

Modality as Hedging Device in the US Presidential Election Debate

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Abstract— Modality is the speaker's judgments of probabilities, or the obligation involved in what he/she is saying. Modality can be used as hedging devices. The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the types and realization of modality as hedging device in the US presidential election debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The descriptive qualitative method was implemented in this study. The source of data was the first presidential election debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The data were the utterances using modality as hedging device uttered by the two presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The finding revealed that epistemic modality was the most dominant modality as hedging device in the presidential election debate and modal auxiliary will and would were mostly found in the debate. It means that the politicians tend to use hedging device as evasive and defensive strategy to distance their claim to reality.

Keywords— *modality, epistemic modality, hedging, debate*

I. INTRODUCTION

Politics is a social activity that can be defined, first and foremost, as a struggle for power, between those who are in power and those who are not, but would like to be, although it can be also defined as a set of cooperation strategies carried out by some social institutions with a view to solving some social conflicts [1].

Nowadays, we are provided by so many political discourses if it is in form of written language or spoken language. In form of spoken language, politicians deliver us a lot of political speeches and political debates to express their thought, idea, and feeling exactly to persuade the listeners and the audiences toward their attitudes and behaviors. In democracy country, presidential election has been an important agenda in their democracy party. The presidential election candidates will have argument battle to express their opinion, ideas, and thought in the topic being discussed, the debate is conducted to persuade the audiences to vote them on the election day.

In political setting, language has fundamental role in conveyance of political orators' staged-managed and pre-planned goals to the audience in order to provoke, prevail, and persuade the audience toward the intended goals and meanings [2]. Language is a means of communication, a means of presenting and shaping beliefs [3]. Language is not something,

somehow different from the ideas it contains, but the way language is used says a great deal about how the ideas have been shaped.

Thus, language is used to uniquely convey personal ideas and intentions. Accordingly, in the political terrain, language is used to capture certain messages, convey promises, reflect beliefs and foreground political ideologies. The medium in conveying the messages, promises, beliefs, and ideas in political setting can be form of debate. Based on the researcher observation, the politicians in political debate usually use modality in expressing their behaviors, attitudes, and opinions.

In order to convince the voters to vote them in the election day, the candidates will deliver their promises and commitment related to the program they are going to run when they are elected in their political campaign and their political debate. But we don't know whether the promises and commitment they are delivered will be run or not after they are elected. As we have experienced so far, not all the promises and the commitment delivered by the candidates are conducted. By hedging, we are able to know which candidate who have full commitment. As stated by Fraser [4], hedging is a rhetorical strategy which signals a lack of commitment either to the full category membership of a term or expression in the utterance (content mitigation) or to the intended illocutionary force of the utterance (force mitigation).

This study will be related to modality and hedging, as one of the hedging devices is modality. Thompson [5] says that modality may be used as a hedging strategy to express degree of commitment or precision.

Some studies have been conducted related to this study, Al-Rashady [6] analyzed the three presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 US election cycle in order to identify the most frequently used hedging devices and the functions that these devices serve. The researcher concluded that "modal auxiliary verbs; modal lexical verbs; adjectival, adverbial, nominal modal phrases and approximators" are the most dominant hedging devices.

Therefore, this study was aimed to find out the types of modality as hedging devices in the US presidential debate and since modality as hedging is usually realized by modal auxiliary verb, the other problem will be which modal auxiliary found in the debate.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Modality

Many experts have defined modality. Palmer [7] said that modality refers to the expression of the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding the proposition of a clause. Quirk et al [8] define modality as the "manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true". Lyon [9] said that modality is a category of meaning that deals with "the status of the proposition". Halliday [10] defines modality as the speaker's judgments of probabilities, or the obligation involved in what he/she is saying.

Palmer classifies modality into epistemic, deontic (discourse-oriented) and dynamic (subject-oriented) subtypes. Epistemic modality is concerned with the speaker's attitude to the factuality of the proposition, deontic modality relates to some kind of activity, quality, status etc. of the subject and, dynamic modality relates to the role of "one of the participants in the discourse".

Halliday classifies modality into modalization and modulation. While Coates categorizes modality into Epistemic and Root modality [11]. Huddleston and Pullum classifies modality into deontic modality, epistemic modality, and dynamic modality [12]. Quirk et. Al classify modality into intrinsic modality and extrinsic modality .

