Power and Politics of Language Use: A Survey of Hedging Devices in Political Interviews

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Abstract

One tactful strategy in political rhetoric is hedging which is associated with vagueness and innuendos. Despite the studies that address hedging in academic discourse and conversation analysis, studies that investigate hedges in relation to political power, face, and politeness are tremendously few. To this aim, four political interviews were selected from <u>CNN</u> and <u>BBC</u> websites on the basis of the diversity of topics and the popularity of the interviewees and analyzed following a combination of the existing taxonomies of hedges. The results of this analysis revealed an inverse relationship between the frequency of downtoners and the degree of political power. The use of hedges in political interviews also contributes to the implementation of positive as well as negative politeness strategies.

Keywords: hedging, political rhetoric, face, politeness

1. Introduction

Politicians can achieve their own political aims, that is, constraining the mass action-environment through physical coercion. However, there is another means, which is more tactful, hence strategic to this end: using

political rhetoric to persuade people to act in the way they (politicians) want. Since "power can only be exercised in social relations" (Garcia-Pastor, 2008, p. 105) and language has an indispensable role in maintaining these relations, politicians manipulate language to shape people's thoughts. Their language consists largely of euphemism and fuzziness. It is "designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (Orwel, 1946, p. 157).

The unfixed feature of political language can be attributed to *hedges* since they are said to be associated with conveying purposive vagueness (e.g. Dubois, 1987; Lewin, 2004; Powell, 1985; Salager-Meyer, 2000). Downtoners help the addresser to increase the degree of detachment to the value of a proposition (Hyland, 1998). This way hedges enable the speaker to express fuzziness the exigencies of which, according to Markkanan and Schröder (1997), can be politeness, protection, or politics. To hedge is to behave diplomatically and the behavior which protects the face is described as tactful or diplomatic (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). Thus, the concepts *political rhetoric*, *hedging*, and *face* are interrelated.

Political interviews are part of political discourse. A political interview is a face to face interpersonal role situation in which the interviewer asks a politician questions designed to obtain answers. The receivers of the politicians' answers are not only the interviewers who are present at the scene but the general public who are being represented by their leaders (Bhatia, 2006). Bhatia considers political TV interviews a kind of dyadic conversation in an institutionalized context, where the interviewer's control over the selection and initiation of topics, turn taking, and so on is more than that of the interviewee's. This definition assigns political TV interviews greater spontaneity than other televised political genres. The content of interviews gets created through the generative process of interaction between interviewers and interviewees (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). This interactional process partly shapes the interviewers' as well as the interviewees' public image. As genres are

evolutionary, recently (from the 1950s on) the encounters have grown much more hostile especially in American presidential press conferences and British news interviews. This questioning process, although claimed to be unbiased, may categorize interviewees in a way which makes it easier for interviewers to exercise some ideological bias (ibid).

In studying political interviews, Chilton (2004) introduces the linguistic structures on which political discourse relies. His analysis illustrated how nominalization, agentless passives, and pronouns with ambiguous antecedents are useful for implying politically motivated propositions without stating them explicitly. Bull (2008) reflected on Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett's (1990) theory of equivocation followed by a reflection on the studies he conducted to present the reconceptualization of his theory in terms of face to face management in political interviews. He argued that equivocation is, to a great extent, the result of politicians' attempt to save face and that the concepts of face to face management can prove applicable to the analysis of equivocal as well as non-equivocal political discourse. Fetzer (2008) examined expressions of commitment, focusing on such cognitive verbs as *think* and *believe,* taking into consideration their perlocutionary effects with respect to the expressions of epistemic, emotive, and social commitment. The results of her quantitative and qualitative study suggested that these verbs may boost or attenuate epistemic commitment.

The above studies share one common point with the current study: Focusing on linguistic strategies adopted by politicians in political interviews to evade explicitly stating their ideas and to camouflage their identity in discourse. The present study brings into view hedging as another linguistic strategy which is frequently and strategically exploited by politicians to cover up their ideas.

