Analyzing Modality Expressions as Hedges in English Discourse: A Corpus-based Approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at investigating the communicative purpose of different forms of hedges in English discourse under the umbrella of corpus-based analysis. Hedges are expressions showing the speaker's tentativeness, indirectness and modality in speech communication. The two research corpora of British and American ambassadorial speeches are compiled to provide the data source and the software package of Wordsmith 5.0 is used to achieve statistical data for a comparative analysis of hedges in the research corpora. The results of this research show that most hedges occurring in ambassadorial speeches are in patterns with modal lexical verbs, modal adjectives and modal adverbs as intensifiers and downtoners. Hedges in patterns with modal lexical verbs and modal adjectives occur with higher frequency in the American ambassadorial corpus while more hedges with modal adverbs as intensifiers and downtoners are found in the British ambassadorial corpus. As such, it can be claimed from the data analysis in this research that American ambassadors appear to be more personal and subjective, whereas British ambassadors seem to be more tentative and objective in the use of modality expressions as hedges in their speech delivery.

Keywords: corpus-based approach, corpora, modality expressions, hedges, discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

Hedges are linguistic devices, i.e., understatements, used to convey purposive tentativeness and vagueness in communication. These are tools that the speaker adds to the proposition to make the utterance more acceptable to the hearer. Actually, hedges create no information for the sentence but they increase the capability of acceptance and reduce the risk of negation. As such, hedges are important devices to the discourse by their overall effect on the implication or the message of the text.

This domain has been the interest of ongoing research by a large number of linguists, pragmatists and discourse analysts. The term hedging was commenced into the field of linguistics by Lakoff (1972) in which hedges are associated with unclarity

or fuzziness, as Lakoff (1972) claims "for me some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words or phrases whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy". According to Myers (1988) scientists do not always want precision in all situations. "We sometimes want to be vague" and thus, hedges are among the safest ways to show our vagueness and tentativeness. However, as observed in linguistic research, the term hedging has now been widened to cover a number of interrelated concepts, not only vagueness and tentativeness but also indetermination, indirectness, approximation, etc. (see Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hyland, 1996; Vazquez & Giner, 2008).

Therefore, hedges can be seen as important tools used for "projecting honesty, modesty and proper caution in self-reports and for diplomatically creating space in areas heavily populated by other researchers" (Swales, 1990). They are linguistic devices used to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, a desire not to express the commitment categorically (see Hyland, 1996) and to allow the speaker the greatest liberate in performing actions and making decisions. It is possible to purport that hedges are expressions of indetermination, indirectness, vagueness in communication. Among linguistic theories closely related to the issue of hedging, modality can be seen as a framework for the analysis of linguistic expressions denoting the domains of the speaker's attitude as mentioned above. Furthermore, in this study the way to approach such modality expressions is under the umbrella of corpus-based analysis. As such, this study presents results of an investigation into modality expressions used as hedges in British and American ambassadorial speeches under the method of corpus-based analysis.

CORPUS LINGUISTICS

The school of corpus linguistics developed over recent decades with new computational generations has brought considerable influence to linguistic studies. In the presentation of "historical background" of corpus linguistics, Leech (1991) highlights the 'first generation corpora', as early as Randolph Quirk's plan for the Survey of English Usage (SEU) Corpus in 1959, and soon afterwards with the Brown Corpus compiled by Nelson Francis and Henry Kucera in 1961. These are followed by the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) Corpus 1970 – 1978, and the London Lund Corpus (LLC) 1975. In the 1980s a wide range of English corpora were compiled for specialised purposes.

In the 1990s 'second generation mega-corpora' became available. Among these are the Cobuild Corpus, the Longman Corpus Network (LLELC, LSC and LCLE), and typically the British National Corpus (http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk) (see Aston and Burnard, 1998; Leech et al., 2001), the International Computer Archive of Modern English (ICAME), http://www.hd.uib.no. Stubbs (1996) makes use of four major 'computer-readable corpora' of spoken and written English (LLC, LOB, Longman-Lancaster corpus and The Bank of English) in his study on the semantics of different levels of 'texts, text

types, text corpora and social institutions'. Other large corpora of written and spoken English can be seen in Aijmer and Altenberg (1991), Hunston (2002) and Meyer (2004).

Leech (1991) suggests the 'third generation' corpora, claiming that "it would not be impossible to imagine a commensurate thousand-fold increase to one million million words corpora before 2021". Corpus linguistics has become quite popular as a methodology in language study. This approach has been widely employed in several areas of linguistic studies such as in dictionary compilation, e.g., Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 3rd edition (1995), Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (1995); and in writing grammar reference books, e.g., Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan et al., (1999).

AN OVERVIEW OF MODALITY

The term 'modality' has long been used by philosophers, logicians and linguists to refer to a range of aspects in logic and language. Although it has been studied since Aristotle's time, the formal theory of modality "was revolutionized in the 1960s" (Kaufmann et al., 2006: 71). Since then there have been a range of approaches to modality, leading to a wealth of publications referring to both the semantic and pragmatic features of this domain. However, it is also its diversity and broad sense that makes it difficult to delineate modality in appropriate and relevant terms.

As such, different studies with different structures and aims have approached the notion of modality from different angles. Consequently, there have been a variety of approaches to the theoretical description and analysis of this domain. Some are grammar-centred, (e.g. Givón, 1982, 1990; Bybee et al., 1994; Bybee and Fleischman ed., 1995); while others are semantically oriented, centring on ideas of modal notions, showing the speaker's attitude towards the information presented in the proposition (Palmer, 1990; Coates, 1983, 1995; Facchinetti et al., 2003; Frawley, 2006). In addition, recent approaches to modality have been modified by critical analyses of the basic semantic dimensions and propose a "nomenclature" of modality categories (Bybee, 1985; Bybee et al., 1994; Bybee and Fleischman, 1995 among others). There are further additional notions and subcategories in the manifestations of modality such as subjectivity vs. objectivity; and performativity vs. descriptivity.

