



# Between Mood and Meaning: Interpersonal Negotiation in Russia-Ukraine Podcast Discourse

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## ABSTRACT

Public discussions of global conflict turned out not only to be stages for information exchange but also as arenas for negotiating agreement, direction, evaluation, and participation. In podcast settings, guests typically serve as information providers, which may obscure the interpersonal significance of their grammatical choices given the predominance of declarative statements. This review assesses the effects of disruptions in the conventional relationship between grammatical mood and speech function. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the analysis inspects 484 guest clauses from three English-language episodes of the YouTube series PowerfulJRE that address the Russia-Ukraine War. The data were coded for mood, speech function, congruence, and tenor, integrating frequency analysis with contextual interpretation. While declarative statements structure most of the discourse, 37 clauses (7.6%) deviate from expected mood-function correspondences. These incongruities are unevenly distributed. Instances include questions functioning as statements, statements serving as questions or commands, and commands realized as statements or questions. Contextual analysis shows that those changes facilitate confirmation-seeking, alignment-building, directive mitigation, rhetorical engagement, narrative presentation, and discourse organization. The result shows that the interpersonal meaning of podcast discourse does not emerge only from leading grammatical patterns but also from speakers' purposeful use of the relationship between grammar and function. Incongruent mood therefore functions as a resource that enables primarily informational discourse to achieve greater flexibility and interactivity.

**Keywords:** Mood, Speech Function, Interpersonal Meaning, War Discourse, Systemic Functional Linguistics.



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## 1. Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine war (RUW) has attracted sustained attention from both the public and academic communities, resulting in numerous studies examining how language represents conflict, shape public opinion, and constructs competing narratives. Recent research has concentrated on war rhetoric, political conflict, and media representation, employing a variety of analytical methods. For instance, Chilwa and Ruzaite (2025) utilized textual and critical discourse analysis to investigate the war rhetoric of Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky. Verbytska (2024) analyzed the Western and Ukrainian media framing of the conflict using topic

modeling and corpus linguistics. Collectively, these studies establish that conflict discourse exceeds neutral communication, as linguistic choices deliberately shape and disseminate diverse perspectives.

This study considers the same general communication issue but focuses on the interpersonal side. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views language as a social tool that helps people share experiences, organize their text, and build relationships (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin, 2016). In this scheme, the mood system helps speakers manage exchanges. Statements, questions, and commands are respectively realized in declarative, interrogative, and imperative moods. The link between what an utterance means and how it is structured is key to understanding how people share information, make requests, and manage their roles (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2013).

This relationship is not always direct. Speakers may employ a grammatical mood that does not conventionally correspond to a given speech function. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), such mismatches are referred to as interpersonal grammatical metaphors alongside metaphorical moods, although the definitive theoretical boundaries stay debated (Devrim, 2015; Taverniers, 2006, 2008). Crucially, these mismatches do not constitute communicative failures. Rather, they provide speakers with resources to manage stance, alignment, and discourse organization. The interpretation of these choices depends on the context and the relationships among the participants.

Podcast discourse is a good setting for studying this relationship because it combines long conversations with public digital sharing. Earlier SFL studies on podcasts have found that declarative mood and statements are most common. For instance, Auliarachma et al., (2022) found that declarative mood and statements dominate in episodes of the Not Overthinking podcast. More recently, Humaizi & Yusuf (2024) looked at mood congruency in COVID-19 podcast discussions, and Silaban et al. (2025) studied speech functions and mood in the Berkeley Exec Ed podcast. These studies show that mood and speech function are useful tools for analyzing podcasts. They also point out that context matters, since podcast types, roles, topics, and goals can differ.

Wider SFL research also emphasized how important context is in interpersonal analysis. In this sense, tenor is one of the contexts to consider in interpersonal discourse. Tenor refers to the people involved, their relationships, and the social aspects of their interaction, such as status, contact, emotion, and protocol (Eggins, 2004; Humaizi et al., 2020). Hence, Cheng (2024) reviewed 160 studies on interpersonal metafunction published between 2012 and 2022 and found that discourse analysis, conversation and speech, and media discourse are well-established areas. The review also points out that there are still chances for new theory, methods, and context-based research. This shows that interpersonal analysis works best when language use is studied in context, not exclusively as individual grammar forms.

In this context, there is a clear research gap where conflict discourse, podcast interaction, and interpersonal SFL intersect. Most studies on the RUW have examined political rhetoric, media framing, and other aspects of conflict discourse. On the other hand, recent podcast research has mostly focused on mood and speech function in non-conflict situations. There has been little focus on how guests in public discussions about a dynamic geopolitical conflict use mood and speech function to shape interpersonal meaning, or how these choices connect to tenor. This matters because podcast guests were beyond just sharing information. They interact with the podcaster, delivering speech as a guest, and join a conversation that is open to the public.

