

Hedges Used in the Speech of American President, Joe Biden, at Valley Forge ahead on January 6, 2024

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Abstract. This study examines the utilization of linguistic devices known as hedges in Joe Biden's speech delivered on January 6, 2024. It describes and classifies hedges employed by Joe Biden in his speech and to determine the most commonly occurring categories of hedges in the speech. Descriptive qualitative method was used in this study, drawing upon Salager-Meyer's (1997) theory as a study framework. The data were taken from Joe Biden's Speech at Valley Forge ahead on January 6, 2024. Then the data were analyzed using the following steps: (1) Transcribing the speech from YouTube, (2) verifying the accuracy of the transcript, (3) identifying the hedges used in the speech, (4) classifying the hedges, (5) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions based on the data obtained. The results show that there are 125 hedges used in the speech and the dominant type of hedges used is modal auxiliary verbs. This indicates that in giving his speech Joe Biden employs strategic measures to mitigate any risks to his facial region.

Keywords: hedges, language, speech, modal auxiliary verbs.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Language is a complex system employed by people to engage in communication and social interaction. Language serves as a means of communicating ideas, thoughts, wishes, feelings, and experiences to others. Hence, language plays a crucial part in life. As to the findings of Okarisma, Irna, Sarah, and Lazuardi (2022), language skills are essential for a communicator or communicant to comprehend the content of a discussion in the communication process. Hence, it is imperative that we possess the ability to effectively utilize language in order to provide seamless communication and relationships with other individuals. In addition, it is important to employ appropriate language to ensure that the recipient comprehends the intended message being conveyed during the conversation. In addition to employing suitable language, it is imperative that we ensure our words do not pose harm to our reputation or to the individual we are conversing with, and refrain from making comments that are not definitive.

The utilization of language is fundamentally connected with the identity of the person who uses it and the purpose for which it is employed. It is related to the purpose and functionality of the language. As previously said, people utilize language as a means of communication and social interaction. In this instance, it signifies the existence of a linguistic phenomenon characterized by the presence of several language variations. Language variety refers to the utilization of distinct languages based on the subject matter being communicated by the person using them (speaker). There are other linguistic differences, however, this study only examines the language spoken by politicians.

Typically, the language employed by a politician carries several connotations and has the potential to shape the public's opinion. Political speech serves the interests of the speaker and is imbued with its own ideological framework. Consequently, political language frequently employs various interpretations and can even be characterized by ambiguity and dishonesty. The outcome may contradict the stated intention. The language of politics has the purpose of hiding as well as conveying information (Sri Rahayu, 2021). In addition, Sri Rahayu (2021) elucidates that political language is a skill that language users may employ to adeptly negotiate linguistic conflicts. However, they must also uphold their reputation among one another. As a result, they must utilize an instrument known as hedges.

Based on this background, the objective of this study is to examine the utilization of hedges in the verbal communication of the President of the United States, that is Joe Biden. The objective of this study is to examine the various forms of hedges employed by Joe Biden in his speeches to indicate uncertainty or qualification. Additionally, it seeks to determine the frequency of usage of modal auxiliary verbs in his speech. Researchers analyze Joe Biden's address delivered on January 6, 2024, which was broadcast on the NBC NEWS channel's YouTube platform.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Hedges are an important topic of study in the field of pragmatic science. Pragmatics is a linguistic study that examines how language is employed in accordance with its surrounding environment. Salager-Meyer (1997) classified hedging into seven distinct categories such as modal auxiliary verbs; Modal lexical verbs; Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases; Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time; Introductory phrases; "If clauses"; and Compound hedges. Hedges have a few purposes. Salager-Meyer's theory (1997) identifies four primary reasons for hedging such as (1) Minimizing the "thread-to-face", (2) Being a way of being more precise in reporting results, (3) Being positive or negative politeness strategies, (4) Conforming to an established writing style.