Hedging has been investigated in conversation analysis where informal expressions such as *I think, sort of, maybe,* and *possibly* are frequently used to create vitality, facilitate discussion, indicate politeness, and lubricate phatic communication (e.g. Coates, 1987; Holmes, 1982, 1984). It is also considered as a means of achieving the distance between

a speaker and what is said (e.g. Prince, Frader, & Bosk, 1982; Skelton, 1988).

Hedges are considered as positive or negative politeness strategies that serve the function of reducing threat to the addressees' negative face by mitigating the claims and giving the addressees the freedom of judgment or showing "solidarity with the (discourse) community by exhibiting responses that assume shared knowledge and desires" (Myers, 1989, p. 8). Hedges can be used as shields to protect the addresser, who anticipates possible negative consequences of being proved wrong, from criticism. In so doing, the cautious addresser reduces the commitment to the proposition.

Hedges not only fulfill the function of avoiding face-threatening-acts (Banks, 1994, as cited in Salager-Meyer, 1994), but they may also be the result of a speech style, or as Crompton (1997) assumes, "a product of social forces" (p. 275), or devices that give life to language (Skelton, 1988). The frequent use of hedges has been reported as resulting in social attractiveness (Parton, Sitanen, Hosman & Langenderfer, 2002) and positive attitudes towards the content of the message (Crismore & Vande Kopple, 1997). Therefore, following the social norms necessitates employing a definite degree of hedges.

The above studies, though revealing in their own ways, do not offer clues as to the fuzzy or bold and ostentatious nature of the language used by politicians in interview settings. On the other hand, the issue of hedging is a subject which has been challenged by researchers in various contexts including conversation analysis and phatic communication (e.g. Coates, 1987; Holmes, 1982, 1984; Prince,Frader & Bosk,1982; Skelton, 1988), scientific or academic discourse (e.g. Butler, 1990; Clyne, 1991; Crompton, 1997; Hyland, 1994, 1998, 2000; Jalilifar, 2007a & b; Markkanen & Schröder, 1989; Meyer, 1997; Myers, 1989; Salager-Meyer, 1994, 2000; Varttala, 1999) and business texts (Bloor & Bloor, 1993; Donohue, 2006; McLaren-Hankin, 2008; Pindi & Bloor, 1987). A very rare example of studies that trace hedges in powerful and powerless speech styles is Parton, et al.'s (2002) study in job interviews, which

found that more frequent use of hedges and hesitation markers, characteristic of powerless speech style, resulted in negative attribution of employability and competence. In contrast, the powerful speech style, with less hedges and hesitations, attracted higher evaluations of competence but not of social attractiveness.

However, as Fraser (2010, p. 201) claims, very few, if any, studies seem to be dedicated exclusively to the study of hedges in political interviews, nor has the previous research linked the concept of hedging to the degree of political power and face exclusively. With the dearth of research in this area, the present study takes a critical approach to investigating hedging in political discourse, specifically in interviews aiming to gain a better understanding of hedges, one of the many strategies politicians draw upon to influence the masses, from a functional perspective since this, in turn, can provide insights into the interactional and rhetorical nature of political language. The study aims to reflect on the following questions:

1. Does any relationship exist between the degree of political power and the degree of toning down?

2. Do the politicians use hedges for the purpose of politeness and face?

2. Methodology

2.1 Materials

We aimed to demonstrate the functions that hedges have in political context. The dataset used for this study consists of transcripts of four lengthy interviews downloaded on November 5, 2008 from BBC and CNN websites (George W Bush:news.bbc.uk/2/hi/americas/7245670.stm; Jimmy Carter:www.bbc.co.uk/hardtalk; Sarah Palin:articles.cnn.com/2008-10-21/politics/; David Coltart:www.bbc.co.uk/hardtalk). The transcripts of the full interviews were analyzed in terms of hedges since we needed as much material as possible in order to arrive at some sound conclusions regarding these politicians' hedging patterns in that context. The interviewees were prominent political figures, namely George W. Bush

(the U.S. President), Jimmy Carter (the U.S. former President), David Coltart (a senior member of Zembabwe's main opposing party, the Movement for Democratic Change), and Sarah Palin (McCain's vice president). They were interviewed in February 2008, December 2002, October 2006, and October 2008, respectively. The reason we chose almost synchronic politicians was the concern we had over fluctuations in the use of such attitudinal devices as hedges over time, as genres are prone to change. With this in mind, even politicians belonging to, for example, two or more decades ago, like Thatcher or Gandhi did not seem to be suitable substitutes for Sarah Palin, for instance, who belongs to almost the same context as the other interviewees'.