Therefore, the 'many-faceted features' of modality, together with linguists' different views, make it a highly diverse object of study. Van der Auwera and Plungian (1998: 80) claim that "modality and its types can be defined and named in various ways. There is no one correct way". Nuyts (2006: 1) also claims that "modality turns out to be very hard to delineate in simple, positive terms". As a result, it is relatively difficult to give a stable and clear definition that can cover all these related dimensions of modality.

Perkins (1983: 1 – 4), when presenting the five principal ways that distinguish his approach from Lyons' (1977) and Palmer's (1979) views in defining modality, states that: "in spite of the vastness of the available literature, it is by no means easy to find out what modality actually is". Likewise, conducting research on modality "is very similar to trying to move in an overcrowded room without treading on anyone else's feet" (Perkins, 1983: 4).

Although previous studies on modality diverge in different ways with suggestions for other alternative divisions of modality, the major interest that scholars share is in the taxonomy of this domain. That is to say the common thing that can be seen from prior theoretical approaches to the domain of modality is to reflect multi-faceted relationships between the speaker's attitude and the proposition; between the proposition and the objective reality; and between the speaker and the addressee in terms of the basic semantic categories of modality. The framework of modality meanings can be set up as in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Theoretical framework of modality meanings

<table>
<tr><th rowspan="2">Other alternative divisions of modality</th><th colspan="3">The basic semantic categories of modality</th><th rowspan="2">Authors</th></tr>
<tr><th>Epistemic</th><th>Deontic</th><th>Dynamic</th></tr>
<tr><td>Discourse-oriented</td><td></td><td>obligation, permission</td><td></td><td>Palmer (1986)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Subject-oriented</td><td></td><td></td><td>ability, volition desirability</td><td>Palmer (1974)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intrinsic</td><td></td><td colspan="2">obligation, permission, volition, desire, ability, intention, willingness</td><td rowspan="2">Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech (1985)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Extrinsic</td><td>certainty, possibility, probability, likelihood, prediction</td><td></td><td>Ability</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theoretical</td><td>certainty, possibility, probability, likelihood, prediction</td><td></td><td></td><td rowspan="2">James (1986)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Practical</td><td></td><td colspan="2">wish, regret, obligation, permission, ability, desire, intention, willingness</td></tr>
<tr><td>Agent-oriented</td><td></td><td colspan="2">obligation, root possibility ability, desire</td><td rowspan="2">Bybee and Fleischman (1995)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Speaker-oriented</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Imperatives, permissives, Optatives</td></tr>
</table>

It can be seen from the theoretical analysis of modality that no matter what ways of reorganisation are suggested for modality categories, the common factor is that modality can be viewed as a device in spoken communication conveying the three basic dimensions of modality including (1) epistemic: the speaker's attitude in assessing the truth value of the proposition in degrees of certainty, possibility, probability, and likelihood; (2) deontic: the speaker's intervention in the speech event by imposing obligations, and giving or declining permission; and (3) dynamic: the speaker's emotional expressions such as wish, regret, desire, ability, intention, and willingness. As such, the alternative divisions of modality (as shown in Table 1) can be seen to originate from the basic dimensions of epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality. These are combined to form an overall picture of modality meanings.

It can be seen in Table 1 that although there are a variety of ways in approaching other alternative divisions of modality, the distinction of modality meanings in such divisions is not clear-cut because there is overlap in the elements of the theory. Therefore, it can be argued that these proposed dimensions of modality cannot be used as a replacement for the basic categories of *epistemic*, *deontic* and *dynamic* modality.

As observed in these theoretical elements, the sense of epistemic modality remains unchanged whereas the other alternative divisions are mainly proposed merely to cover the meanings of modality in paired comparisons, and within each pair there is an overlap of the dimensions with each other. As such, there is no consensus on how the set of modality dimensions should be characterised and each of them is identified separately with specific meanings which are not in themselves sufficient to replace the basic dimensions of modality. Therefore, it can be argued that the three basic dimensions of modality remain more prominent than the other alternative divisions. The *epistemic-deontic-dynamic* scheme can be considered as the framework for the analysis of MMs collected from ambassadorial speeches.

With regard to linguistic forms of modality, there seems to be a tendency for most accounts of modality in English to be central to the use of the modal auxiliaries (see Coates, 1983; Perkins, 1983; Quirk et al., 1985; Leech, 2003) and semi-modals (see Bybee et al., 1994; Krug, 2000; Leech and Smith, 2009). However, the linguistic expression of modality is actually marked through a wide range of other syntactic structures and lexical items (see Hoye, 1997; Nuyts, 2001). Consequently, the sense of modality is expressed not only by the main verbs (including modal auxiliaries or other modal lexical verbs) but also by other non-auxiliary modals such as modal adverbs, modal adjectives or modal nouns. In addition modality is expressed through the whole sentence (see Palmer, 1986: 2) or a finite or non-finite clause (see Halliday, 1994: 89; Nuyts, 2001: 29).

REVIEW OF CORPUS-BASED RESEARCH ON MODALITY

Corpus-based methods have been employed to provide data for comparative analyses of frequencies and semantic categories in studies on the English modal verb forms. However, such studies as Kennedy (1998: 195) claim "have been rare because of difficulties in getting corpora which contain similar text types or were compiled at a similar time". Thus, in this section an overview of some corpus-based research on modality is presented as a guideline for the analysis of modality expressions as hedges in the research.

