

The two scales of epistemic modality put forth by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 147), viz., probability and usuality, manifest themselves in the speech under study. The table beneath itemizes some occurrences.

It can be deduced from Table 3 above that probability is encoded in the speech in three ways: via (a) finite modal operators such as 'can', 'can't', 'could', 'may', 'will'; (b) mood adjunct of probability: 'maybe', and (c) grammatical metaphor (also called metaphor of probability): 'I hope'. Whatever the modalization marker used to express probability, it is clear that it introduces the speaker's attitude or judgement about the likelihood of the proposition referred to. Thus, 'couldn't' in EM<sub>2</sub> serves as the means whereby Michelle Obama declares it is not likely that the achievement made be a reality "without the support of the Department of Education". Likewise, 'can't' signals in EM<sub>4</sub> the incapacity for young people to "believe in themselves" at times. On the other hand, one is tempted to understand that the orator deploys 'can' in a series of interrogation to seek to know whether her interactants (more explicitly her special guests) are able to perform the actions requested, that is, to 'come', to 'do', to 'take', to 'ask', to 'trap', to 'sing'. In fact, that is, pragmatically speaking, a polite way to invite them to perform those actions. Such succession of indirect speech acts built on a parallel structure not only

aims to indulge into action, but also to yield a poetic effect. While the mood adjunct of probability ‘maybe’ indicates in EM<sub>6</sub> an absence of total assurance about the occurrence of the stated proposition, that is, people’s inspiration “to rise to their best possible selves”, ‘may’ nonetheless exudes the addressee’s permission to “say for the last time officially, welcome to the White House”. On the contrary, the first lady has recourse to ‘will’ in EM<sub>5</sub> to frankly warn her audience about the certainty/confidence that they encounter obstacles. This certitude is stylistically enhanced by the clause “I guarantee you”. Moreover, another cohesive stylistic device characteristic of this clause is perceptible: ellipsis. In fact, the full statement is “you will encounter obstacles”, whereof the Predicator and the complement are left unsaid. This kind of ellipsis is known as verbal ellipsis since it “operate[s] on the verbal group” (L. Koussouhon, P. Akogbeto, & F. Amoussou, 2017, p. 90). At last, Michelle resorts to the grammatical metaphor ‘I hope’ to assert her wish to have “made [her compatriots] proud”. Coming back to usuality, it is noteworthy to argue that it refers to the frequency of propositions. Hence, the American former president’s wife to uses ‘always’ in EM<sub>8</sub> to give her listeners the hope that in every case “something better” undoubtedly befalls people who get stuck to their dream and “fight for it”. By contrast, ‘never’ implies in EM<sub>9</sub> that a *thorough absence* of dream by “my dad” may nevertheless result in certain opportunities for his kids. This, according to the orator, is made possible by his eager commitment to his job, and his faith in life.

### 3.2.2 Deontic Modality

**Table 4. Deontic Modality in Michelle Obama’s Speech**

Degree of obligation	Degree of inclination
DM1: that’s where the spotlight <u>should</u> be	DM <sub>6</sub> : I <u>will</u> be with you
DM <sub>2</sub> : ...they <u>should</u> finally get some recognition.	
DM <sub>3</sub> : And here’s what Kyra <u>had to</u> say.	
DM <sub>4</sub> : Right now, you <u>need to</u> be preparing yourself to add your voice to our national conversation.	
DM <sub>5</sub> : you <u>need to</u> prepare yourself to be informed and engaged as a citizen.	

Like epistemic modality, both sub-categories of deontic modality, i.e., obligation and inclination, are recorded in the address. Tabulated below are some instances.

From Table 4 above, it is crystal clear that obligation is manifested in the speech through *modulated modals* (S. Eggins, 1994/2004) such as ‘should’, ‘had to’, and ‘need to’. These are what Brown (1980, quoted in L. A. Koussouhon & Y. C. Amoussou, 2015, p. 280) calls *strengtheners*. In fact, unlike epistemic modality choices earlier explored, those modal operators disclose a high degree of

confidence in and commitment to the stated actions or proposals. In that perspective, ‘should’ is resorted to in DM<sub>1</sub> & M<sub>2</sub> to point, in that order, to the necessity for the American nation to re-define the direction of the spotlight, and for school counselors to “get some recognition”.

