

# The Epistemic Modality in the Inaugural Speeches of Philippine Presidents

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative corpus-based study employing epistemic analysis uncovered the epistemic modality (EM) markers used and their communicative functions in the seven inaugural speeches of the seven Philippine 5th Republic presidents. The findings revealed the preponderant use of epistemic modal verbs with 152 occurrences (81.72%), followed by epistemic lexical verbs with 20 occurrences (10.75%), epistemic modal adverbs with 9 occurrences (4.84%), and epistemic modal adjectives with 5 occurrences (2.69%). Moreover, the top-five modal verbs operated in the presidential inaugurals are *will* with 97 instances (66.9%), *can* with 28 instances (19.31%), *shall* with 9 instances (6.21%), *would* with 6 instances (4.14%), and *could* with 5 instances (3.44%). Meanwhile, *should* and *might* were never used by any president. In this regard, the presidents are confident, committed, bold, and certain with their statements; some are tentative and quite confident but still communicatively sensitive and polite; and few are uncertain but still diplomatic. Further, the communicative functions of the EM markers were categorized to *high-intermediate-low* modality values, *certain-probable-possible* semantic meanings, and *close-near-distant* epistemic distances.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Epistemic modality (EM) is concerned with the assumptions of the locutor or the writer, and the evaluation of possibilities. In the English language, epistemic modality is commonly expressed by modal auxiliary verbs, lexical verbs, modal adverbs, and modal adjectives. In inaugural and political addresses, EM is woven for locutors and writers to express beliefs, nuances, assumptions, doubts, certainties, confidence, commitment, knowledge, and the like. Yet, misinterpretation in meaning arises because EM markers are subjective [1] and they hold a myriad of implications and divergent notions [2].

Milkovich and Sitarica [3] analyzed the EM in the political statements of the USA and UK's administrations and revealed that they used epistemic modals *may* and *might* as hedging devices to avoid giving an outright statement and to prevent themselves from being held accountable as reflected in the phrase *there may be certain aircraft flying*, the speaker epistemically

uses may as a hedging device to illustrate skepticism and deference. Likewise, in the study of Nemickienė [4], Russian politicians used EM markers to dodge from their political or national obligations like in the phrase *We sincerely assume that [...]*, the speaker epistemically uses assume and the first-person personal pronoun we to reduce personal commitment. In other words, those political leaders were evasive, unreliable, and unconfident when delivering political messages. Additionally, Kantorgorje et al. [5] uncovered that the former presidents of the Fourth Republic of Ghana utilized intermediate and low epistemic modality markers which resulted to partial commitment, unreliability, and apprehension, while the low epistemic modality markers depicted weak and tentative commitment and low confidence. However, Bashir et al. [6], Alsbbagh and Abdullah [7], and Aning [8] averred that epistemic modality is utilized to exude certainty, to deliver a decisive message, and to indicate strong intention to the masses such in *The awareness [...] will help to build a national identity, Our priority must always be [...], We will not renege on our commitment, and We will empower women [...]*.

These cement Cornillie's [9] claim that subjectivity and context differences in expressing epistemic modality poses challenges for analysis. Palmer [10] iterated that the context sensitivity of epistemic modality causes interpretation challenges to researchers. Further, Abdul-Fattah [11] and Moafian et al. [12] recognized the polysemous, ambiguous, and multifunctional behaviors of EM markers may cause misperception. Nevertheless, Leech and Svartvik [13] claim that the inherent polysemy of EM markers (e.g., modal verbs) allows them to achieve varying communicative intents and purposes in a political discourse. While Hardjanto and Mazia [14] positively emphasized that epistemic modality always plays important roles in political speeches even so because it demonstrates the locutor's degree of commitment and confidence towards the truth of his utterances.

Despite several research on modality, Nartey and Yankson [15] clinched that there is a dearth of further studies on modality in political manifestos or political speeches alike. They specified that the semantic implication of modality in political speeches, though pertinent, remains relatively under-researched. Likewise, Umeh and Anyanwu [16] stated that studies carried out on modality in political speeches are not much while Zhao [17] expressed that less attention has been given to modalities in inauguration addresses. Meanwhile, Huesca-Palmares [18] asserted that there are few studies conducted in the analysis of political speech using corpus linguistics in the Philippine context. More importantly, no Philippine-based study explored the epistemic modality in the inaugurals of the Philippine presidents. Thus, the determined pursuit of this study.