Among the early corpus-based studies on modality, Coates (1983) provides a comparative analysis of the frequencies and semantics of ten modal auxiliaries occurring in the London-Lund corpus of spoken British English (BrE) and the LOB corpus of written British English. Collins (1991) compares modality in an Australian English corpus with that in British and American English (AmE) corpora based on parts of the LLC, LOB and the Brown corpora. Kennedy (1998) considers the use of modal verbs in the London-Lund corpus and the LOB corpus claiming that while some modal verb forms like *need, ought, must, should* and *can* are the most frequently used in root meanings expressing obligation, necessity and possibility, others such as *may*, *will*, *would* and *could* are mainly used to express epistemic meanings (i.e., degrees of certainty) and hypothetical meanings. The common factor that can be gleaned from such studies is in the comparative analyses of the frequency use of modal verbs in categories of root, epistemic and hypothetical meanings in different varieties of English.

Recent corpus-based studies on modality, i.e., Krug (2000), Leech (2003), Leech and Smith (2006, 2009) have been central to changes in the English modals. Krug (2000) in his study on "emerging modals and emergent grammar" suggests that a change in the English modals is under way, the quasi-modals have become modalised and are assuming the typical features of central modals. Leech (2003), in a corpus-based study on the changes of modal auxiliaries in the two British corpora (LOB and F-LOB), claims that "the English modal auxiliaries as a group have been declining significantly in their frequency of use" (2003: 223). Leech and Smith (2009: 175 – 195) propose an explanation for grammatical changes in BrE and AmE with the main focus being on the English modal verbs. In sum, prior corpus-based studies on modality, as discussed above, provide important guidelines for the semantic and pragmatic analysis of modality markers (MMs) in this research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main focus of the design of British and American ambassadorial corpora was to investigate modality expressions used as hedges in the ambassadors' speeches. The research was designed on the basis of research corpora with the utilization of the software package of Wordsmith 5.0. This research sought to explore the use of modality

expressions as hedges in speeches made by some British and American ambassadors and to contribute to the practice of the discourse community with corpus-based analysis. Therefore, the research gave answers to the following key questions:

1. What forms of modality expressions occur as hedges in the research corpora of British and American ambassadorial speeches?

2. What similarities and differences can be identified from the comparative analysis of modality expressions used as hedges in British and American ambassadorial speeches?

METHODOLOGY

Basic Tasks in a Corpus-based Research

A corpus is obviously the key component in any corpus-based research. Therefore, the initial issue in any corpus-based study is corpus design which determines the effect of any corpus-based research. Although there is a wide range of corpora of different levels of text types, size and style, it would be misleading to treat corpora as the overall storage of any potentiality for linguistic research and then to only the appropriate software to sort out the questions of study from the corpora. Basic principles have to be considered, and careful collections and planning for the organisation of the corpus have to be undertaken before a corpus is designed. Aston and Burnard (1998: 21) indicate two groups of criteria to be considered in designing a corpus: "on the one hand the size of a corpus and of its component parts and on the other the material actually selected for inclusion". Hunston (2002: 25 – 31) proposes four principal issues in corpus design as 'size', 'content', 'balance and representativeness', and 'permanence'.

Basic tasks in the development of corpus-based research as claimed in Leech (1991) are three stages in priority: (i) basic corpus development, (ii) corpus tool development, and (iii) development of corpus annotations. Kennedy (1998) and Leech (1991) suggest that the key points in any corpus design are in the researcher's determinations of what texts are to be included in the corpus to achieve data for analysis; what comparison is intended to be made between corpora; and for what purposes the data is to be obtained. There must be careful planning decisions in selecting texts which promise the potentiality of the research efficiency in order to ensure its appropriateness in terms of variables, e.g., origin, genre, style, authorship, topic, etc.

Building the Research Corpora and Process of Data Collection for Analysis

Typical in building the research corpora and process of data collection for corpus-based analysis are in Biber et al., (1998, 1999, 2002); Keck and Biber (2004); Baker (2006). On

the basis of prior studies on data collection, the steps of collecting British and American ambassadorial speeches and building the research corpora are undertaken as follows.

Firstly, British and American ambassadors' speeches are selected because they are expected to contain expressions of the speaker's tentativeness. Then, patterns of hedges are coded and selected speeches are compiled into two research corpora. One is built from speeches made by British ambassadors to Vietnam (BAC) and the other is from speeches delivered by American ambassadors to Vietnam (AAC). These two research corpora provide data of hedges for quantitative analysis while qualitative analysis is used on selected utterances as illustration.

Table 2 Data on the corpus of American ambassadorial speeches (The AAC)

Ambassadors	Date range	Number of speeches	% of corpus	Number of words	% of words
A01	2000 – 2003	13	19.25%	19,763	18.91%
A02	2003 – 2005	17	23.61%	26,910	25.76%
A03	2005 – 2008	25	35.22%	33,267	31.84%
A04	2008 – 2011	15	21.32%	24,544	23.49%
Total		**70**	**100%**	**104,484**	**100%**

Table 3 Data on the corpus of British ambassadorial speeches (The BAC)

Ambassadors	Date range	Number of speeches	% of corpus	Number of words	% of words
B01	2002 – 2004	20	28.52%	29,599	28.19%
B02	2004 – 2006	17	23.38%	23,638	22.51%
B03	2006 – 2008	17	23.38%	24,920	23.73%
B04	2008 – 2010	18	24.72%	26,845	25.57%
Total		**72**	**100%**	**105,002**	**100%**

In Table 2, the AAC consists of 70 speeches delivered by four American ambassadors to Vietnam in the period from 2000 to 2011, in the size of 104,484 words. The highest proportion of speeches contributing to the compilation of this corpus is from those made by ambassador A03, accounting for 25 speeches, at 35.22% of corpus and 31.84% of total words. The number of speeches delivered by ambassador A01 is the fewest in this corpus, with 13 speeches, at 19.25% of corpus and 18.91% of total words. The number of speeches made by ambassadors A02 and A04 collected for this corpus are 17 and 15 respectively, at 23.61% and 21.32% of the corpus, 26.76% and 23.49% of total words.

