



Hedging Expressions as Diplomatic Strategies in Joe Biden's Speeches at the 78th and 79th Sessions of the UN General Assembly

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ABSTRAK

Abstrak: Pidato politik menuntut pembicara untuk berkomunikasi secara hati-hati, terutama dalam forum internasional yang melibatkan hubungan diplomatik dan kerja sama global. Salah satu strategi kebahasaan yang digunakan untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut adalah *hedging expressions*. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis *hedging expressions*, menganalisis fungsinya, serta menjelaskan perannya sebagai strategi diplomatik dalam pidato-pidato Joe Biden di Sidang Majelis Umum PBB. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan sumber data berupa transkrip resmi pidato Joe Biden pada Sidang Majelis Umum PBB sesi ke-78 dan ke-79. Data dianalisis menggunakan teori *hedging expressions* dari Salager-Meyer (1997) dan teori diplomasi dari Berridge (2015). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya 59 *hedging expressions* yang terdiri atas *approximators* (29), *modal auxiliary verbs* (22), *introductory phrases* (5), *modal lexical verbs* (1), *adjectival modal phrases* (1), dan *compound hedges* (1), sedangkan *if-clauses* tidak ditemukan. *Hedging expressions* memiliki lima fungsi, dengan fungsi menyatakan ketidakpastian sebagai yang paling dominan. Dalam konteks diplomasi, *hedging expressions* berfungsi mendorong negosiasi dan dialog internasional, membangun kerja sama dan konsensus, serta menjaga hubungan diplomatik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa *hedging expressions* tidak hanya menjadi perangkat kebahasaan untuk menyatakan ketidakpastian, tetapi juga strategi diplomatik yang efektif dalam menyampaikan isu-isu sensitif di forum internasional.

Abstract: Political speeches require speakers to communicate carefully, especially in international forums involving diplomatic relations and global cooperation. One of the linguistic strategies used to achieve this goal is *hedging expressions*. This study aims to identify the types of *hedging expressions*, analyze their functions, and explain their role as diplomatic strategies in Joe Biden's speeches at the UN General Assembly. This study uses a qualitative approach with data sources in the form of official transcripts of Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th UN General Assembly sessions. The data were analyzed using the *hedging expressions* theory by Salager-Meyer (1997) and the diplomacy theory by Berridge (2015). The results show that there are 59 *hedging expressions* consisting of *approximators* (29), *modal auxiliary verbs* (22), *introductory phrases* (5), *modal lexical verbs* (1), *adjectival modal phrases* (1), and *compound hedges* (1), while *if-clauses* were not found. *Hedging expressions* have five functions, with the function of expressing uncertainty being the most dominant. In the context of diplomacy, *hedging expressions* serve to encourage international negotiations and dialogue, build cooperation and consensus, and maintain diplomatic relations. These findings indicate that *hedging expressions* are not only a linguistic tool for expressing uncertainty, but also an effective diplomatic strategy in conveying sensitive issues in international forums.



A. INTRODUCTION

Language is the foundation of various aspects of life, including political communication. Political activity cannot exist without the use of language (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002). Language is not just a way to share information, but also a powerful tool for showing, discussing, and building social identities together (Blitvich & Georgakopoulou, 2021). Language and politics have a dynamic relationship because they can change based on the situation and goals. Therefore, political actors utilize language as a linguistic strategy to establish authority, shape perceptions, influence public opinion, and legitimize power (Chilton, 2004).

In the context of political discourse, politicians are required to maintain a balance between assertiveness and caution by making statements that are convincing but do not appear authoritarian, and are required to show certainty without appearing absolute (Almarayat et al., 2025). One linguistic strategy that politicians often use to maintain this balance is hedging expressions. Lakoff (1973) defines hedges as words or phrases that function to make a statement more or less fuzzy so that it does not seem absolute. Through hedges, speakers can demonstrate uncertainty and reduce the level of assertiveness of a statement. Hedges can also be used as protection if the statement conveyed by the speaker is inaccurate (Yule, 2010).

Meanwhile, Salager-Meyer (1997) describes hedging expression as a practical way to soften statements and keep things polite when people communicate. Salager-Meyer (1997) categorizes hedges into several types, including approximators, modal auxiliary, modal lexical, introductory phrases, adjectival, adverbial, nominal modal phrases, compound hedges, and if-clauses. Phrases or words like *I think*, *it seems*, *appear*, and *maybe* allow speakers to minimize the threat to face inherent in each act of communication (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

The use of hedging expressions serves not only as a stylistic tool in political communication but also as a tool for maintaining diplomatic

relations. In the context of political communication, politicians are required to deliver statements carefully due to differences in audience background, issue sensitivity, and categorical statements that can create inconsistencies in the future (Almarayat, 2025). Therefore, the use of hedging expressions becomes relevant in this case because hedging expressions can allow the speaker to protect his reputation, avoid absolute statements that could put the speaker in a threatening or embarrassing situation, show the extent to which the speaker is committed to the truth of the statement being made, and allow the speaker to be open to other interpretations (Salager-Meyer, 1994).

Political speeches are a part of political discourse that provide an appropriate context for analyzing the use of hedging expressions. This linguistic phenomenon is often found in speeches by state leaders in formal and organized international forums. In this regard, Joe Biden's speech at the United Nations General Assembly was chosen as the data source for this study because it reflects a form of political communication in the context of international diplomacy. Through the United Nations General Assembly, leaders and representatives from various countries gather to discuss and express their views on sensitive global issues so that speakers must be more careful when making statements.

As head of state, the remarks made by Joe Biden at the international forum were not only intended to convey information, but also to negotiate, maintain diplomatic relations, and represent political positions. According to research by AlAfnan (2022), Joe Biden tends to have a more cautious and inclusive communication style than Donald Trump, who has a more assertive style that demonstrates a high level of certainty. Therefore, the use of linguistic strategies in the speech delivered by Joe Biden is interesting to analyze, especially regarding the analysis of the use of hedging expressions in political discourse.

This study specifically uses Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the

United Nations General Assembly as data sources because these two sessions took place consecutively during the same presidency, allowing for analysis of the use of hedging expressions by the same speakers and forums, but in different temporal contexts. Compared to speeches from previous sessions, such as the 76th and 77th sessions, which occurred in the early phase of Joe Biden's administration, the 78th and 79th sessions have a higher level of sensitivity because at that time the war in Ukraine was still ongoing and the conflict between Israel and Palestine had escalated again. This demonstrates a higher level of diplomacy and more sensitive international issues, making the use of hedging expressions as a strategy to demonstrate caution more significant. Furthermore, the varying global contexts of each session could influence the type and function of hedging expressions. Thus, these two speeches may demonstrate consistency in Joe Biden's linguistic strategies.

