

Determining the Role of Hedging Devices in the Political Discourse of Two American Presidentiables in 2008

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Abstract

The use of hedging devices or expressions that convey inexactitude in political discourses may mitigate the strength of the assertions intended in written and oral communication (Martin-Martin, 2009). This study aims to investigate how hedging devices serve a function as discourse politics strategy. Specifically, it focuses on the analysis of the three presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 US election cycle. Using the descriptive-quantitative research design, hedging devices and their functions are qualitatively and quantitatively treated following the frameworks of Hyland (2005), Salager-Meyer (1997), and Martin-Martin (2008). The mixed method of discourse analysis, survey, and focus group discussion were used to gather, validate, and analyze data from the target respondents consisting of 35 graduate students pursuing language-related studies. Initial analysis reveals that hedging devices are also prominently used in the spoken discourse specifically in the context of politics or political debate and that they can be categorized into different types such as modal auxiliary verbs; modal lexical verbs; adjectival, adverbial, nominal modal phrases and approximators, among others. As indicated, some types are more dominant than the others. Another is that hedging devices also serve different functions depending on the intention or purpose of the speaker. Furthermore, the frequent use of certain hedging devices including can, will, should, I think, among others, appears to significantly promote the effectiveness of a speaker's argument.

Keywords: Political Discourse, American Presidentiables

Introduction

The radical technological inventions that ushered the world into the new millennium had turned the once impossible concept of global community into a glaring reality. Correspondingly, the establishment of the global community has resulted in the greater challenge for English language teaching practitioners to help second language learners (L2) acquire not only grammatical competence but a total communicative competence in the English language. According to Canale and Swain (1980), total communicative competence entails discourse competence or the ability to communicate in a coherent and logical way, strategic competence or the ability to negotiate meaning, sociolinguistic competence or the ability to use language appropriately depending on the culture and social context of the discourse, and linguistic competence or the ability to manipulate the system of the language. As a result, research investigations in the field of linguistics and English language teaching have focused on the analysis of discourses which are used in different disciplines in order to find out relevant concepts in the field of linguistics. These concepts help the L2 learners incorporate the said concepts in their discourses which characterize the language of native English speakers. Thus, it has been part of the mission of English language teaching practitioners to equip the L2 learners with communicative competence that will facilitate their participation in the global community of professionals.

Apparently, among the characteristics of native English speakers' discourse that is essential for the L2 learners to acquire if they were to be accepted as part of the global community of professionals is the effective use of cautious and polite language or more popularly known as hedging devices (Hyland, 1995). As pointed out by Brown and Levinson (1987), interlocutors who participate in conversation bring with them a "face" or "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (p. 61) that needs to be protected from "face threatening acts" or utterances that violate the need of the face to be free from imposition. Hedging devices are important as a politeness strategy because they enable interlocutors to "minimize the imposition, authoritativeness or directness of the utterances" (Wilamova, 2005, p. 85).

Related Literature and Studies

Fraser (2010) did a study on hedging in political discourses which focused on U.S. President George Bush's press conferences. He found out that there are hedge-type expressions that did not function as hedging devices. Furthermore, he found out that some neutral hedging devices had no impact on the issue being discussed. The study somewhat proved that the use of hedges in Bush's speeches did not show his evasion of responsibility.

Hedges frequently occur in academic discourse (Martin-Martin, 2008), which has been traditionally characterized by its rationality and neutrality, points to the fact that scientific texts are not merely a collection of conventions that can be explained in terms of the norms for conveying scientific information, that is, scientific texts are not only content-oriented and informative but also seek to convince and influence their audience. An increasing number of research studies on a variety of disciplines has been able to demonstrate just how academic discourse is both socially-situated and structured to accomplish rhetorical objectives. In this research tradition, politeness has been seen as a main motivating factor for hedging, because as Myers (1989, p. 5, as cited in Martin-Martin, 2008) states "scientific discourse consists of interactions among scientists in which the maintenance of face is crucial". Myers (1989) applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) model to a corpus of biology research articles (RAs) and found that some of the politeness strategies that are used in spoken interaction can be extended to scientific texts. He argues that in scientific discourse, the making of claims and even the mere act of presenting one's findings threatens the negative face of other researchers. As a result, the use of politeness strategies (e.g. hedges) is frequent in a bid to mitigate Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) involved in the social interactions between writers and readers.