Table 3 shows details of the BAC compiled from 72 speeches delivered by 4 British ambassadors to Vietnam in the period from 2002 to 2010, in the size of 105,002 words. Ambassador B01 contributes the highest proportion of the BAC, accounting for 20 speeches, at 28.52% of the corpus and 28.19% of total words. The number of speeches made by ambassadors B04 follows, accounting for 18, at 24.72% of the corpus and 25.57% of words. The speeches made by ambassadors B02 and B03 are equal, each with 17 speeches, at 22.51% and 27.73% of total words, respectively. In general, the size and synchronic range of these transcribed speeches are approximately equal. Therefore, they are expected to be relevant for collecting data and analysing the hedging expressions that the British and American ambassadors perform in their speech delivery.

Actually, the population of ambassadorial speeches selected for the compilation of each research corpus is not very large (70 speeches in the AAC and 72 in the BAC) and the size of the research corpora is also small (over 100,000 words each). However, the two research corpora can be seen representative since they contain similar text types of general speeches delivered by British and American ambassadors to a general audience of Vietnamese users of English at similar times and are thus expected to provide spontaneous data for the comparative analysis and interpretation of hedging expressions.

It is recognised that the research corpora are not all-sided for the genre of ambassadorial speeches in terms of varieties. Actually, samples of ambassadorial speeches for this genre could be collected from more varieties of English other than only those made by British and American ambassadors. However, speeches delivered by non-native English speakers would make this genre of speeches more complicated and thus cause the research corpora to be less representative.

Ambassadorial speeches collected are examined carefully and the patterns of hedges are coded manually. Then, the software package of Wordsmith version 5.0 (see below) is used to provide statistical data of hedges in patterns as coded for analysis. Quantitative analysis shows the difference in frequency of the use of hedges between the corpora of British and American ambassadorial speeches. Qualitative investigation into selected utterances provides illustrations of hedges as well as indicates the major differences between British and American ambassadors in using patterns of hedges in their speech delivery.

The Software Package Used in the Research

Aijmer and Altenberg (1991), Kennedy (1998), Biber et al., (1998), Baker (2006) can be considered as seminal studies on the development of computerised corpora, statistical tools, computer programmes and specialised software packages used for corpus-based studies on issues of authentic language. The software package used for this corpus-based analysis of modality markers as hedges is Wordsmith 5.0 (http://www.lexically.net/

wordsmith), as shown in Figure 1. Particular tools used to achieve statistical data are in terms of wordlist, keywords and concordance lines.

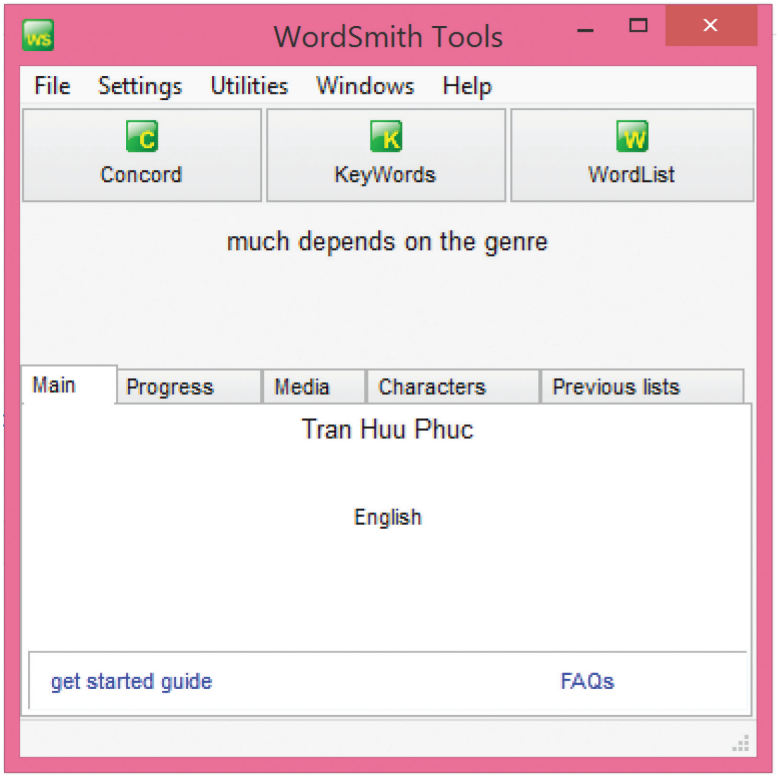
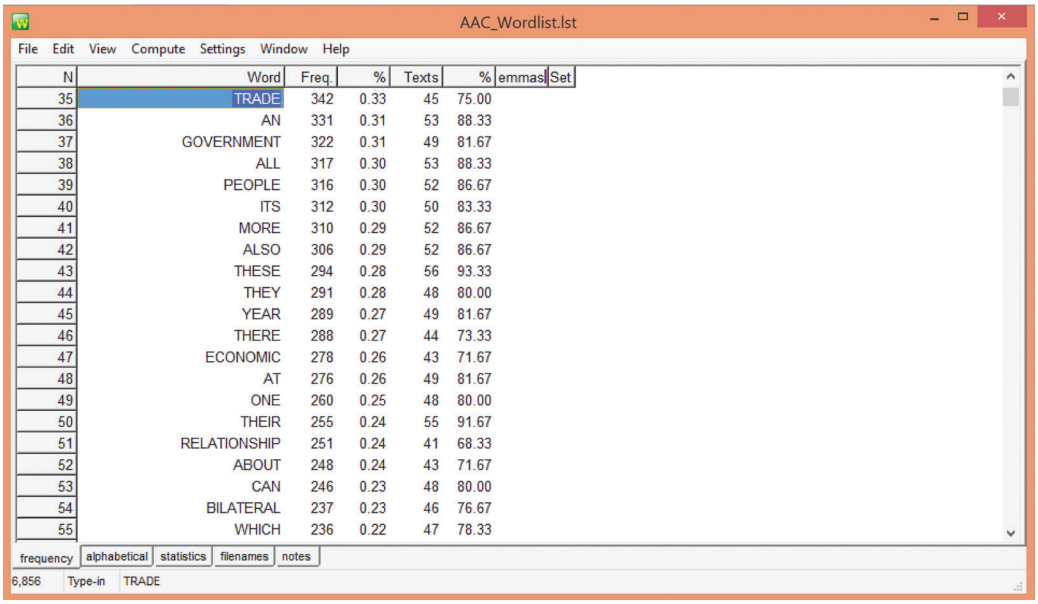