In line with that, this study investigates guest discourse in three English-language podcast episodes addressing the RUW. Instead of merely evaluating guests' political perspectives, this investigation studies the linguistic strategies they use to convey their positions in interactions. The analysis addresses three primary questions: (1) What patterns of mood and speech function are present in guest discourse? (2) How are congruent and incongruent mood realizations distributed and manifested? (3) In what ways can guests' mood choices be interpreted in relation to tenor and the podcast context? Therefore, this study provides an interpersonal SFL perspective by linking mood and speech-function patterns to contextually grounded interpretations of both congruent and incongruent cases.

### 1.1. Scope of the study

The scope of this study is intentionally confined to the interpersonal metafunction, with a particular focus on mood, speech function, congruence or incongruence, and tenor. Tenor is operationalized through affect, status, contact, and formality. While ideational and textual meanings are recognized as co-occurring in discourse, they were not systematically coded, as these aspects fall outside the study's stated objectives. This delimitation aligns with the research focus on how participants construct social relations and negotiate exchanges through linguistic choices.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study applied qualitative content analysis (Ezzy, 2013) within the SFL framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, 2004). The SFL framework was chosen because it paradigmatically organizes the classification of naturally occurring clauses, followed by the contextual interpretation of the coded patterns. In this study, the interpersonal function took place as the foundation of the analysis of the data. Frequency counts and percentages were used descriptively to summarize the distributions of mood, speech functions, and congruence or incongruence, without treating the corpus as statistically representative of podcast discourse in general.

### 2.2. Data Source and Corpus

The data of this study consisted of three English-language podcast episodes about the RUW accessed from the PowerfulJRE YouTube channel. The data source as well as the clause distribution can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Data sources and clause distribution.**

| <b>Video Code (V)</b> | <b>Episode</b>                                               | <b>Clause (Cl)</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| V1                    | Lex Fridman Analysis on Putin and Ukraine                    | 146                |
| V2                    | Tulsi Gabbard on Ukraine and the Military Industrial Complex | 162                |
| V3                    | Dave Smith Breaks Down the Russia Invaded Ukraine            | 176                |
| <b>Total</b>          |                                                              | <b>484</b>         |

The three episodes were accessed in 2023 and selected for their extended guest discussions of conflict, the inclusion of diverse guests, and the provision of sufficient interactional material for interpersonal analysis. The analysis was limited to guest clauses; the podcaster's clauses were excluded from the research.

### 2.3. Transcription and Coding

The videos were initially transcribed using Sonix.ai. The resulting transcripts were manually cross-checked to avoid mistranscription and to capture important notes from the actual videos, including clause boundaries and wording relevant to mood classification. The final corpus contained 484 clauses. Each clause was coded for (a) mood type-declarative, imperative, interrogative, or zero mood; (b) speech function-statement, command, question, or offer; (c) congruent or incongruent realization; and (d) tenor features. The coding categories follow the interpersonal grammar of SFL (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

### 2.4. Tenor and Analytical Procedure

In this study, tenor was analyzed by examining affect, status, contact, and formality. The codification categories included positive, negative, or neutral affect; equal or unequal status; frequent or infrequent contact; and formal, informal, or balanced formality (Eggins, 2004; Humaizi et al., 2020). After coding, clauses were organized into summary tables. Congruent and incongruent cases were compared, and key clauses were interpreted within their immediate context. Two SFL/discourse-analysis supervisors also reviewed the analysis early in the thesis process to verify the interpretations.

In this article, claims about communicative purpose are treated as contextual interpretations. The researcher did not rely on direct evidence to infer a speaker's private intention. This is especially important for incongruent mood, since transcripts capture language and interaction but do not reveal what a speaker was thinking. Even when clauses appear together in a message, mood-residue analysis was conducted at the level of individual clauses for consistency. Each clause was identified within the larger structure and then analyzed for its interpersonal features: subject and finite make up the mood, while predicator, complement, and relevant adjuncts make up the residue. Logical links between clauses, such as projection and dependency, were analyzed separately from the mood-residue structure.

### 3. Results and Discussion.

#### 3.1. Mood and Speech-Function Patterns

The 484 guest clauses are classified into three mood types: declarative, imperative, and interrogative. Zero mood is absent. Declarative mood is clearly dominant, accounting for 426 clauses (88.0%), followed by imperative mood with 36 clauses (7.4%) and interrogative mood with 22 clauses (4.5%). The same corpus is dominated by statements (449; 92.8%), followed by commands (19; 3.9%) and questions (16; 3.3%). No offer function was identified.