The selection of the interviews was also motivated by the interviewees' political achievements as well as the diversity of the topics that could be raised in their interviews. They comprised such themes as the possibility of *Zimbabwe's Opposition*'s having what it takes to mobilize the masses; George W. Bush's foreign policies in Africa, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the possibility of the Nobel committee's playing policies with the prize and Jimmy Carter's encouraging it, and Sarah Palin's future plans as a Republican vice president. The diversity of the topics lent themselves to different types of hedges, and this is exactly what reveals the nature of hedges, that is highly-context-sensitive. What seems to be of paramount importance is the general context (political) shared between all the interviewees. This is exactly what Simon-Vandenbergen, White, and Aijmer (2007) considered a sufficient criterion to base their work on, when they said, "These programs share a number of features, including that the protagonists are politicians, that the topics are political issues, and hence that these are interactions which all fall under the heading of political discourse" (p. 37).

All the titles, Website addresses, dates, and the interviewers' turns were deleted so that the computer word count would show the exact number of the words uttered by each interviewee (2421 words for George W. Bush, 2607 words for Sarah Palin, 2678 words for Jimmy Carter, and 2385 words for David Coltart). In so doing, it became possible to make

interpersonal comparisons among the interviewees in regard to their use of hedging devices. The transcripts were then carefully read and the occurrences of hedges in each transcript were underlined and then classified according to the existing taxonomy of hedges. The number of hedges in each category and in each transcript was counted and the percentage of hedged words was calculated. Since the study was based on the transcripts of the interviews, we attempted to compensate for the missing contextual clues by relying on the contextual as well as the textual organization of the written discourse.

2.2   Analytical procedure

Some studies in political discourse start with a formal linguistic device and explore its discursive functions (e.g. Fetzer, 2008; Fraser, 2010; Scheithauer, 2007; Simon-Vandenbergen, White & Aijmer, 2007) while others use a function to form approach, departing from discursive goals, strategies and tactics, and exploring their realizations in context (e.g. Becker, 2007; Fetzer, 2007). The present study is to be situated within the first group. It aims to explore the functions a linguistic device, a hedge in our case, has in the face-to-face context of televised interviews.

Hyland (1996) asserts that hedges are *polypragmatic*; that is, they convey multiple meanings simultaneously. In the same vein, Holmes (1988) has identified over 350 markers of mitigation in conversation. This is conceded when we realize that the existing taxonomies developed by different scholars appear to be far from inclusive. Thus, a major hurdle for us was to interpret hedges in the context in which they are employed and then fit each hedging item into a neat scheme of discrete categories. This required a bottom-up analysis of the interviews. Therefore, we did a preliminary analysis of a portion of our data-set in terms of hedging devices, drawing upon the works of different scholars in this field, to come up with our own classification of hedges which is a combination of the existing taxonomies of hedges. To this aim, one of the interviewee's language was analyzed for mitigating expressions separately by the two of us (a Ph.D. holder in applied linguistics and an

M.A. student) and alpha reliability of analysis computed was 0.9. A Cohen's Kappa test also revealed interrater reliability of more than 0.9. Having negotiated the minor differences on the categorization of hedges, we continued analysis of the other interviews and the whole process was repeated with a time interval of about one month. This guaranteed our coder reliability of analysis. The analyses in our study were more qualitative than quantitative. That is why we did not perform fine statistical computations. Instead, we tended to show the differences by using as many examples from the interviews as possible, and in each example we tried to pinpoint the function the hedging device played in the context of use.

3. Results

The taxonomy of hedges adopted in this study and the percentages of the occurrence of hedged words in relation to all the words in each of the transcripts under the study are shown in Table 1. Table 2 demonstrates the percentages of different categories of hedges in relation to all the hedged words in each transcript. The total number of hedged words and the word count are also given.