Figure 1 The software package of WordSmith 5.0

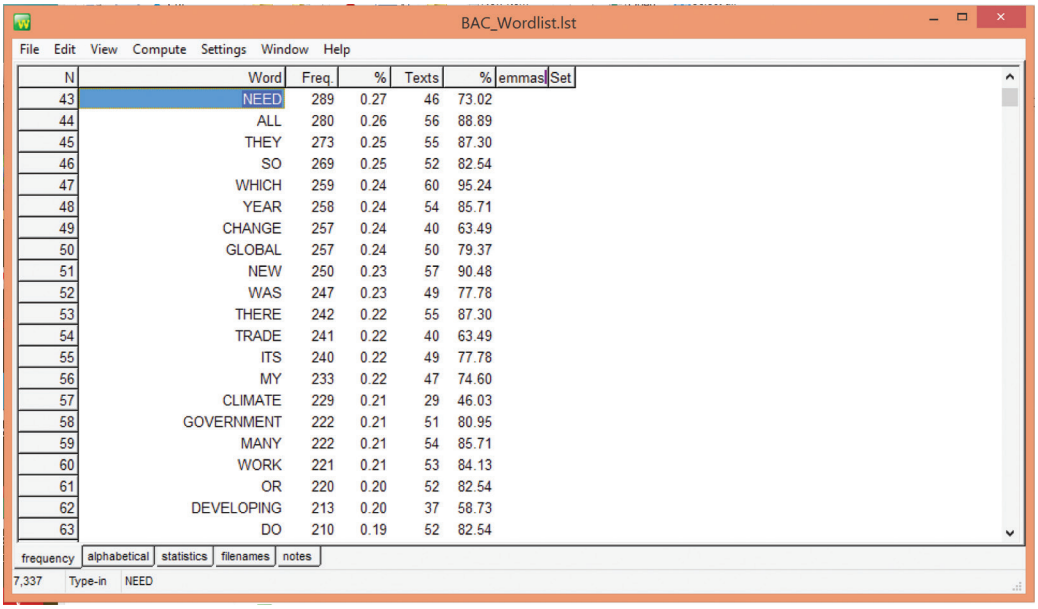
Wordlist

The tool of wordlist (or frequency list) is used to collect statistical data on the frequency of words used in a research corpus, the number of running words counted (tokens) and distinct words occurring in the corpus (types). With the utilisation of this tool, the researcher can find the frequency of the use of words in inverted alphabetical order; identify the keyword; analyse the concordance lines of keywords in a text; compare the pragmatics and semantics of the same word in different text types.



N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	emmasl	Set
35	TRADE	342	0.33	45	75.00		
36	AN	331	0.31	53	88.33		
37	GOVERNMENT	322	0.31	49	81.67		
38	ALL	317	0.30	53	88.33		
39	PEOPLE	316	0.30	52	86.67		
40	ITS	312	0.30	50	83.33		
41	MORE	310	0.29	52	86.67		
42	ALSO	306	0.29	52	86.67		
43	THESE	294	0.28	56	93.33		
44	THEY	291	0.28	48	80.00		
45	YEAR	289	0.27	49	81.67		
46	THERE	288	0.27	44	73.33		
47	ECONOMIC	278	0.26	43	71.67		
48	AT	276	0.26	49	81.67		
49	ONE	260	0.25	48	80.00		
50	THEIR	255	0.24	55	91.67		
51	RELATIONSHIP	251	0.24	41	68.33		
52	ABOUT	248	0.24	43	71.67		
53	CAN	246	0.23	48	80.00		
54	BILATERAL	237	0.23	46	76.67		
55	WHICH	236	0.22	47	78.33		

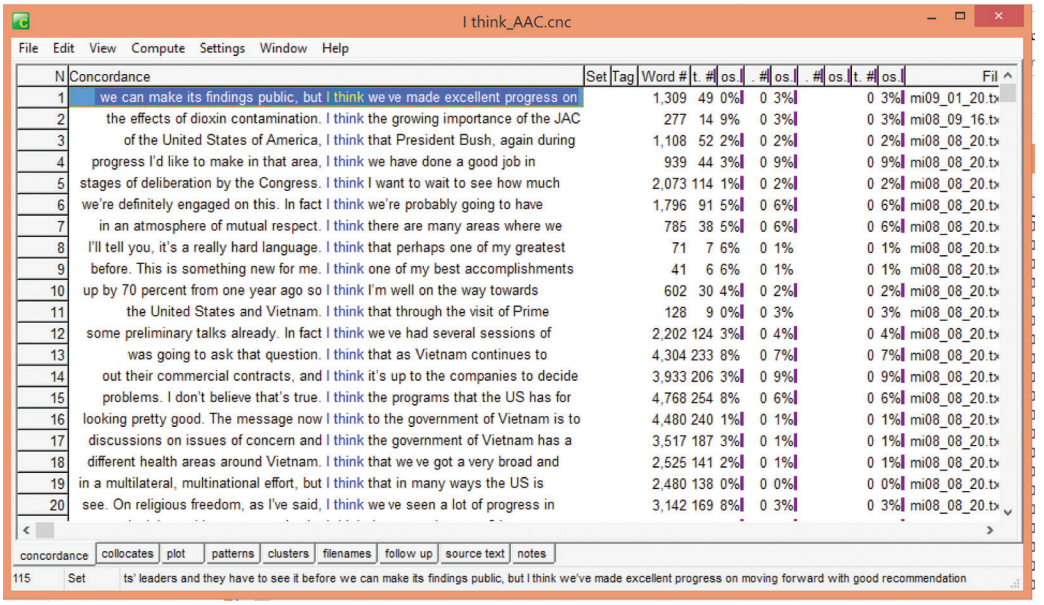
Figure 2 The wordlist in American ambassadorial corpus (AAC)