On the other hand, through the finite verbal operator ‘had to’, a moral obligation is assigned to Kyra in DM<sub>3</sub> to say all the benefits she gets from her benefactor Tchorzynski. Meanwhile, ‘need to’ conveys the meaning of the requirement or necessity that everyone gets prepared to have their say in the national affairs, “to be informed and engaged as a citizen”. Finally, the modulated modal ‘will’ uttered in DM<sub>6</sub> is not an expression of obligation whatsoever, but of inclination from the speaker. Actually, Michelle uses that finite to candidly express her commitment to constantly be at their side, to endlessly share their sorrows, their problems, their distresses, their predicaments.

#### **4. Recapitulation of the Findings, Evaluation and Conclusion**

The current study has undertaken a discourse stylistic exploration of Mood features on a public speech, so to speak. It has primarily attempted to probe into Simpson (1993, p. 2)’s assertion that “stylistic techniques can be applied to texts other than those included in the established literary canon”. In that endeavor, after giving a clearer picture of the theoretical assumptions which inform the research work, we strived to showcase, through textual features of Michelle Obama’s final address to the nation, how the mood structures and the modality patterns deployed by the then first lady have been purposely selected to give an aesthetic value to the discourse.

As a matter of fact, the analysis of the speech functions has displayed the presence of both the indicative and the imperative moods. Concerning the former mood type, it is discovered that statements and questions are registered. Declarative mood is the mechanism whereby the speech deliverer has provided her audience with information about (i) her recognition to “special guests” such as John King (Secretary of Education), Arne Duncan (former Education Secretary), Eric Waldo (Executive Director), Greg Darnieder (Senior Advisor), and many others (educators, leaders, friends, etc.); (ii) her achievements in the field of education (making College Signing Day a national event, launching a social media campaign termed Better Make Room, doubling investments in Pell grants and college tax credits, expanding income-based loan repayment options, etc.), (iii) the results obtained (testimonies about school counselors), and (iv) her hope giving and exhortation words (everyone, of whatever background and social condition are part of a proud American tradition, can think critically, can get a good job, can be a positive force, etc.).

As for interrogative mood, it has mainly consisted in maintaining a relationship of superiority over the audience, making her a powerful participant controlling the discourse. Meanwhile, imperative has contributed to creating a face-to-face ‘interactive event’ whereby orders are received by the audience who just performs actions to comply like sitting down, applauding, laughing, expressing surprise, etc. Nevertheless, the addressee has contrived to keep with her recipients a relation of informal situation (thus of equal status) through the use of everyday words, slangy expressions, terms of endearment, etc.

She has also tempered her attitude and judgement through epistemic modality. However, deontic choices have helped to pinpoint the participants' obligation inherent to the educational field she has focused her final remarks on. Besides, they have been resorted to as grammatical textual features to display the orator's inclination to continue being with the populace, "rooting for [it] and working to support [it] for the rest of [her] life".

It is however important to stress that the aforementioned lexico-grammatical features have helped to lay bare the style of the speaker. In fact, it has been demonstrated in this study that in the course of delivering her message, Michelle Obama has made recourse to a great range of rhetorical and cohesive devices such as foregrounding (notably linguistic parallelism), ellipsis, metaphor, simile, repetition, extension, enhancement, etc. Those stylistic choices have significantly contributed to unravelling the persuasive language of Michelle Obama. In other words, they have made the text a merely creative/artistic product which ultimately discloses the poetic quality of the political elite woman. Moreover, they have helped to reveal how the language has been beautifully and skillfully carved to suit the context of culture and the context of situation in which the message was delivered.

In a nutshell, it can be contended from the stylo-functional analysis carried out so far that both linguistic and literary features have been woven together by Michelle Obama to give meaning to her discourse. As such, her message chiefly bears a social function as well as an aesthetic mark. The study has also exuded the ideology in/behind the then first lady's address, namely in terms of education. From that finding, we cogently submit to E. Ngara (1982, p. 29)'s contention that "the style of a serious writer [or speaker] cannot be divorced from his ideological concerns". And this has clearly been evidenced in the studied discourse!

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