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**A STUDY OF
FACTIVE ASSERTIVES IN POLITICAL
SPEECHES BY U.S. PRESIDENT
BARACK OBAMA**

**Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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**MASTER THESIS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND
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(A SUMMARY)**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

George W. Bush, former U.S. President, in the 2003 State of the Union address, uttered: "The British government has **LEARNED** that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." This line referred to intelligence reports suggesting that Saddam Hussein may have tried to buy a kind of uranium ore from sources in Niger in West Africa. For many people, the possibility that Saddam was assembling nuclear weapon was the only acceptable reason to invade Iraq. In that year, the United States led the invasion and over the next few years, it became apparent that this intelligence lead was incorrect. Saddam had no facilities in place to manufacture nuclear weapons. In the words of headlines all over the world media, "Bush Lied." Did he? British intelligence did believe that Saddam was trying to buy uranium but all the evidences they got at that time were not convincing enough. Nevertheless, instead of saying that British government believed Saddam Hussein had sought uranium, Bush stated that British government **LEARNED** it. The way the speech was phrased, using what linguists defined as a factive assertive, implicitly asserted the lead as truth rather than hypothesis. As a result, he committed himself to the proposition that the uranium seeking actually took place, which was in fact not true. The story above is a practical illustration of a factive assertive (or factive assertive predicate) and its effect in speechmaking. From this,

we can say that factive assertives play an important role in political speeches, especially ones made by a president of a country.

As a Master student of English Language at Danang, improving oratory, as well as other language production skills, is very important. Students are always assigned with many presentations but they have in fact no proper training of oratory. Looking at their curriculum, we can see that they are directed to learn how to communicate 1-on-1 and debate over a topic; however, when they have to stand in front of a large audience and try to present their ideas, they often play it by ear without any particular strategy. Learning Barack Obama's oratory, or at least his way of using factive assertive, can help student improve. Therefore, I long to study his political speeches to find out what factive assertives Barack Obama employed and how he did it.

1.2. AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1.2.1. Aims

This study aims at investigating the factive assertives in Barack Obama's speeches and suggesting some strategies for using factive assertives in speechmaking.

1.2.2. Objectives

This study is intended to achieve these following objectives:

- To examine the factive assertives in Barack Obama's speeches in terms of syntactic, semantics and pragmatics.
- To identify strategies of using factive assertives in Barack Obama's political speeches.
- To put forward some suggestions to learning and teaching concerning factive assertives in making a speech.

1.2.3. Research questions

To achieve the aims and objectives mentioned above, this study tries to give answers to the following questions.

1. What are the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of the factive assertives in Barack Obama's political speeches?
2. What are Barack Obama's strategies of using factive assertives in his political speeches?

1.3. THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study will examine a wide range of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of factive assertives in Barack Obama's political speeches in order to identify his strategies of using factive assertives. Finally, I will generalize his patterns to suggest some strategies of using factive assertives.

1.4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.5. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review Literature

Chapter 3: Method and Procedure

Chapter 4: Discussion on findings

Chapter 5: Conclusion

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. PRIOR RESEARCH

Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1970) seminal work on factive predicates shows the existence of a deep correlation between the semantic properties of factive complements. Karttunen (1971) investigates further into factivity and finds out two distinct classes of predicate in entailment-preservation, semi-factive and true factive. Hooper (1975) proposes rather extensive classification of verbal predicates which will be adopted in this work. Palmer (1986) in his research “Mood and modality”, suggests that epistemic modality should involve any modal system that indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he or she says.

In Viet Nam, modality and factivity have been discussed by Cao Xuan Hao (1991), and Nguyen Minh Thuyet – Nguyen Van Hiep (1998). The first published research, “Tiếng Việt – mấy vấn đề ngữ âm, ngữ pháp và ngữ nghĩa” by Cao Xuan Hao (1991), show the degrees of modality in sentences through the studies of functional grammar. It also gave out some concepts on factivity, more particularly factive verbs, used in Vietnamese speech. Nguyen Thi Cam Thanh (2003) focused on non-factive lexical and grammatical devices on syntactic and semantic features. Ngu Thien Hung (2004) investigated grammatical and lexical devices in epistemic modality in English and Vietnamese in aspects of syntactic and pragmatics. Later, Nguyen Van Hiep (2007) brings out the general view of modality and

introduces some modal lexical devices in natural language especially in Vietnamese.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Epistemic Modality

2.2.2. Factivity

a. Factivity and Related Terms

b. Complements in Factive Sentences

2.2.3. The relationship between (epistemic) modality and factivity

2.2.4. Theory of Speech Acts

2.2.5. Appraisal System

a. Overview

Appraisal theory is concerned with the linguistic resources for by which a texts/speakers come to express, negotiate and naturalize particular inter-subjective and ultimately ideological positions. This paper is intended to adopt Martin & White (2005)'s Appraisal system as the theoretical framework for analyzing semantic and pragmatic characteristics of the factive assertives in Obama's speeches.

b. Engagement

In this paper, we only employ a sub-category of ENGAGEMENT - Heteroglossia to analyze the semantic and pragmatic features of factive assertives in U.S. President Obama's political speeches. Heteroglossia includes following four categories: disclaim, proclaim, entertain, and attribute.