The following forms of hedges based on Salager-Meyer will be displayed: Some researchers have conducted studies on the use of hedging in the orations delivered by politicians and presidents. Wendri Susanti (2014) did a study entitled Gender And Hedges In Political Public Speaking: A Case Study On Barack Obama and Jill Stein In US Presidential Public Election 2012. The research analyzed the utilization of hedges by Obama and Stein in their speeches during the campaign. The researchers discovered that both candidates employed hedging techniques in their speeches, with Obama exhibiting the highest frequency of hedging. Researchers identified 342 instances of hedging in Obama's speech, but Stein's speech had just 150 instances of hedging. The findings of this analysis indicate that the predominant hedging methods employed in speeches delivered by Obama and Stalin are modal auxiliary verbs. The second study is titled "The Uses and Functions of Barack Obama's Hedging Language in Selected Speeches" authored by Almutairi, M., Al Kous, N., and Zitouni, M. (2022). The analysis focuses on the use and categorization of hedging types employed by Obama in his speech. The researchers discovered that the predominant hedging methods employed in Obama's speeches are modal auxiliary verbs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to describe and analyze the phenomena of hedging in Joe Biden's speech. Wayan Suwendra (2018) identifies three fundamental principles in

this research: (1) a heightened awareness of issues that develop in the natural world, (2) a strong inclination to conduct in-depth studies, and (3) a curiosity to uncover the underlying meaning behind observed phenomena. Consequently, researchers employ this method to examine and describe the utilization of hedges. This study aims to analyze different categories of hedges.

The research data was taken from Joe Biden's speak to on January 6, which was streamed on the NBC NEWS channel on YouTube. The researchers will transcribe the video in order to simplify the process of analyzing the data. After that, researchers will check the accuracy of video transcript. The researcher will next begin the process of identifying, analyzing, and categorizing linguistic features, specifically Modal Auxiliary Verbs; Modal Lexical Verbs; Adjective; Adverb; Nominal Modal Phrases; Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time; Introductory Phrases; "if" Clauses; and Compound Hedges, observed in language that is spoken. Then, the researcher will count and sum the data pertaining to each type of hedging. In the end, the researchers concluded and determined the hedge types that exhibited the highest level of dominance in Joe Biden's speech.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 displays the results of Joe Biden's utilization of the hedging category and its frequency, according to the taxonomy outlined by Salager-Meyer in 1997. The results section provides a thorough explanation of the data given in Table 2.

Table 1 The result of Hedges in Joe Biden's Speech

| No | Types Of Hedges | Words | Quantity | Percentage |
|--------------|---|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1. | Modal auxiliary verbs | can, could, would, and should. | 34 | 25,1 % |
| 2. | Modal lexical verbs | Believe, think | 20 | 14,8 % |
| 3. | Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases | Possible, claim, virtually | 4 | 3 % |
| 4. | Approximates of degree, quantity, frequency, and time | About, a lot of. | 29 | 21,4 % |
| 5. | Introductory phrases | I believe | 9 | 6,7 % |
| 6. | If clauses | if anything. | 8 | 6 % |
| 7. | Compound hedges | | 31 | 23 % |
| TOTAL | | | 125 | 100% |

1. Modal Auxiliary Verb

Modal auxiliary verbs serve the purpose of expressing modality. Common modal terms include may, can, could, would, should, and may. The analysis revealed that the modals "can" and "would" were used equally, each occurring 12 times. Additionally, the modals "could" and "should" were used with the same frequency, appearing 5 times each.

Excerpt 1

He went on to say he would be a dictator on day one

In this context, "would" is used to express a hypothetical or future action. It indicates that the person being referred to expressed the intention or possibility of becoming a dictator on the first day. The use of "would" in this sentence helps convey a sense of the speaker reporting someone else's statement about their future actions, introducing a level of speculation or intention into the description.

Excerpt 2

Even found in the Constitution, he *could* terminate?

