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**A CORPUS- BASED RESEARCH ON EPISTEMIC
MODALITY EXPRESSIONS AS MITIGATION
MARKERS IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN
POLITICAL SPEECHES**

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RATIONALE

Politicians in every nation in the world obviously know that delivering speeches is the most important part of their job. Political speeches, like any other talk, may potentially violate hearers' interactional rights, face wants, or ideological autonomy. As a result, politicians have to pay close attention to the listeners' reaction in order to meet the requirement of the hearer's face want or not to impinge on the hearer's interest. More than ever, through speech delivering, politicians know they can motivate or dissuade political action.

As such, politicians find it necessary to use modality expressions in their speeches to raise the importance of the message and show their concerns about hearers' needs.

In fact, a broad range of modality expressions as mitigation markers combined with alethic, epistemic, deontic and existential senses, have been analyzed at linguistic forms in some types of discourse. Nevertheless, little research has been deeply conducted on epistemic modality expressions as mitigation markers. In other words, few studies have been touched on mitigation markers in the use of epistemic modality expressions.

For the reasons mentioned above, I decided to conduct "*A corpus-based research on epistemic modality expressions as mitigation markers in British and American political speeches*" as

my master thesis. The research is expected to provide English language learners with certain comprehension of epistemic modality expressions as mitigation markers in political speeches made by British and American politicians.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

The study aims at extensively investigating epistemic modality expressions used as mitigation markers that British and American leaders use in their political speeches. Through this, lexical entries and syntactic structures used as mitigation markers are analyzed through the method of corpus-based approach. Moreover, the study's findings are expected to contribute to the betterment in the use of modality devices, which facilitates the comprehension and application in English discourse analysis.

1.2.2. Objectives

- To classify and describe types of mitigation markers that British and American politicians use in their speeches.
- To examine lexical entries and syntactic structures of epistemic modality expressions used as mitigation markers in British and American political speeches.
- To compare the similarities and differences in the use of mitigation markers between British and American politicians in their speeches.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study mainly concentrates on the analysis of epistemic

modality expressions as mitigation markers regarding lexical entries and syntactic structures in political speeches made by British and American politicians in a certain range of time through two authentic research corpora.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the lexical entries and syntactic structures of mitigation markers found from the research corpora?
2. What types of mitigation markers in political speeches are classified?
3. What similarities and differences are found from the use of mitigation markers in British and American political speeches?

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study has precious values to facilitate better understanding of the use of modality expressions concerning lexical choice and syntactic structures. Additionally, English learners are provided with an essential reference for more targeted ways in using mitigation markers and producing special effects in public speeches to reflect different intentions of the speakers and persuade the hearers. Furthermore, the findings are supposed to be a useful source of modality expressions for the teaching and learning of English and especially for those who are interested in investigating the use of epistemic modality expressions in political discourse.

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Regarding research on the use of modality expressions in discourse, so far a number of studies have been carried out.

Palmer (1986: 9-10), reproducing Jespersen (1924), claims that modality expresses “certain attitudes of mind of the speaker towards the contents of the sentence”. This can be considered as a seminal study for the pragmatic aspect of modality. Besides, quoted in Palmer (1986), Jespersen’s (1924) lists twenty sub-categories of modality which is divided into two sets.

Von Wright (1951) suggests a distinction of four ‘modes’ the alethic ,epistemic, deontic and existential modes.

According to Lyons (1977: 793), “category of modality is concerned with matters of knowledge and belief” of the speaker. He also makes a distinction between the two kinds of epistemic modality namely objective and subjective which are synonymous with traditional modal logic and linguistic modality, respectively. Of these two types, Lyons (1977) considers subjective epistemic modality to be more concerned with linguistic modality than objective epistemic modality.

Through a corpus-based analysis, Trailovic (2014) studies political speeches of warfare delivered by George Bush and Barack Obama. His thesis examines a variety of lexical entries delivered by the two American Presidents from 2001 to 2013.

In Vietnam, a number of linguistic researchers have paid attention to studies on modality. Their diverse notions on modality can be seen in Cao Xuan Hao (1991:51) in which he classified modality into two different aspects.

Tran Huu Phuc (2015) studies modality expressions as politeness strategies in British and American ambassadorial speeches.

From the revision of previous studies and theoretical approaches to modality as presented above, it can be claimed that Facchinetti and Palmer's (2004) view has great influence on studies of modality expressions. has great influence on the modality marker analysis in political discourse.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. An overview of modality

With the historical length from Aristotle's time, the study of theoretical modality with many approaches via semantic and pragmatic features suggests that modality is often used in psychology, linguistics to express the lack of commitment toward the content of the proposition.

