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The role of deontic modality in the construction and mitigation of evaluation in hard news reporting

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of deontic modality as a strategic means of mitigating evaluative meanings within and across texts. Evaluative meanings concern the function of language as used to express the speaker's or writer's subjective opinions, and such meanings have been extensively analysed through Appraisal framework. The framework has been used to account for evaluative/attitudinal meanings in texts, as well as dealing with the interaction of voices as one way through which speakers and writers can attribute evaluations to third parties in order to downplay or distance themselves from the evaluations that are expressed. Within the literature on Appraisal, however, the potential for deontic modality to mitigate subjective evaluation in texts has largely been overlooked and, thus, under-analysed. In this paper therefore, we develop a systems network for analysing the role of deontic modality and its interaction with other features as a tool for text analysis. We illustrate the distinctions in the network with examples of contrasting values from hard news stories that covered the 2011 public sector workers' strike in Botswana and finish up with a short textual analysis to demonstrate how the consideration of deontic modality as a strategy of mitigation can not only enhance our understanding of how evaluative meanings are downplayed or overridden in texts, but also of how the distinctions between text types themselves can be blurred.

Keywords: appraisal; deontic modality; evaluation; hard news stories; mitigation

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1 Introduction

In this paper, we consider the role of deontic modality (also known as *event modality* or *modulation*,[1] though there are different nuances to these terms) as it is strategically employed within and across texts. This entails considering the options within the system of deontic modality itself, as a lexicogrammatical system; the interaction between deontic modal elements and other elements of the clause in creating a higher-order pattern of meanings (corresponding to the *semantic stratum* in Halliday and Hasan's model of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and, less directly, to Martin's *discourse semantics*); and the function of these textual meanings in relation to the social context of their production. While deontic modality has generally been viewed as essentially concerned with the logic of obligation and permission, in this paper we consider deontic modality as a semantic and value-laden means that a speaker or writer has of evaluating an existing state-of-affairs against an ideal state-of-affairs. In that way, certain entities are discursively foregrounded in texts as the primary attitudinal targets whose actions are evaluated as either compliant or contradictory to an ideal state-of-affairs. This work arose from Rantsudu's (2018) doctoral research into the strategies used to *mitigate* evaluative meanings (based on Martin's Appraisal framework) in hard news stories that are obliged to remain objective, and the different discursive effects of the various mitigating strategies employed by two different news agencies.

The requirement for objective reporting is one of the focal points that are outlined in the *Media Code of Ethics* as set out by the Press Council of Botswana. The Council was established by Parliament to "preserve the maintenance of high professional standards within the media" (Parliament of Botswana 2008). According to the *Media Code of Ethics*, objectivity encompasses principles of accuracy, impartiality, and neutrality, and over the years, the government has constantly called on news agencies to demonstrate professional standards by following these principles. The government's position on media objectivity has, however, been met with some strong contention. In his scrutiny of Botswana's media regulation policies, Tutwane (2011: 47) presents a historical overview of the policies and argues that such policies have been used by government as a self-serving mechanism to stifle dissent, censor journalists, and get journalists to "follow the government line". Echoing similar sentiments, and with reference to the 2011 public sector workers' strike in Botswana, Rooney (2012: 12) states that regulation policies on the running of press reporting give the government inequitable influence and control over state-owned media. Rooney

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1 Modulation is the term used for modality of this kind within the Systemic Functional Literature. However, we have chosen to use deontic modality as the default term in this paper as we hope to show the relevance of this angle of analysis to a wider audience.

further argues that during the public sector workers' strike, the state-owned media did not report the news objectively but presented a distorted and subjective coverage that in turn gave the public a negative view of the strike.

When considered alongside the government's requirement for objective news reporting, the arguments that are advanced by Tutwane (2011) and Rooney (2012) seem to point to some underlying differences of opinion about what objectivity entails. Of particular concern is the apparent elusive nature of objectivity, and in light of this, we will in the next section consider various definitions of objectivity as presented in the literature.

2 Objectivity

Objectivity has been shown to be a key value of news reporting across different journalistic cultures (Richardson 2007; White and Thomson 2008) and its definition is a matter of ongoing debate. With a view to approaching objectivity from the angle of the news media, White (2000: 383) sees objectivity in terms of three constituent principles: *neutrality*, *balance*, and *reliability*. White (2000) indicates that the key characteristic of these principles is the quotation of external news sources. To differentiate between *neutrality*, *balance*, and *reliability*, White sees *neutrality* as the overarching principle by which news reporters quote third-party voices within news texts, particularly in hard news stories, thus, refraining from expressing opinions, judgements, or emotional responses of their own. White (2000: 383) also indicates that while the quotation of third-party voices may be used by the news media as validation for objective reporting, the media has a complex role when reporters have to navigate through contentious judgements or emotionally charged news content that is expressed by external news sources. White argues that in such cases, the news media must rely on the principle of *balance.* This principle of objectivity involves the presentation of more than one point of view. That means, on a given matter that is being reported, news reporters have the responsibility to present more than one point of view and by so doing, they provide news sources with the opportunity to 'reply to' or contend the views that are presented by other news sources. In terms of *reliability*, the requirement is that third-party voices that are quoted should have appropriate authority or social standing.

Interestingly, the argument for the use of quotations as a characteristic mark of objectivity in news reporting has been shown to be problematic. White (2006, 2009, 2012) and Jullian (2011) point out that the practice of using third party voices involves processes of subjective selection, interpretation, and exploitation of external voices for evaluative purposes. Drawing from White's (2000) discussion of neutrality,

Thomson et al. (2008), Pounds (2010), and Sabao and Visser (2015) opine that objectivity is better defined in terms of strategic choices that journalistic authors make in order to constrain and conceal their authorial subjectivity in the news. Thomson et al. (2008), Pounds (2010), and Sabao and Visser (2015) argue that the appearance of evaluations or subjective opinions within 'objective' news reports, though such subjectivity may be strategically managed, renders objectivity a vague, obscure, and ideologically determined concept.