**Table 2. Mood and Speech Function Types Distribution**

| Features        | Category      | n   | %    |
|-----------------|---------------|-----|------|
| Mood            | Declarative   | 426 | 88.0 |
| Mood            | Imperative    | 36  | 7.4  |
| Mood            | Interrogative | 22  | 4.5  |
| Mood            | Zero mood     | 0   | 0    |
| Speech Function | Statement     | 449 | 92.8 |
| Speech Function | Command       | 19  | 3.9  |
| Speech Function | Question      | 16  | 3.3  |
| Speech Function | Offer         | 0   | 0    |

The dominance of declarative mood and statements was consistent with the interactional role assigned to guests in the selected episodes. Guests were invited to provide information, interpretation, experience, or opinion, while the podcaster frequently served as the information seeker. In SFL terms, a statement realized by a declarative was the congruent realization for giving information (Bakuro, 2017; Halliday, 1985; Matthiessen et al., 2022). The numerical dominance of this pairing should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of a special grammatical preference associated with the RUW. However, it was compatible with the participation roles and communicative activity of the podcast setting.

The comparatively low frequency of imperative and interrogative moods is also interpretable in this context. Commands demand goods or services, whereas questions request information. Because the guests are predominantly positioned as information providers, it was common for them to have fewer interactional reasons to issue direct commands or seek information from the podcaster than the podcaster had to question them. The distribution therefore underscores the importance of examining mood alongside participant roles and not treating mood frequencies in isolation.

#### 3.2. The Realization of Congruent and Incongruent Mood

Of the 484 clauses, 447 (92.4%) are congruent, and 37 (7.6%) are incongruent. The incongruent clauses are distributed across all three episodes: seven in V1, fifteen in V2, and fifteen in V3. Thus, incongruence is a minority pattern, yet it occurs consistently across the three data sources.

**Table 3. Incongruent Mood Realizations in the Guest Corpus**

| Incongruent Pattern     | V1 | V2 | V3 | Total |
|-------------------------|----|----|----|-------|
| Declarative-Question    | 2  | 4  | 3  | 9     |
| Declarative-Command     | 1  | 1  | 3  | 5     |
| Imperative-Statement    | 1  | 7  | 1  | 9     |
| Imperative-Question     | 0  | 0  | 1  | 1     |
| Interrogative-Statement | 3  | 3  | 7  | 13    |
| Total                   | 7  | 15 | 15 | 37    |

The pattern shows that incongruence is not a single phenomenon. The largest category is interrogative mood realizing a statement (13 clauses), followed by declarative mood realizing a question (9) and imperative mood realizing a statement (9). Declarative-to-command realizations account for five clauses, while imperative-to-question occurs once. No incongruent command realized through interrogative mood was identified in the corpus.

The relatively small proportion of incongruent clauses is theoretically important because it provides a

baseline to evaluate marked interpersonal choices. Congruent mood represents the expected relation between mood and speech function: declarative–statement, imperative–command, and interrogative–question. Incongruent realizations depart from this pairing and therefore require greater attention to context. As Taverniers (2008) argues, interpersonal grammatical metaphor involves a reconfiguration of interpersonal meaning across grammatical and semantic levels; consequently, the form cannot be interpreted independently of its discourse environment.

### 3.3. Interpersonal Functions of Incongruent Realizations

The qualitative analysis shows several recurring interactional functions such as confirmation-seeking through declarative-question, softened directive through declarative-command, narrative statement through imperative form, interrogative form realizing statement, and discourse organization through imperative statement. These functions should be understood as contextual interpretations more than categorical claims about speaker intention.

#### a. confirmation-seeking through declarative-question

In V1:Cl126, the guest says, “Hitler's messaging was also very sort of beautiful sounding, right?”

|                           |            |                          |                           |                 |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Hitler's messaging</i> | <i>Was</i> | <i>also very sort of</i> | <i>beautiful sounding</i> | <i>, right?</i> |
| Subject                   | Finite     | Adjunct                  | Complement                | Mood tag        |
| Mood                      |            | Residue                  |                           |                 |

The clause is coded as declarative in grammatical form but as a question in speech function. The final “right?” invites confirmation from the interlocutor. The guest could have presented the proposition as an explicit statement. However, in the podcast, the interrogative function opens the proposition to the other participant. In the immediate interactional context, the incongruent realization can therefore be interpreted as a resource for negotiating alignment rather than simply asserting a proposition.