The purpose of this study was to identify the dominant EM markers in the inaugural speeches of the Philippine 5th Republic presidents and to analyze the communicative functions that underpin the use of EM markers in the same inaugurals using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory of Halliday [19]. Specifically, it utilized Halliday's model of Epistemic Modality known as modalization in the interpersonal metafunction. SFL provides a framework for understanding the communicative functions (i.e., ideational, interpersonal, and textual) of language. In political texts such as inaugurals, Halliday [19] as iterated in Kantorgorje et al. [5] averred that among the three, it is the interpersonal metafunction that is projected more through the pervasive use of EM markers. In other words, to attain the interpersonal metafunctional goal in a political discourse or speech, the epistemic modality system is scrutinized since it deals with people's attitudes, opinions, and judgments about a proposition. More so, in modalization, the locutor or the writer makes a statement or question about a proposition to the listener or reader, and it expresses the validity of the meanings of a proposition in terms of probability and usability.

### **Theoretical Lens**

This study was grounded under the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory of Halliday [19]. Specifically, it utilized Halliday's model of Epistemic Modality (EM) known as modalization in interpersonal metafunction. SFL provides a framework for understanding the communicative functions of language. These communicative functions are ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Ideational metafunction focuses on the expression of experiences, events, and states of affairs. It deals with how language represents the world and includes the categories of field, tenor, and mode. Interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the social aspects of communication such as

how language is used to enact social roles, establish relationships, and express attitudes. It includes the categories of mood, modality, and person. Textual metafunction examines how language is organized to create cohesive and coherent texts. It involves choices related to theme, rheme, and coherence.

In political texts such as inaugurals, Halliday [19] as iterated in Kantorgorje et al. [5] averred that among the three, it is the interpersonal metafunction that is projected more through the pervasive use of EM markers. In other words, to attain the interpersonal metafunctional goal in a political discourse or speech, the epistemic modality system is scrutinized since it deals with people's attitudes, opinions, and judgments about a proposition. Moreover, in modalization, the locutor or the writer makes a statement or question about a proposition to the listener or reader. Also, it expresses the validity of the meanings of a proposition in terms of probability and usuality.

Since this study primarily focused on the analyses of epistemic modality employed in the inaugural speeches, Halliday's model of modalization in the interpersonal metafunction under the SFL theory was adopted as the premise of this study. This model was deemed appropriate in the context of the study considering that Philippine presidents in their inaugural speeches employed epistemic modality markers in conveying the communicative functions to attain the goal or purpose of the talk.

## 2. METHOD

In this section, the researchers delineate the parts of the method which cover research design, research materials, and data analysis.

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative corpus-based approach employing epistemic analysis of modality markers. Palmer [20] founded epistemic analysis which involves examining linguistic elements such as modal verbs, lexical verbs, modal adverbs, modal adjectives, and other expressions, to uncover the speaker's stance on the truth or likelihood of a statement. Epistemic modal auxiliary verbs like *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *may*, *might*, and *must*; epistemic lexical verbs such as *think*, *know*, *assume*, *acknowledge*, *deny*, *believe*, *suppose*, *claim*, *confirm*, *affirm*, *doubt*, and *among others*; epistemic modal adverbs like *certainly*, *probably*, *likely*, *indeed*, *undoubtedly*, *arguably*, *presumably*, *surely*, *maybe*, and *among others*; and epistemic modal adjectives like *certain*, *sure*, *probable*, *definite*, *undeniable*, *inevitable*, and *among others* are often central to this analysis, as they explicitly convey the speaker's epistemic perspectives, stance, identity, and judgment.