A further definition of objectivity is given by Stenvall (2008, 2014) who views objectivity as a concept that is related to *factuality* and opines that the two concepts are intertwined. Stenvall (2014: 462) considers *factuality* "to be a somewhat more specific concept than objectivity" and states that *factuality* relates to journalists' "quest for reporting facts". Stenvall's definition highlights the complex and controversial nature of objectivity, and the likelihood of *objectivity* and *factuality* being used interchangeably, thus resulting in terminological uncertainty. Evidently, objectivity is a variously defined and contested term with overlapping or even contradictory facets, and in some cases facets that may be different cross-culturally. Each of the principles of objectivity can be said to be indicative of some complex relations that news reporters manage within texts. If we take the principle of *balance* for example, the requirement is for the presentation of 'both sides of the story'. However, it has been shown in the literature that news reporters can embed their subjective comments and intrude into the text while quoting external news sources, and that the choice of certain 'factual' information can betray what appears as 'objective' news coverage (Rantsudu 2022; Reeves and Keeble 2015; Sabao and Visser 2015). As such, *balance* can be highly evaluative of both sides. Arguably, the requirement for objective reporting as outlined in the *Media Code of Ethics* of Botswana is brought into question. Rather than base her research on any one of the definitions around objectivity and neutrality, Rantsudu (2018) opted to analyse the different means by which evaluative or subjective language was *mitigated* and only then to relate the findings to the range of perspectives on objectivity and neutrality.

3 Mitigation strategies in hard news reporting

Our use of the term *mitigation* is intended to cover any means of reducing or overriding either the degree or the subjective load of evaluative language. In this regard it encompasses other terms, such as attribution, evocation, and hedging, inasmuch as these strategies are used to lessen or deflect the evaluative content of statements (which may not be their unique function in texts). We extend the use of this term to include the use of deontic modality, therefore, even if it is high in force, as

it downplays or obscures the degree of direct subjectivity in the implied evaluation. The deontic force itself can also be downplayed, of course, through interaction with other features included in our network, such as attribution.

In the course of her doctoral research, Rantsudu (2018) built up a system network of mitigating strategies. The individual language features within this network were taken from the Appraisal Framework. Whereas Rantsudu's work was centred on mitigation, however, Martin and White (2005: 1) describe their approach as being concerned with "the construction of shared feelings and values", with the affiliative properties of texts, and the systems networks they develop are constructed accordingly. This difference in perspective meant that it was necessary to demonstrate the connections between features in new ways. This should not be seen as a challenge to the existing Appraisal networks. We know that words and structures are semantically interconnected in multiple ways, such that no two-dimensional network can capture all these relations. This goes back to Saussure (1916: 170–171):

> Alternatively, outside of speech, words which have something in common are associated in the memory and therefore form groups at the heart of which highly diverse associations are in operation. Thus, the word *teaching* will bring a host of other words unconsciously to mind (*teach*, *teacher*, etc., or *arming*, *changing*, etc., or even *education* and *apprenticeship*); in one way or another, all of these have something in common between them. (Saussure 1916: 170–171, authors' translation)

It is therefore possible to highlight the connections between items in different ways for specific purposes. Such two-dimensional representations can be seen as the motivated privileging of a specific angle of interpretation and the semantic interconnections relevant to that perspective. As pointed out by Matthiessen (2023: 201):

> As always, descriptive decisions reflect considerations from different vantage points, and will be made to optimize these considerations. (Matthiessen 2023: 201)

Therefore, while privileging the perspective of mitigation produces different systems networks from those privileging affiliation, these networks are not to be seen as either modifications or alternatives. They are merely looking at the same complex web of relations from a different angle. For example, scription (inscription vs evocation) and attribution appear at quite distant points in the web as pictured in Martin and White, with scription being a subsystem of ATTITUDE (Martin and White 2005: 67) and attribution (in its various forms) being a subsystem of ENGAGEMENT (Martin and White 2005: 117). However, when we adopt a different perspective for specific analytical purposes, we see that these two features come into much closer contact, as with the system for JOURNALISTIC KEY (Martin and White 2005: 173). Here we note that the system for JOURNALISTIC KEY is clearly related to questions of objectivity and mitigation, so it should come as no surprise that the system of MITIGATION

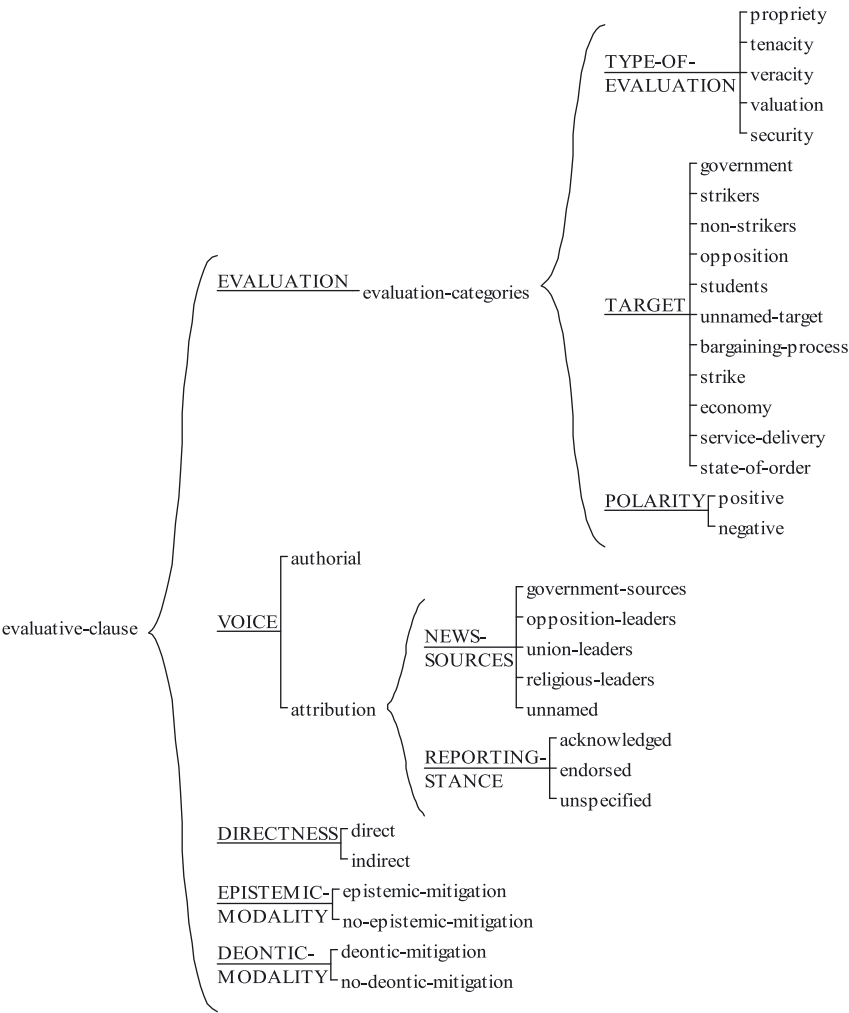**Figure 1:** System network of evaluation and mitigating strategies in Botswana newspapers (Rantsudu 2018).