In connection with this research, there are several previous studies that also discuss the use of hedging expressions. The first research was conducted by Johansen (2021), which aimed to compare the types of hedging strategies employed in Norwegian and English informal spoken conversations. The results showed that English speakers used significantly more speaker-oriented hedging strategies, while Norwegian speakers used more hearer-oriented hedges. Another research was conducted by Almutairi, Al Kous, and Zitouni (2022), which aimed to identify and retrieve the hedging devices in Barack Obama's speeches. This research applied Salager-Meyer's theory to identify the categories, frequencies, and pragmatic function of hedges in Obama's speeches. The results revealed that the modal auxiliary verb was the most frequently used hedging devices. Meanwhile, Leláková and Praženicová (2024) conducted a research about hedging in spoken discourse. This research aimed to examine the occurrence of hedges in English spoken discourse in the Spoken British National Corpus 2014. This research focused on the differences in the use of approximators and shields across gender, age groups, and levels of education. The results showed that shields were

commonly use than approximators.

The fourth research was conducted by Korostenskienė and Žebelytė (2024), which examined the use, frequencies and pragmatic functions of hedges in U.S. politicians' press conference speeches. This research compared the scripted and the spontaneous speeches as well as compare the use of hedges by female and male politicians. The results showed that the approximators were most frequently used, and male politicians used more hedges than female politicians. The last research was conducted by Almarayat, Almazaidah, and Alkayid (2025), which analyzed hedging devices in the 2012 U.S. presidential debates between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. This research aimed to identify the dominant types and pragmatic functions of hedging devices used by both candidates and demonstrate how hedging devices contribute to persuasion and credibility management. The results revealed that modal auxiliaries and subjectivization expressions were the most frequently used. Obama used hedges more frequently, reflecting caution and inclusiveness, while Romney's language was more direct and assertive.

The previous studies mentioned above focused on hedging expressions in informal spoken conversations, speeches, spoken discourse, press conference, and debates, which largely involve oral discourse and domestic political communication. However, research analyzing hedging expressions in political speeches delivered in international forums is still limited. This research aims to fill the gap by analyzing the use of hedging expressions in Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. Using Salager-Meyer's (1997) and Berridge's (2015) theory, this research aims to identify the types and functions of hedging expressions used by Joe Biden and to explain how hedging expressions function as diplomatic strategies. This research is expected to contribute to the study of pragmatics, particularly in the field of international political speech.

B. METHOD

This study utilized qualitative research to identify the types of hedging expressions, analyze the functions of hedging expressions, and explain how hedging expressions function as diplomatic strategies in Joe Biden's speeches. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a method used by researchers to explore and understand the meanings created by individuals or groups regarding social or humanitarian issues. The researcher chose this qualitative approach because the data are hedging expressions found in political speech transcripts. This study identifies, explains, and interprets hedging expressions, rather than calculating their statistical frequency. Although frequency counts are presented, they are only used to show the distribution of hedging expressions identified in the data. The frequencies are not used for statistical analysis, but merely to support the qualitative interpretation of the data. Qualitative research is an appropriate method for conveying the results of this study because it can describe and elaborate on the research findings broadly.

The data of this research consist of Joe Biden's utterances in his speeches in the United Nations General Assembly, including words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that contain hedging expressions. The data includes various types of hedging expressions, such as approximators, modal auxiliary, modal lexical, introductory phrases, adjectival, adverbial, nominal modal phrases, compound hedges, and if-clauses. The data sources of this research are the transcripts of Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. The speech in the 78th session was delivered in 2023, while the 79th session was Joe Biden's final speech, delivered in 2024 before his term of office ended. Both speech transcripts were taken from the official website of White House.

The researcher used the documentation technique to collect the data. Creswell (2009) explains that qualitative research can collect data from documents, photographs, audiovisual materials, and other textual sources. Therefore, documentation technique is selected because it is most appropriate for collecting the required data

because the transcript of Joe Biden's speech is textual data that are already accessible on the official website of White House. In collecting the data, the researcher uses several stages consisting of searching and downloading the speech transcripts, reading the entire transcripts, identify hedges, sorting data, and verifying the data.

The data that has been collected is then analyzed through five stages. First, the researcher organized and prepared the data to compile and review to ensure that the data were complete and suitable for analysis. Second, the researcher read the collected data to obtain a general understanding of the information. This step involved examining the identified hedging expressions together with their linguistic contexts in order to understand how they were used throughout the speeches. Third, the collected hedging expressions are classified into several categories based on Salager-Meyer (1997) theory and described to give explanations of the data. Fourth, the researcher used the same theory to analyze the functions of hedging expressions. Furthermore, the researcher interpreted how hedging expressions function as diplomatic strategies in Joe Biden's speeches based on Berridge's (2015) theory of diplomacy. The last, the researcher concluded the results of this analysis after all research questions have been answered.

C. RESULTS

1. Types and Functions of Hedging Expressions

Based on the analysis, Joe Biden used several types of hedging expressions in his speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. The researcher found a total of 59 utterances demonstrating hedging expressions used by Joe Biden in his speeches. Based on Salager-Meyer's (1997) theory, the types of hedging expressions found in Joe Biden's speeches were modal auxiliary verbs, modal lexical verbs, adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time, introductory phrases, and compound hedges. Approximators were the most dominant type used,

followed by modal auxiliary verbs. Meanwhile, if-clauses were not found in Joe Biden's speeches.

In addition to identifying the types of hedging expressions, the researcher also analyzed their functions based on Salager-Meyer's (1997) framework. The findings reveal that hedging expressions in Joe Biden's speeches have several functions, including expressing uncertainty, maintaining politeness, inviting negotiation, protecting the speaker from criticism, and showing humility and credibility. Among the five functions identified, expressing uncertainty was the most dominant function, indicating Joe Biden's tendency to avoid categorical statements and present ideas in a more cautious manner. The following table 1 and 2 present the frequency distribution of the types and functions of hedging expressions identified in Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the United Nations General Assembly.

Tabel 1. Frequency and types of hedging expressions in Joe Biden's speeches

No	Type of Hedging Expressions	Frequency
1	Modal auxiliary verbs	22
2	Modal lexical verbs	1
3	Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases	1
4	Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time	29
5	Introductory phrases	5
6	If-clauses	0
7	Compound hedges	1
Total		59

Tabel 2. Frequency and functions of hedging expressions in Joe Biden's speeches

No	Functions of Hedging Expressions	Frequency
1	Expressing uncertainty	23
2	Maintaining politeness	3
3	Inviting negotiation	1
4	Protecting the speaker from criticism	19
5	Showing humility and credibility	13
Total		59

1) Modal auxiliary verbs

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), modal auxiliary verbs are the easiest and most widely used means of modality to express uncertainty, desire, and possibility. In Joe Biden's speeches, modal auxiliary

verbs appeared 22 times. The modal auxiliary verbs found include *may*, *can*, *could*, *would*, and *should*. The modal auxiliary *can* is the hedging expression most frequently used by Joe Biden, with 14 occurrences, while *should* is the least frequent, with 2 occurrences. Here are some examples of these points.

a. The use of modal auxiliary verb "maybe"

- (1) *"I recognize the challenges from Ukraine to Gaza to Sudan and beyond: war, hunger, terrorism, brutality, record displacement of people, a climate crisis, democracy at risk, strains within our societies, the promise of artificial intelligence and its significant risks. The list goes on. But **maybe** because of all I've seen and all we have done together over the decades, I have hope."*

The word *maybe* in this sentence is categorized as a modal auxiliary verb. Joe Biden uses *maybe* as a hedging expression to express uncertainty. By using this word, Joe Biden is expressing that his hopes for the future are personal claims based on his own experiences.