Disclaim and proclaim categories are grouped into the contract set of resources, while entertain and attribute categories are

grouped into the expand set. The contract resources function to exclude or limit other voices or position within a text. The expand resources, on the contrary, function to invoke alternatives. To sum up, Martin & White (2005) have a diagram for ENGAGEMENT resource of APPRAISAL.

2.2.6. Summary

The chapter reviews some previous studies which are related to epistemic modality and factivity and presents the background of knowledge, including notions and theories that the research bases on. The theoretical background consists of a lot of different views on epistemic modality and factivity by some linguists. Among them, Kiparsky & Kiparsky (1970) and Hooper (1975)'s concepts and classification of factivity are chosen to define the term of factive assertives targeted in this paper. Besides, speech act theory by Searle also plays an essential part in discussing matters on modality. In addition, appraisal theory by Martin & White (2005) is particularly considered as the framework for the analysis of factive assertives in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a qualitative research using descriptive analysis with qualitative data collection method.

3.1.1. Research methodology

The descriptive method of research is to gather information about the present existing condition. It emphasizes on the description rather than make evaluation or criticism of product or process. To discuss findings of the research, inductive reasoning is also applied. Inductive reasoning is more compatible with this research since it moves from specific observations to broader generalizations.

3.1.2. Procedure

- a. Collecting data*
- b. Classifying*
- c. Describing factive assertives*
- d. Discussing the findings*
- e. Suggesting some implications*

3.2. DATA COLLECTION

3.2.1. Instruments

3.2.2. Sampling

3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, the reviewed existing theories serve as a basis of the data analysis. Particular is paid to analyzing and categorizing the data syntactically, semantically and pragmatically.

3.4. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

3.5. SUMMARY

This chapter presents research methodology and the ways to collect data including how to get samples, instrumentation and procedure of data collection. In addition, the ways to analyze data and reliability and validity of the thesis are also mentioned in chapter 3. This chapter shows in detail necessary preparations for further findings and discussion in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. SYNTACTIC FEATURES

4.1.1. Structure: Gerund, Infinitive and ECM complements

Sentences constructed from factive verb followed by gerund or that-complement have factive reading, while infinitive and ECM complements do not.

Table 4.1. Structure and possibility of factive reading of sentence containing factive verbs

Structure	Pattern	Factivity possible?
Factive verb + <i>that</i> -complement	SVC	YES
Factive verb + gerund complement	SVC	YES
Factive verb + infinitive complement	SVC	NO
Factive verb + ECM complement	SVOC	NO

4.1.2. The role of tense

From the discussion in the previous section, it is clear that to be factive, a factive verb generally requires a tensed complement. Overall, the association of tense and factivity seems to be fairly general. The infinitive or non-finite complement of a factive verb behaves like that of a non-factive verb.

In short, the tensed complements retain factivity in a sentence, whereas infinitive or non-finite complements may have other functions.

4.1.3. Complementizer deletion

In Obama's speeches, there are many times the *that*-complementizer is deleted in CPs. It is a fact that *that*-complementizer is omitted mostly frequently in casual conversation and least frequently in academic prose, with fiction and news reportage falling between the two extremes. Either way, we can drop or retain the *that*-complementizer without affecting the meaning of the clause.

The complementizer deletion or retaining is not strict, as even formal registers nowadays are often a mix of the formal and the less formal. Overall, although the deletion of *that*-complementizer is syntactically optional, it is omitted most in informal spoken language while it is retained most in formal language.

4.1.4. Adjectival predicates as factive assertives

Another way that Obama employ to insert factive assertives into his speeches is the use of evaluative adjectival predicates. With evaluative adjectives like *interesting*, *nice*, *big*, *important*, etc. as the head of the complements, the speaker can transfer factivity into his sentences instead of using factive verbs.