Table 1. *Frequency and percentage of hedged words in the four interviews*

Type	George W. Bush	Sara Palin	Jimmy Carter	David Coltart
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
MCH	2(0.08)	4(0.15)	4(0.15)	4(0.16)
CH	4(0.16)	49(1.88)	170(6.34)	116(4.86)
MI	32(1.32)	30(1.15)	50(1.86)	23(0.96)
CCon	10(0.41)	18(0.69)	30(1.12)	25(1.04)
CCl	47(1.94)	115(4.41)	119(4.44)	167(6.99)
P	1(0.04)	3(0.11)	0	0
PV	47(1.94)	43(1.65)	67(2.50)	35(1.46)
VJ	0	2 (0.0)	0	3(0.12)
TJ	8(0.33)	12(0.46)	4(0.15)	10(0.41)
M	1(0.04)	4(0.15)	6(0.22)	11(0.46)
FS	11(0.45)	22(0.83)	59(2.20)	38(1.58)

Type	George W. Bush	Sara Palin	Jimmy Carter	David Coltart
SIP	49(2.02)	30(1.15)	53(1.98)	57(2.39)
FPPP	56(2.31)	60(2.31)	11(0.41)	45(1.88)
Total hedged words	268(11.04)	392(15.00)	573(21.37)	534(22.32)
Total words	2421	2607	2678	2385

MCH. Markers of conventional hedge

CH. Compound hedges

MI. Markers of imprecision/ approximators (of degree, quantity, frequency …)

CCon. Concessive conjuncts

CCl. Conditional clauses

P. Particles

PV. Passive voice

VJ. Value judgment

TJ. Truth judgment

M. Modifiers

FS. Framing statements

SIP. Sentence introductory phrases

FPPP. First person plural pronoun

The following table demonstrates the politicians' general tendency towards using specific hedging strategies rather than others. It indicates that conditional clauses are used the most (25.35%) in the whole interviews. Next comes compound hedges (19.18%) followed by "passive voice" (10.86), "sentence introductory phrases" (10.7%), "first person plural pronoun" (9.73), "markers of imprecision" (7.64), "framing statement" (7.36), "concessive conjuncts" (4.7), "truth judgment" (1.92), "modifiers" (1.22), "markers of conventional hedges" (0.8), "value judgment" (0.28) and finally "particles" (0.22) down the hierarchy.

Table 2. *Frequency and percentage of hedging categories in all hedged words*

Type	George W. Bush	Sara Palin	Jimmy Carter	David Coltart
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
MCH	2(0.75)	4(1.02)	4(0.70)	4(0.75)
CH	4(1.50)	49(12.50)	170(29.67)	116(21.72)
MI	32(11.94)	30(7.65)	50(8.72)	23(4.31)
CCon	10(3.73)	18(4.60)	30(5.24)	25(4.68)
CCl	47(17.54)	115(29.34)	119(20.77)	167(31.27)
P	1(0.37)	3(0.76)	0	0
PV	47(17.53)	43(11.00)	67(11.70)	35(6.55)
VJ	0	2 (0.51)	0	3(0.56)
TJ	8(2.99)	12(3.06)	4(0.70)	10(1.87)
M	1(0.37)	4(1.02)	6(1.05)	11(2.06)
FS	11(4.10)	22(5.61)	59(10.30)	38(7.12)
SIP	49(18.30)	30(7.65)	53(9.25)	57(10.67)
FPPP	56(20.90)	60(15.31)	11(1.92)	45(8.43)
Total hedged words	268(100)	392(100)	573(100)	534(100)

The politicians are arranged in the above tables according to the degree of hedged expressions they used, with George W. Bush exploiting the least number of hedges, on the left side of the tables, and David Coltart the most, on the right of the tables. That is, David Coltart's use of hedges was more than double the number used by George W. Bush. The language used by Jimmy Carter and David Coltart, however, was close to one another in terms of mitigating devices. George W. Bush's most favorite hedging devices were FPPP and SIP. That is, he seems to be very skillful at the rhetorical use of pronouns and introductory phrases, as shown below:

(1) Interviewer: I mention the genocide thing also because your predecessor, President Clinton, says that the one thing-one of the key things that keeps him up at night is that he didn't do enough over at

Rwanda to stop the killing there. Is it possible that Darfur might become your Rwanda?