Different studies of modality have investigated from different angles and there are thus a variety of approaches to analyse theories of modality. Moreover, these approaches also provide more notions and subcategories to reflect the relationship between subjectivity vs. objectivity; and performativity vs. descriptivity.

Palmer (1986) focusing on the subjectivity of modality, defines it as grammaticalization of speaker's attitudes and opinions in an attempt to express certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation, necessity and ability by using modal words and expressions.

Lyons (1977: 452) claims that modality refers to a speaker or writer's "opinion or attitude towards the proposition that a sentence expresses, or the situation that a proposition describes" (see also Quirk et al., 1985: 219).

Although there have been a variety of studies on modality in different ways but the most common point in the definition of modality is to state the speaker's attitude to the content of proposition, to the objective reality. Especially the correlation between the speaker and the addressee in terms of the basic semantic categories of modality.

2.2.2. An introduction to corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics is the language study based on the basic of corpora. This study approach has thus grown quickly to linguistic studies.

Samples of texts selected for the subject matter of the research are compiled into a corpus or corpora. Corpus-based analyses are usually specialized in the use of software programs and data of electronic format. Therefore, corpus linguistics is an approach to studying language in discourse via computerized data to collect and analyze data quantitatively and qualitatively.

2.2.3. Epistemic modality

Coates (1983: 18) suggests that epistemic modality not only mentions to the assessment of possibilities but also expresses the lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed.

On the work of Palmer (1986) epistemic modality is also characterised in terms of contrast between subjective and objective epistemic modality, or subcategorised according to the writer's

judgment of necessity and possibility on the one hand, and evidentiality on the other hand. Hengeveld (1988) states that the objective modality is used for evaluating the part of the writer's knowledge of the state of affairs.

On the contrary, Facchinetti and Palmer (2004) show that epistemic modality is also divided into 2 types: epistemic possibility and epistemic necessary.

Hengeveld (1988) states "knowledge of possible situations obtaining in S's conception of reality or of a hypothesized situation". Epistemic is considered the stable modality compared with other categories of modality, as Nuyts (2006: 6) claims, "the core definition of this category is relatively noncontroversial"

2.2.4. Speeches and political speeches

Speech includes a variety of linguistic components with high structures that is used as delivering the purpose of communication. It conveys the speaker's views and convinces the hearer with specific purposes.

From Reisigl's view, it can be considered that speakers are presented a variety of styles of language use to accomplish the speech acts in expressing speaker's point of views and persuade the hearer through speeches.

Since this research investigates the use of modality expressions as MMs in British and American political speeches, the relation between political speeches and speech arts will be compared to point out that speech arts not only serve the communicative purposes but contribute to the success of political speech delivery.

Therefore, politicians serve their specific political goals by delivering political speeches with particular functions to persuade the audience and make them believe what is being said.

It is important that to make political speeches, the distinction between their “structure” and “style” is extremely important for the success of political speech delivery, as Charteris- Black (2005: 4). The combination between the factors above and the speaker’s performance contribute to the success of politicians.

2.2.5. Mitigation expressions

Mitigation markers are modality expressions used in the utterance to attenuate the sense of obligation or necessity imposed on hearers in order to preserve both the speaker’s and hearers’ face. The term epistemic modality marker refers to linguistic elements, whose main function is the qualification of the writer’s commitment or lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition.

The semantic aspects of modality expressions can be seen in the senses of epistemic necessity referring to what is known – deduction; and epistemic possibility speculation. With two basic notions of possibility and necessity, epistemic modality as mitigation markers in term of lexical items and syntactic structures plays an essential roles in politeness of the speech, mitigating turn-taking violations, and aid persuasion. From those reasons, mitigation markers would give fundamentally political conditions for the speakers' divergent choices.

Therefore, the discursive occurrence of metalingual mitigation markers in a political address satisfies the three rules of politeness: formality, hesitancy and equality or camaraderie (see

Lakoff, 1977: 88).

According to Facchinetti and Palmer (2004), modality construed metalingual adverbials whose chiefly pragmatic function are threefold: on the interactional level, on the pragmatic level and on the political/ideological level. Moreover, with some lexical items and syntactic features related to mitigation markers in political speeches will take into consideration in this study.