The text above contains a modal auxiliary verb, specifically "could." In this context, "could" is used to pose a question about the possibility or authority of someone terminating something, possibly referring to a power granted in the Constitution. The use of "could" suggests a speculative or conditional tone, asking whether the authority to terminate is present or allowed, and it introduces an element of uncertainty into the question

Excerpt 3

it's the very site that I think every American *should* visit because it tells the story

The text above includes the modal auxiliary verb "should." In this context, "should" is used to express a recommendation or a suggestion. "Should" in this sentence adds a sense of obligation or desirability, suggesting that visiting the site is something the speaker views as valuable or useful.

2. Modal Lexical Verb

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), lexical modal verbs, also known as speech act verbs, primarily convey a feeling of uncertainty and evaluation rather than just giving a description. In this study, a total of 20 hedging expressions employed by Joe Biden were identified within this specific category. However, only two specific hedges, specifically "think" and "believe", were utilized. Among these, the term "think" was employed on 7 occasions, while "believe" was used 13 times. Within this group, the term "believe" comes out as the most commonly employed hedge.

Excerpt 4

It's really kind of hard *to believe*.

The text above includes a modal lexical verb, specifically "hard to believe." In this context, "hard to believe" functions as a phrase expressing difficulty or challenge in accepting or understanding something. The combination of "hard" and "to believe" conveys the idea that the speakers find it challenging or difficult to accept the information or situation being discussed.

3. Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases

Almutairi M., Al Kous N., and Zitouni M. (2022) state that adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases are employed in spoken language to convey possibility and uncertainty, as well as to mitigate the assertiveness of the speaker's statements. The researcher identified 4 hedges in this category, including one instance of "Possible," two instances of "Claim," and one instance of "Virtually."

Excerpt 5

Without democracy, no progress is (inaudible) *possible*

In this context, "possible" functions as an adverb to modify the verb "is." The adverbial modal phrase "is possible" conveys the idea that the existence of democracy is a condition necessary for progress to occur. It suggests a relationship between the presence of democracy and the feasibility of progress.

Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases often involve words like "possible," providing additional information about the nature or likelihood of an action or condition.

Excerpt 6

Trump's *claims* about the 2020 election never could stand up in court

The term "could" functions as the modal element, expressing a sense of ability or possibility. In this context, "could stand up in court" is an adverbial phrase modifying the verb "never." It conveys the idea that Trump's claims lacked the ability or viability to succeed in a legal context.

Excerpt 7

...and I know all of them, *virtually* all of them

The term "virtually" serves as the adverb, modifying the verb "know." It conveys the idea that the speaker knows almost all of the mentioned entities, suggesting a high degree of familiarity. In this case, the modal emphasis is on the extent or degree of the speaker's knowledge, conveyed by the adverbial modifier "virtually."

4. Approximates of degree, quantity, frequency, and time

According to Safira, L. A., & Mulatsih, S. (2022), Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time are not only employed to introduce ambiguity; rather, some are utilized when precise values are inconsequential. In this research, researchers found as many as 29 hedges found in this category. The division was around 27, and as many as 2.

Excerpt 8

Democracy is *about* being able to bring about peaceful change

The word "about" in this context serves as an adverbial modifier, indicating an imprecise but significant aspect of democracy. It conveys that a fundamental characteristic or purpose of democracy is the capacity to facilitate peaceful change. In this case, "about" functions as an approximate measure, providing a sense of the general or essential nature of democracy without specifying precise details.

Excerpt 9

saw a *lot of* hate and violence

The term "a lot" serves as an adverbial modifier, conveying a general sense of a significant amount or degree of hate and violence witnessed. In this context, "a lot" does not specify an exact quantity but suggests a notable or substantial presence of negative emotions and actions. Expressions like "a lot" fall under the category of approximates of degree or quantity, providing a relative indication of the intensity or extent of the observed phenomena without specifying precise numerical values.