The use of the word *maybe* in this sentence serves to express uncertainty. Joe Biden does not explicitly state that his experience is the reason for his hope. He presents it as a personal belief that remains open to doubt. Thus, the use of the word *maybe* in this sentence makes Joe Biden's statement more flexible, less absolute, and open to other interpretations.

b. The use of modal auxiliary verb "can"

- (2) *"With a concerted leadership and careful effort, adversaries **can** become partners, overwhelming challenges **can** be resolved, and deep wounds **can** heal."*

In this sentence, there are three instances of the word *can*, which are hedging expressions used by Joe Biden. According to Salager-Meyer (1997), *can* is categorized as a modal auxiliary verb. Joe Biden uses *can* as a hedging expression to express uncertainty by presenting future outcomes as possible rather than certain. The word *can* indicates that a particular situation may occur if the necessary conditions are met, without guaranteeing that it will happen.

The use of hedging expression *can* in this sentence serves to express uncertainty. By using the hedging expression *can*, Joe Biden does not state

definitely that adversaries will become partners, that all challenges will certainly be resolved, or that deep wounds will certainly heal. Instead, he presents these outcomes as possible developments that depend on coordinated leadership and careful effort. Thus, the use of word *can* reduces the degree of certainty and makes his claims less absolute.

c. The use of modal auxiliary verb “could”

- (3) *“Artificial intelligence is going to change our ways of life, our ways of work, and our ways of war. It **could** usher in scientific progress at a pace never seen before. And much of it **could** make our lives better.”*

The word *could* is categorized as a modal auxiliary verb used to reduce the level of certainty in a statement. Thus, the function of this hedging expression is to express uncertainty. Joe Biden uses the word *could* to express uncertainty by presenting the potential impact of artificial intelligence as a possible outcome rather than a definite outcome. By using the word *could*, Joe Biden does not claim that artificial intelligence will certainly improve human life, acknowledging that its impact cannot be predicted with certainty and may develop in different ways in the future. This use of hedging expression allows Joe Biden's statement to sound less absolute and more cautious.

d. The use of modal auxiliary verb “would”

- (4) *“This year, we’ve safely destroyed the last chemical munitions in the U.S. stockpile, fulfilling our commitment toward a world free of chemical weapons. And we condemn the DPRK’s continued violations of U.N. Security Council Resolutions, but we are committed to diplomacy that **would** bring about the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”*

The word *would* in this sentence is categorized as a modal auxiliary verb. Joe Biden uses *would* as a hedging expression to express uncertainty by presenting the outcome of diplomacy as an expected or intended result rather than a definite one. This use of hedging expression allows the speaker to convey a statement more flexibly than using the word *will*, which sounds more direct.

The use of hedging expression *would* in this sentence serves to express uncertainty. The modal auxiliary *would* reduces the degree of certainty regarding the outcome of diplomacy. Instead of guaranteeing that diplomacy will achieve denuclearization, Biden presents it as an expected or intended outcome. Therefore, the statement remains open to uncertainty and can be interpreted as a hedging expression.

e. The use of modal auxiliary verb “should”

- (5) *“As AI grows more powerful, it also must grow more responsive to our collective needs and values. The benefits of all must be shared equitably. It **should** be harnessed to narrow, not deepen digital divides.”*

In this sentence, Joe Biden uses the word *should*, which is categorized as a modal auxiliary verb. This modal auxiliary verb is used to convey suggestions or hopes without sounding too absolute. The use of a hedging expression like *should* allows the speaker to express a point of view without seeming to force others to accept that view or to do what the speaker is suggesting.

The function of this hedging expression is to invite negotiation. In this sentence, Joe Biden does not state that artificial intelligence must minimize the digital divide. By using the hedging expression *should*, he cautiously conveys that artificial intelligence should be utilized to minimize the digital divide. The hedging expression *should* indicates that Joe Biden's statement is a hope regarding how artificial intelligence developments should be utilized. Thus, the use of hedging expression *should* can soften Joe Biden's claim, making it more open and less forceful.

2) Modal lexical verbs

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), modal lexical verbs are speech act verbs used to indicate actions such as doubting or evaluating, rather than simply conveying information. Modal lexical verbs indicate the speaker's opinion or thoughts, not what the speaker knows. In Joe Biden's speeches, a modal lexical verb appears only once. The modal lexical verb found is *seems*. The following example demonstrates the use of a modal lexical verb.

a. The use of modal lexical verb “seems”

- (6) *"Every age faces its challenges. I saw it as a young man. I see it today. But we are stronger than we think. We're stronger together than alone. And what the people call "impossible" is just an illusion. Nelson Mandela taught us, and I quote, 'It always seems impossible until it's done.'"*

In this sentence, the word *seems* is categorized as a modal lexical verb. According to Salager-Meyer (1997), modal lexical verbs are commonly used to express personal perceptions or evaluations in a less categorical manner. Joe Biden uses the word *seems* as a hedging expression to express uncertainty by presenting the situation as an impression rather than as an absolute fact.

The use of the word *seems* in this sentence serves to express uncertainty. Joe Biden suggests that something seems impossible based on common perception. However, by using the modal lexical verb *seems*, Joe Biden does not state that it is truly impossible. Instead, he presents impossibility as an impression that remains open to alternative interpretations. Thus, the use of the word *seems* reduces the degree of certainty and makes the statement less absolute.

3) Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases

Salager-Meyer (1997) explain that adjectival modal phrases can indicate a degree of possibility or ability, and adverbial modal phrases can provide information about the speaker's attitude. Meanwhile, Varttala (2001) states that adverbial modal phrases are used to convey ambiguity in a statement, and adjectival modal phrases are used to convey possibility and opportunity. In speech delivered by Joe Biden, only one instance of an adjectival modal phrase was found. The following example demonstrates the use of adjectival modal phrases.

a. The use of adjectival modal phrase "possible"

- (7) *"Full-scale war is not in anyone's interest. Even as the situation has escalated, a diplomatic solution is still possible."*

In this sentence, the hedging expression found is the word *possible*. According to Salager-Meyer (1997), the word *possible* is categorized as an

adjectival modal phrase. Joe Biden uses the word *possible* as a hedging expression to express uncertainty by presenting a diplomatic solution as a potential outcome rather than a certain one. Through this expression, he acknowledges that such an outcome remains open to different possibilities in the future.