In sum, this study chiefly focuses on their view to analyze the epistemic modality expressions in terms of lexical entries and syntactic structures and their functions as mitigation markers in samples of British and American political discourses.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. A CORPUS- BASED ANALYSIS

Research corpora together with the appropriate corpus-based method can help language researchers produce the natural and authentic language data from a variety of speakers or writers and they needn't have to pay attention to intuition on their own or native speakers' one.

Thus, with the effectiveness of a corpus-based method and the utility of the software package of WordSmith 5.0, this research on epistemic modality expressions used as mitigation markers in the discourse of political speeches is expected to reflect issues of attested language into the theories of modality.

3.2. DESIGNING THE RESEARCH CORPORA

3.2.1. An introduction to research corpus design

Hunston's (2002: 25-31) suggests four principals in delivering a research corpus are *size, content, balance and representativeness*. As such, it can be seen that to design a research corpus, the most important thing is to meet the principals set out above.

Since my study is epistemic modality expressions as mitigation markers, it is based on the texts of native speakers and meet four principles mentioned above. The size of text is large enough, balanced enough with 58 speeches (191,316 words) made by four American politicians and 44 speeches (197,479 word) selected from four British politicians. (detailed in 3.2.2. below).

Besides, the content of corpora is suitable for research objective because it contains the important elements that is necessary for analyzing.

Last but not least, these two research corpora are presented by native speakers as British and American politicians, this can be concluded that it may represent for authenticity and validity.

3.2.2. Collecting texts and building the research corpora

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below show details of the two machine-readable text corpora used in this research.

Table 3.1: Data on the corpus of the US Presidents' speeches (The USC)

Politician	Date range	No. of speeches	No. of words
US01	1981-1992	14	47,071
US02	1993-1998	9	50,899
US03	2001-2004	14	45,097
US04	2005-2009	21	48,249
Total		58	191,316

Table 3.2: Data on the corpus of the UK Prime Ministers' speeches (The UKC)

Politician	Date range	No. of speeches	No. of words	% of words
UK01	1975-1989	16	55,297	28%
UK02	1999-2007	11	52,564	26.6 %
UK03	2005-2010	7	43,086	21.8%
UK04	2010-2011	10	46,532	23.6%
Total		44	197,479	100.00%

3.2.3. Description of samples

American and British political speeches are collected from on-line sources. These speeches are in electronic format and are therefore easily compiled into the research corpora used for the study.

Among 102 political speeches, 58 speeches made by American presidents and 44 speeches made by British Prime Ministers whose names have been anonymous and these speeches were delivered by the politicians from 1992 to 2011.

3.2.4. Data analysis

After collecting samples of mitigation markers from a large number of randomly chosen political speeches, they will be qualitatively and quantitatively interpreted, and then classified, described and analyzed by using the tables, pie charts or diagrams.

In addition, the analyses of frequency use of mitigation markers help to find out the linguistic characteristics of commonly-used modality expressions in American and British political speeches.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents analyses of the pragmatic aspects of epistemic modality expressions as mitigation markers in American and British political speeches. The speeches are identified as the primary data source since they have been made by native English-speaking politicians.

4.2 EPISTEMIC MODALITY EXPRESSIONS AS MITIGATION MARKERS

4.2.1. Mitigation markers in form of modal auxiliaries

The investigation into epistemic meanings of these modal auxiliaries shows that the epistemic sense of mitigation is found only in the modal *may*, *should* and *would* which indicates the speaker's implication of mitigating the illocutionary force in the utterance presented as analyzed below.

4.2.1.1. *Mitigation markers with may*

4.2.1.2. *Mitigation markers with should*

4.2.1.3 *Mitigation markers with would*

4.2.2. Mitigation markers in form of other modal forms

This section concentrates on analyzing other modal forms (or non-auxiliary modals) collected from the research corpora as modality markers including patterns with modal lexical verbs, modal adjectives, modal adverbs and modal nouns. These modality expressions show the speaker's levels of certainty and commitment to the proposition presented.

4.2.2.1. Mitigation markers with modal lexical verbs

It can be seen from investigation into the epistemic sense of modal lexical verbs in the research corpora that *believe, know, see and understand* combined with the *I* pronoun express the strong commitment. While *think, hope, expect and wish* are modal lexical verbs denoting the sense of weak commitment. These convey the speaker's implication of lacking confidence in the content of the proposition.

4.2.2.2. Mitigation markers with modal adjectives

Other patterns with modal adjectives expressing strong commitment or subjective commitment to the content of the proposition are found in two research corpora such as '*I am confident that...*', '*I am hopeful that...*', '*I am certain that...*'

4.2.2.3. Mitigation markers with modal adverbs

Patterns of modal adverbs as MMs collected from the two research corpora occur in two subcategories. One is in the category of modal adverbs as sentence modifiers in their functions as "peripheral in clause structure" (see Perkins, 1983: 90). The other consists of modal adverbs as "verb modifiers" occurring within the structure of the utterance and directly modifying the main verbs.