N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	emmasl	Set
43	NEED	289	0.27	46	73.02		
44	ALL	280	0.26	56	88.89		
45	THEY	273	0.25	55	87.30		
46	SO	269	0.25	52	82.54		
47	WHICH	259	0.24	60	95.24		
48	YEAR	258	0.24	54	85.71		
49	CHANGE	257	0.24	40	63.49		
50	GLOBAL	257	0.24	50	79.37		
51	NEW	250	0.23	57	90.48		
52	WAS	247	0.23	49	77.78		
53	THERE	242	0.22	55	87.30		
54	TRADE	241	0.22	40	63.49		
55	ITS	240	0.22	49	77.78		
56	MY	233	0.22	47	74.60		
57	CLIMATE	229	0.21	29	46.03		
58	GOVERNMENT	222	0.21	51	80.95		
59	MANY	222	0.21	54	85.71		
60	WORK	221	0.21	53	84.13		
61	OR	220	0.20	52	82.54		
62	DEVELOPING	213	0.20	37	58.73		
63	DO	210	0.19	52	82.54		

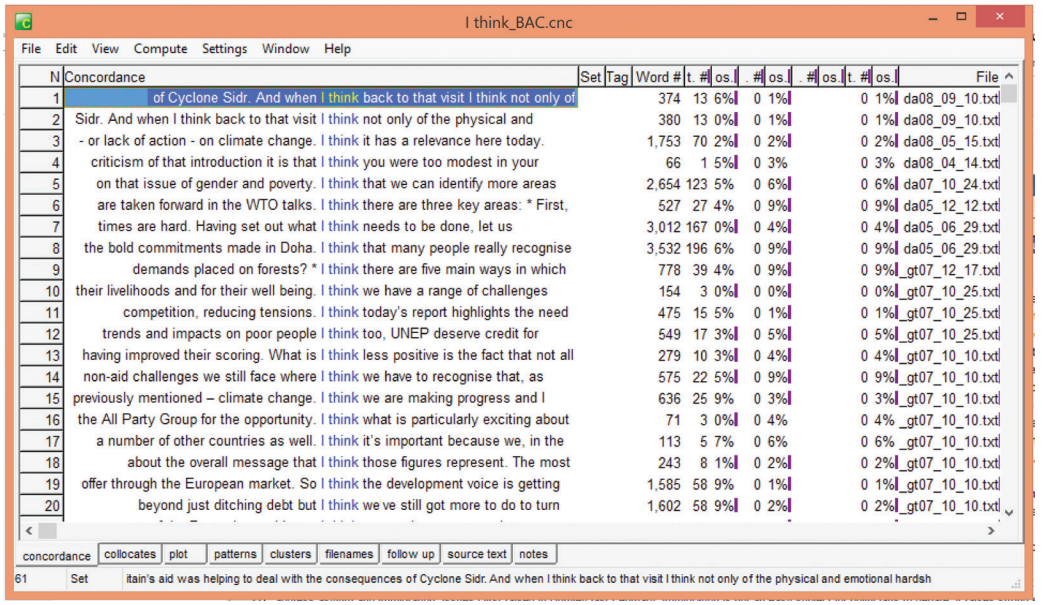
Figure 3 The wordlist in British ambassadorial corpus (BAC)

CONCORDANCE LINES



N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	t. #	os.	. #	os.	. #	os.	t. #	os.	Fil
1	we can make its findings public, but I think we've made excellent progress on			1,309	49	0%	0	3%			0	3%	mi09_01_20.tx
2	the effects of dioxin contamination. I think the growing importance of the JAC			277	14	9%	0	3%			0	3%	mi08_09_16.tx
3	of the United States of America, I think that President Bush, again during			1,108	52	2%	0	2%			0	2%	mi08_08_20.tx
4	progress I'd like to make in that area, I think we have done a good job in			939	44	3%	0	9%			0	9%	mi08_08_20.tx
5	stages of deliberation by the Congress. I think I want to wait to see how much			2,073	114	1%	0	2%			0	2%	mi08_08_20.tx
6	we're definitely engaged on this. In fact I think we're probably going to have			1,796	91	5%	0	6%			0	6%	mi08_08_20.tx
7	in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I think there are many areas where we			785	38	5%	0	6%			0	6%	mi08_08_20.tx
8	I'll tell you, it's a really hard language. I think that perhaps one of my greatest			71	7	6%	0	1%			0	1%	mi08_08_20.tx
9	before. This is something new for me. I think one of my best accomplishments			41	6	6%	0	1%			0	1%	mi08_08_20.tx
10	up by 70 percent from one year ago so I think I'm well on the way towards			602	30	4%	0	2%			0	2%	mi08_08_20.tx
11	the United States and Vietnam. I think that through the visit of Prime			128	9	0%	0	3%			0	3%	mi08_08_20.tx
12	some preliminary talks already. In fact I think we've had several sessions of			2,202	124	3%	0	4%			0	4%	mi08_08_20.tx
13	was going to ask that question. I think that as Vietnam continues to			4,304	233	8%	0	7%			0	7%	mi08_08_20.tx
14	out their commercial contracts, and I think it's up to the companies to decide			3,933	206	3%	0	9%			0	9%	mi08_08_20.tx
15	problems. I don't believe that's true. I think the programs that the US has for			4,768	254	8%	0	6%			0	6%	mi08_08_20.tx
16	looking pretty good. The message now I think to the government of Vietnam is to			4,480	240	1%	0	1%			0	1%	mi08_08_20.tx
17	discussions on issues of concern and I think the government of Vietnam has a			3,517	187	3%	0	1%			0	1%	mi08_08_20.tx
18	different health areas around Vietnam. I think that we've got a very broad and			2,525	141	2%	0	1%			0	1%	mi08_08_20.tx
19	in a multilateral, multinational effort, but I think that in many ways the US is			2,480	138	0%	0	0%			0	0%	mi08_08_20.tx
20	see. On religious freedom, as I've said, I think we've seen a lot of progress in			3,142	169	8%	0	3%			0	3%	mi08_08_20.tx

