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The Analysis of Interpersonal Metafunction of Anne Hathaway's Speech on International Women's Day 2026

Izzatul Jannah¹, Sherly Aisyia Anggraeni²,
Yohannes Rikki F. Situmeang³, Widhiyanto⁴, Galuh Kirana Dwi Areni⁵

^{1*}, ², ³, ⁴, ⁵Universitas Negeri Semarang

¹izzatuljannah@students.unnes.ac.id

***Corresponding Author**

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Abstract

This study investigates the realization of interpersonal metafunction in Anne Hathaway's speech on International Women's Day 2026 by employing the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The analysis concentrates on the interpersonal resources embedded in the speech, particularly mood types, speech functions, subject choices, and modality, to examine how linguistic elements are utilized to establish relationships with the audience and convey persuasive messages. The findings demonstrate that declarative clauses are the most frequently occurring mood type and primarily function as statements, indicating that Hathaway's main objective is to inform, persuade, and raise awareness about issues concerning gender equality and women's rights. The speech also features several rhetorical questions that encourage audience reflection and emotional involvement rather than seeking direct responses. Furthermore, the recurring use of the inclusive pronoun *we* reflects an intentional strategy to foster solidarity, collective identity, and shared responsibility among participants. The use of modal verbs, including *must*, *can*, *will*, and *would*, further reveals the speaker's attitudes toward obligation, possibility, commitment, and hope for future social progress. These interpersonal linguistic features enable Hathaway to strengthen her connection with the audience, enhance the persuasive impact of her message, and promote collective engagement in addressing gender-related challenges. therefore, the study highlights how interpersonal metafunction serves as an effective linguistic resource for constructing social relationships, influencing audience perspectives, and supporting advocacy for women's empowerment and gender equality.

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Introduction

Language is not only used to convey information but also to express ideas, emotions, perspectives, and social values, as well as to establish and maintain relationships between speakers and audiences. According to Edward Sapir (1921), language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through a system of voluntarily produced symbols. This indicates that language plays an essential role in shaping human interaction, especially in public communication such as speeches delivered by public figures and celebrities. Through speeches, speakers can influence audiences, express personal viewpoints, and promote social awareness regarding important global issues.

In contemporary society, speeches delivered by celebrities and public figures often extend beyond entertainment and become platforms for social advocacy. One of the major global issues frequently addressed in public discourse is gender equality and women's rights. Public speeches related to these issues are significant because they not only convey information but also attempt to persuade audiences, build solidarity, and encourage social change. Therefore, analyzing speeches concerning women's empowerment is important to understand how language is strategically used to create interpersonal relationships with audiences and deliver persuasive messages.

One approach that can be used to analyze such speeches is Discourse Analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed by M. A. K. Halliday. In this framework, language performs three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Among these metafunctions, interpersonal metafunction focuses on how speakers establish social relationships, express attitudes, negotiate meanings, and influence audiences through linguistic resources such as mood, modality, pronouns, and evaluative expressions. Through interpersonal metafunction analysis, researchers can identify how speakers position themselves toward audiences and how persuasive meanings are constructed in discourse.

This study focuses on the analysis of interpersonal metafunction in Anne Hathaway's speech delivered on International Women's Day 2026. The speech is significant because it addresses issues related to women's empowerment, gender equality, and social justice, which are central topics in global discourse today. As a globally recognized public figure, Anne Hathaway uses her platform to inspire audiences and raise awareness about women's rights. Her speech is considered important to analyze because it demonstrates how language is employed to express solidarity, encourage empowerment, and establish emotional connections with audiences in an international context.

Several previous studies have examined interpersonal metafunction in speeches and public discourse. For example, Wang (2010) analyzed speeches by Barack Obama using critical discourse analysis to explore political language, although the study did not specifically focus on interpersonal metafunction. Another study by Putra (2021) analyzed interpersonal metafunction in Donald Trump's speech regarding Jerusalem, showing how linguistic choices were used to persuade audiences and construct authority. Similarly, Sari (2022) investigated interpersonal meanings in speeches by Vladimir Putin and found that language was strategically employed to influence public perception and reinforce ideological positions.