G. W. B.: <u>I don't think</u> so. I certainly hope not. <u>I mean</u>, Rwanda was, <u>you know</u>, <u>I think</u> 900,000 people in a very quick period of time of just wholesale slaughter. And I, <u>you know</u>, I appreciate President Clinton's compassion and concern. And, <u>you know</u>, I'm comfortable with making a decision that <u>I think</u> is the best decision. And comfortable with the notion that once that decision is made <u>we</u>'re keeping the world's focus as best as <u>we</u> can on that amongst other issues.

In regard to using FPPP, Sarah Palin is in line with George W. Bush. But her first highest hedging device was CCl. She mostly relied on CCl as a linguistic strategy to refer to hypothetical situations:

(2) Interviewer: Will you and John McCain appoint Democrats to cabinet positions?

S.P.: I don't know why you wouldn't, <u>if</u> they, <u>if</u> these Democrats are best suited to serve, and <u>if</u> they will not let obsessive partisanship get in the way of just doing what's right with a team effort, and support of the president to get this economy moving, and to win these wars, to meet these great challenge*s,* I wouldn't have as my litmus test a party affiliation.

Jimmy Carter was also inclined to use CCl frequently, but mostly he tended to use CH; as the following example shows, this item is a combination of CCl and other items:

(3) J.C.: Well, I did the same thing when I was President. There was a time when Israel was contemplating an invasion of Lebanon, and I went to Israel and confronted Prime Minister Begin about it, and I told him in effect that <u>If</u> US weapons were used in an invasion of Lebanon, that I would use my authority as President, which I had under the law, to declare that these weapons were being used improperly, and not for the defense of Israel, but for the attack of another country, and at that time Prime Minister Begin cancelled his decision to go into Lebanon.

Compared to George W. Bush and Sarah Palin, Carter's use of PV is greater. He employed this type of hedging devices whenever he was not

inclined to reveal the agent(s) of the political actions. He was also the highest in using FS through which he expressed his doubt and uncertainty:

(4) J. C.: Well, <u>I'm not sure</u> that at this point, any member of the Security Council has seen the 11,000 pages of report, and all the information will eventually come out, not only for the members of the Security Council, but also for the public. <u>I don't know how</u> to make a judgment in advance.

David Coltart's mostly used type of hedging devices was CCl. Like Sarah Palin he had a great inclination to refer to hypothetical situations, thus using this hedging device. His next highest item was the use of CH, again a combination of CCl and other items. Compared to Jimmy Carter, Coltart showed more tendencies to use FPPP.

(5) Interviewer: Do you think that Mugambe is going to go before his term ends in 2008?

D.C.: I think if we are to stop the suffering of Zimbabweans, if we are to tackle the economy, he needs to have gone yesterday. But I think he is so fearful that he will hang on to the death.

4. Discussion

Some politicians' speech is more powerful than others, and their opinion is taken to be more credible and authoritative than the opinion of others. This is represented in their use of mitigating devices. The data in the present study enabled us to conclude that all the politicians except for George W. Bush polarized in favor of CCl, and the politicians who were still in power were inclined to use FPPP. Our speculation is that this choice of hedging expressions depends mostly on their professional power status at the time of the interview and the topic of the interview. The results of this study also suggest that the degree of political power has an inverse relationship with the frequency of hedges employed by a politician.

Being the president of the most powerful country in the world (at the time of the interview), George W. Bush can be considered the most

powerful politician. His power is most likely to give him the incentive to be more committed to his claims and, therefore, to be the least hedge user in the group of politicians under the study. He terminated his interview with a very great boost which shows his confidence in himself and his agenda:

* (6) I'm not only happy to defend decisions, I'm confident that they will lead to a better tomorrow.

At the time of the interview, Sarah Palin was running campaigns for the Republican Candidate, John McCain. With this in mind, one might expect her to be positive. Still, she exercised greater reservations toward her speech whenever the need arose. Examples 2 and the following demonstrate this fact:

*(7) Interviewer: Governor, is Barak Obama a socialist?