developed by Rantsudu (2018) similarly privileged the semantics that connect these two features (see Figure 1).

3.1 Deontic modality as a mitigation strategy

The network of mitigating strategies in Figure 1 was developed in inductive fashion during Rantsudu's (2018) analysis of hard news stories concerning the public sector

strike in Botswana (for more details see below). In the course of this process, it became clear that deontic modality was an important and oft-used resource for introducing judgments in which the inherent subjectivity was presented in mitigated form. This should not come as a surprise, as deontic modality serves to evaluate a current state of affairs against an ideal state of affairs, and thus implies a value judgment without explicitly stating it. Compare for example, Examples (1) and (2).

(1)   Their behaviour was evil.
(2)   They should not have done that.

In Example (1), there is a clear value judgment that would transgress the requirements for objectivity in the Botswana press. This appears to be avoided in Example (2), though the criticism of the actions in question remains. Notice, however, that Example (2) could also serve as a mitigated form of Examples (3) and (4).

(3)   Their behaviour was ineffective.
(4)   Their behaviour upset everyone.

Part of the effect of modulating a statement, therefore, appears to be a neutralisation of the underlying value judgment, which needs to be recovered from either the cotext (a question of discourse semantics) or the context (a question of social systems and ideology). For a fuller understanding of the effects of deontic modality, and on what would be *appliable* in discourse analysis, we need to consider features beyond the semantics of the deontic system itself. Example (5), from Rantsudu's data set (*Daily News*, 18 April 2011), illustrates precisely this potential complexity.

(5)   Government must show commitment when engaging civil servants over salary
       negotiations, Botswana Congress Party president, Mr Dumelang Saleshando
       said at a press conference last Friday.

The press conference that is being referred to in Example (5) was held by opposition party leaders a few days before the workers' strike commenced. This followed the collapse of negotiations between the government and workers' unions. In this example, the president of the Botswana Congress Party is said to have expressed an imposition of obligation on the government to act in a certain way, that is, to show commitment to the process of negotiations with the workers' unions. When we consider this example within the broader news coverage of negotiations between the government and workers' unions, we find an implied sense of antagonistic relations between the government and the unions. In addition, the government is presented as the entity that is responsible for the declining relations between the government and the unions, with accusations of negligence of the workers' welfare. It is on this basis that an implicit criticism of the actions of the government can be said to be couched in the forceful deontic expression that appears in a thematic position in Example (5).

The opposition party leader asserts this implicit criticism and denouncement of the government and, in a way, bases the criticism on the government's seeming lack of recognition of the importance of the workers' rights and welfare. Turning to the journalistic decision to include this statement and to present it in this way, what we have in Example (5), therefore, is a dynamic interaction of deontic modality, attribution, and an implicit reference to underlying moral expectations for the government to be mindful of the workers' welfare. We return to this example below in our short text analysis.

With regard to the lexicogrammar, IFG and elsewhere describe the modal resources available in the language in terms of the contrast between modulation (roughly, deontic modality) and modalisation (roughly, epistemic modality) and the various options within each (developed below). Despite the relevance of deontic modality in construing values while mitigating the subjectivity behind these, however, there is comparatively little discussion of deontic modality, or modulation, in terms of discourse semantics and text analysis within the SFL tradition.

In the literature on Appraisal, deontic modality is very much the poor relation in comparison with its epistemic cousin. Martin and White (2005: 2), for example, talk of the central relevance of evidentiality and epistemic modality (or *modalisation*) to the framework, and reference it several times, whereas modulation/deontic modality is limited to a walk-on part as a category of 'entertain' in the ENGAGEMENT system (2005: 110). From a different perspective, Hood (2019: 389) discusses how deontic modal adjuncts can function as expressions of GRADUATION, as in Example (6).

(6)   It's vital that ….

In her discussion of objectivity and authorial voice, Coffin (2006: 144) largely overlooks the role of deontic modality on claiming that "Within the appraisal framework, modal resources, referred to as probabilize [i.e. epistemic], are […] seen as central resources for expressing heterogloss". In related literature on voices in journalism, Pounds (2010) examines the extent to which attitude and subjectivity are strategically embedded in hard news reporting via expressions of (un)certainty and obligation. Taking a cross-cultural approach to her analysis of Italian and British hard news stories, Pounds (2010: 111) develops a framework of subjectivity markers that includes authorial and mediated expressions of (un)certainty (epistemic modality) and obligation (deontic modality). She emphasises that when considered within 'objective' news stories, expressions of (un)certainty and obligation should be recognised as types of attitude. Pounds's analysis provides valuable insight into the interaction between 'reporter voice' and subjectivity in news texts that are classified as 'objective'.

Also in the field of media studies, Kaltenbacher (2019) considers subjectivity and objectivity in different news genres, but focuses almost exclusively on the IFG distinction between subjective and objective modality. This is a distinction which

covers both epistemic and deontic modality and, in Kaltenbacher's data set, at least, "epistemic modal evaluations of the type 'probability' are most frequent'. Kaltenbacher (2019: 135) does, however, provide one example of deontic modality, reproduced as Example 7, and makes the useful comment that in this example "the author conceals the source of the directive and pretends the obligation was a public duty without identifying who commissioned this duty". We will follow up on this idea below.