In addition, several studies have explored interpersonal metafunction in non-political contexts. Zudianto (2015) analyzed interpersonal metafunction in English textbooks to examine how social relationships are represented in educational discourse. Kabigting (2020) investigated interpersonal metafunction in online news headlines during the COVID-19

pandemic and highlighted how language shapes public attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, Lauwren (2021) analyzed interpersonal functions in Greta Thunberg's speeches, demonstrating how interpersonal elements contribute to persuasive environmental discourse.

However, most previous studies primarily focus on political leaders, educational texts, or news discourse. There is still limited research examining interpersonal metafunction in speeches delivered by celebrities or public figures advocating for social issues, particularly speeches related to women's empowerment and gender equality. Moreover, studies specifically analyzing Anne Hathaway's speech on International Women's Day 2026 remain scarce. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how interpersonal meanings are constructed in Anne Hathaway's speech and how linguistic features are used to engage and influence audiences.

The objectives of this study are twofold. First, this study aims to identify the interpersonal metafunction elements used in Anne Hathaway's speech on International Women's Day 2026. Second, it seeks to analyze how these interpersonal features are realized through linguistic elements such as mood, modality, pronouns, and evaluative expressions in constructing relationships with audiences. By achieving these objectives, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how interpersonal meanings are constructed in public speeches and how language is strategically used to influence and inspire audiences in the context of social advocacy.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using a content analysis approach to analyze the interpersonal metafunction found in a speech delivered by Anne Hathaway on International Women's Day. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to examine interpersonal meanings and relationships expressed through language in a detailed and contextual manner. Content analysis is applied to systematically identify, classify, and interpret linguistic features related to interpersonal metafunction within the speech.

The primary data of this study consist of the transcript of Anne Hathaway's speech on International Women's Day 2026. The speech was selected because it contains various interpersonal features that reflect attitudes, emotions, judgments, and interactions between the speaker and the audience. The data source is obtained from official videos, transcripts, or publicly accessible media platforms to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the data.

The data collection technique used in this study is documentation. The researcher collected the transcript of the speech, listened to and reviewed the speech repeatedly, and carefully examined the text to identify clauses containing interpersonal metafunction elements. The analysis specifically focuses on mood systems, modality, personal pronouns, and evaluative expressions that represent interaction and negotiation of meaning between the speaker and listeners.

For data analysis, this study adopts the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the interpersonal metafunction theory proposed by M.A.K. Halliday and Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen (2014). The analysis is conducted through several steps. First, the speech transcript is divided into clauses to facilitate detailed examination. Second, each clause is analyzed based on interpersonal metafunction components, including mood structures such as declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative forms. Third, modality expressions, including modal verbs and modal adjuncts, are identified to examine the

speaker's degree of certainty, obligation, and commitment. Fourth, personal pronouns and evaluative expressions are analyzed to reveal how the speaker establishes relationships, expresses attitudes, and engages the audience. Finally, the findings are categorized and interpreted descriptively to reveal patterns of interpersonal meaning realized throughout the speech.

To ensure the validity of the study, the researcher applies theoretical triangulation by referring to established SFL theories and previous related studies concerning interpersonal metafunction analysis. The findings are presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal metafunction is realized in Anne Hathaway's speech on International Women's Day 2026.

Results and Discussion

1. Language Strategies Used by Anne Hathaway to Interact with Her Audience Through Interpersonal Metafunction

The first objective of this study was to identify the language strategies employed by Anne Hathaway to interact with her audience through interpersonal metafunction in her speech delivered on International Women's Day 2026. The analysis reveals that Hathaway strategically employs declarative statements, rhetorical questions, inclusive pronouns, and modality to establish interpersonal relationships with her audience and strengthen her advocacy for gender equality.