In international forums such as the UN General Assembly, speakers must be more cautious in their statements to avoid confrontation. Therefore, Joe Biden uses the hedging expression *possible*, which serves to express uncertainty, to avoid absolute claims that could put the speaker in a threatening situation. Joe Biden does not state that a diplomatic solution will definitely be reached. By using the word *possible*, he presents it as a potential outcome despite the escalating situation. Thus, the use of this hedging expression makes Joe Biden's statement appear more cautious and less absolute.

4) Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), approximators are not always used to obscure information. Sometimes approximators are used when the speaker's knowledge is limited, precise details are unavailable, or irrelevant. Words such as *about*, *more*, and *over* can help speakers convey a range or degree of uncertainty without implying exactness (Varttala, 2001). In speeches delivered by Joe Biden, approximators appear 29 times. The approximators found include *about*, *almost*, *often*, *less*, *many*, *much*, *more*, *over*, *some*, and *nearly*. The approximator *many* is the hedging expression most frequently used by Joe Biden, with 9 occurrences. The following examples demonstrate the use of approximators.

a. The use of approximator of degree

- (8) *"Russia is shredding longstanding arms control agreements, including announcing the suspension of New START and withdrawing from the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. I view it as irresponsible, and it makes the entire world less safe."*

The word *less* in this sentence is categorized as an approximator of degree. The word *less* is used to indicate a lower degree of a condition without

specifying the exact extent of the decrease. According to Varttala (2001), approximators can be used by speakers to convey a general overview when precision is not required. In this sentence, the use of the word *less* serves to maintain politeness by softening the negative evaluation expressed in the statement.

Joe Biden used the word *less* to describe the impact of Russia's actions on global security. By stating that *it makes the entire world less safe*, Joe Biden indicates that the world's level of safety has decreased without presenting it as completely unsafe. Instead of using the more absolute expression *unsafe*, Joe Biden chose *less safe*, which softens the negative evaluation and makes the statement sound more diplomatic while still conveying criticism of Russia's actions.

b. The use of approximator of quantity

- (9) *"It wasn't always perfect. But working together, the world made some remarkable and undeniable progress that improved the lives of all people. We avoided the renewal of global conflict while lifting **more than** 1 billion people out of extreme poverty."*

The phrase *more than* in this sentence is categorized as an approximator of quantity. The phrase *more than* is used to indicate an amount without providing specific numerical data. According to Martin-Martin (2008), approximators indicate that the speaker does not want to make a precise commitment to the proposition being conveyed. In this sentence, the use of the phrase *more than* serves to protect the speaker from criticism by avoiding commitment to a specific numerical figure that could later be questioned or criticized if there are changes or incompatibility in the data.

In this sentence, Joe Biden states that more than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty. Joe Biden only stated a minimum limit for an amount but did not provide a specific number. By using the phrase *more than*, Joe Biden made his statement more flexible and less precise.

c. The use of approximator of frequency

- (10) *"We need to be able to break the gridlock that **too often** stymies progress and blocks consensus on the*

Council. We need more voices and more perspectives at the table."

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), the word *often* is categorized as an approximator of frequency. Approximators of frequency are used to indicate the frequency of an event without specifying its exact occurrence. In this sentence, the use of the phrase *too often* serves to protect the speaker from criticism by avoiding commitment to a precise frequency that could be questioned or criticized.

In this sentence, Joe Biden uses the word *often* to indicate that gridlock frequently hinders consensus and progress within the Security Council without specifying the number or frequency of such situations that have occurred. This use of the hedging expression can make Joe Biden's statement less absolute.

d. The use of approximator of time

- (11) *"Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, and my fellow leaders, **about** a week ago I stood on the other side of the world in Vietnam on soil once bloody with war. And I met a small group of veterans, Americans and Vietnamese, and I watched an exchange of personal artifacts from that war—identification cards and a diary. It was deeply moving to see the reaction of the Vietnamese and American soldiers."*

In this sentence, the word *about* is categorized as an approximator of time. Approximators are used when the speaker does not have completely precise or specific information, but instead present estimates regarding level, amount, frequency, and time. The word *about* can be categorized as an approximator of time because it is used to indicate an estimated rather than an exact time.

In this sentence, the use of the word *about* serves to protect the speaker from criticism by avoiding commitment to a specific point in time that could later be questioned or criticized. By using the phrase *about a week ago*, Joe Biden does not specify a specific time for his visit to Vietnam. He only provides an approximate time, indicating that the event occurred about a week ago. Thus, the use of the word

about makes the statement more flexible and less vulnerable to criticism.

5) Introductory phrases

Salager-Meyer (1997) states that phrases like *I think, I believe*, and *It is our view that* reveal personal doubts and the speaker's direct engagement with the audience. Meanwhile, Martin-Martin (2008) explains that first-person pronouns like *I* and *we*, combined with cognitive verbs like *think, suggest*, and *suppose*, can help speakers express personal opinions, build relationships with the audience, and demonstrate respect for the audience's perspective.

In Joe Biden's speech, introductory phrases appeared five times. These were *I believe, I view*, and *I argue*. The following examples demonstrate the use of introductory phrases.

a. The use of introductory phrase "I believe"

- (12) *"I believed America had to look forward. New challenges, new threats, new opportunities were in front of us. We needed to put ourselves in a position to see the threats, to deal with the challenges, and to seize the opportunities as well."*

In this sentence, the hedging expression found is the phrase *I believe*. The phrase *I believe* is categorized as an introductory phrase. This phrase is used to indicate that the speaker's statement is a personal view or assessment. Introductory phrases such as *I think, I believe*, or *we feel* are used to indicate that the information conveyed is the speaker's personal perspective, not absolute fact.

By using the hedging expression, *I believe*, Joe Biden is not implying that his statement is absolute fact. He is simply emphasizing that his statement represents his personal belief regarding the direction America should take. The use of this hedging expression serves to demonstrate the speaker's humility and credibility. Joe Biden demonstrates humility by acknowledging that his views are personal perspectives that the audience can discuss and consider. Furthermore, the use of the hedging expression *I believe* also builds Joe Biden's credibility as a leader by demonstrating that his views are based on consideration of various challenges, threats, and opportunities in the future.

b. The use of introductory phrase "I view"

- (13) *"Russia is shredding longstanding arms control agreements, including announcing the suspension of New START and withdrawing from the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. I view it as irresponsible, and it makes the entire world less safe."*

The hedging expression found in this sentence is the phrase *I view*. The phrase *I view* is categorized as an introductory phrase. Like phrase *I believe*, this phrase is used to indicate that the speaker's statement represents a personal view or judgment. In this sentence, Joe Biden does not claim absolute irresponsibility for the action. By using the hedging expression *I view*, he emphasizes that the statement is the result of his personal judgment or opinion.