### Research Materials

The corpora of the study were the speeches delivered by Philippine presidents that are posted in the Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines via <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph>. Specifically, seven inaugural speeches delivered by the seven Philippine 5<sup>th</sup> Republic presidents namely Corazon "Cory" Cojuangco Aquino, Fidel Valdez Ramos, Joseph "Erap" Ejercito Estrada, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Benigno "Noynoy" Simeon Cojuangco Aquino III, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos Jr. were examined in this study. In addition, each inaugural speech was assigned with a code that starts with "P" which stands for President, followed by the initials of the president's full name or the moniker popularized by the Philippine media. These are PCory, PFVR, PErap, PGMA, PNoy, PRRD, and PBBM.

The number of corpora required for corpus-based research can vary significantly depending on the research question, the scope of the study, and the specific requirements of the analysis. There is no fixed or universally agreed-upon number of corpora that is considered sufficient, and it often rests on the goals and methodology of the research. In fact, the Department of Language and Linguistics of the University of Essex informed that there are no given definitions of how large corpus research must use or, how many examples or how many of something one must find for corpus studies; instead, it is more pertinent to have 'enough' data.

## Data Analysis

In this study, the analysis of data focused on identifying the dominant epistemic modality (EM) markers in seven inaugural addresses delivered by seven presidents of the Philippine 5<sup>th</sup> Republic with the aid of corpus-based computer software and freeware—AntConc version 4.2.4 and on analyzing the communicative functions of the identified EM markers in accordance with Halliday's model of modalization in the interpersonal metafunction under the SFL theory.

For the actual analysis, the seven inaugural speeches were read, processed, and fed into the freeware AntConc version 4.2.4. The title, pictures, tables, parenthesized actions, and direct quotations in the corpora were omitted for they will not form part of the body of the text which contains EM markers. Since corpus analysis tools do not read digital texts in Microsoft Word or PDF, they were converted into plain text. In AntConc, the frequency or plot tool was used to determine the dominant EM markers while the keyword in context or KWIC tool was utilized to analyze the communicative functions that underpin the EM markers in the presidential inaugural addresses.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In particular, the dominant epistemic modality markers used in the presidential inaugural speeches and the communicative functions that underpin the use of EM markers in the same inaugurals are presented in this section. The discussion of the findings then follows contextualization with existing literatures.

### 3.1. Dominant Epistemic Modality Markers in the Presidential Inaugural Speeches

The EM markers were identified and classified based on the parameters such as *structure* which looks at the syntactic arrangement of an epistemic proposition as having all or some of the following: an inanimate or an existential subject, a stative verb(s), and may be in the active or passive voice; *context* which details the environment in which EM markers occur; and *personal idiosyncrasy* which is based on the personal judgment of the speaker.

In Table 1, the dominant epistemic modality (EM) markers are identified with the aid of the freeware AntConc version 4.2.4. Among the four EM markers, modal verbs are the most used with 152 occurrences which are comprised of *will*, *would*, *can*, *could*, *shall*, *may*, and *must*. It is followed by lexical verbs with 20 occurrences which are comprised of *know*, *acknowledge*, *deny*, *think*, and *believe*. Next, modal adverbs with 9 occurrences which are comprised of *certainly*, *surely*, *indeed*, *maybe*, and *perhaps*. Lastly, modal adjectives with 5 occurrences which are comprised of *inevitable*, *sure*, and *possible*. In sum, 186 EM markers are utilized in the corpora.

**Table 1. Dominant Epistemic Modality Markers in the Presidential Inaugural Speeches**

EM Marker	PCory	PFVR	PERap	PGMA	PNoy	PRRD	PBBM	Total	%
Modal Verbs	1	32	18	23	37	10	31	152	<b>81.72</b>
Lexical Verbs	0	5	3	2	6	3	1	20	<b>10.75</b>
Modal Adverbs	0	1	3	1	0	1	3	9	<b>4.84</b>
Modal Adjectives	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	5	<b>2.69</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>100</b>

Since modal verbs are the most utilized EM markers, the top five most used modal verbs—with a total of 145 occurrences—are then identified in Table 2. These are *will* with a total of 97 occurrences, *can* with a total of 28 occurrences, *shall* with a total of 9 occurrences, *would* with a total of 6 occurrences, and *could* with a total of 5 occurrences. Additionally, *must* and *may* are not presented in the table as they are placed sixth and seventh with four and three occurrences, respectively.