In scientific writing, vagueness has also been seen as a motivating factor for the use of hedges. In order to avoid making categorical assertions, the writer will make vague statements if, for example, exact data is missing or if precise information is irrelevant in preliminary results. Hedges thus protect writers from making false statements by indicating either a lack of complete commitment to the truth value of a proposition, or a desire not to express that commitment categorically. This role of hedging as an indicator of vagueness and imprecision has been discussed in the framework of LSP texts by, for example, Salager-Meyer (1994), who claims that the association of hedges with evasiveness does not necessarily show confusion or imprecision. On the contrary, hedges, for Salager-Meyer (1994, p. 151), can be considered as "ways of being more precise in reporting results". She also argues that academics may choose to remain vague in their claims to show their readers that they do not have the final word on the subject, revealing that typical features of science are "uncertainty, skepticism and doubt". Taking this into consideration, hedges, because of their mitigating and evasive effect, can increase the credibility of a statement in academic texts (Martin-Martin, 2008).

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing interest in cross-cultural studies which have analyzed the phenomenon of hedging in academic texts. Ventola and Mauranen (1990, as

cited in Martin-Martin, 2008) found that Finns writing in English showed less variation in expressions of epistemic modality than did native speakers of English. Clyne's (1991) interlanguage study of German scholarly writing in English revealed that German writers hedge more both in their native language and in English than do native speakers of English. Following the work by Clyne (1991), Kreutz and Harres (1997, as cited in Martin-Martin, 2008) analyzed the distribution and function of hedging in English and German academic writing, and found that while hedges serve to downtone and mitigate arguments in English texts, their main function in German writing may be one of "assertion and authority". Vassileva (1997) examined hedging in English and Bulgarian research articles. Her results revealed differences in the distribution of hedges throughout the research articles and in the means of realizing hedging in both languages. The results of all these studies point to the view that the pragmatics of hedging is culturally determined. Although the strategy of hedging in the RA has been analyzed in a number of languages other than English, contrastive studies of this phenomenon in English and Spanish papers have received less attention.

The confidence or the detachment of novice writers across all disciplines in their research papers was the focus of Nivales (2005). Hyland's (2005) categorization was used in the study. It was found out that hedges and boosters were almost equally used in the introduction and conclusion sections of the research articles sampled. Moreover, it appeared that psychology writers appear to be more detached while mass communication writers seem more committed. The usage of the hedges and boosters appeared to be influenced by the topics of the research papers.

Mojica (2005) extended the study on hedging in research articles to examine how Filipino authors use this academic discourse feature in introduction, discussion, and conclusion sections. She found out that there was significant difference in the way the two groups of authors would show commitment and detachment to their proposed ideas: Engineers boost more while linguists hedge more. She attributed this difference to the highly technical discussions in engineering as well as to its writing conventions which may not be as rigid as that of the linguists'. Mojica further suggested that the engineers' use of hedging despite the probable absence of academic writing training could be influenced by the Filipino culture, known for its politeness. Despite this interest however, there has been little attention to what hedging and boosting devices are and how these are used in political speeches.

The present study is deemed first in its investigation of hedging devices as discourse strategy in formal political speeches specifically debates. And given the foregoing, this paper aims to find out the a) hedging devices that are used in the three political debates between the two US presidential candidates (one Democrat and one Republican) of 2008; b) identify the types of hedging devices used and figure out which types of hedging devices are most dominant in the political discourse of the two mentioned American presidential aspirants during their three debates; and c) identify the specific functions of hedging in those three political debates of the two subjects.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the spoken discourse - specifically in deducing a speaker's intent, pragmatics is thus necessary. As its components, the cooperative principle of Grice, politeness principle of Leech, speech act theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) and that of Searle (1976) are briefly discussed. The typology of hedging devices and hedging functions proposed by Martin-Martin (2008) as well as Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy of hedges is also accounted for. Included too is the discussion in casual spoken discourse and the use of hedges as politeness strategy in academic writing. Relevant theories and concepts such as conversational analysis, genre analysis, and pragmatic analysis are also taken into account.