#### b. softened directive through declarative-command

In V3:Cl442, the guest says, “I highly recommend everyone read his stuff, his sub-task, incredible stuff unbelievable.”

|              |                 |                         |                                                            |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| $Cl\ \alpha$ | $I$             | <i>highly recommend</i> |                                                            |
|              | Subject         | Finite+Predicator       |                                                            |
|              | Mood            | Residue                 |                                                            |
| $Cl\ \beta$  | <i>everyone</i> | <i>Read</i>             | <i>his stuff, his stuff, incredible stuff unbelievable</i> |
|              | Subject         | Predicator              | Complement                                                 |
|              | Mood            | Residue                 |                                                            |

The clause is in the declarative mood, but its interpersonal function is coded as a command because it recommends an action to the audience. The declarative form avoids the high direct force of an imperative such as “Read his stuff!” and frames the directive as a recommendation. In this public podcast context, the form can therefore be interpreted as reducing the overt force of the directive while retaining its action-oriented meaning

#### c. narrative statement through imperative form

In V2:Cl256, “Don't eat any of the fruit because it's contaminated”

|              |            |                         |                                  |
|--------------|------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Don't</i> | <i>eat</i> | <i>any of the fruit</i> | <i>because it's contaminated</i> |
| Finite       | Predicator | Complement              | Adjunct                          |
| Mood         | Residue    |                         |                                  |

is coded as imperative in form but statement in function. The utterance occurs in a narrative account of the guest's experience at Chornobyl. It does not function as a direct command to the podcaster; instead, the imperative form presents information in a vivid, action-oriented way. The example illustrates why speech function cannot be inferred from mood alone and why the immediate discourse context is essential.

d. *interrogative form realizing statement*

In V3, several clauses coded as interrogative in form are interpreted as statements. For example, “Isn't that funny?”

|              |             |              |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| <i>Isn't</i> | <i>that</i> | <i>funny</i> |
| Finite       | Subject     | Complement   |
| Mood         |             | Residue      |

(V3:CL411) is not primarily a request for unknown information; it functions rhetorically to present an evaluation in which the speaker invites the interlocutor to recognize the speaker's assessment. Similarly, “would you call that an unprovoked attack?” in (V3:CL429) below,

|              |            |             |             |                             |
|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Would</i> | <i>you</i> | <i>Call</i> | <i>that</i> | <i>an unprovoked attack</i> |
| Finite       | Subject    | Predicator  | Complement  | Complement                  |
| Mood         |            | Residue     |             |                             |

That clause is coded as an interrogative but functions within the surrounding discourse to advance and test an evaluative proposition. Such forms allow the guest to package a position as an apparent question rather than an unqualified assertion

e. *discourse organization through imperative statement*

V2 contains “Let's start with the military industrial complex” (V2:CL148)

|              |              |                                             |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <i>Let's</i> | <i>start</i> | <i>with the military industrial complex</i> |
| Subject      | Predicator   | Adjunct                                     |
| Mood         | Residue      |                                             |

The CL148 above is coded as imperative in form and statement in function. Here the clause organizes the direction of the discussion rather than simply commanding the podcaster to perform a service. The suggestive “let's” constructs the next stage of the discourse as a shared activity. The example shows that imperative morphology can also be used to manage discourse progression.

Taken together, these examples show that the 37 incongruent clauses perform different interpersonal jobs. Some invite alignment, some mitigate directive force, some organize the discussion, and some present propositions through rhetorical questioning. The findings therefore support an interpretation of incongruent mood as a contextual resource for negotiating interpersonal force, not as an anomalous grammatical error.

### 3.4. Tenor Configuration and Contextual Interpretation

The tenor coding provides a contextual profile of the 484 clauses. Equal status is coded throughout the corpus (484 clauses; 100%). Infrequent contact dominates the contact dimension (476; 98.3%), while frequent contact occurs in eight clauses (1.7%). Informal formality is overwhelmingly dominant (477; 98.6%), with neutral formality in seven clauses (1.4%) and no clauses coded as formal. Affect is predominantly negative (341; 70.5%), followed by neutral affect (98; 20.2%) and positive affect (45; 9.3%).

**Table 4. Tenor Configuration across 484 Clauses**

| Tenor Category     | n   | %      |
|--------------------|-----|--------|
| Affect-Negative    | 341 | 70.5   |
| Affect-Neutral     | 98  | 20.2   |
| Affect-Positive    | 45  | 9.3    |
| Status-Equal       | 484 | 100.00 |
| Contact-Infrequent | 476 | 98.3   |
| Contact-Frequent   | 8   | 1.7    |
| Formality-Informal | 477 | 98.6   |
| Formality-Neutral  | 7   | 1.4    |

The tenor profile is consistent with the interactive character of the selected podcast episodes. Equal status and predominantly informal formality indicate that the interaction does not resemble a highly institutional or ceremonially formal exchange. At the same time, infrequent contact suggests that the participants are not coded as members of an intimate or routinely interacting relationship. The combination of informal formality and infrequent contact is compatible with a public conversational encounter in which participants can speak relatively casually without necessarily sharing a close personal relationship.