From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), interpersonal metafunction concerns how language is used to enact social relationships and negotiate meanings between speakers and listeners (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In public speeches, interpersonal meaning plays a crucial role because speakers are expected not only to convey information but also to influence attitudes, emotions, and actions. The findings indicate that Hathaway effectively utilizes linguistic resources to achieve these interpersonal purposes.

a. Declarative Statements as an Informative and Persuasive Strategy

The most dominant interpersonal strategy identified in the speech is the use of declarative statements. Hathaway frequently employs declarative clauses to provide information, express evaluations, and communicate her perspective on gender-related issues. For example, she states:

"I'm sure I don't need to tell you that this is a strange, thorny moment in the world."

Another example can be found in the following clause:

"It's hard knowing that this day, which is meant to celebrate women, must yet still be about how unsafe it is to be a woman, even less safe to be a girl."

These clauses demonstrate how Hathaway positions herself as a knowledgeable and concerned speaker who seeks to raise awareness among her audience. Rather than simply celebrating women's achievements, she encourages listeners to recognize the ongoing challenges faced by women globally.

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), declarative clauses are primarily associated with the speech function of giving information. Such clauses enable speakers to construct particular interpretations of reality and influence how audiences perceive social issues. Similarly, Thompson (2014) argues that declarative statements are powerful persuasive devices because they present opinions as socially meaningful observations rather than direct arguments.

In Hathaway's speech, declarative clauses are not merely descriptive; they also carry evaluative meanings. For instance, the phrase "strange, thorny moment" reflects her assessment of contemporary social conditions. This evaluative language encourages listeners to share her concerns regarding inequality and injustice.

Furthermore, declarative statements help establish credibility. By presenting observations, facts, and evaluations, Hathaway positions herself as an advocate who is both informed and emotionally invested in the issues she discusses. This finding supports Martin and White's (2005) argument that speakers often use evaluative language to align audiences with their viewpoints and values.

b. Rhetorical Questions as a Reflection and Engagement Strategy

Another significant interpersonal strategy identified in the speech is the use of rhetorical questions. Several examples include:

"Are we not all tormented that societal progress for women has in large part been in response to extreme gender violence?"

"Are we not tormented by what women like Giselle Pelico, Virginia Juffre, and Malala Yousafzai have had to endure?"

"Do we really dare celebrate?"

Although these clauses take the grammatical form of questions, they do not genuinely seek information from listeners. Instead, they function rhetorically to encourage reflection and emotional engagement.

Eggins (2004) explains that interrogative clauses can be employed rhetorically to establish interpersonal involvement and stimulate audience participation. Rather than requiring verbal responses, rhetorical questions encourage audiences to internally negotiate meaning with the speaker.

The rhetorical questions used by Hathaway are particularly effective because they connect emotional concerns with social realities. By asking whether audiences are "tormented" by violence against women, she invites listeners to share a collective moral response. This strategy transforms the audience from passive listeners into active participants in the discourse.

Similarly, Bloor and Bloor (2013) argue that rhetorical questions function as persuasive devices because they guide audiences toward particular conclusions while preserving the appearance of dialogue. Hathaway's use of rhetorical questions illustrates this function

clearly. The audience is implicitly encouraged to agree that gender-based violence remains a critical issue requiring continued action.

The question “Do we really dare celebrate?” is particularly significant because it introduces a moment of tension within the speech. On one hand, International Women’s Day is a celebration of women’s achievements. On the other hand, Hathaway reminds audiences that many women continue to face discrimination and violence. The rhetorical question therefore serves as a bridge between celebration and critical reflection.

c. Inclusive Pronouns as a Solidarity-Building Strategy

The findings also reveal the extensive use of inclusive pronouns, particularly the pronoun *we*. Examples include:

“We celebrate.”