Cooperative Principle of Grice

According to Grice, persons involved in a conversation or discourse are essentially rational beings who cooperate with each other in order to achieve the purpose of the conversation or discourse. Thus, in the context of Gricean cooperative principle, interlocutors are expected to “make conversational contribution such as what is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged” (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Consequently, the Gricean cooperative principle was divided into four maxims which include maxims of quantity, maxims of quality, maxims of relevance, and maxims of manner. The maxims of quantity expect the interlocutors to give as much information as required while the maxims of quality require interlocutors to say only what they believe to be true. On the other hand, the maxims of relevance instruct interlocutors to provide only relevant information while the maxims of manner expect interlocutors to avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity.

Politeness Principle of Leech (1983)

Leech (1983) posited that aside from the cooperative principle, there is the politeness principle that governs successful conversations. According to Leech (1983), the politeness principle consists of six maxims—tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Leech (1983) further argued that among the six maxims, the maxim of tact which implies the maximization of expressing the beliefs that entail cost to other interlocutors and the minimization of expressing beliefs that entail benefit to other interlocutors rank the highest. Tact is said to be most powerful among maxims because it focuses more on the addressee, signifying that politeness is focused more strongly on the other person than on the self.

Typology of Hedging Devices and Hedging Functions Proposed by Martin-Martin (2008, p. 138-139)

The taxonomy of hedging devices which Martin-Martin (2008) proposes draws on the different classifications that can be found in the literature. For the analysis, he primarily considered the socio-pragmatic context in which hedges occur, as it appears that it is virtually impossible to attribute a function to a hedge without considering both the linguistic and situational context. A preliminary analysis of the corpus revealed that the linguistic devices which the writers in both languages use at a lexico-grammatical and syntactic level for the explicit function of hedges can be described as realizing the following basic strategies:

1. Strategy of Indetermination, by giving a proposition a coloring of lesser semantic, qualitative and quantitative explicitness as well as of uncertainty, vagueness and fuzziness. This strategy may comprise:

1.1. Epistemic modality, which can be realized by means of:

- Modal auxiliary verbs expressing possibility, such as may, might, can.
- Semi-auxiliaries such as to seem, to appear.
- Epistemic lexical verbs such as to suggest, to speculate, to assume, that is, verbs which relate to the probability of a proposition or hypothesis being true.
- Verbs of cognition such as to believe, to think.
- Modal adverbs (perhaps, possibly, probably)
- Modal nouns (possibility, assumption, suggestion).
- Modal adjectives (possible, probable, likely).

1.2. Approximators of quantity, frequency, degree and time such as generally, approximately, most, relatively, frequently, etc., which indicate an unwillingness to make precise and complete commitment to the proposition expressed.

2. Strategy of Subjectivization.

This includes:

2.1. The use of first personal pronouns (I/we) followed by verbs of cognition (think, believe) or performative verbs (suppose, suggest), that can be interpreted as the writers signalling that what they say is simply their personal/subjective opinion. In this way, the writers show respect for the reader's alternative opinion and invite the reader to become involved in the communicative situation. In this subcategory, Martin-Martin (2008) also included those linguistic devices which express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement such as to our knowledge, in our view, in my experience.

2.2. Quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions such as extremely interesting, particularly important that is, emphatic expressions that Hyland (1998) names "boosters" and which are equivalent to what Salager-Meyer (1994) terms as "emotionally-charged intensifiers", which are used to convince the readers of the importance / truth of the propositions expressed by revealing the writer's emotional state. At the same time, these expressions can be considered as a positive politeness strategy (Myers, 1989) as they show solidarity with the discourse community by exhibiting responses that assume shared knowledge and desires.

3. Strategy of Depersonalization. This refers to those cases in which the writers diminish their presence in the texts by using various impersonal, agentless and passive constructions in order to relieve themselves of responsibility for the truth of the propositions expressed. This strategy is syntactically realised by means of:

3.1. Agentless passive and impersonal constructions such as an attempt was made to see..., it seems/appears that

3.2. Impersonal active constructions in which the personal subject is replaced by some non-human entity such as findings, results, data, as in the following examples: The findings suggest/ reveal..., these data indicate...;