The affect distribution is also relevant to the topic. Negative affect is the most frequent category, which is unsurprising in a corpus devoted to war and political conflict, but the frequency should not be equated with a uniform emotional stance toward a particular side of the conflict. It indicates that the clauses were frequently coded in contexts containing negatively oriented events, evaluations, or circumstances. The tenor data, therefore, provide contextual background for the mood patterns interpretation without determining the guests' geopolitical stance.

The tenor categories should not, however, be interpreted as direct causes of particular mood choices. The data do not show that informal formality causes interrogatives, that infrequent contact causes incongruence, or that negative affect necessarily produces marked mood. Rather, tenor provides the interpersonal environment in which a particular realization can acquire contextual value. This distinction is especially important because three dimensions of the tenor configuration are highly stable in the corpus. When status is equal across all 484 clauses, for example, status cannot by itself explain why one particular utterance is declarative in nature and another interrogative. Its analytical value lies in describing the absence of a persistent hierarchical relation in the interaction. This point becomes visible when the representative examples are compared. For example, the CL40 in V1 is as below.

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V1:CL40<br>declarative-command<br>“ <i>as a political leader, you have to have extra precautions.</i> ” | Negative; equal; infrequent; informal<br>presents directive force as obligation or advice instead of an overt imperative. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The CL40 is coded as negative affect, equal status, infrequent contact, and informal formality. Its declarative form nevertheless expresses a command through the obligation implied by “*have to*”. The broad tenor allows the guest to utilize directiveness as conversational advice, not as ultimate order to the audience or podcaster. Similarly, V3:CL442 is also directive in function, but its affect is positive and the lexical choice “*recommend*” explicitly frames the action as an evaluation.

|                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V3:CL442<br>Declarative → Command<br>“ <i>I highly recommend everyone read his stuff...</i> ” | Positive; Equal; Infrequent; Informal<br>Combines evaluation with recommendation and extends the directive beyond the current podcaster |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In the basic principles of mood and speech functions, it was clear that command should be expressed in the imperative mood. Even so, the guest chose to employ the declarative form to deliver his ‘command’, which then made it less directive. The common social environment, therefore, does not prescribe a single directive form. However, different linguistic resources shape the meaning of directives in context.

On the other hand, V2:CL148 is especially informative because it is one of the rare incongruent clauses with frequent contact and neutral formality.

|                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V2:CL148<br>Imperative-Statement<br>“ <i>Let's start with the military-industrial complex.</i> ” | Positive; Equal; Frequent; Neutral<br>Organizes the discussion as a shared activity; the inclusive imperative manages discourse progression |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The CL148 above occurs at the opening of the guest's explanation and adopts inclusive “*let's*” to construct the next stage of the discussion as a shared activity. The combination of grammatical form and social context makes the clause better understood as collaborative discourse management than as a command demanding a service. This single contrast also demonstrates why the tenor analysis should remain descriptive since the unusual contact/formality values are compatible with the function observed in context, but they do not solely prove that those tenor values caused the imperative form.

V2:CL149 provides another perspective. Its neutral affect, equal status, infrequent contact, and informal formality occur in a clause coded as interrogative but functioning as a statement.

|                                                      |                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V2:Cl149<br>Interrogative-Statement<br>“What is it?” | Neutral; Equal; Infrequent; Informal<br>Stages the guest's explanation as a question-and-answer sequence that the guest immediately resolves. |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The guest immediately answers her own question by using the Cl149. Thus, the tenor contextualizes a dialogic manner in which the guest can simulate a dialogic question-and-answer pattern inside an explanatory monologue. The interpersonal value lies in how the form organizes participation and information, and it does not solely require a simple request for an answer.

Another example demonstrating why the contact and formality aspects dimensions alone cannot explain all incongruent realizations appears in V2:Cl256.

|                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V2:Cl256<br>Imperative-Statement<br>“Don’t eat any of the fruit because it’s contaminated.” | Negative; Equal; Infrequent; Informal<br>Presents a reported/narrated prohibition as vivid information. Not a present command to the podcaster. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Based on the tenor configuration, the clause indicates a negative affect and occurs under the dominant equal/infrequent/informal tenor, but it is embedded in a narrated experience. Here the imperative form belongs to the representation of an earlier situation. It is not a present command toward the podcaster. The example shows that contextual interpretation must distinguish between the interactional relationship in the current podcast and the relationship represented inside the guest's narrative.