(7)   This country is required to cut public spending.

Although in Rantsudu's data set examples of deontic modality were also less frequent than those of epistemic modality, they were by no means insignificant. For the rest of this paper, therefore, we will change our angle of systemic gaze once again, to provide a motivated privileging of deontic modality from a discourse analytical perspective.

4 Methodology

The methodological perspective we propose for the analysis of deontic modality as a resource for construction of evaluation on one hand, and a resource for mitigation of evaluation on the other entails three different aspects of description:

  (i) The lexicogrammatical system of deontic modality.
 (ii) The interplay of deontic modality and other elements of the clause.
(iii) The value systems (implicitly) underlying the utterances in context.

This perspective corresponds closely with Halliday's trinocular perspective of examining the functions of features from below, from roundabout and from above, and also with the concept of lexicogrammatical features realising semantic, social or contextual distinctions.

At the lexicogrammatical level (i), we will simply reproduce Halliday's descriptions as these are already familiar and operationalised by many authors. To this we will add features we have inductively identified as cooccurring in relevant ways with deontic features (ii), as well as an open system for the system of values within which individual judgments/evaluations are analysed as operating (iii).

After a brief overview of the data set, we will present the systems network as it has been developed to date, talking through each of the systemic contrasts within the network and illustrating these with examples from the data set. It should be noted here that this is the system as developed to date on the basis of one specific corpus of texts. While we would expect most of the distinctions included to be robust, it is within the nature of such inductive description that new categories will arise and old ones will need to be revised.

Once we have explained the systems within the network in detail, we will discuss one complete text from the data set to consider the effect of interacting features on clausal semantics and the relationship with the underlying value systems of the text producers. And we will finish with a brief consideration of the utility of the system, and the overall approach, for text and discourse analysis more generally.

4.1 Data set

In carrying out an analysis of mitigating strategies in hard news stories, Rantsudu (2018) considered a total of sixteen hard news stories from two Botswana English language dailies, *Daily News* (a state-owned newspaper) and *Mmegi* (a privately-owned newspaper). The news stories were obtained from online editions of the two newspapers' official websites, www.dailynews.gov.bw (*Daily News*) and www.mmegi.bw (*Mmegi*) between July 2013 and December 2014. As we mentioned earlier, the news stories covered the 2011 public sector strike in Botswana. This data set was chosen on account of the fact that news about the strike was often reported with antagonistic overtones, and the key players in the event were constantly expressing value judgements about the existing states-of-affairs, that is:

(i) The collapse of negotiations between the government and workers' unions, and the resultant eight-week strike, and

(ii) the apparent negligence of workers' welfare by the government (expressed by opposition parties as they discursively questioned the reasons advanced by the government for the non-increment of workers' salaries).

In this paper, therefore, our focus is on the creation of the systems network of deontic modality and we use the strike news data set to illustrate relevant features of the network. This is because the data set presented a rich resource for attitudinal meanings that are typically associated with hard news stories. The systems network developed on the basis of this data set is presented as Figure 2.

The systems network above comprises five main dimensions of systems:

(i)   Domain type
(ii) Interactants
(iii) Modality
(iv) Attribution
(v)   Evaluation

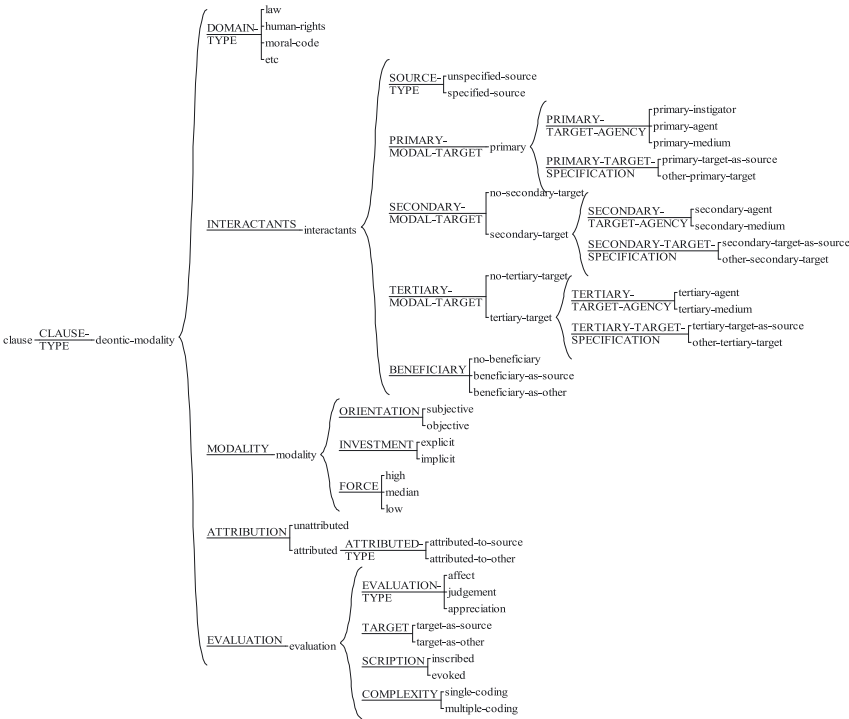We will discuss these in turn, with some examples below. Italics are added to the examples for emphasis.