4.2. SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC FEATURES

4.2.1. Factive Assertives in Pronouncement

The analysis of Obama's speeches yielded instances of factive assertives with which he utilized strategies to contract the dialogic aspects of the speech. In these instances of factive assertives, the speaker limited the opportunity to (indirectly) question his statements, or express differing opinions.

Obama contracts the dialogic nature of the speech situation. He used factive assertive to affirm the truth in his utterance. Hence, he suppressed all questioning opportunities and alternative positions and voices. Also, the use of the pronoun *we* and the utterance is produced in past tense make what Obama says more justified and concrete. There were many times, he pronounced future or conditional events using the same proclaim: pronounce formulation. Furthermore, by intentionally saying something clearly untrue, he sometimes provoked questions from the audience.

Table 4.2. Formulations of proclaim: pronounce with effects and purposes in Obama's speeches

Subject	Linguistic/Locution feature	Appraisal Effect	Illocutionary force/purpose
We/I	Factive assertive predicate in simple/past tense	Limit/suppress alternative voices	Pronounce/Affirm a proposition
We/I	Factive assertive followed by future tense - conditional complement	Limit/suppress alternative voices	Factualize a possible event
I	Predicate containing factive verb with (recognizable) false fact in simple tense	Provoke questions/alter native voices	Create controversies

4.2.2. Factive Assertives in Endorsement

As using proclaim: endorse formulation, Obama confirmed that the proposition in his utterance were correct, valid, undeniable or otherwise maximally warrantable. Also, the use of proclaim: endorse excluded any dialogic spaces for alternative viewpoints for the proposition. As a result, Obama took over the responsibility for the proposition, or at least shared responsibility for it with the cited source. This is due to the subjectivity in endorsement is a multiple one which includes both the external source and the inner authorial voice. And crucially it is the inner authorial voice which intervenes in the meaning making to construe the proposition. The level of responsibility the speaker has to take is the major difference between proclaim: endorse and attribute: acknowledge formulation.

Table 4.3. Formulations of proclaim: endorse with effects and purposes in Obama's speeches

Subject	Linguistic/Locution feature	Appraisal effect	Illocutionary force/purpose
evidenc e/ history/ report/ research	Factive assertive predicate in simple/past tense	- Exclude alternative voices - Inner authorial voice shares responsibility with external source	Endorse a proposition

4.2.3. Factive Assertives in Denial

In Obama's speeches, utterances which included signals of disclaims could function as proclaims. In dialogistic terms, the negative is not the simple logical opposite of the positive, since the negative necessarily carries with it the positive, while the positive does not reciprocally carry the negative, or at least not typically. Therefore, the denial, sometimes presents itself as an assertion to respond to claims/beliefs.

Table 4.4. Formulations of disclaim: deny with effects and purposes in Obama's speeches

Subject	Linguistic/Locution feature	Appraisal effect	Illocutionary purpose
We/I	Negation of predicate not containing factive assertive	Introduce alternative voices	Deny
We/I	Negation of factive assertive predicate in simple/past tense	Limit/suppress alternative voices	Deny the speaker's acknowledgement of certain information but also affirm the truth of it.
It	Negation of adjectival predicate as factive assertive	Limit/suppress alternative voices	Pronounce/Affirm proposition with lower level of certainty

4.2.4. Factive Assertives in Acknowledgement

Table 4.5. Formulations of Attribute: acknowledge with effects and purposes in Obama's speeches

Subject	Linguistic/Locution feature	Appraisal effect	Illocutionary Purpose
	Factive assertive followed by future tense - conditional complement	Attribute authorial voice to external source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge and factualize a possible event. - Stay aligned with external source but refuse to be the authorial voice (Take no responsibility)
Personal pronoun/ (Ambiguous) Third person pronoun	Factive assertive predicate in simple/past tense	Attribute authorial voice to external source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge a fact. - Stay aligned with external source but refuse to be the authorial voice (Take no responsibility)

4.2.5. Factive Incompatibility

Table 4.6. Type of Formulations incompatible with factive assertives

Type of formulation	Linguistic/Locution features	Illocutionary force/purpose
Concurring	Adverbial phrase (e.g. <i>of course, naturally</i>)	Announce agreement
Countering	- Conjunction (e.g. <i>but</i>) - Connective (e.g. <i>however, even though</i>) - Adverbial phrase (e.g. <i>surprisingly</i>)	Counter current proposition with another one
Entertaining	- Modal auxiliary (e.g. <i>may, might</i>) - Modal adjunct (e.g. <i>perhaps, probably</i>) - Modal attribute (e.g. <i>it's possible that...</i>) - Non-factive verb (e.g. <i>think, believe</i>)	Present opinion but also make dialogic space for other ones