**Table 2. The top-five epistemic modal verbs in the presidential inaugural speeches**

<b>Epistemic Modal Verbs</b>	<b>PCory</b>	<b>PFVR</b>	<b>PERap</b>	<b>PGMA</b>	<b>PNoy</b>	<b>PRRD</b>	<b>PBBM</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
will	0	15	10	21	23	6	22	97	<b>66.9</b>
can	0	10	3	1	9	1	4	28	<b>19.31</b>
shall	0	2	0	1	0	3	3	9	<b>6.21</b>
would	1	0	3	0	2	0	0	6	<b>4.14</b>
could	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	5	<b>3.44</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100</b>

This preponderant utilization of EMV echoes the study of Kantorgorje et al. [5], Hardjanto and Mazia [14], Xu [21], and Hoyer [22] who postulated that epistemic modal verbs are the most frequently utilized linguistic strategies by political leaders, especially presidents, to express their conviction, confidence, or judgment of a proposition in terms of their truth value or otherwise. Essentially, Kantorgorje et al. [5] and Vuković [23] elucidated that modal verbs are frequently used as epistemic modality markers in inaugural speeches because they allow the country leaders to convey certainty, possibility, necessity, authority, leadership, campaigns, initiative, or permission regarding future events, propositions, actions, plans, policies, advocacies, and decisions. Country leaders, especially presidents, preponderantly utilize epistemic modal verbs in their addresses to express certainty and confidence, to convey vision and determination, to provide clarity and assurance, to emphasize leadership and responsibility, to engage and persuade the audience, and to maintain diplomatic relations.

Moreover, Alsbbagh and Abdullah [7], Adu et al. [1], and Kantorgorje et al. [5] reasoned that epistemic modal verbs allow presidents of a nation to exude their certainty and confidence in their declarations, propositions, and promises. By using epistemic modal verbs *will* and *must*, they establish authority and exude conviction which can rouse trust, assurance, and faith in the listeners or countrymen in general. Rahmawati [24] furthered that they also help presidents of a nation to articulate their vision for the future of the country and of the citizens and to display determination to attain their objectives and goals. According to Aning [8], phrases like *I will*, *We will*, *I must*, *We must*, *I shall*, and *We shall* signal varying degrees of commitment to specific actions and principles, rallying support and fostering a sense of unity and purpose among the audience or countrymen in general.

Rahmawati [24] added that epistemic modal verbs contribute to the clarity and coherence of presidential speeches by directing the country presidents' perspectives on the likelihood or necessity of certain plans, advocacies, and engagements. This helps refine the intended message and reassure the audience or citizens about the feasibility and significance of the proposed agenda. Likewise, they emphasize the presidents' leadership role and the obligations, duties and responsibilities associated with it. By expressing what they *will*, *shall*, *can*, and *must* do, they assert their authority and accountability for driving growth and success and for addressing challenges faced by the populace and the entire nation.

Furthermore, Ekawati [25] averred that the epistemic modal verbs' inherent and implicit persuasive power helps presidents of a nation engage the listeners and influence them to support and approve their policies, proposals, and plans. By framing their policies, proposals, and plans with epistemic modal verbs such as *can*, *may*, *will*, or *must*, they appeal to the countrymen's values, principles, aspirations, and sense of duty. Meanwhile, Moafian et al. [12] noted that when the inaugural speech contains discussions about actions and initiatives on the international and global contexts, epistemic modal verbs aid presidents to maintain diplomatic relations, establish stance, negotiate agreements with other nations since epistemic modal verbs have linguistic abilities that can soften demands, signal flexibility, and express willingness to collaborate. Relatively, they foster constructive dialogue and diplomatic solutions.

Evidently, inaugural speeches often aim to instill confidence, hope, and a sense of purpose in the masses; thus, modal verbs are versatile linguistic tools for expressing such sentiments. More importantly, the employment of epistemic modal verbs in presidential inaugurals or political talks

reflects the complex interplay of communication, leadership, diplomacy, and persuasion, as such leaders seek to inspire, influence, lead, and unite their people towards success, progress, and a better future.