S.P.: I'm not gonna call him a socialist, but, as Joe the plumber had suggested, in fact he came right out and said it sounds like socialism to him and he speaks for so many Americans who are quite concerned now, after hearing finally what Barak Obama's true intentions are with his tax and economic plan, and that is, to take more from small businesses, more from our families, and then redistribute that according to his priorities….

Although she did not explicitly call Obama a socialist, Palin relied on an external source (Joe the plumber) to imply that he is a socialist. She did so to reduce the responsibility for the utterance and thereby to shield herself from potential reactions to her claim. What is necessary to add about Sarah Palin is that she used to study journalism and she was a TV news reporter for a while. Richardson (2004) considers journalism a powerful genre of communication with considerable social effects. Thus, the conclusion one may draw at this point is that Palin has got an expertise in the manipulation of language which helps her to express her opinions with a more domineering attitude.

Jimmy Carter, the next in the row, was in White House in early 80s. He is famous for his noteworthy foreign policy accomplishments during his presidency of the United States (Camp David Accord, the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, the SALT II treaty, and a lot more),

which made him worthy of receiving the Noble Peace Prize. After the end of his term, he founded The Carter Center which addresses national and international issues of public policy. Considering his prosperous past and current stable status, Jimmy Carter is expected to be more powerful than David Coltart. The reflection of his power on his speech style, more powerful with fewer hedges, proved this expectation to be plausible.

Although still in power, David Coltart used a less powerful speech style, with more hedges, than Jimmy Carter. But this is not a far fetched result considering his political status. David Coltart is a senior member of Zimbabwe's main opposing party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This party is said to be pre-occupied with internal battles, and these battles are due to a split in the movement. The split occurred in October 2005, when, as some claim, David Coltart and a member of his senior colleagues in the MDC decided it was right and proper to fight the Senate Elections that Mugabe had called for in November of 2005. Tsrangirai, the leader of the party, thought that was plain wrong. Coltart believes that the split occurred because of a difference in views as how best to tackle the regime, with some in favor of contemplating violent actions and some not prepared to go down that route. Therefore, his volatile political status was realized in his less powerful language and inevitable downtoners.

The results suggested the important role of context in shaping the text and in decding on the degree of mitigating language Consequently, not only is power an important contextual variable and an incentive for the use of hedging devices but the type of questions raised by the interviewers can also have a great influence on the interviewees' speech style.

An important finding of this study was that the politicians whose interview scripts were under study, except for George W. Bush, polarized in favor of the use of CCl. The ubiquity of this hedging device can be indicative of another finding: CCls can be a characteristic of political rhetoric. However, the motivation to rely on this device seems to be context sensitive. The duty Sarah Palin embarked on necessitated making

claims about hypothetical conditions, and she, with an opaque view of her party's and her future political status, resorted to the use of CCls whenever she wanted to talk about her party's future plans. In other words, in order to be on the safe side, she chose to answer the interviewer's questions with caution. Consequently, when asked about her future role as a vice president, she replied:

(8) Well, we've talked a lot about that, John McCain and I have, about the mission that I'll get to embark on <u>if</u> we are so blessed to be hired by the American people to work for them.

Lack of direct involvement in the current policies and inability to lay down rules, too, give Jimmy Carter the edge to rely heavily on CCls to talk about hypothetical conditions. Thus, when asked about the American agreement to give Russia a free hand in Chechnya, he answered:

(9) I would not have done it. I don't agree with that. *I* <u>think</u> that Russia should, <u>if possible,</u> negotiate the Chechen problem with mediation by an outside entity in order to resolve that problem peacefully, but to give them a so-called free hand,<u> if </u>the high British official was speaking with authority, would not be a means of excessive force exerted on the Chechen people.

Like Sarah Palin, David Coltart's prospect of success in the future can be a reason for his tendency to rely on the CCls. In response to a question asking about the possibility of his being more pessimistic about Zimbabwe's short and medium term future he said:

(10) No, I'm not pessimistic surprisingly enough, because I study history and I realize that dictators come and go and they are often the authors of their own demise. So when one looks at Hitler in his final days, he became more extreme, more paranoid and I see the same thing happening to this regime. <u>If</u> anything I think the regime is speeding up its own demise and so in the context of this being a process, I see us nearing the end.