“We come together today under complicated skies.”

“We celebrate that we have come far enough to have evidence to prove that fact.”

“We grieve that there is yet so much evidence of the necessity of this work.”

“We keep going until it's done.”

The repeated use of *we* demonstrates Hathaway’s effort to establish solidarity and collective identity. Instead of positioning herself as separate from the audience, she presents herself as part of a broader community committed to social justice.

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), pronouns are important interpersonal resources because they define social relationships among participants. Inclusive pronouns, in particular, reduce social distance and create a sense of shared responsibility.

Martin and Rose (2007) further explain that inclusive pronouns function as alignment resources that help speakers construct collective identities. Through repeated use of *we*, Hathaway frames gender equality as a common mission rather than an issue affecting only women.

This strategy is especially important in advocacy discourse. By using *we*, Hathaway broadens responsibility for social change beyond specific groups and encourages collective action. The audience is not merely observing a discussion about gender equality; they are positioned as participants in the movement toward achieving it.

d. Modality as a Strategy of Commitment and Evaluation

The final interpersonal strategy identified in the speech is modality. Examples include:

“This day, which is meant to celebrate women, must yet still be about how unsafe it is to be a woman.”

“Progress which we know can be devastatingly slow.”

“A path which we pray will lead to the peace of future generations.”

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), modality occupies the area between absolute affirmation and absolute negation. Through modality, speakers express varying

degrees of certainty, obligation, possibility, and commitment.

The modal verb *must* represents high-value modality because it conveys strong obligation. Its use indicates Hathaway's belief that discussions about women's safety remain necessary despite the celebratory nature of International Women's Day.

Meanwhile, *can* expresses possibility and acknowledges the challenges associated with social progress. The modal verb *will* projects hope and confidence regarding future outcomes.

Eggins (2004) argues that modality is an important interpersonal resource because it allows speakers to express attitudes and negotiate relationships with audiences. Similarly, Butt et al. (2021) suggest that modality contributes to persuasion by signaling the speaker's degree of commitment to particular ideas.

In Hathaway's speech, modality strengthens the overall advocacy message by combining urgency, realism, and optimism. These modal expressions encourage audiences to recognize existing problems while maintaining hope for future change.

2. Realization of Interpersonal Strategies Through Linguistic Elements

The second objective of this study was to analyze how the identified interpersonal strategies were realized through linguistic elements. The analysis focuses on mood types, speech functions, subject choices, and modal verbs as the main resources for constructing interpersonal meaning.

a. Mood Types

The distribution of mood types in the speech is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Mood Types

Mood Type	Frequency	Percentage
Declarative	31	75.6%
Interrogative	5	12.2%
Imperative	2	4.9%
Minor Clauses	3	7.3%
Total	41	100%

Table 1 shows that declarative mood dominates the speech, accounting for 75.6% of all clauses. This dominance reflects Hathaway's intention to inform and persuade the audience about issues related to women's rights and gender equality.

For example:

"Their work has laid the path for gender equality which we proudly walk today together."

and

"Our fighters have been the cornerstone of accountability."

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), mood is the principal grammatical system through which interpersonal meanings are enacted. The predominance of declarative mood therefore indicates that Hathaway primarily uses language to provide information and shape audience perspectives.

b. Speech Functions

The distribution of speech functions is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Speech Functions

Speech Function	Frequency	Percentage
Statement	32	78.0%
Question	5	12.2%
Command	2	4.9%
Minor/Greeting	2	4.9%
Total	41	100%

Table 2 demonstrates that statements constitute the dominant speech function. This finding is consistent with the predominance of declarative mood identified earlier. One example is:

“We celebrate the fact that strong autonomous feminist movements are among the most consistent predictors of government action to address violence against women.”

Another example is:

“We grieve that there is yet so much evidence of the necessity of this work.”