clause — CLAUSE-TYPE — deontic-modality

- DOMAIN-TYPE
  - law
  - human-rights
  - moral-code
  - etc
- INTERACTANTS — interactants
  - SOURCE-TYPE
    - unspecified-source
    - specified-source
  - PRIMARY-MODAL-TARGET — primary
    - PRIMARY-TARGET-AGENCY
      - primary-instigator
      - primary-agent
      - primary-medium
    - PRIMARY-TARGET-SPECIFICATION
      - primary-target-as-source
      - other-primary-target
  - SECONDARY-MODAL-TARGET
    - no-secondary-target
    - secondary-target
      - SECONDARY-TARGET-AGENCY
        - secondary-agent
        - secondary-medium
      - SECONDARY-TARGET-SPECIFICATION
        - secondary-target-as-source
        - other-secondary-target
  - TERTIARY-MODAL-TARGET
    - no-tertiary-target
    - tertiary-target
      - TERTIARY-TARGET-AGENCY
        - tertiary-agent
        - tertiary-medium
      - TERTIARY-TARGET-SPECIFICATION
        - tertiary-target-as-source
        - other-tertiary-target
  - BENEFICIARY
    - no-beneficiary
    - beneficiary-as-source
    - beneficiary-as-other
- MODALITY — modality
  - ORIENTATION
    - subjective
    - objective
  - INVESTMENT
    - explicit
    - implicit
  - FORCE
    - high
    - median
    - low
- ATTRIBUTION
  - unattributed
  - attributed
    - ATTRIBUTED-TYPE
      - attributed-to-source
      - attributed-to-other
- EVALUATION — evaluation
  - EVALUATION-TYPE
    - affect
    - judgement
    - appreciation
  - TARGET
    - target-as-source
    - target-as-other
  - SCRIPTION
    - inscribed
    - evoked
  - COMPLEXITY
    - single-coding
    - multiple-coding

Figure 2: The systems network for deontic modality in its textual and discursive environment.

4.2 Domain type

Domain type represents an open system of underlying social or cultural, and ideological or political values that are implicitly activated in the news stories. Since deontic modality serves to evaluate a current state of affairs against an ideal state of affairs, such an ideal state of affairs can be thought of as a reflection of the social context within which it exists. Martin and Rose (2007: 4) point out that, "cultures manifest themselves through a myriad of texts", and this manifestation of cultures through texts provides a means for the analysis and recovery of the overall meaning of the texts. In the case of the news stories that we consider in this paper, expressions of deontic modality can be explained in relation to sets of social and ideological values that are strategically embedded in various news statements. These social and ideological values embody cultural (social expectations and norms) and political motifs that constantly invoke values such as compliance with the law or established rules, adherence to moral code, and respect for human rights. Let us consider the

following examples to illustrate how the contrastive options within the Domain type, that is, law, human rights, and moral code might manifest within the news stories from *Daily News* and *Mmegi*.

4.2.1 Law

(8)   Briefing MPs on the impending public sector strike, Mr Masisi said government *was obliged in the rules of the strike* to make sure that workers' rights were protected.

In Example (8), Mr. Masisi, who at the time was a cabinet minister, is reported to have briefed parliament on the public sector strike that was due to commence in a few days' time. This was in response to a question from another MP concerning possible service disruption in government departments during the strike. In his response, Mr. Masisi gives pre-eminence to the rules of the strike, and in a tone that is somewhat unequivocal, announces that the government is legally bound to protect the rights of the workers to embark on a strike. We follow up on the issue of worker's rights in the next example.

4.2.2 Human rights

(9)   *Government will ensure protection of workers' rights* during industrial action, Presidential Affairs and Public Administration minister assured Parliament on Friday.

Example (9) depicts a high degree of agency that the cabinet minister ascribes to the government in its role as the protector of workers' rights. This degree of agency is marked by the use of a combination of the modal *will* and the verb *ensure*, to emphasise the government's deontic willingness to protect or respect the rights of the workers. When viewed through the lens of the protracted industrial dispute between the government and the unions, this expression of deontic willingness on the part of the government seems to be projected as a praiseworthy course of action. Werbner (2021: 599) is of the view that trade unions in Botswana are essentially litigious and that there is a high regard for the law as it applies to the recognition of the workers' rights to take strike action. It is therefore not surprising that the government would want to portray a positive picture about themselves with regard to protecting the rights of the workers.

4.2.3 Moral code

(10)   He [President Khama] said instead of embarking on a strike and risk crippling the economy, *civil servants should be working hard to help the country in its recovery process.*

Unlike Example (9) in which the cabinet minister presents a positive image about the government through an expression of deontic willingness, in Example (10) the president expresses an implied condemnation or criticism of civil servants. Such implied criticism is indicated by deontic obligation that is imposed on the civil servants. According to the president, civil servants are expected to *help the country in its economic recovery process*. The action of embarking on a strike therefore does not match moral expectations. Civil servants' actions seem to be judged according to some normative principles, and their unwillingness to 'help the country' is condemned on moral grounds. The imposition of obligation, and in turn implied condemnation/ criticism, foregrounds the mismatch between the action that civil servants have opted to embark on, and the action that is expected of them.

     As we indicated earlier, evaluating a current state of affairs against an ideal state of affairs implies a value judgment without explicitly stating it. Thompson (2008: 173) highlights that there exists a relation between social values and subjective language that appears in texts. Thompson suggests that in order to fully understand evaluation and covert subjectivity in texts, social values should be given some level of analytical salience. As we noticed in the examples that we have just discussed, there is a pattern of values that are referenced in the news stories, that is, compliance with the rules of the strike/abiding by the law, the respect for workers' rights, and the moral expectations for civil servants to *help the country in its economic recovery.* Social and ideological values can therefore be seen as the foundational factors that indirectly signal deontic responsibility (willingness or obligation) and the roles that are discursively assigned to various participants who are referenced as key players in the news stories. We capture such key players within the system of Interactants that we discuss next.

4.3 Interactants

The system of Interactants represents five interrelated subsystems of Source type, Primary modal target, Secondary modal target, Tertiary modal target, and modal Beneficiary. These subsystems can also be seen to represent interrelations between participants as they take different roles that are projected within the news stories. In order to put our discussion of Interactants in perspective, we will briefly refer to the

concept of *context* with a focus on an aspect that is relevant to interpersonal relations between participants/speakers as represented in texts, and the different roles that the participants are said to be involved in or expected to play. This aspect of context is known as the *tenor* of context. Let us consider Halliday and Hasan's description of *tenor* as it relates to interpersonal relations between participants and speakers within texts:

> Tenor refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationships obtain, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech roles they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 12, cited in Martin and Rose 2007: 296).

Drawing on Halliday and Hasan's dimension of tenor, we consider statements of deontic obligation and deontic willingness/inclination as articulated in the news stories and how such statements are loaded with referential strategies that assign various participants discursive statuses and roles as deontic sources, deontic targets, and deontic beneficiaries.