Reconsidering the results obtained reveals another important issue: Being retired or still in power has imposed specific speech styles, with different hedging patterns, on those politicians. Thus, not only is the quantity of

hedges influenced by the degree of power but the quality is also affected. Jimmy Carter is not in power any more, and so this condition was probably a good reason for him to use statements expressing doubt and uncertainty (FS) more often than the rest of the politicians in this group. He was also the only politician who made the least use of FPPP. In this case, the lack of commitment was shown in the guise of expressions implying doubt and uncertainty, and this in turn is due to the lack of power and direct involvement in political issues. As a result, when Jimmy Carter was asked about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the British officials' opinion about this issue, he replied:

(11) <u>I'm not aware</u> that the British officials had access to the document but <u>I don't know</u> that my information is correct.

He consistently resorted to such statements whenever asked about matters he did not seem to be involved in directly any more.

Resorting to such mitigating expressions is also useful in the "minimization of negative reactions and attitudes" (Bhatia, 2006, p. 191). For instance, Jimmy Carter sidesteps a question regarding the possibility of his support of an American military action against Iraq in case there was no collusion with the Security Council. By resorting to a series of hedges (<u>Well</u>, <u>I would</u> wait, <u>I think</u>, until that time materializes, because I don't want to say what <u>I would or I would not</u> do, <u>if this or that might</u> happen. <u>I think</u> I'll avoid that speculation.), Jimmy Carter succeeded in not giving any lucid answer to that question in order to shield himself against any consequent brickbats either from the American government or from the public opinion.

Being retired, Jimmy Carter made a little use of FPPP. On the contrary, George W. Bush, Sarah Palin, and David Coltart relied heavily on the use of FPPP. They seemed to be more concerned about seeking solidarity, which leads us to the relationship between hedging, face, and politeness. Normally viewed as a negative politeness strategy (e.g. Hübler 1983), however, in political interviews, hedging seems also to be a matter of interpersonal positive politeness. This claim has two

supporting ideas: The adherence of the politicians to the use of the FPPP reflects their concern for solidarity. When they refer to themselves as *we* instead of *I*, they try to involve others who may be other people, a group (say the government or a political party), the whole country, or the rest of humanity. Thus, they fulfill two important functions: a) hiding agency, the person, or the party who commits a certain action, and b) showing solidarity with their addressees.

Jones and Wareing (1999) recount a fragment of George W. Bush's speech as an example of the use of the FPPP. They provide an explanation for Bush's shift from *I* to *we*: "it would be that President Bush uses *we* when the focus of his speech is relatively controversial, as it is unclear who *we* refers to, and *I* when he is on safer ground and wanting to claim responsibility for positive achievements" (p. 46). However, this claim is not always true, since in this study the second function seems to be more plausible. Bush sometimes accompanied the use of the FPPP with *you know*; in fact, he repeated this expression 30 times in his interview, and this shows that he was more concerned with positive politeness and solidarity.

(12) Can you honestly say, Mr. President, that today America still occupies the moral high ground?

G. W. B.: Absolutely – absolutely. <u>We</u> believe in human rights and human dignity. <u>We</u> believe in the human condition. <u>We</u> believe in freedom. And <u>we</u>'re willing to take the lead. <u>We</u>'re willing to ask nations to do hard things. <u>We</u>'re willing to accept responsibilities. And … And I [firmly] believe that <u>we</u> are laying the foundation for peace. People have written off the Middle East. It's impossible to change the conditions there. Let'<u>s</u> just ignore it. Or let'<u>s</u> promote stability, which was part of the foreign policy of the past … <u>You know, we</u> live in the world like – and all due respect – the 24 hour news. <u>We</u> live in a world where everything's, like, instant. But, the work <u>we</u>'re doing … it takes patience…

Fetzer (2008) believes that expressions like *I think* are commonly used by political figures "to invite the addressee to adopt the politician's

perspective toward the issue at hand" (p. 394). Sarah Palin was performing the same function through the use of FPPP:

(13) Interviewer: Let's talk about some of that, because, I mean, two months ago you were, where you were from and Wasilla, Alaska. I think, now it's just the economy. And you are the only person in this race with executive experience, who's taken over governments as mayor and governor. What will you do, day one, to tell the American people, things are changing for the better?