Hedges in Casual Spoken Discourses

Nevertheless, advocates of Brown and Levinson's theory of hedging as a politeness strategy investigated the use of hedging in spoken discourses. Among the pioneering studies in the use of hedging in spoken discourse is the study published by Lakoff (1975, cited in Dixon & Foster, 1997) which investigated hedging in women's discourse. Lakoff hypothesized that women would hedge more than men because culture dictates that in order to be feminine, women have to use language that manifests lack of assertiveness and lack of force. According to Lakoff (1975, cited in Dixon & Foster, 1997), women use hedges to soften utterances, signal imprecision, and demonstrate lack of commitment. Despite the fact that Lakoff's pioneering work spurred interest in gender and communication, it has been criticized for its bias against women as it puts forward the belief that women are indecisive and deficient. Also, Lakoff's study seems to lack validity and reliability because she based her argument only on personal observations and hypothetical statements.

Testing the argument of Lakoff that women hedge more because hedging manifests women's deficiency and indecisiveness, Holmes (1995, cited in Dixon & Foster, 1997) spent considerable time studying the use of hedging in casual conversation using a corpus of New Zealand English. Her analysis revealed that hedges serve a variety of functions, and she distinguished between the affective and the epistemic functions of hedges. According to Holmes (1995, cited in Dixon & Foster, 1997, p. 91), affective hedges "express speakers' solidarity" while epistemic hedges "express speakers' uncertainty about the validity of particular statements. Furthermore, she pointed out that based on her data, men and women hedge equally, and gender differences in the use of hedging are manifested only in the functions of the hedges used. To illustrate, women use hedging as a positive politeness strategy to soften

statements and to make others part of conversation while men use hedges to indicate hesitancy and uncertainty.

Taxonomy of Hedges of Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110)

Although not totally comprehensive nor categorically watertight, the scheme below represents the most widely used hedging categories, at least in scientific English. Typically, hedging is expressed through the used of the following “strategic stereotypes”:

1. Modal auxiliary verbs (the most straightforward and widely used means of expressing modality in English academic writing), the most tentative ones being: may, might, can, could, would, should.

2. Modal lexical verbs (or the so-called “speech act verbs” used to perform acts such as doubting and evaluating rather than merely describing) of varying degree of illocutionary force: to seem, to appear (epistemic verbs), to believe, to assume, to suggest, to estimate, to tend, to think, to argue, to indicate, to propose, to speculate. Although a wide range of verbs can be used in this way (Banks, 1994), there tends to be a heavy reliance on the above-mentioned example especially in academic writing:

3. Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases:

3.1. probability adjectives: e.g., possible, probable, un/likely

3.2. nouns: e.g., assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion

3.3. adverbs (which could be considered as non-verbal modals): e.g., perhaps, possibly, probably, practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently.

4. Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time: e.g., approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of.

5. Introductory phrases such as I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that, which express the author’s personal doubt and direct involvement.

6. “If” clauses, e.g., if true, if nothing.

7. Compound hedges. These are phrases made up of several hedges, the commonest forms being: 1. a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (e.g., it would appear), and 2. a lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective where the adverb (or adjective) reinforces the hedge already inherent in the lexical verb (e.g., it seems reasonable/probable). Such compound hedges can be double hedges (it may suggest that; it seems likely that; it would indicate that; this probably indicates); treble hedges (it seems reasonable to assume that); quadruple hedges (it would seem somewhat unlikely that, it may appear somewhat speculative that), and as can be seen all the forms presented above imply that the statements in which they appear contain personal beliefs based on plausible reasoning (or empirical data). Without these “strategic stereotypes,” readers would imply that the information conveyed pertains to universally established knowledge.

Methodology

Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this study are the two 2008 US presidential aspirants – Barack Obama and John McCain. The demographic profile of the two subjects consists of their educational attainment, language background, ethnicity, and political party.

Barack Obama, by profession, is a lawyer. He earned his law degree from Harvard Law School, one of the top universities worldwide. He is African-American and his first language is English. He ran for the US election in 2008 representing the US Democratic Party.

John McCain, on the other hand, is a military man and served the military profession for 22 years. He is a product of the U.S. Naval Academy. He is American and a native speaker of English. He was the Republican's representative in 2008.

Comparatively speaking, the two subjects are of equal footing particularly on the language variable which serves as the major focus of this investigation.

B. Instrumentation and Research Procedure

This study makes use of the following research instruments: Grid for discourse analysis, Survey Questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussion questions as Interview Index.