Figure 4 The concordance lines of 'I think' in American ambassadorial corpus (AAC)



N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	t. #	os.	. #	os.	. #	os.	t. #	os.	File
1	of Cyclone Sidr. And when I think back to that visit I think not only of			374	13	6%	0	1%			0	1%	da08_09_10.txtl
2	Sidr. And when I think back to that visit I think not only of the physical and			380	13	0%	0	1%			0	1%	da08_09_10.txtl
3	- or lack of action - on climate change. I think it has a relevance here today.			1,753	70	2%	0	2%			0	2%	da08_05_15.txtl
4	criticism of that introduction it is that I think you were too modest in your			66	1	5%	0	3%			0	3%	da08_04_14.txtl
5	on that issue of gender and poverty. I think that we can identify more areas			2,654	123	5%	0	6%			0	6%	da07_10_24.txtl
6	are taken forward in the WTO talks. I think there are three key areas: * First,			527	27	4%	0	9%			0	9%	da05_12_12.txtl
7	times are hard. Having set out what I think needs to be done, let us			3,012	167	0%	0	4%			0	4%	da05_06_29.txtl
8	the bold commitments made in Doha. I think that many people really recognise			3,532	196	6%	0	9%			0	9%	da05_06_29.txtl
9	demands placed on forests? * I think there are five main ways in which			778	39	4%	0	9%			0	9%	_gt07_12_17.txtl
10	their livelihoods and for their well being. I think we have a range of challenges			154	3	0%	0	0%			0	0%	_gt07_10_25.txtl
11	competition, reducing tensions. I think today's report highlights the need			475	15	5%	0	1%			0	1%	_gt07_10_25.txtl
12	trends and impacts on poor people I think too, UNEP deserve credit for			549	17	3%	0	5%			0	5%	_gt07_10_25.txtl
13	having improved their scoring. What is I think less positive is the fact that not all			279	10	3%	0	4%			0	4%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
14	non-aid challenges we still face where I think we have to recognise that, as			575	22	5%	0	9%			0	9%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
15	previously mentioned – climate change. I think we are making progress and I			636	25	9%	0	3%			0	3%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
16	the All Party Group for the opportunity. I think what is particularly exciting about			71	3	0%	0	4%			0	4%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
17	a number of other countries as well. I think it's important because we, in the			113	5	7%	0	6%			0	6%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
18	about the overall message that I think those figures represent. The most			243	8	1%	0	2%			0	2%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
19	offer through the European market. So I think the development voice is getting			1,585	58	9%	0	1%			0	1%	_gt07_10_10.txtl
20	beyond just ditching debt but I think we've still got more to do to turn			1,602	58	9%	0	2%			0	2%	_gt07_10_10.txtl

Figure 5 The concordance lines of 'I think' in British ambassadorial corpus (BAC)

With the support of Wordsmith 5.0, the researcher can investigate the context and concordance lines of any keyword in the discourse. This tool provides the statistical data of MMs identified in each research corpus. Data collected by the use of concordance lines are the authentic reflection of the collocation of the keyword which helps the researcher undertake any specific analysis of the research corpus. For instance, the following tables indicate hits of a particular pattern of '*I think*' identified from the concordance lines provided by the software package of WordSmith 5.0.

When investigating the hits of concordance lines, e.g., 'I think' as in Figures 4 and 5, perspectives in terms of vocabulary, grammar and semantics of tokens of *I think* can be analysed. (The whole sentential context will be shown when double-clicking on each token of the keyword.)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hedges with Modal Lexical Verbs

Modal lexical verbs normally occur in the comment clause of an utterance to indicate the speaker's commitment to the occurrence of the event presented in the complement clause of the utterance. These are in patterns with "parenthetical verbs" co-occurring with 1st person subjects to form comment clauses expressing the speaker's "mental state or attitude" towards the proposition (see Perkins, 1983: 97). As such, different modal lexical verbs in patterns of comment clauses as MMs indicate different levels of the speaker's commitment to the event presented in the proposition uttered as in the following excerpts from the research corpora:

[1] Madame Minister, I personally renew our commitment to you here today, to stand with you as your partners and to fight side by side with you as your friends against this dreaded disease. Together, *I believe* we can keep making progress and give hope to those in need. [A03U]

[2] *I think* today's report highlights the need for sound science, for monitoring and assessment, so we can understand the environmental trends much better, and, crucially, to understand the impact of those trends on the very poorest. [B03M]

In the excerpts above, patterns like *I believe…, I think…* are expressions of embedded modality. Such patterns play the function as hedges marking the speaker's engagement to the content of the utterance. The epistemic meaning expressed by the pattern *I believe* as in [1] indicates the speaker's strong belief that the two sides *can keep making progress and give hope to those in need*. Thus, this pattern is used to convey the strong epistemic sense of commitment. In [2], the pattern *I think* implies that the speaker neither completely commits himself to nor is fully responsible for the achievement of

today's report and he just shows his opinions. As such, it can be claimed that '*believe*' is typically used in hedges showing the speaker's strong commitment while '*think*' is used to express the speaker's weak commitment to the occurrence of the event presented.