These statements provide information while simultaneously expressing evaluation and emotion. Thompson (2014) explains that statements are widely used in public speeches to build arguments and influence audience attitudes.

c. Subject Choices and Interpersonal Positioning

The distribution of subject types is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Subject Types

Subject Type	Frequency
We	15
It	8
They/These Women	6
I	5
Others	7
Total	41

As shown in Table 3, the pronoun **we** is the most frequently used subject. Examples include:

“We celebrate.”

“We come together today under complicated skies.”

“We keep going until it's done.”

The dominance of **we** indicates Hathaway's effort to create solidarity and collective responsibility. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) state that subject choices are important interpersonal resources because they determine how speakers position themselves in relation to listeners. By repeatedly using **we**, Hathaway frames gender equality as a shared responsibility among all participants.

d. Modality

The distribution of modal verbs is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Modal Verbs

Modal Verb	Frequency
Must	1
Can	1
Will	1
Would	1
Total	4

Although modality occurs less frequently than other interpersonal resources, it plays a significant role in expressing commitment and evaluation. Examples include:

“This day ... must yet still be about how unsafe it is to be a woman.”

“Progress which we know can be devastatingly slow.”

“A path which we pray will lead to the peace of future generations.”

Eggins (2004) explains that modality enables speakers to express attitudes, judgments, and levels of commitment. The use of **must** reflects strong obligation, while **can** and **will** express possibility and future hope. These modal expressions reinforce Hathaway’s determination to advocate for gender equality and social change.

Hence, the findings demonstrate that Anne Hathaway realizes interpersonal metafunction through a strategic combination of declarative statements, rhetorical questions, inclusive pronouns, and modality. These interpersonal strategies are linguistically realized through mood types, speech functions, subject choices, and modal verbs.

The predominance of declarative mood and statement speech functions reflects Hathaway’s role as an advocate who seeks to inform and persuade. The frequent use of rhetorical questions encourages audience reflection, while the extensive use of the inclusive pronoun *we* constructs solidarity and collective responsibility. Furthermore, modality strengthens the persuasive force of the speech by expressing obligation, commitment, possibility, and hope.

These findings support Halliday’s (1978) view that language functions as a social semiotic system through which speakers negotiate interpersonal relationships and influence social action. In the context of International Women’s Day 2026, Hathaway’s speech effectively uses interpersonal metafunction to inspire collective engagement and promote awareness of gender equality on a global scale.

Conclusion

This study examined the interpersonal metafunction in Anne Hathaway’s speech on International Women’s Day 2026 through the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The findings indicate that Anne Hathaway employed various interpersonal strategies to establish interaction with her audience, including declarative statements, rhetorical questions, inclusive pronouns, and modality. These strategies enabled her to communicate ideas effectively, engage listeners emotionally, and reinforce her advocacy for gender equality and women’s rights.

The analysis further revealed that these interpersonal strategies were realized through specific linguistic elements, namely mood types, speech functions, subject choices, and

modal verbs. Declarative mood and statement speech functions were found to be the most dominant features, reflecting the speaker's role in providing information and persuading the audience. In addition, the frequent use of the inclusive pronoun *we* demonstrated Hathaway's effort to create solidarity and a sense of collective responsibility among listeners. The use of modal verbs such as *must*, *can*, and *will* further strengthened the interpersonal meaning of the speech by expressing obligation, commitment, possibility, and hope for future social change.

Therefore, the findings confirm that interpersonal metafunction plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between speaker and audience. Through carefully selected linguistic resources, Anne Hathaway successfully constructed interpersonal meaning that encouraged reflection, fostered solidarity, and motivated collective action toward gender equality. This study highlights the significance of interpersonal metafunction in public speeches and demonstrates how language can be strategically utilized to influence audiences and promote social awareness. Consequently, the study contributes to the understanding of interpersonal meaning in public discourse and provides further evidence of the applicability of Systemic Functional Linguistics in speech analysis.

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