The function of hedging expression in this sentence is to demonstrate humility and build the speaker's credibility. This use of the hedging expression demonstrates humility because Joe Biden does not impose his views as truths that must be accepted by the audience. Instead, Joe Biden demonstrates his openness to other views by making claims that sound more subjective. Furthermore, this hedging expression also allows Joe Biden to build an image of a reflective leader who respects other perspectives.

6) Compound hedges

Compound hedges are a combination of two or more hedging elements in a single sentence. The most common form is a combination of a modal auxiliary and a lexical verb, such as *it would appear*. The second form is a combination of a lexical verb and a hedging adverb or adjective that can strengthen the hedge attached to the lexical verb, such as *it seems probable*. Compound hedges come in several types: double hedges, treble hedges, quadruple hedges, and so on. In Joe Biden's speeches, compound hedges only appeared once. The compound hedge found was the double hedges, *I'd respectfully suggest*.

a. The use of compound hedges (Double hedges)

- (14) *"If we allow Ukraine to be carved up, is the independence of any nation*

secure? I'd respectfully suggest the answer is no."

The hedging expression found in the sentence is the phrase *I'd respectfully suggest*. According to Salager-Meyer (1997), this phrase is categorized as a compound hedge because it combines two hedging elements in one sentence. The phrase *I'd* is an abbreviation of *I would*, which is a modal auxiliary verb, while the word *suggest* is a modal lexical verb. According to Salager-Meyer (1997), the combination of these two hedging elements is called a double hedge, which has a more complex form than a single hedge.

The use of hedging expression *I'd respectfully suggest* serves to maintain politeness in international political communication. Joe Biden does not directly state that the answer is no. He uses modal auxiliary verbs and modal lexical verbs to soften his statement, making it sound more polite.

As an international forum attended by leaders and representatives from various countries, the United Nations General Assembly requires speakers to use more polite language. By using this hedging expression, Joe Biden can convey his opinions without sounding confrontational and absolute. Thus, this hedging expression can reduce the threat to the audience's face.

Based on research findings, Joe Biden used six types of hedging expressions in his speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the United Nation General Assembly: modal auxiliary verbs, modal lexical verbs, adjectival modal phrases, approximators, introductory phrases, and compound hedges. Of the 59 data found, approximators were the most dominant type of hedging expressions, with 29 occurrences, followed by modal auxiliary verbs with 22 occurrences. Meanwhile, if-clauses were not found in the data. The dominant use of approximators indicates Joe Biden's tendency to convey information flexibly and not too precisely, especially when discussing complex and sensitive global issues.

In terms of function, the hedging expressions used by Joe Biden have several functions, including expressing uncertainty, inviting negotiation, maintaining politeness, protecting the speaker from criticism, and showing humility and credibility of the speaker. The findings indicate that expressing

uncertainty was the most prominent function, particularly through the use of modal auxiliary verbs and adjectival modal phrases that reduced the degree of certainty in the propositions being conveyed. In addition, hedging expression like *should* was used to invite negotiation by keeping statements open to discussion and alternative viewpoints. Hedging expressions also functioned to maintain politeness and reduce the force of potentially sensitive claims, especially in the context of international diplomacy. Furthermore, approximators helped protect the speaker from criticism by reducing commitment to precise figures or factual claims, while introductory phrases such as *I believe* and *I view* demonstrated humility and enhanced the speaker's credibility by presenting opinions as personal views or judgments rather than absolute truths. Overall, the findings suggest that hedging expressions enabled Joe Biden to communicate political messages in a cautious, flexible, and diplomatic manner.

2. Hedging Expressions as Diplomatic Strategy in Joe Biden's Speeches

Based on the analysis in the previous subchapter, the use of hedging expressions in Joe Biden's speeches not only serves as a linguistic device to indicate uncertainty, maintain politeness, protect the speaker from criticism, etc. The hedging expressions used in Joe Biden's speeches also function as a diplomatic strategy in international forums that can encourage negotiations and international dialogue, build international cooperation and consensus, and maintain diplomatic relations between nations. This aligns with Berridge's (2015) view that diplomacy relies on communication and negotiation.

The hedging expression in data (1) functions to express uncertainty by presenting the reason for the speaker's optimism as an opinion based on personal experience rather than an absolute fact. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden has just outlined numerous global challenges, including the wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, humanitarian crises, climate change, threats to democracy, and the risks posed by artificial intelligence. After acknowledging these complex international problems, he uses the hedging expression to avoid making an overly

confident claim that hope is fully justified. Instead, he cautiously attributes his optimism to his personal experiences, allowing the statement to remain open rather than absolute despite the uncertain global situation.

Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of building international cooperation and consensus. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy aims to encourage states to work collectively in addressing shared international challenges. Rather than focusing solely on the severity of the crises, Joe Biden ends the discussion with carefully expressed optimism grounded in the experience of countries working together over previous decades. By avoiding an absolute claim while emphasizing a hope through collective action, he encourages United Nations member states to continue cooperating in responding to global challenges. Thus, the hedging expression supports cooperation by inspiring confidence in multilateral efforts without ignoring the uncertainty surrounding ongoing international conflicts.

The hedging expression in data (2) functions to express uncertainty by presenting positive international outcomes as expectations rather than guaranteed results. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden emphasizes that transforming adversarial relationships, resolving global challenges, and healing deep conflicts require concerted leadership and careful effort. By using the modal auxiliary *can*, he avoids guaranteeing that these outcomes will certainly be achieved and instead acknowledges that they depend on the commitment and collaboration of all parties. Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of building international cooperation and consensus. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy seeks to promote collaboration among states in addressing shared international challenges. Therefore, by cautiously presenting these outcomes instead of asserting them as certainties, Joe Biden encourages United Nations member states to continue working together toward common goals through collective action.