4.3. A SUMMARY OF OBAMA'S STRATEGIES

In this chapter, I already presented and discussed my findings about syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of factive assertives in U.S. President Barack Obama's political speeches. Thus, we are justified to draw a summary of his strategies of using factive assertives out of those results. First of all, we can agree that Obama

did have a patterns of using factive assertives. The examples we shows in the previous sections of this chapter are not unique but representatives for many other instances sharing the same syntactic, semantic or pragmatic features. For every type of factive assertive predicates, he had a clear purpose when using it. Table 4.7 summarizes all the structures discussed in this chapter along with its possibility of embedding tense and factive reading. In order to simplify the results collected from the analysis of semantics and pragmatics of factive assertives in Obama's speeches, we have table 4.8.

Table 4.8. Obama's strategies of using factive assertives

Utterance structure	Subject	Speaker's purpose
Factive assertive predicate in simple/past tense	<i>We/I</i>	Pronounce/Affirm a proposition
	Personal pronoun/ (Ambiguous) Third person pronoun	- Acknowledge a fact. - Stay aligned with external source but refuse to be the authorial voice (Take no responsibility)
	<i>evidence/ history/ report/ research</i>	Endorse a proposition.
Factive	<i>We/I</i>	Factualize a possible event

<p>assertive followed by future tense - conditional complement</p>	<p>Personal pronoun/ (Ambiguous) Third person pronoun</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge and factualize a possible event. - Stay aligned with external source but refuse to be the authorial voice (Take no responsibility)
<p>Predicate containing factive verb with (recognizable) false fact in simple tense</p>	<p><i>I</i></p>	<p>Create controversies</p>
<p>Negation of factive assertive predicate in simple/past tense</p>	<p><i>We/I</i></p>	<p>Deny the speaker's acknowledgement of certain information but also affirm the truth of it.</p>
<p>Negation of adjectival predicate as factive assertive</p>	<p><i>It</i></p>	<p>Pronounce/Affirm proposition with lower level of certainty</p>

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. SUMMARY

My research was conducted as a qualitative study carried out with a descriptive analysis. Factive assertives are extracted from U.S. President Barack Obama's political speeches. They are described in terms of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features. The findings can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, in terms of syntactic, factive assertives can take gerund, adjectival or tensed complement to assert the truth in Obama's utterances. However, factive assertives do not take infinitive or ECM complement. When being followed by infinitive or ECM complement, predicates containing factive verbs do not function as factive predicates anymore. Tense is also a factor to consider the degree of truth in a factive assertive predicates. Usually, except for non-finite complements led by gerunds, finite complements are the default form of factive sentences. Furthermore, the omission of that-complementizer is often found in Obama's speeches and this phenomenon do not impact the factivity in factive assertives. In Obama's speeches, sentences with that-complements and gerund complements are the most common structures that associate with factive assertives.

Secondly, based on Appraisal theory by Martin & White (2005), we analyzed the Engagement aspect of Obama's utterances. The findings show that factive assertives can effectively deliver the Obama's illocutionary purposes in cases of pronouncement,

endorsement, denial and acknowledgement. When Obama wants to acknowledge a fact, affirm or endorse a proposition, he uses factive assertive predicate in simple or past tense. When Obama uses factive assertives predicates in future or conditional sentences, he is trying to factualize a possible or future event. Besides, Obama also uses negative form of factive assertive in order to deny his acknowledgement or even affirm a proposition with lower degree of certainty. Sometimes, factive assertive predicates that are not truth were intentionally produced to create controversies over the topic. The subjects can be pronouns like we/I, personal pronoun, or nouns like evidence, history, report or research, according to the linguistic features of the utterances. Again, tense is still a major factor in explaining semantics and pragmatics features of Obama's factive assertives.

Thirdly, I want to mention the cases of incompatibility with factive assertive in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Syntactically, it is regrettable that factive NPs with the fact, the truth, the knowledge, etc, which are used a lot in Obama's speeches, can indeed give the sentences/utterances factive reading even when negated or modality downgraded, but they do not belong to the category of factive assertive defined by Hooper (1975). However, this could be an interesting proposition for further research in section 5.5 (Suggestions for further research). In terms of semantics and pragmatics, there are cases that are completely incompatible with factive. Concurring and courtering are formulated via adverbial phrases. Entertaining are formulated via modal auxiliaries, adjuncts, attributes or non-factive verbs.