Grid for Discourse Analysis

The grid for discourse analysis consists of five elements or headings such as sentence, codes, hedging device, type, and function. Sentence refers to the statement or utterance as translated in the transcription. Each sentence that carries a hedging device is copied under the sentence heading. Codes, on the other hand, refer to the utterance number and debate number where the sentence will be lifted. Under hedging device, what is written will be the particular hedge that appears in the sentence. For type, the specific kind of a hedging device as analyzed is indicated while in the function heading, the identified purpose of the hedging device is written. This instrument has been designed to expedite the analysis of hedging devices employed by the two American presidentiables in their debates.

Survey Questionnaire

This instrument is used to gather the ideas or reactions of the respondents who are asked to view the videos of the debate between Obama and McCain. Generally, the questions center around a) asking them which hedging devices (as adopted from Salager-Meyer, 1997) they are most familiar with that they use them often in their daily discourse, in particular, spoken discourse, b) how they find the debates, c) their reaction or comments on the use of language of the two speakers, and d) who they think is probably the better speaker, and why, as based on their careful observation. The said questionnaire has been subjected to validation.

Respondents of the Study and the Research Locale for the Study

The respondents of this study are graduate students of a Catholic University in the Philippines who are pursuing degrees aligned with language teaching and English language. The purpose of considering respondents whose specializations are aligned with language is the assumption that they have a relatively better grasp of the main topic of the study which is hedging in particular. Furthermore, these respondents were asked to view all the videos of the identified debates. The target number of respondents is 30 which represents around 80% of the population. All of the target 30 respondents are bonafide graduate students but not

necessarily an all-Filipino group as a few of them are foreign nationals. They are chosen from the research population using purposive sampling to ascertain the right sample for the study.

Focus Group Discussion Questions

This interview index instrument lists crucial questions that ask respondents about their observations on: a) the use of language or hedging devices in particular of the two subjects, b) what they perceive as functions of those hedging devices as well those functions which prove to be the most effective discourse strategy, and c) if the frequent use of hedges would significantly promote the effectiveness of arguments being raised by any of the party.

The purpose of this instrument is to validate the answers of the respondents in the survey questionnaire with the hope also of gaining more insights from the respondents to enrich the interpretive analysis to be made in the study. The participants are given a list of hedging devices, their functions, and categories to guide them more concretely as they are asked to respond to the focus group interview.

The Corpora for Discourse / Text Analysis

The transcripts of the three U.S. presidential debates form the major corpora of this study. These debates transpired on the following dates: Friday, September 26, 2008 which was originally planned to focus on foreign policy, national security, and economic issues; Tuesday, October 7, 2008 which had a town meeting hall format; and Wednesday, October 25, 2008 which focused on domestic and economic policy. Videos of the said debates are available online through the website www.youtube.com for viewing purposes. Transcripts of the debates are archived online in websites such as www.cnn.com.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study following the order of problems identified in the study.

A. Hedging devices used by McCain and Obama in the three political debates in 2008

In order to send their message to the American people, McCain and Obama made use of the following hedging devices in the three debates they engaged in as US presidential aspirants in 2008: may, might, can, could, would, should, to suggest, to think, perhaps, possibly, probably, about, somewhat, somehow, well, if, it seems, may suggest, I think, in my experience, among others.

Below are some examples showing each of them:

L364 And that's just a fact. Again, you can look it up.

L368 Now, look, we all would love to lower taxes on everybody.

L526 There's no doubt it will affect our budgets.

L635 So I think the lesson to be drawn is that we should never hesitate to use military force....

L954 You might think that with that kind of concern that Senator Obama would have gone to Afghanistan, particularly given his....

L555 ...anyone's taxes is probably the best recipe for eventually having our economy recover.

L2595 ...send Marines in there, how can we possibly beneficially affect this situation?

B. Types of hedging devices used

The following are the types of hedging devices used in McCain and Obama's exchange in their 2008 US presidential debates: modal auxiliary verbs that include may, might, can, could, would, should; subjectivization which includes the use of first personal pronouns (I/we) followed by verbs of cognition (think, believe) or performative verbs (suppose, suggest); adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases including probability adjectives: e.g., possible, probable, un/likely; nouns: e.g., assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion; adverbs (which could be considered as non-verbal modals): e.g., perhaps, possibly, probably, practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently; modal lexical verbs such as may, might, can, could, would, should; approximators like approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of; introductory word and that is well; if clauses such as if true, if nothing; and compound hedges which include a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (e.g., it would appear), and a lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective where the adverb (or adjective) reinforces the hedge already inherent in the lexical verb (e.g., it seems reasonable/probable).