4.2.3. Other patterns as mitigation markers

4.2.3.1. Inclusive We as mitigation markers

Actually, the modal *must* occurring in patterns collected from the research corpora is in the deontic sense of modality. The sense of mitigation is in that when deontic *must* is combined with the first person plural subject inclusive '*we*'; this expression includes both the speaker and hearers (understood as '*you*') in the responsibility for

performing the act uttered. The pattern of '*We must*' is used as the speaker's attitude of mitigating the sense of imposing an obligation directly on hearers.

4.2.3.2. Impersonalization as mitigation markers

The MMs found in the research corpora indicate that the speaker intentionally reminds the hearers of their responsibility for the event presented. These MMs linked with impersonal subject *It* or general subject to convey the force of obligation imposed on someone else other than on hearers. The passive structure makes the attitude of obligation become weaker as there is no overt subject indicated as being responsible for the performance of the action presented.

Accordingly, the passive structure is a safer way for the speaker to impose the sense of obligation indirectly on hearers.

4.3. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MITIGATION MARKERS IN BRITISH AND AMERICA POLITICAL SPEECHES

4.3.1. Introduction

This section is used for comparative analysis of the frequency use of MMs in British and American political speeches. The account of modality expressions APs and BPs produce in implementing their speeches along with the classification of MMs will be used to discuss the similarities and differences between the APs and BPs in the use of modality expressions as MMs in discourse.

4.3.2. A comparative analysis of mitigation markers in British and America political speeches

Table 4.1: Frequencies of mitigation markers collected in the research corpora

Mitigation markers	Modality Expressions	The UKC	The USC	Subtotal
Epistemic modal auxiliaries	<i>may/ would/ should</i>	912(65.2%)	787(68.7%)	1699(66.7%)
Modal lexical verbs	<i>I believe/ think/ know/ hope/ see/ expect</i>	334(23.8%)	230(20.1%)	564(22.2%)
Modal adjectives	<i>I am sure/ confident/ optimistic / certain/ hopeful</i>	24(1.7%)	36(3.2%)	60(2.4%)
Modal adverbs	<i>Perhaps/ Probably/ Maybe</i>	124(8.9%)	85(7.4%)	209(8.2%)
Modal nouns	<i>There is no doubt/ It's my belief that/ It is my hope that...</i>	5(0.4%)	7(0.6%)	12(0.5%)
Total		1399(100%)	1145(100%)	2544(100%)

Generally, the analysis of the differences between the APs and the BPs in their use of MMs as presented above may reveal certain non- linguistic reasons for their difference in culture. Although the analysis of the pragmatic functions of modality expressions as MMs in the selected political speeches cannot reveal how different British and American politicians are in their culture, findings from the use of modality expressions as MMs reveal that the APs seem to be more informal and personal while the BPs appear to be more formal and reserved.

The next section is a comparative analysis of major patterns of modality expressions with high frequency use as MMs in the USC and the UKC.

4.3.3. Major categories of mitigation markers found in the research corpora

4.3.3.1. Patterns of mitigation markers with inclusive We

Table 4.2: The frequencies of pattern We must

	We must
The UKC	152 (54.1 %)
The USC	129 (45.9 %)
Total	281 (100%)

The higher frequency of this pattern as MMs in the UKC than in the USC also reveal that APs are more personal while BPs seem to be more reserved and cautious in expressing their opinions and commitment to the propositional content of the sentence through the

use of inclusive *we* combined with deontic *must* to mitigate the attitude of imposing an obligation on hearers.

4.3.3.2. *Impersonalization as mitigation markers*

Table 4.3: The frequencies of impersonalization

	It must	General subject + must	Total
The UKC	34 (52.4 %)	23	57(53.8 %)
The USC	28 (47.6 %)	21	49 (46.2 %)
Subtotal	62 (100%)	44 (100%)	106 (100 %)

It can be concluded that both British and American politicians use the patterns with impersonalization as mitigation markers in their speeches and these are considered as MMs of avoiding imposition on the hearers. However the higher frequency of these MMs in the UKC than in the USC proves that British politicians appear to be more reserved indirect and more objective in expressing the sense of obligation. Meanwhile American politicians tend to be more personal, more subjective and more direct.