S. P.: You know, that's a good point about that experience and <u>we</u> don't like to toot <u>our</u> own horn so <u>we</u> don't, I don't talk about my experience that much … working with John McCain, <u>we</u> will take on the special interests and <u>we</u> will clean up Wall Street and …, and <u>we</u> do this economically speaking here, by …,   not increasing them, allowing <u>our</u> small businesses and <u>our</u> families to keep more of what they earn, …. <u>Our</u> small businesses, keeping more of what they earn, …, that gets <u>our</u> economy going … providing tools for <u>our</u> families, for <u>our</u> businesses,…. But David Coltart was more concerned about the hiding agency.

(14) Interviewer: When I asked you about street protests, you couched your answer very carefully. Does that mean you have some doubts abut the decision for example of the Zimbabwe Trade Unions to go for a series of mass action protests over the next few weeks and months we believe?

D. C.: No, I have no doubts at all. I commend, <u>we</u> commend, what the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has done. <u>We</u> commend their bravery and the bravery   displayed by other civic organizations such as WOZA and the National Constitutional Assembly. What <u>we</u> do say, however, is that this must be well organized and that it shouldn't be the only focus.

In this extract, the question is directed to David Coltart personally. This is reflected in the interviewer's flashback on what David Coltart has just said in the interview (the way he couched his answer). Thus, the interviewer wants a response anchored to the author, as Goffman (1981, p 144) puts it (referring to "someone who has selected the sentiments that

are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded") and thus acknowledgement of responsibility, but David Coltart does not comply. At first, he responds on the author level by *I have no doubts at all* and then, after a self repair, he shifts in footing from author to principal (Goffman, 1981, p. 144) terminology, as "someone whose position is established by the words spoken" which is accompanied by changing the self-reference from 'I' to 'we').

On the surface, David Coltart responds as requested in an author-anchored position when he expresses his attitude towards his propositions. The propositions, however, receive a shift in footing from an author-based statement to a principal-based statement in an argumentative sequence. Thus, the multilayered response from his own personal attitude towards that of his party allows David Coltart to equivocate. Bull and Fetzer (2006) claim that various shifts in footing enable speakers to "distance themselves from what they are saying" (p. 9) and this shift in footing can be achieved through a "shift in pronouns" (p. 10).

Further support for hedging as a positive politeness strategy in political interviews comes from the fact that the interviewee is addressing the masses who are not supposed to be specialists like s/he is in politics. This kind of interaction can be considered as specialist-to-layperson's talk which needs a lot of manipulation of language on the part of the specialist, which is facilitated, to a large degree, through the use of hedges, and results in a care for managing the positive face of the addressees. Consequently, the face managed this way avoids making the interviewee (the specialist) appear unwelcome.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study, notwithstanding its limitations, provide evidence for the relationship between hedging and the degree of political power. It also sheds some light on the relationship between hedging patterns, politeness, and face. Both the quantitative and qualitative parts of this study point to an inverse relationship between the frequency of

downtoners employed and the degree of political power. The study suggests that the questions and the interviewer's behavior towards the interviewee can change the pattern of hedging on the part of the interviewee and that the degree of political power influences both the quantity and the quality of the hedging devices.

Being members of the same discourse community presupposes being aware of community's conventions. Accordingly, members have their own set of specialized terminology, vocabulary, and ways of communication (Swales, 1990). Political discourse, as Bhatia (1997) claims, enables politicians to achieve their desired communicative purposes while cultural impacts may cease to be the constraining factor on their wording. Instead, within the institutionalized genre-specific televised discourse, the various hedging preferences may, more likely, correspond with the fluctuations in the degree of the interviewees' political power. However, since we do not know exactly how and to what extent national identity and cultural forces might have a bearing upon linguistic choices, this can be the subject for further research in this area.

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