The table below presents the order of the said types of hedging devices based on frequency.

Table 1
Types of Hedging Devices and their Frequency

Type	F (D1)	F (D2)	F (D3)	Total
Modal auxiliary verbs	168	132	137	437
Subjectivization	113	71	158	342
Quality-emphasizing adjectival/adverbial expressions	22	38	35	95
Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases	19	34	30	83
Modal lexical verbs	27	33	21	81
Approximators	23	5	11	39
Introductory phrases	10	9	11	30
If clauses	4	3	5	12
Compound hedges	3	2	2	7

As can be seen from the table, modal auxiliary verbs attained the highest frequency consisting of 437 (39%) followed by subjectivization with 342 occurrences corresponding to 30%. Quality-emphasizing adjectival/adverbial expressions and adjectival, adverbial, and nominal phrases follow respectively having both 8%. The least used are introductory phrases (30 / 3%), if clauses (12/1%), and compound hedges (7/1%).

C. Specific roles or functions of hedging in those three political debates of the two subjects

This section presents the specific roles or functions of hedging in the three 2008 US presidential debates between McCain and Obama.

C.1 Modal auxiliary verbs – similar to what Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110) states, modal auxiliary verbs are the most straightforward and widely used means of expressing modality in English academic writing, the most tentative ones being: may, might, can, could,

would, should. All these are true also of the three debates between the two US presidential candidates.

C.2 Strategy of Subjectivization - Similar to what Martin-Martin (2008, pp. 138-139) states, the use of first personal pronouns (I/we) followed by verbs of cognition (think, believe) or performative verbs (suppose, suggest), can be interpreted as the speakers signaling that what they say is simply their personal/subjective opinion. In this way, the speakers show respect for the listener's alternative opinion and invite the listener to become involved in the communicative situation. In addition, the use of first personal pronouns puts forward the candidates' accomplishments that they know they can use to win the people's support.

C.3 Quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions- these are expressions extremely interesting, particularly important, that is, emphatic expressions that Hyland (1998) names "boosters" and which are equivalent to what Salager-Meyer (1991, 1994, 1998) terms as "emotionally-charged intensifiers", which are used to convince the readers of the importance / truth of the propositions expressed by revealing the speaker's emotional state. In addition, quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions in the debates add a certain effect that would convince the listeners that the speakers are so confident of what they say and of their accomplishments thereby making people think the speaker is really good.

C.4 Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases - these modal phrases are used to show probability as in probability adjectives like possible, probable, un/likely; nouns such as assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion; and adverbs (which could be considered as non-verbal modals): e.g., perhaps, possibly, probably, practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently. By these modal phrases, the speakers soften their claims and that they acknowledge they are not sure of the veracity of what they say.

C.5 Modal lexical verbs or the so-called "speech act verbs" - true to what Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110) states, modal lexical verbs are used to perform acts such as doubting and evaluating rather than merely describing) of varying degree of illocutionary force: to seem, to appear (epistemic verbs), to believe, to assume, to suggest, to estimate, to tend, to think, to argue, to indicate, to propose, to speculate.

C.6 Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time - as stated by Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110), examples of these approximators are approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of, among others, that are used to estimate degree and quantity as well as frequency and time.

C.7 Introductory phrases - according to Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110), introductory phrases such as I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that, express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement. In this investigation, an introductory phrase is shown through an introductory word well that reflects the speaker's mark that he is carefully thinking or processing the information he is about to utter.

C.8 "If" clauses, - as noted by Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110), examples of this hedging device include if true, if nothing, that also shows uncertainty or doubt concerning a condition.