The hedging expression in data (3) functions to express uncertainty by presenting the

future impact of artificial intelligence without making an absolute claim. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden discusses artificial intelligence as a technology that may bring unprecedented scientific progress while also posing significant risks to humanity. By using the modal auxiliary *could*, he avoids asserting that artificial intelligence will certainly improve people's lives and instead acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding its future development and consequences. Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of encouraging negotiations and international dialogue. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy relies on dialogue and consultation to address emerging international issues that require collective responses. Therefore, by expressing the potential benefits of artificial intelligence cautiously rather than as certainties, Joe Biden encourages countries to continue engaging in discussions and developing shared approaches to the governance and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

The hedging expression in data (4) functions to express uncertainty by presenting the outcome of diplomacy as an intended objective rather than a definite result. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden condemns the DPRK's continued violations of United Nations Security Council resolutions while reaffirming the United States' commitment to diplomacy in pursuing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. By using the modal auxiliary *would*, he avoids guaranteeing that diplomatic efforts will certainly achieve denuclearization and instead acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding such a complex international security issue. Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of encouraging negotiations and international dialogue. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy emphasizes negotiation and peaceful dialogue as the primary means of resolving international disputes. Therefore, by cautiously presenting denuclearization as the intended outcome of diplomacy rather than a certainty, Joe Biden reinforces the importance of continuing diplomatic engagement to address security challenges on the Korean Peninsula.

The hedging expression in data (5) functions to invite negotiation by presenting the speaker's view as a recommendation rather than an absolute obligation. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden discusses the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and emphasizes that its benefits should be distributed equitably while reducing digital divides. By using the modal auxiliary *should*, he avoids imposing his position as the only acceptable approach and instead leaves room for discussion among countries regarding how artificial intelligence ought to be governed. Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of encouraging negotiations and international dialogue. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy relies on consultation and negotiation to achieve mutual understanding and agreement on international issues. Therefore, by expressing his recommendation in a less forceful manner, Joe Biden encourages states to engage in dialogue and work toward a shared framework for the responsible development and governance of artificial intelligence.

The hedging expression in data (6) functions to express uncertainty by presenting impossibility as a common perception rather than an absolute reality. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden discusses the challenges faced by every generation and emphasizes that countries are stronger when they work together. By quoting Nelson Mandela's statement that something *seems* impossible until it is done, he avoids portraying global challenges as permanently insurmountable and instead suggests that such perceptions can be overcome through collective action. Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of building international cooperation and consensus. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy encourages states to work together in addressing shared international challenges. Therefore, by cautiously framing impossibility as a matter of perception rather than certainty, Joe Biden inspires United Nations member states to strengthen cooperation and maintain confidence in their collective ability to overcome global problems.

The hedging expression in data (7) functions to express uncertainty by presenting a diplomatic solution as a realistic prospect rather than a guaranteed outcome. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden addresses an escalating international conflict and emphasizes that a full-scale war would not benefit any party involved. By using the adjective *possible*, he avoids claiming that diplomacy will certainly resolve the conflict and instead acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding the situation while maintaining confidence in peaceful efforts. Considering both the function of the hedging expression and its context, this reflects the diplomatic strategy of encouraging negotiations and international dialogue. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy seeks to resolve international disputes through negotiation and peaceful communication rather than military confrontation. Therefore, by cautiously expressing confidence in the availability of a diplomatic solution, Joe Biden encourages the parties involved to continue pursuing dialogue instead of allowing the conflict to escalate further.

The hedging expression in data (8) functions to maintain politeness by reducing the degree of the speaker's negative evaluation. Within the context of the speech, Joe Biden criticizes Russia's suspension of major arms control agreements and its withdrawal from international treaties, arguing that these actions have weakened global security. However, instead of stating that the world has become *unsafe*, Joe Biden uses the approximator *less* to soften the criticism, making his evaluation more measured and less confrontational. Viewed in relation to its context, this demonstrates the diplomatic strategy of maintaining diplomatic relations. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy requires states to communicate disagreements in polite manner. Therefore, by mitigating the intensity of his criticism through the hedging expression *less*, Joe Biden conveys concern over Russia's actions while maintaining a diplomatic tone that helps avoid unnecessarily escalating tensions.

The hedging expression in data (9) functions to protect the speaker from criticism by avoiding a precise numerical claim. In this part of the speech, Joe Biden highlights the achievements

of international cooperation in preventing global conflict and reducing extreme poverty. By using the approximator *more than* instead of stating an exact figure, he avoids committing himself to a specific statistic that could later be questioned or challenged. This allows him to emphasize the broader significance of the achievement without drawing attention to the precision of the data. Viewed in relation to its context, this supports the diplomatic strategy of building international cooperation and consensus. By focusing on the collective success achieved through working together rather than on exact statistical evidence, Joe Biden reinforces the value of multilateral cooperation and encourages countries to remain committed to addressing global challenges collectively.

The hedging expression in data (10) functions to protect the speaker from criticism by avoiding an absolute statement about the frequency of gridlock in the United Nations Security Council. In the context of the speech, Joe Biden calls for a more representative and effective Security Council by emphasizing the need for more voices and perspectives in its decision-making process. By using the approximator *too often*, he acknowledges that gridlock has hindered progress and blocked consensus without suggesting that this occurs in every situation. This allows him to advocate for institutional reform without making an overly generalized claim about the Council's performance. Viewed in relation to its context, this supports the diplomatic strategy of building cooperation and consensus. By emphasizing the need for more voices and more perspectives at the table, Joe Biden promotes broader participation in the Council's decision-making process and encourages member states to work together toward achieving greater consensus in addressing international challenges.

The hedging expression in data (11) functions to protect the speaker from criticism by avoiding a precise reference to the time of the event. In this part of the speech, Joe Biden recalls his recent visit to Vietnam before describing the emotional exchange between American and Vietnamese veterans as a symbol of reconciliation after years of conflict. By using the approximator *about* instead of specifying the exact date or

number of days, he avoids committing himself to a precise temporal detail that could later be questioned while keeping the audience's attention on the significance of the experience. Viewed in relation to its context, this supports the diplomatic strategy of building cooperation and consensus. By presenting Vietnam as an example of former adversaries who have transformed conflict into reconciliation and partnership, Joe Biden emphasizes that lasting cooperation can be achieved through mutual understanding and shared commitment despite historical differences.

The hedging expression in data (12) functions to show humility and credibility of the speaker by presenting the statement as the speaker's personal belief rather than as an absolute fact. In this part of the speech, Joe Biden reflects on the need for the United States to move beyond past conflicts and focus on emerging global challenges, threats, and opportunities. By using the introductory phrase *I believed*, he acknowledges that the proposed direction reflects his own judgment and experience instead of imposing it as an unquestionable truth. This makes his argument appear more balanced and credible, allowing other nations to consider his perspective without feeling that it is being forced upon them. Viewed in relation to its context, this supports the diplomatic strategy of building cooperation and consensus. By presenting his vision in a modest and credible manner, Joe Biden encourages countries to recognize their shared challenges and work together toward common objectives through mutual understanding and collective action.