4.3.1 Source type

Within the subsystem of Source Type, we group participants who, through their speech roles, are portrayed in the news stories as the ones who impose an obligation on other participants, or express the willingness or promise to carry out certain actions or fulfil certain expectations for the achievement of an ideal state of affairs. We distinguish between *specified* and *unspecified* sources. Specified sources is, in principle, an open set, though a closed set of salient interactants might well be motivated within specific research projects.

This classification of deontic source types into specified and unspecified sources is closely related to Kaltenbacher's (2019) discussion of modality in news texts. Drawing on the work of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), Kaltenbacher points out that the authorial voice (the news writer) can reveal or conceal the source of a proposal. Examples (11) and (12) illustrate this point.

(11)   Government must show commitment when engaging civil servants over salary negotiations, Botswana Congress Party president, Dumelang Saleshando said at a press conference last Friday.

(12)   When *you* go out and *you* have a process established and there are rules governing it, *you have to* respect that.

In Example (11) the deontic source is specified in the news story as Botswana Congress Party president, Mr. Dumelang Saleshando, who is said to have expressed

an imposition of obligation on the government to show commitment in their nego-
tiations with workers' unions. In contrast, the source of the obligation is strategically
concealed in Example (12). It is important to highlight that in the complete news story
from which Example (12) is taken, the statement appears within news content that is
attributed to a cabinet minister, and it may seem like the cabinet minister is a
specified source. However, the repetitive use of the pronoun *you* as a grammatical
subject suggests some reference to people in general, and the obligation to respect
'the process' is presented as a general public duty. We therefore argue that in this
example, the cabinet minister conceals the source of the directive for evaluative
purposes and the evaluation is downplayed at the same time. This example illus-
trates a complex interaction between specified and unspecified deontic sources as
they play out in texts.

4.3.2 Primary modal target

The primary modal target is concerned with participants who are textually posi-
tioned by deontic sources (as discussed above) with a leading role in bringing to pass
an ideal state of affairs. This subsystem comprises two simultaneous systems –
Primary Target Agency and Primary Target Specification – and we will illustrate the
contrastive categories in each with examples. In terms of Agency, there are three
options: Primary Instigator, Primary Agent or Primary Medium. The Instigator is the
participant that causes or allows someone or something else to do something or that
causes or allows a state of affairs to come about. In Hallidayan terms (Halliday and
Matthiessen 2014: 353), this role would include, but not be limited to, the Initiator role
from the transitivity system and the $Agent_2$ role from ergativity. In contrast, the
Agent is the participant that carries out an action and a Medium is a participant that
experiences a state of affairs or that has something done to them. Our use of Agent
here does not quite align with Halliday's analysis, as we use the term to refer to any
party that has control over a specified action, whether the action is carried out by
themselves or others. In Hallidayan terms, the Agent role only applies to participants
affecting the state or actions of others.

Agency: primary instigator is systemic contrast under primary modal target
(13)   Saleshando said *it is the role of the government* to ensure that its people have a
         dignified existence through better pay.

In Example (13) we see that, while the end goal is that the people have a dignified
existence, the government is given responsibility for making this state of affairs come
about.

Agency: primary agent is a systemic contrast under primary modal target

(14)   He said instead of embarking on a strike and risk crippling the economy, *civil servants should be working hard* to help the country in its recovery process.

In Example (14), civil servants are attributed modal responsibility as active agents who should be working hard.

Agency: primary medium is a systemic contrast under primary modal target

(15)   *Grievances by public workers' unions*, he said, must be taken seriously and they must be respected by the government.

In Example (15), the passive form is used to give salience to what must happen to the grievances by public workers' unions rather than what the government must do. The grievances are therefore analysed as primary-medium in this example.

Specification: primary target as source versus 'other' primary target

In our discussion of domain types earlier we referred to Example (9) (repeated below as Example 16) to illustrate a case in which a representative of the government ascribes positive agency to the government and expresses the government's willingness to protect workers' rights.

(16)   Government will ensure protection of workers' rights during industrial action, presidential affairs and public administration minister assured parliament on Friday.

Example (16) illustrates the specification of the primary modal target (the government) when such a target is the same as the deontic source. This contrasts with the specification of the primary modal target when the target is a different participant other than the deontic source as illustrated in Example (17).

(17)   Grievances by public workers' unions, he said, must be taken seriously and they must be respected by the government.

4.3.3 Secondary and tertiary modal targets

While the primary target is the participant that is given modal responsibility for an action or state of affairs, further participants can be included within the scope of the obligation. In general terms, if there is a primary Instigator, then there will be an Agent or a Medium involved in a secondary role, as in Example (18), repeated from above, where *its people* is the secondary-Medium.

(18)   Saleshando said it is the role of the government to ensure that *its people* have a dignified existence through better pay.

Similarly, where there is a primary Agent, there is potentially a secondary Medium, as in Example (19) (from Kaltenbacher, repeated from above); and, where there is a primary Medium, there is potentially a secondary Agent, as in Example (20) (repeated from above).

(19)   This country is required to cut *public spending.*

(20)   Grievances by public workers' unions, he said, must be taken seriously and they must be respected *by the government.*

The optional placement of interactants as primary, secondary or tertiary deontic targets serves to focus or downplay the centrality of each in the realisation of the ideal state of affairs. Example (21) provides an example of primary, secondary and tertiary targets. In this news extract, the vice president was reported to have addressed parents following reports of 'disturbances' in schools across the country. Some news agencies had reported that students were staging demonstrations to show concern about the unresolved dispute between the government and the workers' unions. While the concerns raised by students were seen as legitimate by some political figures, the government had a different view and accused opposition parties of using students to try to gain political applause. In this example there appears to be a subtle criticism of parents as they are called on by the government to discourage their children from participating in any way in the ongoing dispute.

(21)   The Vice President, Lt Gen Mompati Merafhe has appealed to parents to advise their children that they are being used as pawns in the ongoing strike by public servants. Addressing a kgotla meeting in Mahalapye this week he said *parents should not allow their children to be used by striking public servants or by politicians* because children had nothing to benefit.