C.9 Compound hedges - following what Salager-Meyer (2007, pp. 109-110) notes, compound hedges are phrases made up of several hedges, the most common forms being: 1. a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (e.g., it would appear), and 2. a lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective where the adverb (or adjective)

reinforces the hedge already inherent in the lexical verb (e.g., it seems reasonable/probable). Such compound hedges can be double hedges (it may suggest that; it seems likely that; it would indicate that; this probably indicates); treble hedges (it seems reasonable to assume that); quadruple hedges (it would seem somewhat unlikely that, it may appear somewhat speculative that), and as can be seen all the forms presented above imply that the statements in which they appear contain personal beliefs based on plausible reasoning (or empirical data). Without these “strategic stereotypes,” listeners or viewers would imply that the information conveyed pertains to universally established knowledge.

Discussion

As indicated in the results of this study, hedging devices cannot simply be limited to the written discourse. They are also observed in the spoken discourse like in the data analyzed in this study. This confirms the validity of Lakoff’s study (1975, as cited in Foster, 1977) that the use of hedging devices in the casual spoken discourse is observed by speakers regardless of gender. In this particular case, it can be assumed that McCain and Obama are so conscious of everything that they say during the debate. They perhaps know that their thoughts and how they are translated into actual language would have certain effect on their listeners who will later on vote for them. Since the two presidential candidates are aware of debates and how they can influence particularly the undecided voters, they know that they need to exercise appropriate tone, that they need to be formal, and that they need to be cautious with what they say. With propriety in language, they must be aware that there is a big chance for one of them to win.

One evidence that shows their being mindful of their language is the apparent use of hedging devices and using them in instances they deem appropriate. For instance, the use of *can* in line 364 (L364 And that's just a fact. Again, you can look it up.) shows the speaker’s confidence with what he says and that he is certain. The same is true with the use of *should* in L365 (So I think the lesson to be drawn is that we should never hesitate to use military force....) where evidently, the speaker is sure with what he says and that using military force for national security is really needed. On the other hand, if the speaker is not so certain with what he says, the use of other modal auxiliary verbs surfaces as in lines 954 and 555 (L954 You might think that with that kind of concern that Senator Obama would have gone to Afghanistan, particularly given his....L555 ...anyone's taxes is probably the best recipe for eventually having our economy recover.) respectively. Notice that the use of *might* and *probably* clearly shows the speaker’s uncertainty. Again, the examples above simply show that hedging devices come alive in the spoken discourse in much the same way that they are more consciously observed by writers when they write academic papers, in particular (Salager-Meyer, 2007).

Another point of concern in this investigation is the identification of the types of hedging devices and putting them in order based on the frequency of occurrences beginning from the most used. As shown in the results, modal auxiliary verbs, subjectivization, quality-emphasizing expressions and adjectival, adverbial and nominal phrases are among the most frequently used types of hedging devices with 39, 30, 8, and 8 percent shares respectively. Those that are least used are approximators (3%), introductory phrases (3%), *if* clauses and compound hedges with 1% share each. Why modal auxiliaries and subjectivization top the order can be explained in two ways. First, through modal auxiliaries, the speakers can very well distinguish between points they are most certain and least certain and they are needed when they talk about their plans for America - their country. The second point which explains the high occurrences of subjectivization, that is, verb plus either verb of cognition or performative verb is also understandable since the speakers have to talk about things with reference to themselves and their specific achievements, hence the use of personal pronouns *I*

and we. It is through the use of these personal pronouns that they can sell themselves best to the voting public. This finding is quite unexpected yet understandable.

As expected for the third concern of this study, the use of the hedging devices are justified in a way that the speakers observed them appropriately. This is also understandable since both debaters are using English as their first language. Using modal auxiliaries when they are either certain or uncertain about what they say shows their being knowledgeable of how hedging devices can positively support their intention of winning the voting public. In addition, the use of subjectivization such as I think, I believe, I suppose, I suggest, reflects the speaker's signal that what he says is merely his personal opinion. Using quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions such as L1829 (And so while it's true that nobody's completely innocent here, we have....) and L1176 (And at this point, it is absolutely critical for the next president to make....) also shows their awareness that through emphasizing quality, viewers would be able to measure up their certainty. They can be good devices to convince the listeners or viewers of the importance or truth of the discourse by revealing their emotional state.

Conclusion

Hedging devices can be very useful in oral discourse like debate. If every speaker is aware of the benefits he or she can get from using them, then, he or she would be able to attain effective communication. Thus, it can be safe to say that hedging devices can be used as discourse politics strategy especially among politicians.

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