### 3.2. Communicative Functions of EM Markers in the Presidential Inaugural Speeches

In Table 3, the three major communicative functions from the perspectives of the three epistemic values in the context of interpersonal metafunction are presented. The communicative functions are related to their values, meanings, or distance that vary from *high, intermediate, low* modality values—how the locutor’s beliefs and opinions are formulated and graded along semantic meanings *certain, probable, possible* and the epistemic distances *close, near, distant*—during the persuasion processes.

**Table 3. The Communicative Functions of EM Markers in the Inaugural Speeches**

Communicative Functions	PCory	PFVR	PERap	PGMA	PNoy	PRRD	PBBM	Total	(%)
High, Certain, Close	0	23	15	23	27	10	26	124	<b>66.67</b>
Intermediate, Probable, Near	1	4	3	1	5	3	4	21	<b>11.29</b>
Low, Possible, Distant	0	14	6	2	12	1	6	41	<b>22.04</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 3.2.1. EM of High Value: Close to Certainty

The most frequent high epistemic modal verb used by six presidents—PFVR, PERap, PGMA, PNoy, PRRD, PBBM—is *will* while PCory never used it. Klinge and Muller [26] regarded *will* as a semantically ambiguous marker because it suggests various meanings such as prediction, expectation, volition, intention, willingness, or a combination of, and many more. Despite its vague and polysemous nature, the presidents demonstrated their utmost certainty on the veracity or likelihood of their statements using EMV *will*.

In statement *During my term, we will be celebrating the centennial of our national revolution*, EMV *will* expresses precision and factuality as described by Kantogorje et al. [5], about a momentous or historical event to be celebrated within the term of presidency. While statements *We will prove that [...]*, *My administration will prove that [...]*, *I pledge to [...] that will lift up [...]*, and *I pledge to [...] that will live within [...]*, display a high level of commitment, willingness, and volition through EMV *will* according to Adu et al. [1] and Umeh and Anyanwu [16] which bolster optimism to and hope in the people. Additionally, the statements *The immediate future will be difficult [...]*, *The destiny of the Filipino will return [...]*, and *Do them and we will work together. Do not do them, we will part sooner than later*, express the addressors’ predictions and expectation as explained by Aning [8]. Whereas Hardjanto and Mazia [14] in statements *Power and water will be regularly provided [...]*, *Metro Manila will be decongested*, *There will be changes starting tomorrow*, and *The fight will be relentless, and it will be sustained*, the presidents’ predictions are laid out through EMV *will*.

More so, in statements *With proper governance, life will improve; Through good governance, [...] we will lessen our problems*, and *For without stability, [...] life will be brutish and precarious*, the presidents’ logical deductions consistent with Alsbbagh and Abdullah [7], are demonstrated through EMV *will*. While statements *Starting today, they will have [...]*, *I will get it done*, and *You will not be disappointed. So do not be afraid*, strong certainty, intention, and power are projected through EMV *will* according to Nartey and Yankson [15] and Newson [27]. Subsequently, modal verb *must* of high value was also utilized epistemically even though it is ranked as the lowest employed epistemic modal verb in all corpora. In statements *Our ideology [...] tells us that power must flow [...]*, *Both farm and factory must be empowered [...]*, *another round of sacrifice that must fall [...]*, logical deductions, confident conclusions, and expectation are averred through EMV *must* as defined by Collins [28] and Palmer [29].

Conclusively, the use of high epistemic modal verbs *will* and *must* emphasized the confidence, conviction, certainty, and commitment of the six presidents. The excerpts prove Leech and Svartvik's [13] claim that the inherent polysemy of modal verbs allows them to achieve varying specific communicative intents and purposes in a political discourse. This further emphasizes Coates' [30] claim that context and personal judgment are ways to separate or classify the specific communicative functions of epistemic modal verbs such as *will* and *must*.

Other than epistemic modal verbs, some presidents also used few epistemic lexical verbs, epistemic modal adverbs, and epistemic modal adjectives of high value. For examples, *We acknowledge a debt of gratitude to [...]; We know that the most damaging crimes [...]; I know the limits of [...]; I know what is legal and what is not; Certainly, there can be no [...]; But, surely, it is time for [...]; Indeed, ours is a problem that [...], and I am sure, will exceed expectations*, the presidents' utmost certainty and emphasis on the message of their claims are buttressed through ELV *acknowledge* and *know*; EMAdv *certainly, surely, indeed*; and EMAdj *sure* on the words of Kantorgorje et al. [5], Nemickienė [4], and Hardjanto and Mazia [14].