V3:Cl411 and V3:Cl429 further manifest the role of the same broad tenor configuration in two different forms of dialogic engagement.

|                                                                                    |                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V3:Cl411<br>Interrogative-statement<br>“Isn’t that funny?”                         | Negative; Equal; Infrequent; Informal<br>Opens an evaluation to shared recognition.                                     |
| V3:Cl429<br>Interrogative-Statement<br>“Would you call that an unprovoked attack?” | Negative; Equal; Infrequent; Informal<br>Advances an evaluation while opening an explicit point for interlocutor uptake |

Both are coded as negative affect, equal status, infrequent contact, and informal formality, yet the clauses perform different interpersonal work. “Isn’t that funny?” opens an evaluation to shared recognition, whereas “would you call that an unprovoked attack?” presents an evaluative proposition for the interlocutor's uptake. The tenor is thus stable while the mood choice changes according to the immediate discourse activity.

Additionally, V3:Cl482 makes the same point from a different angle.

|                                                             |                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V3:Cl482<br>Declarative-Question<br>“You know what I mean?” | Negative; Equal; Infrequent; Informal<br>Checks shared understanding and maintains interlocutor involvement in an extended explanation. |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The declarative question “You know what I mean?” occurs in an extended explanation and explicitly monitors common understanding. The form does not introduce a new topic or provide factual information, but it keeps the interlocutor engaged in constructing meaning. This is a useful illustration of how a public podcast can retain an informal, conversational tone while the guest intermittently checks in on the interpersonal connection with the podcaster.

The affect dimension contributes another layer to this interpretation. Negative affect is dominant across the corpus, but the incongruent subset is not exclusively negative. Nevertheless, it includes both positive and neutral cases. The positive examples, such as V2:Cl148 and V3:Cl442, show that marked realizations can occur when the discourse is collaborative or evaluatively favorable, while negative examples occur in criticism, conflict description, and other evaluative contexts. Affect therefore reflects contextual information about the discourse orientation, but it should not be converted into a claim about the speakers' private affective conditions.

Taken together, the tenor findings answer the contextual dimension of the research question. The guests

speak within a relatively stable interpersonal environment characterized by equal status, predominantly infrequent contact, and predominantly informal formality. Against this background, the dominant declarative–statement pattern is consistent with an information-provider role, while the incongruent realizations become resources for affirmation, alignment, direction, recommendation, rhetorical evaluation, narrative representation, and discourse organization. Tenor consequently contextualizes the interpersonal value of mood choices without mechanically determining them (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Eggins, 2004).

### *3.5. Further Interpretation and Contribution*

The results suggest that the most informative feature of the corpus is not simply the high percentage of declarative clauses. In general, the evidence indicates that guests commonly use congruent declaratives to convey information and provide interpretation. In contrast, the minority cases where the expected relationship is altered become essential. These cases reveal how speakers can retain the appearance of information-giving while simultaneously performing other interpersonal purposes.

This finding adds a contextual dimension to recent SFL research on podcast discourse. Auliarachma et al. (2022) and Silaban et al. (2025) similarly identify declarative and statement patterns as prominent in podcast data, while (Humaizi & Yusuf, 2024) demonstrate the usefulness of congruence analysis in podcast discourse. The present study enlarges this line of work to a conflict-related podcast setting and explicitly connects the mood–speech-function relation with tenor. At the same time, the study also should not be read as claiming that the discerned patterns are unique to RUW discourse. However, the findings to this point show how a specific interactional setting makes particular interpersonal choices visible.

Therefore, the study is most likely a linguistic account of discourse rather than an assessment of the political claims made in the podcast episodes because the analysis does not determine whether the guests' historical explanations, causal claims, or evaluations of the RUW are factually correct. Nor does it infer that a particular grammatical choice reveals a guest's private intention. The researcher put this distinction to strengthen the study's analytical objective stability. It seeks the interpersonal realization in language and how it can be interpreted in context. The result is a more precise account of discourse than would be obtained by turning linguistic observations into judgments about political positions.

The study also opens a route toward a more extensive interpersonal analysis. Mood and speech function establish how exchanges are organized, while modality and appraisal could reveal how speakers grade certainty, obligation, evaluation, and alignment. The present data include potentially relevant resources, but they were not systematically coded because the research question was deliberately limited. Thus, a future corpus could examine whether incongruent mood co-occurs with particular patterns of modality, appraisal, or engagement. Such a design would allow researchers to test whether the marked mood choices identified here form part of larger interpersonal packages rather than operating solely within the individual scope.