In Example (21), the parents are the primary-instigator while children are included within the scope of the modality as secondary-medium and striking public servants or politicians as the tertiary-agent. This strategy serves to highlight the obligations of the parents over the needs of their children or the goals of the strikers. As with primary targets, secondary and tertiary targets might or might not be the modal source.

As mentioned above, for this section of the overall network we have used labels from the ergative model as these encompass all transitivity types. The network could, of course, be increased in detail and delicacy by including participant roles from transitivity as well as ergativity roles (see Bartlett 2004, 2005).

4.3.4 Beneficiary

Besides participants/speakers who express the desirability for ideal states of affairs or course of action to take place (deontic sources), and those who are represented as having the agentive role in fulfilling obligations (modal targets), within the scope of

the modality there may also be beneficiaries, participants who are presented as a group that will be positively affected by the fulfilment or realisation of an ideal state of affairs. We analyse beneficiaries according to the overall semantics of clauses and they are, therefore, not necessarily equivalent to Beneficiaries in the transitivity system. For this category of Interactants, let us revisit Example (14) that we discussed earlier. We have repeated it below as Example (22).

(22)   He said instead of embarking on a strike and risk crippling the economy, civil servants should be working hard to help the country in its recovery process.

When we discussed this example earlier, we stated that it carries some moral overtones. When considered in terms of modal beneficiary, it can be noticed that civil servants are presented as a group that is not keen to help in the country's economic recovery. Their fulfilment of the required obligation would be for the good of the country (civil servants should work hard for the good of the country or the economy).

Beneficiary as source versus beneficiary as other
The data set that we are considering in this paper does not indicate illustrative examples in which the category of beneficiary also happens to be the deontic source. This may be a further strategy that is maintained by the newspapers in their quest to project objectivity in the news. In terms of beneficiary as 'other', the fulfilment of an obligation/inclination by a deontic target is presented as a course of action that will benefit participants other than the deontic source, as in Example (22).

4.4 Modality

The system of Modality involves the means deontic sources have of evaluating a proposal in terms of how necessary it is, or how willing they are to carry out that proposal (Bartlett 2014: 188). As we showed in our discussion of Interactants above, when it comes to the imposition of obligation and the responsibility to make the proposal come true, the deontic source and the modal target are crucial. We will briefly sketch over the categories of modal orientation, investment and force here as these are covered in detail in several standard SFL sources.

4.4.1 Modal orientation

Modal orientation refers to how overtly the speaker takes responsibility for the modal meaning (Bartlett 2014; Thompson and Muntigl 2008) and it has two contrasting levels: Subjective and Objective modality. In the case of subjective modality, the speaker takes

personal responsibility and makes their evaluation overt. This differs with objective modality in which the speaker does not take personal responsibility for the evaluation.

4.4.2 Modal investment

Modal investment refers to whether modality is either explicit or implicit. The nature of explicit modality is such that the Subjective or Objective orientation is overtly marked, and in the case of implicit modality, the Subjective or Objective orientation is not overtly marked. Taking these two categories together, *I order you to go* would be explicitly subjective; *You must go* would be implicitly subjective; *You have to* go would be implicitly objective; and *It's necessary for you to go* would be explicitly objective.

4.4.3 Modal force

Modal force, also known as modal value, attends to the level of strength that the deontic source uses to express the desirability/necessity for the modal target to make a proposal come true. The strength that is attached to the imposition of obligation or the willingness to fulfil the inclination is graded as high, median, or low force/value. A proposal is therefore graded as showing high force/value if the imposition of obligation, or the articulation of deontic willingness is amplified, as in *You must go* as opposed to the median force *You should go.*

4.5 Attribution

Attribution is widely recognised as a feature of Martin and White's (2005) 'reporter voice' and it is associated with 'objective' news reporting. A key component of 'reporter voice' is the prohibition of inscribed authorial evaluations, and evaluations are "mediated through attribution to external news sources" (Martin and White 2005: 183). As can be noticed from the examples of news excerpts we have so far discussed, expressions of deontic obligation and deontic willingness tend to appear in attributed statements. This characteristic of deontic modality has also been observed by Katajamäki (2017) who states that meanings of obligation, often voiced as directives, tend to appear in attributed news content. Using attribution, journalists distance themselves from the content of what is being expressed and disassociate themselves from evaluative meanings (Lauerbach 2006; White 2006), including evaluative meanings that are embedded in expressions of deontic obligation and deontic willingness. However, as we noted earlier, attribution of news content to external sources is not devoid of subjectivity. Other mechanisms can come into play

to advance a subjective news narrative by foregrounding or downplaying the voices of those to whom statements are attributed (Piazza 2009; White 2004). Hong Van and Thomson (2008: 55) point out that due to the multi-voiced nature of 'objective' news stories, modality and attribution play a key role in the evaluative construction of the news stories. It therefore comes as no surprise that the examples of hard news stories that we discuss in this paper show an interesting interplay between deontic modality and attribution.

4.6 Evaluation

The final dimension in our systems network is Evaluation. As we have discussed throughout this paper, our focus is on how the subjective load of evaluative/attitudinal language gets downplayed via deontic obligation and deontic willingness. Drawing from Appraisal framework (Martin and White 2005; Martin and Rose 2007), we consider the types of evaluation (Affect, Judgement, Appreciation), and the types of evaluative targets. Affect is a type of evaluation by which speakers express emotional reactions to phenomena. Speakers can mark their misery, cheer, displeasure, or admiration. Judgement on the other hand involves assessments of human behaviour and character by reference to some value systems or norms, while Appreciation attends to assessments of states of affairs and how they are assigned value in terms of their social significance, potential harm, or benefit. Targets of evaluation are the participants or entities to which expressions of evaluation are directed. It should be noted that the Targets within this subsystem are not necessarily the same as the modal targets in the Interactants system, particularly when evoked evaluation is in play.