The hedging expression in data (13) functions to show humility and credibility by presenting the evaluation as the speaker's personal judgment rather than as an unquestionable fact. In this part of the speech, Joe Biden criticizes Russia's decision to suspend major arms control agreements and withdraw from international treaties, expressing concern over its implications for global security. By using the introductory phrase *I view*, he frames the criticism as his own assessment instead of presenting it as an objective truth. This makes his argument appear more balanced and credible while acknowledging that the evaluation reflects his perspective. Viewed in relation to its context, this

supports the diplomatic strategy of maintaining diplomatic relations. Although Joe Biden strongly disapproves of Russia's actions, presenting the criticism as a personal judgment allows him to express his position in a measured diplomatic manner that avoids unnecessarily intensifying confrontation and preserves the possibility of continued diplomatic engagement.

The hedging expression in data (14) functions to maintain politeness by presenting the speaker's conclusion in a respectful and less assertive manner. In this part of the speech, Joe Biden emphasizes the broader consequences of allowing Ukraine's sovereignty to be violated, arguing that such actions would undermine the security of all nations. Rather than delivering his conclusion as an absolute statement, he uses the compound hedge *I'd respectfully suggest* to express his evaluation with greater restraint and respect toward his international audience. This softens the force of his assertion while still conveying a clear diplomatic position. Viewed in relation to its context, this supports the diplomatic strategy of maintaining diplomatic relations. By expressing his criticism through a respectful and carefully qualified statement, Joe Biden communicates the United States' position firmly while maintaining the diplomatic tone expected in international forums, thereby reducing unnecessary confrontation.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the hedging expressions used by Joe Biden in his speeches function as a diplomatic strategy by encouraging negotiations and international dialogue, building international cooperation and consensus, and maintaining diplomatic relations between countries. Hedging expressions serve not only as a linguistic device to convey uncertainty but also as a strategy that helps achieve diplomatic goals in international forums.

D. DISCUSSION

1) Hedges as Strategic Linguistic Devices in International Communication

The findings indicate that hedging expressions function as strategic linguistic devices

that enable Joe Biden to communicate sensitive international issues in a cautious and effective manner. Although hedging expressions are associated with uncertainty, the present study demonstrates that their role extends beyond simply expressing doubt or caution. In Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, hedging expressions were used to express uncertainty, invite negotiation, maintain politeness, protect the speaker from criticism, and show humility and credibility. These functions are particularly significant because the speeches were delivered in a multilateral diplomatic forum where political statements may influence international perceptions and relations.

The predominance of approximators and modal auxiliary verbs suggests that Joe Biden tends to avoid presenting political issues as absolute and unquestionable facts. Instead, he frequently frames global challenges, international conflicts, and future developments with a degree of uncertainty rather than certainty. This finding supports Salager-Meyer's (1997) argument that hedging expressions allow speakers to reduce certainty and avoid absolute claims. Similarly, Hyland (1998) argues that hedging expressions indicate a speaker's unwillingness to express complete commitment to the truth value of a statement. In the context of the United Nations General Assembly, such caution is essential because international issues are often complex, dynamic, and unpredictable. Therefore, hedging expressions help Joe Biden acknowledge uncertainty while still conveying political messages.

The findings also support the study conducted by Almutairi, Al Kous, and Zitouni (2022), which found that hedges in Barack Obama's speeches served important functions such as expressing possibility and reducing the force of political claims. However, the present study modifies their findings regarding the dominant type of hedging expression. While modal auxiliary verbs were reported as the most frequently used category in Barack Obama's speeches, approximators emerged as the most dominant type in Joe Biden's speeches. This difference suggests that the use of hedging expressions may vary according to communicative context and the nature of the issues being discussed. Joe Biden's speeches focused heavily on ongoing international crises, including the wars in Ukraine

and Gaza, climate change, technological development, etc. Consequently, approximators became useful linguistic devices for discussing sensitive issues without making overly precise or potentially controversial claims.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Korostenskienė and Žebelytė (2024), who found that approximators were frequently used in political discourse to generalize information and save the speaker's face. In the present study, approximators such as *more*, *about*, *often*, and *many* were frequently employed when discussing international conditions, global development, and political achievements. Rather than providing exact information, these expressions enabled Joe Biden to present information more flexibly and avoid the risk of criticism if circumstances changed. The present findings further demonstrate that approximators were employed across several dimensions, including degree, quantity, frequency, and time, allowing the speaker to reduce commitment to precise evaluations or factual details depending on the communicative context. Therefore, the findings support Salager-Meyer's (1997) view that hedging expressions function as a protective mechanism that allows speakers to avoid complete responsibility for potentially disputable claims.

Another important finding concerns the use of introductory phrases such as *I believe* and *I view*. These hedging expressions functioned to show humility and credibility rather than authority and certainty. This finding supports Almarayat, Almazaidah, and Alkayid (2025), who found that subjectivization expressions contribute to credibility management in political discourse. By presenting statements as personal views or judgments rather than objective truths, Joe Biden reflects the image of a reflective leader who remains open to alternative perspectives. Such a communication style is particularly relevant in international forums because diplomatic communication requires leaders to persuade without appearing authoritarian. Thus, the findings demonstrate that hedging expressions function not only as markers of uncertainty but also as important strategy for constructing credibility and maintaining a positive public image.

Overall, the findings suggest that hedging expressions play a significant role in international political communication. Through hedging expressions, Joe Biden is able to balance caution and

commitment, communicate complex international issues responsibly, and present political messages without sounding excessively certain or confrontational. This finding supports previous studies on the functions of hedging expressions while extending their application to the context of international political speeches delivered in an international diplomatic forum.

2) Hedges as Diplomatic Strategies in International Communication

Beyond their functions, the findings reveal that hedging expressions also serve as diplomatic strategies in international communication. Based on the analysis, hedging expressions functioned to encourage negotiation and international dialogue, build cooperation and consensus, and maintain diplomatic relations among nations. These findings support Berridge's (2015) view that diplomacy fundamentally depends on communication practices that facilitate dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful interaction among international actors.

The first diplomatic strategy identified in this study is encouraging negotiation and international dialogue. Many of Joe Biden's hedging expressions, particularly modal auxiliary verbs such as *would*, *should*, and *can*, present political ideas as possibilities, suggestions, or aspirations rather than absolute claim. By avoiding categorical statements, Joe Biden leaves room for interpretation, discussion, and response from other countries. This finding is closely related to Salager-Meyer's (1997) function of inviting negotiation. However, the present study extends this function beyond interpersonal communication by demonstrating its role in international diplomacy. In the context of the United Nations General Assembly, negotiation does not occur only between individuals but also among states with different political interests. Therefore, hedging expressions facilitate negotiation and international dialogue by preventing statements from appearing overly forceful or coercive.

The second diplomatic strategy is building cooperation and consensus. According to Berridge (2015), diplomacy seeks not only to represent national interests but also to promote collective action toward common goals. The findings show that Joe Biden frequently employed hedging expressions when discussing global challenges such as war, climate change, poverty, and technological

development. Rather than presenting solutions as absolute answers, he framed them as possibilities that require collective participation. This strategy allows other countries to perceive themselves as partners rather than passive recipients of American policy proposals. Consequently, hedging expressions contribute to creating a more inclusive atmosphere that builds cooperation and consensus among nations. This finding expands previous studies by showing that the persuasive and inclusive functions identified by Almarayat et al. (2025) can also operate as mechanisms for achieving diplomatic consensus in international forums.