Based on the limited corpus generalization, the findings consequently describe this as a selected interactional environment within podcast discourse, not the whole. The guest-only design is useful for isolating the linguistic behavior of invited speakers, but it removes part of the interactional system through which speech functions are negotiated. However, it is entirely possible that a podcaster's question can make a guest's declarative response highly predictable, while a podcaster's challenge can prompt an interrogative or directive response. To this extent, future research should therefore examine complete podcaster–guest sequences and compare guest choices with the podcaster turns that immediately precede and follow them.

In addition, the coding process has limitations that should remain visible. The original research used automated transcription followed by manual checking, which improves textual accuracy but cannot eliminate all ambiguity in spontaneous speech. Clause segmentation in spoken language can be difficult because speakers interrupt themselves, repeat words, leave constructions incomplete, and use discourse markers. Speech-function classification is also interpretive when a clause is rhetorically shaped or dependent on preceding turns. The present article therefore avoids presenting the 37 incongruent cases as mechanically self-evident. The classifications represent reasoned SFL interpretations grounded in the transcript and local context. A future study could strengthen replicability by having independent coders classify the full corpus and reporting agreement statistics before adjudication.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of retaining the complete corpus distribution while selecting marked cases for close analysis. The 484-clause count provides a transparent baseline. Without it, qualitative examples could be mistaken for the dominant pattern. Conversely, without close analysis of the 37 incongruent clauses, the article would reduce interpersonal meaning to a set of percentages. The combination creates a defensible progression for the development of corpus description and functional interpretation, such as: first, establish what is common; then, identify what is marked; then, examine why the marked pattern is

interactionally relevant.

A further theoretical implication concerns the treatment of incongruent mood as meaningful, not defective. In conventional language teaching, declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives are often introduced as relatively stable sentence types associated with statements, questions, and commands. That pedagogical simplification is useful at an introductory level. Meanwhile, during spoken interaction, those form-function relations are used flexibly. The present examples show that the flexibility is systematic enough to be analytically described. *“Isn't that funny?”* is not simply a badly formed question because the speaker is not necessarily seeking unknown information; *“let's start with...”* is not simply a command because its function includes organizing a shared activity. The relevant analytical question is therefore not whether the form matches a classroom prototype, but what interpersonal value the selected form acquires in context.

On the other hand, the affect finding exhibits why contextual coding is important. Based on the tenor configuration analysis, negative affect occurs in 70.5% of the clauses. Meanwhile, the frequency of negative affect cannot be equated with a stable emotional attitude toward one side of the conflict. The corpus concerns war, political violence, military policy, historical grievances, and related controversial events, so negatively oriented experiential and evaluative contexts are structurally available throughout the material. The coding therefore identifies an affective orientation in the discourse rather than diagnosing the speakers' emotions. This distinction is especially important when linguistic research addresses politically dynamic topics because a linguistic category should not be converted into a claim about a person's psychological state or political motive without independent evidence.

The role of tenor should not be treated as deterministic by its nature. It should be treated as contextually relative to the surrounding text. The corpus generally shows equal status across all coded clauses, overwhelmingly infrequent contact, and overwhelmingly informal formality. These values also should not be interpreted as objective measurements of the participants' complete social relationships. They describe how the interaction is represented for the purposes of the coding scheme. The podcaster and guest are not presented as members of an institutional hierarchy, and the discourse style is predominantly conversational. Yet public accessibility creates a second layer of participation: the immediate addressee is the podcaster, but the recorded discourse is also available to an audience beyond the immediate exchange. This layered context helps explain why a guest may alternate between straightforward information delivery and more dialogically oriented forms without shifting into a formal institutional register.

The findings also complement research on conflict discourse conducted within other analytical traditions. Chilwa and Ruzait (2024) demonstrate how war rhetoric can be examined through textual and critical discourse analysis, while Verbytska (2024) shows how computational framing methods can identify recurring thematic structures in media coverage of the RUW. Those approaches address questions concerning rhetoric, framing, and representation at broader levels of text or media. The present analysis addresses a different question: how interpersonal exchange is grammatically organized at the clause level in a mediated conversational setting. The approaches are therefore complementary. A speaker can participate in a broader political frame while simultaneously using a declarative to assert, an interrogative to invite alignment, or an imperative to organize discourse. Clause-level interpersonal analysis can thus reveal interactional mechanisms that are not necessarily visible in topic or frame analysis alone.

This finding also clarifies what should count as the contribution of an interpersonal SFL study of podcast discourse. The contribution is not merely the discovery that declaratives are frequent. Similar dominance has been reported in other studies of podcasts and spoken discourse, including Auliarachma et al. (2022) and Silaban et al. (2025). Nor is the contribution the identification of mood congruence as a theoretical principle, since congruence and incongruence are already established within SFL discussions of interpersonal realization (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Taverniers, 2008). Instead, the contribution is the empirical articulation of how these established resources operate within a particular interactional ecology: guests discussing a contested geopolitical issue in a public podcast while responding to a podcaster and orienting to a wider audience. The study therefore contributes contextual specificity rather than theoretical reinvention.