Modality is commonly expressed through the use of modal auxiliaries. These auxiliaries are generally used to express degree of certainty and degree of obligation. Coates has discussed in detail the range of meanings that such modal auxiliaries can convey, as summarized in the table 1 below:

TABLE 1. Meaning of Modal Auxiliaries(Coates, 1983)

Modal Auxiliaries	Meanings
Can	Ability, root possibility, permission
Could	Root possibility, epistemic possibility, ability, hypothesis
May	Root possibility, epistemic possibility, permission, hypothesis
Might	Strong obligation, confident inference
Must	Strong obligation, volition, prediction, determination
Shall	Weak obligation, tentative inference, hypothesis, necessity
Should	Volition, prediction, predictability
Will	Prediction, hypothesis, volition
Would	

B. Hedging

The term "hedge" was first introduced by Lakoff in 1972 to mean "words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy" and was used to imply a number of related concepts, such as tentativeness, politeness, lack of full commitment,

indirectness, possibility, approximation, indeterminacy and vagueness [13].

In 1986, Zuck and Zuck defined hedging as "the process whereby the author reduces the strength of what he is writing" . Brown & Levinson, in 1987, defined hedges as "a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is partial or true only in certain respects, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected" . Salager-Meyer (1994) stated that hedges are associated with "purposive vagueness and tentativeness".

Hyland (1998) defined hedging as "the indication, by linguistic means, of an unwillingness to make a complete commitment to the truth of a proposition, particularly in the case of new knowledge claims" [14].

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was descriptive qualitative. The source of data was the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The data were the utterances (clause) using modality uttered by the two presidential candidates. The data were collected by downloading from youtube and transcribing into written text. The data were analyzed by interactive model classified officially Miles, Huberman & Saldana. In this analysis, it was by ongoing analysis and after collecting the entire the data (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Purpose an analysis as three concurrent flowed of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing / verification .

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the data were classified based on modal auxiliaries as hedging device uttered by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. It can be seen in Table 2 below

TABLE 2. Modal Auxiliaries as Hedging Device by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton

Modal Auxiliaries	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton
Can	12	15
Could	6	1
May	-	-
Might	-	1
Must	-	1
Shall	-	-
Should	13	6
Will	14	18
Would	8	22
Total	53	64

Based on Table 2 above it can be seen that, Hillary Clinton produced more modal auxiliaries as hedging device than Donald Trump. Modal *would* was the most produced modal by Hillary Clinton and modal *will* is the most produced modal by Donald Trump.

- (1) That means jobs in infrastructure, in advanced manufacturing, innovation and technology, clean, renewable energy, and small business, because most of the new jobs **will** come from small business. (HC)
- (2) In fact, it **would** be the most extreme version, the biggest tax cuts for the top percent of the people in this country than we've ever had. (HC)
- (3) And I think it's important that we grip this and deal with it, both at home and abroad. And here's what we can do. We **can** deploy a half a billion more solar panels. (HC)

All modal auxiliaries have epistemic and non epistemic meaning. Since hedging devices expresses tentativeness, possibility, and uncertainty, it is much closer to epistemic modality than deontic modality. In (1) and (4) it can be seen from the utterance produced by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, the modal *will* expresses the future prediction indicates the low degree of the speaker commitment. It is caused by the limited knowledge of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump about the future, so she used *will* to evade and distance to reality.

While *would* is more commonly used as expression of epistemic modality than deontic and dynamic modality. As hedging device *would* is usually used to express prediction and hypothesis. In (2) and (5), Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump make a prediction about the proposition she is saying.

While *can* is frequently used as dynamic modality than deontic and epistemic modality. Huddleston and Pullum said that *can* serves as hedging device only in form of negative and interrogative constructions. But in (3) it shows something different, *can* serve as hedging devices which expresses possibility in positive construction. It can be seen that there is possibility related to solar panel in Hillary Clinton's utterance.

- (4) Companies **will** come. They will build. They will expand. New companies will start. (DT)
- (5) Independent experts have looked at what I've proposed and looked at what Donald's proposed, and basically they've said this, that if his tax plan, which **would** blow up the debt by over \$5 trillion (DT)
- (6) I mean, it **could** be Russia, but it could also be China. It could also be lots of other people. (DT)

While, *could*, like *can*, it is used to convey deontic modality, dynamic and epistemic modality. As hedging device, *could* is served to express tentative possibility.

V. CONCLUSION

From the finding, it can be concluded that epistemic modality is the modality as hedging device and modal auxiliaries *will* and *would* as the most produced modal auxiliary by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. And it can also be concluded that the politicians tend to use hedging device as evasive and defensive strategy to distance their claim to reality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer would like to express respectfulness to Dr. Anni Holila Pulungan, M.Hum and Prof. Zainuddin, M.Hum as the writer's thesis advisors for guiding him to accomplish this paper and for giving useful knowledge and suggestions.

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