The final diplomatic strategy identified in this study is maintaining diplomatic relations. International political speeches frequently address controversial topics, including armed conflict, international security, and geopolitical disputes. In such contexts, overly direct language may threaten relationships between states and create diplomatic tension. The use of hedging expressions allows speakers to express criticism, disagreement, or concern in a more indirect and acceptable manner. This finding is consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which argues that indirectness and mitigation strategies help reduce face-threatening acts and preserve social relationships. Through expressions such as *I'd respectfully suggest*, Biden is able to communicate firm political positions while simultaneously respecting the perspectives of other nations.

An important contribution of the present study is that the relationship between the functions of hedging expressions and diplomatic strategies is not one-to-one but context-dependent. The same linguistic function may contribute to different diplomatic strategies depending on the communicative situation. For example, expressing uncertainty may encourage international dialogue when discussing emerging issues, while it may also facilitate cooperation by avoiding overly definitive claims that could discourage collective participation. Likewise, maintaining politeness and demonstrating humility support diplomatic relations by reducing confrontation and promoting mutual respect among states. These findings suggest that the diplomatic strategy of hedging expressions is determined not only by their linguistic function but also by the political context in which they are employed.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that hedging expressions function not merely as linguistic markers of uncertainty but as diplomatic strategy in international forum. While previous studies primarily focused on hedging expressions in conversations, debates, speeches, and press conferences, the present study shows that hedging expressions also play a crucial role in achieving diplomatic objectives in international forums. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined the linguistic functions of hedging or its role in general political discourse, the present study demonstrates how specific hedging functions are transformed into diplomatic strategies within multilateral diplomatic communication. By connecting the functions of hedging expressions with Berridge's framework of diplomacy, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how linguistic choices support diplomatic objectives in the United Nations General Assembly. This contribution represents the main distinction of the present study compared with previous studies on hedging in political discourse.

E. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of hedging expressions in Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. Regarding the first research question, the findings reveal that Joe Biden employed six types of hedges based on Salager-Meyer's (1997) classification, namely modal auxiliary verbs, modal lexical verbs, adjectival modal phrases, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time, introductory phrases, and compound hedges. Among these categories, approximators were the most frequently used hedging expressions, followed by modal auxiliary verbs. The frequent use of approximators indicates Biden's preference for presenting information in a flexible and non-absolute manner, particularly when addressing complex global issues such as international security, climate change, economic cooperation, and geopolitical conflicts.

Through approximators, Joe Biden was able to avoid excessive precision, soften evaluations when necessary, and reduce commitment to exact figures, frequencies, and time references while still conveying meaningful information to his audience. Meanwhile, modal auxiliary verbs enabled him to express

uncertainty, present future developments in a cautious manner, and, in some cases, invite negotiation by presenting recommendations rather than absolute obligations. The findings also show that some hedging expression types occurred less frequently, such as introductory phrases and compound hedges, while if-clauses were not identified in the data. Overall, the distribution of hedging expression types demonstrates that Joe Biden strategically selected linguistic forms that allowed him to balance clarity, caution, and diplomatic flexibility in his speeches.

Regarding the second research question, the findings show that hedging expressions performed several important communicative functions throughout the speeches. The identified functions include expressing uncertainty, maintaining politeness, inviting negotiation, protecting the speaker from criticism, and showing humility and credibility. Among these functions, expressing uncertainty was the most dominant, indicating Joe Biden's tendency to present political issues cautiously rather than as absolute or unquestionable facts. In terms of expressing uncertainty, hedging expressions enabled Joe Biden to discuss future developments, international challenges, and policy outcomes without presenting them as guaranteed facts. This function is particularly important in diplomatic communication because political situations are often dynamic and unpredictable. In maintaining politeness, hedging expressions softened potentially sensitive statements and reduced the risk of threatening the face of other nations or political actors.

Furthermore, hedging expressions were used to invite negotiation by creating space for alternative perspectives and encouraging cooperation among member states. The findings also demonstrate that hedging expressions protected the speaker from criticism by reducing the degree of commitment to specific claims and predictions. Finally, the use of hedging expressions contributed to the construction of humility and credibility, as Joe Biden frequently avoided appearing overly certain or authoritative when discussing international affairs. These functions illustrate that hedging expressions serve not merely as markers of uncertainty but also as linguistic devices that help speakers manage

interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively in international forum.

Concerning the third research question, the findings demonstrate that hedging expressions functioned as diplomatic strategies in Joe Biden's speeches at the United Nations General Assembly. Beyond expressing uncertainty, hedging expressions encouraged negotiation and international dialogue, built cooperation and consensus, and helped maintain diplomatic relations among nations. By avoiding categorical statements and employing more inclusive and flexible language, Joe Biden created space for discussion and participation from other member states. Furthermore, hedging expressions enabled him to express criticism, recommendations, and political positions without creating unnecessary confrontation. This study contributes to the understanding of political discourse by demonstrating how hedging expressions function not only as linguistic resources but also as practical diplomatic strategies in multilateral communication, particularly within the context of the United Nations General Assembly.

This study has several limitations. First, the data were limited to Joe Biden's speeches at the 78th and 79th Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all of Joe Biden's political speeches or to political discourse in different contexts. Second, this study focused only on hedging expressions based on Salager-Meyer's (1997) classification and did not examine other linguistic strategies that may also contribute to Joe Biden's speeches, such as boosters, metaphors, repetition, or persuasive rhetorical devices. Third, the analysis was conducted from a pragmatic perspective, particularly focusing on the types and functions of hedging expressions and their role as diplomatic strategies. Therefore, broader perspectives such as Critical Discourse Analysis, political discourse analysis, or corpus-based approaches were beyond the scope of this research.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several suggestions can be proposed. For future researchers, it is recommended to examine hedging expressions in a broader range of political speeches, debates, interviews, or diplomatic statements to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of hedging practices in political communication. Future studies may also compare the

use of hedging expressions by different political leaders, countries, or political systems to identify similarities and differences in diplomatic communication strategies. In addition, researchers may combine pragmatic analysis with other approaches, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, corpus linguistics, or political discourse analysis, to provide deeper insights into the relationship between language and politic.

Last, this study suggests that future research should continue exploring the intersection between pragmatics and diplomatic or political discourse. As international communication increasingly shapes political decision-making and global cooperation, understanding the strategic use of language becomes increasingly important. By examining how linguistic features such as hedging expressions operate in international forum, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of how language functions as a tool for negotiation, relationship management, and consensus building in international affairs.

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