Evidently, these ELVs, EMAdvs, and EMAdjs demonstrate modality and epistemicity by accurately expressing the presidents' certainty in the truth of their statements, assertions, claims, opinions, and beliefs. Ergo, these presidents are deemed bold, assertive, and highly confident. These analyses correspond to Shi [31] who clinched that through modality, the locutor's judgment of the authenticity of his statement, the attitude, the responsibility and obligation it bears, and even the social distance and power relationship between the locutor and the listener are unraveled.

### 3.2.2. EM of Intermediate Value: Near to Probability

The intermediate epistemic modal verbs used by the seven presidents are *would* and *shall*. Kantorgorje et al. [5] explained that these epistemic modal verbs are used when the certainty of the speaker is probable and unsure. Comparably, several authors [32, 19, 33] described EM markers of intermediate level as neutral which expresses the locutors' partial commitment to their proposition or statement. In other words, it is the middle ground between certainty and uncertainty.

In the statement *The Filipino people would suffice to [...]*, tentativeness is expressed through EMV *would* as ascribed by Adu et al. [1] and Milkovich and Starica [3]. Whereas in statements *Government cannot afford to feed [...], but it would be [...]; Government cannot afford to build [...], but it would be [...]; and Government cannot afford to give [...], but it would be a [...]*, conditionality is conveyed through EMV *would* and conjunction *if* as emphasized by Hardjanto and Mazia [14]. Also, in statements *Deregulation and privatization shall set free [...], Dismantling [...] shall make [...], This administration shall be built [...], They shall be supplied to you in due time, and We shall be again by radical change [...]*, reveal the president's sense of determination and duty albeit probable through EMV *shall* as stated by Aning [8].

Conclusively, the use of intermediate epistemic modal verbs *would* and *shall* suggested the seven presidents' uncertainties or little confidence. The findings buttress Campbell and Jamieson's [34] idea that the knowledge and stance the political leaders have about their proposition are chiefly unreliable and uncertain. Likewise, Hardjanto and Mazia [14] described that speakers of such have tentative and weak judgments towards their propositions and claims. While Milkovich and Starica [3] depicted such leaders as oblique and irresponsible. Despite these, Kantorgorje et al. [5] portrayed them as polite, diplomatic, and measured. Therefore, these political leaders sound endearing and considerate.

Other than epistemic modal verbs, PFVR and PNoY also used epistemic lexical verbs of intermediate value. In statements *I believe there is more to this democratic idea and I do not believe that [...]*, speculation and personal conviction are conveyed through ELV *believe*. According to Meyenburg [35], *believe* is typically used to indicate a personal knowledge of the possibility of a proposition or an utterance. In other words, the locutor or the writer uses it based on some knowledge, on instinct, and on certain feelings that he has in connection with possibility or otherwise of a proposition. Because the knowledge on evidence for the proposition is unsure and sometimes based on intangible reasons, Kantorgorje et al. [5] stressed that *believe* is considered as

a very subjective and unscientific way of evaluating on a proposition. Thus, speakers and users of intermediate EM markers are deemed half certain and a little confident.

Meanwhile, Vuković [23] explained that *think* is a modal adjective that establishes the extent to which the speaker views the action or state as improbable. More importantly, Simon-Vandenberg [36] underscored those statements such as *I/We think* in political discourses does not serve the purpose of qualifying the truth of the proposition; rather, it is used primarily to focus on the speaker's personal position. Notably, intermediate EMVs, ELVs, EMAdvS, and EMAdjS demonstrate the presidents' tentative certainty in the truth of their statements, assertions, claims, opinions, and beliefs. Despite this, Kantorgorje et al. [5] consider them as diplomatic or democratic.