5. Introductory phrases

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), the introductory phrase expresses the author's personal doubt and direct involvement. The use of the introductory phrase "I believe" emphasizes the speaker's responsibility and accountability for what is being discussed and incorporates personal beliefs and thoughts. Researchers found the use of the phrase "I believe" 9 times in Joe Biden's speech.

Excerpt 10

I believe with every fiber that there is nothing beyond our capacity...

The introductory element here is "I believe with every fiber," which sets the tone for the following statement. It introduces the speaker's strong conviction or belief in the subsequent idea. Introductory phrases often come at the beginning of a sentence or statement and help frame the speaker's perspective or attitude, offering a glimpse into the mindset before presenting the main idea.

Excerpt 11

it's the very site that I think every American should visit because it tells the story

In this context, the text above introduces the speaker's opinion and recommendation about a particular site every American should visit. The introductory phrase provides context and establishes the speaker's perspective, guiding the reader or listener to the primary message of why the mentioned site is significant and worth visiting. Introductory phrases are often used to frame statements, offering insights into the speaker's viewpoint before delving into the main content of the sentence.

6. "If clauses"

"If clauses" show uncertainty or doubt concerning a proposition. According to Sri Mulatsih (2008) "if clause" is usually realized through the use of the following phrases "if true", and "if anything". In this research, the researcher found 8 numbers of this type of category. Here is an example of an if clause.

Excerpt 12

If you doubt me, look around the world

In this context, the if clause is "If you doubt me." It sets up a hypothetical scenario where doubt exists and suggests that the action following the comma, "look around the world," is a recommended or logical response to dispel that doubt. The "if" clause creates a conditional relationship, indicating that looking around the world is a suitable course of action in response to any doubt the listener might have if clauses are commonly used to express potential or hypothetical situations and their consequences or actions.

7. Compound hedges

Compound hedges are combination of several types of hedges. In this category, the most common form is a combination of modal auxiliary verbs with lexical verbs (will appear) and also lexical verbs followed by a hedging adverb or adjective (for example, seems reasonable/possible) is the most common form (Sri Mulatsih , 2008).). In this category there are several types such as double hedging, triple hedging and quadruple hedging. In this study, researchers only found the use of double hedges in 31 data that were formed from modal auxiliary verbs with lexical verbs.

Excerpt 13

the Insurrection Act, which would allow him to deploy...

The text above incorporates a compound hedge by using the modal auxiliary verb "would" in conjunction with the phrase "allow him to." The use of "would" implies a hypothetical or potential action, introducing an element of uncertainty or contingency. Simultaneously, the phrase "allow him to" further emphasizes the conditional nature of the statement, suggesting that the deployment is contingent upon the conditions specified in the Insurrection Act.

Excerpt 14

Together, we can keep proving that America is still a country that believes in decency

The text above incorporates a compound hedge by combining the modal auxiliary verb "can" with the phrase "keep proving." The use of "can" implies the potential for action, and the phrase "keep proving" adds a continuous and persistent quality to the expression. It suggests an ongoing effort to demonstrate that America upholds values of decency.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the examination of the usage of hedging in Joe Biden's speech. The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative methodology to both describe and evaluate the collected data. According to the analysis, Joe Biden utilized all categories of hedges in his speech. These categories include Modal Auxiliary Verbs (24,1%); Modal Lexical Verbs (14,8%); Adjectives, Adverbs, Nominal Modal Phrases (3%); Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time (21,4%); Introductory Phrases (6,7%); "if" Clauses (6%); and Compound Hedges (23%). According to this, the category that is most commonly utilized and appears most frequently in Joe Biden's speech is the modal auxiliary verb category, which is the usage of "can" and "would" 12 times, followed by "could" and "should" 5 times. Salger Meyer (1944) said that modal auxiliary verbs are the most often occurring and widely distributed category, which aligns with this observation. Adjectivals, adverbials, and nominal modal phrases are found in the category that is used the least. Joe Biden employs strategic measures to mitigate any risks to his facial region.

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