This point leads us to evaluative Scription, that is, whether the evaluations that are expressed are inscribed or evoked, and evaluative complexity, whether the evaluations that are identified are characterised by single or multiple coding of features. As explained earlier, evaluation can be expressed explicitly or implicitly. Thompson (2008: 172) states that with evocation, "we are told something about an entity or state which is intended to elicit a particular kind of evaluative reaction, without any of the lexical items being identifiable as unambiguously evaluative". For Martin and White (2005: 61), attitudinal inscription involves attitudinal words that have stable and identical meanings across all contexts. Evocation on the other hand, refers to indirect realisations of evaluative meaning. The distinction between *single* and *multiple* coding attends to the coding of segments of the news texts to determine the extent to which expressions of evaluation are entirely inscribed or evoked, on the one hand, or involve both an inscribed evaluation and an evoked target, often of different targets, as when direct criticism of bad behaviour may imply a criticism of parents or governments.

5 Analysis

In the preceding section, we talked through the systemic contrasts within the network and discussed some illustrative examples from across different texts. We will now look at one complete text from the data set and discuss it in terms of deontic modality as a strategic means of mitigating evaluative language within texts. The following text recounts details about a press conference that was addressed by opposition party leaders concerning the workers' strike.

(1)   Opposition supports workers
(2)   GABORONE: *Government must show commitment when engaging civil servants over salary negotiations, Botswana Congress Party (BCP) president, Mr Dumelang Saleshando said at a press conference last Friday.*
(3)   *Grievances by public workers unions, he said, must be taken seriously and they must be respected by the government.*
(4)   He affirmed that opposition parties support civil servants legal strike whose first phase will last for 10 days.
(5)   *He said public workers' salaries must be increased* because they were being paid peanuts when compared to other countries of the same economic status as Botswana.
(6)   He noted that the cost of living in the country was high, while government had worsened the situation by increasing value added tax (VAT).
(7)   The BCP leader criticised government for allegedly not showing any commitment to avert the salary increment crisis.
(8)   He therefore urged government to show sympathy towards the workforce.
(9)   Also at the press conference was the leader of the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD), Mr. Gomolemo Motswaledi and the leader of Botswana National Front (BNF), Mr. Duma Boko, who shared the same sentiments.
      (*Daily News*, 18 April 2011)

In this brief analysis we will focus on the three clauses containing deontic modality (Clauses 2, 3, and 5) and discuss the effect of these in terms of the range of contributing features set out in Figure 2.

In Clause (2), the deontic source is the BCP President, Mr. Dumelang Saleshando; the primary target is the government, who are construed as agentive, as they have the choice and control over the process of *showing commitment*. There are no secondary or tertiary interactants (as commitment is analysed as part of the process[2]), though civil servants are construed as beneficiaries of the process by means of a non-

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2 As a Scope/Range in SFL terms.

finite clause. The modality is high force and, as with all modal auxiliaries in English, implicitly subjective. The deontic statement is attributed to Mr Saleshando, who is also the source of the modality. The use of the deontic modal here suggests that there is a need to be filled and so realises an evoked negative evaluation of the government in terms of a lack of either tenacity or veracity (or perhaps a blend of both), which are types of social esteem and social sanction within the category of Judgment. In terms of the system of rights and obligations in which this evaluation makes sense, we would initially say that we are in the domain of workers' rights. However, as we will suggest below, domain is perhaps best understood as a prosodic feature which is shaped by the feel of the text overall rather than simply in terms of single clauses.

In Clause (3), the deontic source is still Mr. Saleshando, and the statement is once again directly attributed to him. In this clause, a passive construction is used to construe the medium *grievances by public workers* as the primary target with *the government* as agents and secondary targets. This places the focus on the need for reform rather than on the government's actions, which are seen as the means to this end. As with Clause (2), the modality is high force and implicitly subjective. The target of the evaluation is the government and the evoked criticism hovers between negative veracity and negative propriety in their dealings with the unions. In these terms, we would analyse the evaluative domain as a combination of workers' rights, as with Clause (2), but also with a strong suggestion of good governance.

In Clause (5), we once again have Mr. Saleshando as the attributed deontic source, with the construal of the medium *public workers' salaries* as primary target again focusing on the need for reform rather than the government's actions per se. In this clause, this effect is further enhanced through the absence of the government as secondary agentive target. The deontic force is once again high and implicitly subjective, with the third use of *must* in just three clauses. The evoked evaluation of the government is one of negative propriety, as they are not paying their workers enough, and, in this case, we would suggest that the evaluative domain is once again a blend of workers' rights and good governance.

Taking these three clauses together we would claim that, while all the criticisms of the government are mitigated through the use of both modality and attribution, the repeated use of high force subjective modality is striking, as this would typically be a feature of editorials rather than hard news stories. Adding to this effect, in Clauses (2) and (3) the author has foregrounded the negative evaluations in the reported statements, with the attribution occurring as almost an afterthought after the quotation. In giving thematic prominence to the modal statements in this way, the author appears to be giving their own advice to the government just as much as reporting Mr. Saleshando's speech, and the overall prosody of the text works to place it primarily within the domain of good governance, with workers' rights as subsidiary to this. And at this point we should remember that the article appears in the

Daily News, which is a government-owned paper. What we appear to be dealing with in this article, therefore, is not simply a case of repeated mitigation, whereby evaluative load is smuggled into purportedly objective journalism in order to *criticise* the government, but a blurring of the distinction between authorial and reported voice (cf. Pounds 2010), with the journalist, as author, using attributed sources to ventriloquise their own thoughts in order to *advise* the government.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have shown the range of variation that might come into a discourse analysis of the strategic uses of deontic modality in hard news reporting and discussed interconnecting systems of meaning AND paradigmatic options in each system. For discourse analysis, paradigmatic options and the choices that are not taken are also relevant. As we mentioned in the discussion of deontic beneficiary, the option 'beneficiary as source' was not taken up in any of the examples from the data set. However, this option is still relevant as it is indicative of more possible discursive means of using deontic modality to project objectivity in the news.

Having approached the Appraisal network from an alternative network to focus on mitigation rather than affiliation, and having highlighted deontic modality within a system of mitigation strategies, we can now re-embed these perspectives within a more detailed overall system that offers holistic or multiple vantage points leading to new angles of analysis.

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