### 3.2.2. EM of Low Value: Far from Certainty

The low epistemic modal verbs used by the six presidents—PFVR, PERap, PGMA, PNoy, PRRD, PBBM—are *can*, *could*, and *may* while PCory did not use any of these. Alsbbagh and Abdullah [7] rationalized that epistemic modality markers of low value express weak and tentative commitments. In terms of epistemic distance, they are placed far from certainty as the locutor has very little or no knowledge at all about what he is saying or may just want to be polite.

In statements *But we can win the future only if [...]*; *In this way, funds can be shared [...]*; *we Filipinos can be greater than the sum of [...]*; *Things could get worse before they get better*; *Six years could be just about enough time*; and *political-military dangers may linger in the region [...]*, conditional ability according to Hardjanto and Mazia [14]; possibility or likelihood as per Alsbbagh and Abdullah [7], Aning [8], and Milkovich and Starica [3]; and uncertainty as defined by Ekawati [25], are implied through EMV *can*, *could*, and *may*. These support Dou [37] who stated that *can* and *could* are often employed to express potentiality, ability, condition, or a combination of, which carries a very low modality value. Likewise, Opeyemi and Ajoke [38] stated that *could* indicates a lower possibility. Furthermore, Adu [39] stressed that EMV *may* is utilized to avoid committing oneself to the veracity of his statement or proposition. More importantly, it marks the lowest level of one's knowledge and the weakest commitment of his utterance. Thus, speakers or users of EMV *may* project very low confidence but may still be described as polite or tactful.

Other than epistemic modal verbs, PERap and PGMA also employed epistemic modal adverbs of low value. In statements *Maybe I felt strongly about [...]*, *Maybe I felt that we cannot [...]*, and *I shall have created [...]* perhaps even ten million jobs, possibility or likelihood is illustrated through EMAdv *maybe* and *perhaps* in accordance with Adu et al. [1], Hardjanto and Mazia [14], and Quirk et al. [40]. Apparently, epistemic modal adverbs *maybe* and *perhaps* add a nuanced level of these presidents' doubt in their statements which reflect their approximation of the probability rather than a definitive assertion. Hart and Carp [41] justified those users of EM markers of low value such as *maybe*, *possibly*, *perhaps*, and the like want to evade potential responsibility or to avoid taking accountability if their epistemic judgments turn out to be wrong.

In a nutshell, numerous epistemic modality markers were employed to signal varied communicative functions and purposes in the inaugural speeches. First, the presidents used high EM markers to connect the proximity of the statements and claims to the notion of certainty. Because of it, they are deemed confident and assertive. Second, the presidents used intermediate EM markers to imply that they have insufficient or tentative knowledge about their propositions. In spite of this, they are considered democratic since they leave room for the audience's or reader's views and opinions. Third and finally, the presidents who used low EM markers suggest low confidence and weak commitment albeit respectful. Thus, the Philippine presidents of the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic are bold, open, and diplomatic. Verily, the findings of this study confirm Halliday's (2004) model of modalization in the interpersonal metafunction under the SFL theory.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal significant results on the use of epistemic modality markers in political discourses, particularly in presidential inaugural speeches that could not only contribute to the political-linguistic community, but also to the academic arena.



Specifically, in educational practice, examining epistemic modality markers can facilitate critical thinking through roundtable discussions and debate activities and can navigate information literacy by engaging students in inquiry-based learning. By teaching students to recognize and apply expressions of certainty, probability, possibility, doubt, and the like, teachers aid them develop the skills to question information and evaluate its reliability. In addition, it can hone academic writing skills by making them write persuasive essays or position papers. Teaching epistemic modality to students can help them refine their language skills and language choice to establish strong and plausible arguments. At the same time, it can enhance communication skills through public speaking performances. Learning epistemic modality can improve students in effective communication because they can learn to adapt their language based on context and audience. Moreover, it can foster a growth mindset by teaching that epistemic modality is dynamic, subjective, and contextual. Acknowledging such facts can assist students to become more open to learning, adapting, and embracing new perspectives.

On another note, English or language teachers may incorporate the concept and intricacies of epistemic modality into their lessons, not only for political speeches but also for other forms of verbal and written communications addressed to the public or to a specific audience. By and large, teachers and students alike can also benefit from this study since epistemic modality is central to English language use, language learning, and language transfer.

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