The combined findings support a distinction between grammatical form, exchange function, and contextual interpersonal value. This distinction is theoretically important because an analysis of spoken discourse can easily collapse these three levels. If grammatical mood is treated as equivalent to speech function, then every declarative is assumed to be a statement and every interrogative a question. The present corpus demonstrates why that assumption is insufficient. Mood provides a grammatical resource for construing an exchange, whereas speech function concerns what is being exchanged; the relationship between the two is systematic but not absolute. The 37 incongruent clauses make that relationship empirically visible. They show that speakers can exploit the semiotic distance between form and function without abandoning the basic organization of the interaction.

### 3.6. *The Implications and Limits of Interpretation*

In this sense, the article's principal novelty is best characterized as a contextual synthesis. Mood, speech function, congruence, and tenor are all established SFL resources, but their combined application to guest discourse in Russia-Ukraine conflict podcasts provides a specific account of how public conversational discourse balances information delivery with interpersonal negotiation. The analysis also demonstrates why the smallest numerical category can become the most theoretically revealing one. The 37 incongruent clauses are numerically minor, but they expose the flexibility through which speakers negotiate uptake, action, evaluation, and discourse progression. The article therefore shifts attention from asking which mood is most frequent to asking what changes when the expected relationship between grammatical mood and speech function is not maintained.

This perspective also prevents overstating the role of tenor. The data do not show that informal formality or infrequent contact directly produces incongruent mood. Rather, tenor provides a contextual framework for interpreting the observed grammatical choices. The interaction is sufficiently informal to permit rhetorical questions, recommendations, narrative imperatives, and collaborative discourse management, yet sufficiently public that speakers remain engaged in an extended information-oriented performance. The resulting environment is compatible with the coexistence of a highly stable declarative–statement baseline and occasional departures from that baseline.

A final point concerns the relationship between markedness and communicative efficiency. The high proportion of congruent clauses indicates that speakers do not need to continually manipulate grammatical form in order to construct an effective interaction. The expected form-function relationship supplies a stable communicative background. Marked realizations become noticeable because they occur against that background. This supports a view of interpersonal meaning as a system of choices in which the interpretive significance of an option depends partly on the alternatives that could have been selected. A declarative used as a question is meaningful not simply because it is grammatically declarative, but because a more prototypical interrogative was available as another possible realization.

## 4. Conclusion

This study examined interpersonal meaning in guest discourse from three English-language podcasts discussing the RUW, using SFL as the analytical framework. The analysis of 484 clauses shows a strong preference for declarative mood and statement speech function. Declaratives account for 426 clauses (88.0%), while statements account for 449 (92.8%). Congruent mood–speech-function realizations comprise 447 clauses (92.4%), confirming that the dominant interpersonal pattern aligns with the expected relationship between grammatical mood and speech function.

The study also identified 37 incongruent clauses (7.6%). These clauses do not constitute a single communicative strategy. They include declarative mood used to express questions or commands, imperative mood used to express statements or questions, and interrogative mood used to express statements. Contextual analysis suggests that these marked realizations can be used to seek confirmation, mitigate directive force, organize discourse, construct rhetorical engagement, or present information in a more vivid form. The findings therefore indicate that incongruent mood is not adequately characterized as simply unusual or incorrect grammar; it functions as an interpersonal resource whose interpretation depends on co-text and interactional context.

The tenor analysis further indicates a predominantly informal, infrequently contacted, and equal-status interactional configuration, with negative affect as the most frequent affective category. This profile supports interpreting the podcast as a public yet conversational environment in which guests can occupy an information-provider role while still negotiating alignment and interpersonal force with the podcaster and the wider audience. However, because the study analyzes publicly available discourse rather than speaker interviews or audience responses, the contextual interpretations cannot establish speakers' private intentions.

The study contributes to interpersonal SFL research by integrating mood, speech function, congruence, and tenor within a conflict-related podcast corpus. Its main contribution is therefore contextual rather than classificatory: the findings show that a largely congruent informational discourse contains a smaller set of marked interpersonal realizations through which guests manage the demands of public interaction. The study is limited to three episodes from a single podcast channel and to guest discourse only. Future studies could compare multiple podcast channels, include podcaster–guest exchanges more systematically, examine larger corpora across different geopolitical issues, or combine SFL analysis with audience-response and corpus-based methods.

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## 6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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