4.3.3.3. *Passivization as mitigation markers*

Table 4.4: The frequencies of passivisation

	Passivisation
The UKC	46 (61.3 %)
The USC	29 (38.7 %)
Total	75 (100%)

Observations of the data sets of such patterns collected from the research corpora show that BPs use a lot of passivized patterns with deontic must to mitigate the illocutionary force, avoid imposing on some direct subject than the APs do. It can be stated that British politicians (BPs) are more objective, reserved and less imposing on the content of the utterance presented.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

In brief, here are the conclusion from the analysis of epistemic modality markers in political speeches by American and British politicians. This study approached the semantic and pragmatic functions of epistemic modality expressions in American and British political speeches. In addition, it also contributes to the theories of epistemic modality with the comparative analyses of mitigation markers used by British and American politicians in their speeches.

It is always thought that Americans are more positive than British in communication (e.g. they slap the back or shoulder in interactions). However, there has been no research to support this. There has been little study on modality expressions between British and American discourse and, of course, no study between British and American political speeches either. Therefore, this research contributes to the practice of the discourse community with the analysis of epistemic modality expressions as mitigation markers in the particular discourse of political speeches.

The results obtained during the analysis, classification, and identifying in Chapter 4 Findings and discussion (see 4.3.2 and 4.3.3) of this thesis show that American politicians are more personal and informal in making a political speeches whereas the tentativeness, cautiousness and formality British politicians use in expressing their point of views or attitude through the use of MMs. In other words, it can be claimed from this research that American

politicians are more positive-oriented whereas British politicians are more negative-oriented in the use of modality expressions as MMs.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis provides a new approach to the study of modality expressions used in English public speeches. It can also help the readers to appreciate the public speeches better. Just as one of the elderly educators once said, “The best way to learn the most concise, forceful and refined English is to study public speeches in English”. Thus, this study will certainly provide a meaningful aid to improving our communication in English and it may be beneficial to the teaching and learning of English.

Additionally, this master thesis will serve as a reference for further studies and provide some instructional guidance for students of English. The readers will probably employ these mitigation markers to strengthen their own communicative power and it also provides the learners with some useful techniques in making speeches. Basing on the results of the study, we would like to put forward a number of implications and recommendations.

For students of English, mastering the knowledge and then applying them to speaking or writing is indeed a challenge. From the findings of this thesis, it is hoped that students would appreciate the beauty of political language in famous speeches. It will not only help them get a better understanding of the political language but also provide them with some epistemic modality expressions in speech delivering for various real-life purposes.

Through political speeches containing modality expressions, teachers can help improve students’ speaking skill to a great extent.

Students can learn how to use these naturally and effectively in oral communication via their everyday conversations or their own presentations or speeches. Moreover, students can develop their reading skill, especially reading comprehension. They can interpret what they are reading better and as a result they can have a thorough grasp of the reading materials.

For the teaching of English, how to find out the most effective method for teachers of English to help their students speak naturally and effectively is still a big concern at the moment. This study would give a suggestion on teaching public speaking. The teacher should encourage his students to practice translating and writing political speeches, etc. As a teacher of English as a foreign language, I have noticed that teaching English through famous speeches is an interesting teaching style for the learners.

Moreover, teaching language through political speeches is desirable because of the authenticity of the material. Teachers can encourage students to use modality expressions in their speaking to express their thoughts and ideas more clearly, concisely and convincingly.

5.3. LIMITATIONS

Although we have tried our best in finding materials and investing our efforts, there are still shortcomings in this thesis due to the limited time, knowledge and references. Furthermore, the similarities and differences between the use and the frequent occurrence of all semantic categories of modality should be presented. However, due to limitation in the scale of this thesis, only

epistemic modality markers in review articles and business articles have been investigated.

The study is also expected to contribute useful knowledge to learners and translators, but it has not reached the expectation of the researcher as it should.

Moreover, this research is on modality expressions , it is central to investigating the lexical entries and syntactic functions of mitigation markers from the data source of British and American political discourse rather than analysing the cultural distinctions between British and American politicians in expressing politeness strategies in their speech delivery.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS

With the limitation of the thesis, it can be proposed that further studies can be developed to investigate expressions denoting particular modality meanings in specific genres of discourse, not only political speeches but also in other types of discourse or a comparative study between MMs used in film review and book review.

With those difficulties and limitation of personal ability, source of materials relating to the problem under investigation and outside factors, some weaknesses are inevitable. I would be very grateful to those that take interest in the topic and work. Any comment, advice, and adjustment will be highly appreciated and very valuable to make this paper clearer and more fulfilled.