Finally, as we summarized all the structures and formulations used by U.S. President Barack Obama, we can confirm that he did have clear strategies of using factive assertives in his political speeches. Every type of verb complements acted consistently throughout all his speeches. He had a pattern for devising an utterance for each illocutionary purpose.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

5.2.1. Difficulties of Vietnamese students in understanding and using Factive Assertives

It is a fact that the notion of factivity is not familiar with Vietnamese students. Throughout the time at college, even as an English major student, I had never encountered this concept in any textbooks or lessons since this topic is not included in any subjects of the curriculum and barely mentioned in classroom. Language learners, therefore, are not aware of such notions. However, in everyday communication, students may use factivity without the awareness of its illocutionary forces and appraisal effects when making an assertion. As a result, they may fail to express the intended degree of truth in their utterance and leave their position in the utterance ambiguous. Addressers and addressees have to have a certain level of knowledge of factivity in order to fully communicating with each other. Especially in public speaking, as we can see from the example of factive verbs by George W. Bush in chapter 1, the results from incorrect use of factivity could be critical. There can be many circumstances that this incompetence can lead to misunderstanding. First of all, it can be the case of factive and non-factive verbs being inappropriately used like the example below:

(5.1) Having said that, I know critics are right to point out that without proper safeguards, this type of program could be used to yield more information about our private lives, and open the door to more intrusive bulk collection programs in the future.

(Obama, on review of Signals Intelligence, 2014)

Actually, in (5.1), the original verb of this sentence is believe, not know. I intentionally change a non-factive verb with a factive one so that we can see that from a sentence which expresses Obama's personal opinion, it becomes a statement. The audience therefore will be limited to further questioning his utterance. If students do not have this basis knowledge of factivity, errors in expressing the truth can sometimes be unavoidable. Second, it can be the case that the students are not aware of the tense in factive assertive predicates. Let consider an example from Obama's speeches:

(5.2) We know the principles to be true.

(Obama at National prayer breakfast, 2015)

As listening to (5.2), some students can confidently believe that it is a statement while this utterance is more like expressing Obama's opinion about the principles. Third, students may ignore the factive reading in negative sentences that contain factive assertive predicates.

(5.3) I didn't realize those beds were so long.

(Obama, at College Opportunity Summit, 2014)

In this utterance, the main focus of the speaker is not to negate the factive verb realize, but to assert the truth that those beds

were so long. As this utterance is produced in negative form, some could pay attention only to this and not notice the true intent of the speaker. In short, the lack of knowledge of factivity can lead to some serious misuses and misunderstandings in communication. Students need to be equipped with suitable knowledge to avoid this.

5.2.2. Some suggested solutions

For students who have the difficulties mentioned in the previous section, my generalization of Obama's strategies of using factive assertive discussed in chapter 4 can be a good help. Depending on illocutionary purpose, students can choose to use the corresponding structure as reference to produce their own assertion with confidence. For example, to affirm a proposition, students can use sentences which have factive assertive predicates in simple or past tense along with pronoun We/I as subject. In case of being sure about the information, students can still pronounce or affirm a proposition with lower the level of certainty by negating adjectival predicate as factive assertive in their utterances. The research also sheds light on the positioning of voices in utterance, so that students should keep in mind the factor of dialogic space in order to create the expected interaction in communication.

Also, I recommend teachers of English to raise the awareness about knowledge of factivity in both English and Vietnamese of the students. This can be done via many ways. I suggest adding extra lesson into the curriculum to give them the basic theory of factivity. Explaining factivity in speaking activities is also a practical method: students are asked to talk about matters of argument or make

statement and teachers take note of the factive assertives students produce during his speaking to evaluate how good students understand the concept of factivity. Through these activities, the students can be exposed to a good environment where they have to make use of factive assertive to express their point of view, protect their face as well as show their positions or stances in the conversations.

5.3. LIMITATIONS

The study has just examined factive assertives in political speeches made by U.S. President Barack Obama in recent years. However, due to the limited time, knowledge and references, the study can only examine a certain aspect of Appraisal theory, Engagement. It did not investigate the Attitude or Graduation dimensions of the factive assertives. Consequently, the findings as well as the implications made about the issues mentioned above are not able to apply for explaining all kinds of factive assertives.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis is an attempt to make a detailed analysis of linguistic features of factive assertives Obama's speeches. A lot of effort was put into finding and selecting the appropriate instances of factive assertives in order to serve the purpose of this paper. However, within the limitation of time and materials, the study is by no means complete and still remains some other aspects awaiting research which merit further studies, including:

- A descriptive analysis of true factives (factive non-assertives) in U.S. President Obama's autobiography 'Dreams from my father'.
- A constrictive analysis of true factives and semi-factives in U.S. President Obama's political speeches.