Other modal lexical verbs combined with the *I* pronoun expressing the sense of strong commitment as *believe* are *known, see, understand, assure*. Modal lexical verbs in the sense of weak commitment as *think* are *hope, expect, wish, suggest.* These convey the speaker's implication in lacking of confidence in the proposition presented. Observations of these patterns in the research corpora show that American ambassadors (AAs) employ more patterns of hedges with modal lexical verbs than British ambassadors (BAs) do, accounting for 484 instances (4.6 per 1,000 words) in the AAC compared with 378 instances (3.6 per 1,000 words) in the BAC.

Hedges with Modal Adjectives

Modal adjectives are used in the comment clause as hedging expressions showing the speaker's confidence in the occurrence of the event presented in the utterance. Observations of hedges with modal adjectives collected in the research corpora show that the sense of the speaker's strong or weak confidence is not in the modal adjective itself but through patterns of embedded modality expressing subjective or objective meanings as in the following excerpts:

[3] *It is clear that* beneath this financial crisis lies a human crisis, and we need a coordinated global response to this crisis to ensure that the coming years do not become the 'lost years' in the global fight against poverty. [B04P]

[4] *I am confident that* Vietnam will continue to make domestic changes to ensure the future prosperity and happiness of its people. *I am hopeful that* Vietnam will strengthen its cooperation on challenges to global and regional stability that threaten us all. *I am certain that* our two peoples will continue to grow closer together… [A03P]

In [3], the pattern of modal adjective combined with the impersonal subject '*it*' indicates the sense of objective epistemic modality. Hedges like '*It is clear that…*', '*It is likely that…*' convey the speaker's implication that it is not his judgement but it can be inferred from the situation that it is the case. The speaker transmits a message to the listeners that although he does not commit himself to the event presented, he would like listeners to believe it. Patterns of hedges with modal adjectives as [It is + Adj_{Mod} + that/to] occur with higher frequencies in the BAC than in the AAC, accounting for 25 instances of *clear* found in the BAC, at 29.76% compared with 15 instances in the AAC, at 12.82%; and 23 instances of *likely* in the BAC, at 27.38% compared with only 6 in the AAC, at 5.13%.

In [4], the pattern of a modal adjective combined with the *I* pronoun conveys the sense of subjective epistemic modality. Hedges like '*I am confident that…*', '*I am hopeful that…*', '*I am certain that…*' indicating the speaker's strong belief or subjective commitment occur frequently in the research corpora. Interestingly, patterns of hedges as [I am + Adj_{Mod} + that/to…] are found with a higher frequency in the AAC than in the BAC, accounting for 96 and 36 instances, respectively. As such, it can be argued that AAs are more subjective and thus, more personal and direct than BAs in making commitment to the proposition presented in the utterance.

Intensifiers as Hedges

Intensifiers are MMs used to modify the level of certainty that the speaker would like to claim for the propositional content of the utterance. Most hedges found in ambassadorial speeches as intensifiers are modal adverbs such as *obviously, certainly, definitely, of course, indeed, clearly, etc*. Hedges of this type are used to reinforce the impact of the utterance and help the speaker avoid direct imposition on listeners as in the following examples:

[5] *Obviously there is a need* to make the information that's contained in the Vietnamese media available in English; otherwise your leadership is going to be very limited. [A03Y]

[6] *Clearly* the challenge is huge and *we need* to do more. This Government has committed to spend 0.7% of our national income on aid by 2013 – and we are the first UK government to put a date to the UN target. [B03C]

In [5] and [6], the modal adverbs *obviously* and *clearly* are used to enhance the speaker's opinion that the impact on the sense of obligation represented in *there is a need to…* or in *we need to…* is certain. That is to say although the impact of the utterance is intended to impose on listeners, with these intensifiers the sense of obligation becomes objectively obvious. As such, intensifiers can be seen as hedges conveying the sense of objective certainty about the occurrence of the event presented other than the speaker's subjective opinion. Hedges as intensifiers occur with a higher frequency in the BAC than in the AAC, accounting for 206 and 175 instances, respectively.

Downtoners as Hedges

Downtoners are hedges used to serve the speakers' politeness in attenuating the strong impact of the utterance on listeners. Downtoners as hedges found in ambassadorial speeches are modal adverbs. They are used as sentence modifiers and can be pragmatically seen as the opposite to intensifiers. Downtoners as hedges indicate the speaker's avoidance of certain assertion or candid comment on the issue presented. As such, they are used to

express the speaker's intention in avoiding the strong impact of the utterance on listeners. In ambassadorial speeches downtoners such as *perhaps, probably, maybe, possibly,* etc. are frequently used as hedges as in the following excerpts:

[7] *Perhaps* the first thing to bear in mind is the need for informed public debate. [B03N]

[8] In a business sense, you *probably* really should plan to be patient. It takes time; it takes longer than you may think sometimes. [A02C]

Downtoners like *perhaps* and *probably* are hedges used to attenuate the strong impact on listeners. As in [7], *perhaps* makes it easier for listeners to accept the imposition of obligation paraphrased as *the first thing you must bear in mind is…* In [8] the deontic *should* of obligation is weakened when the modal adverb *probably* is used as a hedging expression.

Downtoners as hedges occur with a higher frequency in the BAC than in the AAC, accounting for 96 compared with 50 instances, respectively. Moreover, the frequencies of individual downtoners are found with higher frequencies in the BAC than in the AAC.

CONCLUSION

It has been observed from the research corpora that hedges are in patterns with modal adjectives, modal lexical verbs, modal adverbs as intensifiers and downtoners. It can be argued that the American ambassadors and British ambassadors are strikingly different in using patterns of hedges in their speech delivery. More instances of hedges with modal adjectives and modal lexical verbs are found in the AAC than in the BAC. On the contrary, higher frequencies of intensifiers and downtoners are found in the BAC than in the AAC. Such differences in patterns of modality expressions as hedges indicate that American ambassadors are more personal and subjective, whereas British ambassadors are more tentative and objective in using hedges in their speech delivery.

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