

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an introductory section of the study. It covers background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, methodology, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background

Language use is not purposeless (Eggins, 2004, p. 5). Politicians, for instance, use language to communicate certain information or a point of view to convince and set the minds of the public. They need to be careful in conveying their intentions. They may use the linguistic devices such as hedges to create a certain effect so that the statements do not sound rude and forced. The term “hedges” refers to the use of linguistic means which aims to “make sentences more acceptable” (Hübler, 1983, p. 23) since the nature of the devices minimizes the possible imposition, threat or force of the statement (Holmes, 2013, p. 72; Martín-Martín, 2008, p. 134; Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 186). As a matter of fact, hedges play an important role in order to make the communication goes smoothly, especially when politicians do not have the exact information to be declared. Furthermore, hedges help them to manipulate language in shaping people’s thought. Those are also used by them in a formal debate in order to maintain the importance of not making mistakes in public communication. Clearly, they use hedges to seek an agreement and avoid a potential embarrassment when the unintended rejection is indicated by interlocutors. It takes a great consideration that the effect of hedging is a pragmatic phenomenon and the interpretation of hedges depends on its context (Clemen, 1997, p. 243).

As discussed earlier, hedges as part of language are an effective way to persuade people. It is because hedges are used “to give the impression of being detailed and precise” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 192). Hence, hedges leave the interlocutors to believe in the information which has been stated by politicians, as if it does carry facts. In other words, hedges are intended to strengthen the statements.

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Hedges can also be used to soften the statements. Lakoff (1972, p. 471) states that hedges are purposefully taken to make meaning uncertain and sounds imprecise. The concept of hedging as the means to soften statements has broadly discussed within the pragmatic study (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this perspective, hedges have a close connection to the concept of face which deals with the desire to maintain the face of oneself or the face of another person. According to Martín-Martín (2008, p. 134), the devices allow the politicians to implicitly hide and weaken the strength of the statement. Therefore, interlocutor or audience would unconsciously take the message as a fact. Furthermore, Markkanen and Schröder (1997, p. 8) explain that hedges show oneself's avoidance of leaning responsibility for the correctness of the statement. Since the statement contains the estimations, the avoidance effect of the devices allows the politicians to set themselves free from the possible denial if they are proven wrong. From the explanation above, it is clear that hedges can be employed as devices to soften the statements and avoid the rejection.

People who use hedging devices are motivated for some reasons. The first reason is the need to take an agreement and acceptance of the statement from the interlocutor (Hübler, 1983, p. 23). Through the use of hedging devices, politicians manipulate language to shape the interlocutor's thought. It can be said that it is an attempt to avoid the possible rejection and negotiation addressed by the interlocutor to them. The second reason which motivates them to use the hedging devices is closely related to the politeness phenomena (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 146). During the communication process, the self-image is still at risk (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61; Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 73) and the speaker should be able to manage the safety of self-image by using the hedging devices. The main aim of hedging investigation is to evaluate the specific reason or motivation of why the speakers hedge, the tendency of the speakers to use hedging devices in expressing ideas in communication.

Some studies have investigated the use of hedges in some certain areas. The studies cover the exploration of this particular devices in scientific discourse (Hyland, 1996, 1998; Salager-Meyer, 1997; Martín-Martín, 2005, 2008),

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academic discourse (Hidayati et al., 2008; Nivales, 2008), and newspaper discourse (Buitkiene, 2008; Mahanani, 2013). Political discourse is one of the interesting topics to be investigated by using the theory of hedging. Laurinaityte (2011), for instance, analyzed the 12 political speeches delivered before and after the United States of America presidential elections, namely before and after November 4th, 2008 for Obama and before and after November 7th, 2000 for Bush. The analysis showed that pre-election speeches contained more hedging devices than post-election ones. The results indicated that the heavy use of hedges in pre-election speeches was motivated by some reasons. The first reason was supported by the desire to protect the politicians themselves of being rejected for the ideas and attitudes. The heavy use of hedges in pre-election speeches was also motivated by the desire to mitigate the force of imposition which is carried by the statement. In short, the mitigation feature of hedges helps the speakers camouflage the identity in persuading the interlocutors without forcing them to believe in the information. In addition, Al-Rashady (2012) examined the frequent use of certain hedging devices on the three presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 U.S. election cycle. The analysis concluded that the features of hedging devices are useful in order to attain an effective communication especially in the context of formal debate.

The motivation behind this study arose from the concern that the previous studies which did not specifically discuss hedges in relation to the concept of face proposed by Ting-Toomey (1988, 1994, 2005). Thus, this study aims to investigate the use of hedging devices as a strategy in a formal political debate on October 22nd, 2012 between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney as the presidential candidates of United States of America in 2012. The study also investigates the function of hedging devices in relation to the concept of face.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is geared toward answering the following research questions:

1. What are hedging devices used by Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during the third United States of America presidential debate in 2012?
2. What are the functions of hedging devices used by each US presidential candidate in relation to the concept of face?

1.3 Aims of the Study

Based on the research questions, the aims of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the use of hedging devices by Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during the third United States of America presidential debate in 2012.
2. To investigate the functions of hedging devices used by Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during the third United States of America presidential debate in 2012 in relation to the concept of face.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to investigating the use of hedging in political discourse in the third as the final United States of America presidential debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney on October 22nd, 2012 from the perspective of discourse analysis and theory of hedging within the pragmatic view.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides useful information both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study can enhance the literature about the use of hedging in political discourse or give academic input toward the use of hedging in general. Practically, through the result of the study, it can help the readers to build the awareness about how reliable or credible politicians are.

1.6 Methodology

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In this study, a qualitative approach was used. Since this study involved an in-depth focus and understanding on a single phenomenon within the real life context (Yin, 2009, p. 18), a case study was used as its design.

The data of the study were taken from the official website of the United States of American government, www.whitehouse.gov. The data were analyzed into two stages. The first stage aimed to investigate the hedging devices used by the two US presidential candidates during the third presidential debate on October 22nd, 2012. It involved the process of identifying, classifying and calculating the hedging device distributions and strategies by using the theory of hedging proposed by Martín-Martín (2005, 2008) and Salager-Meyer (1997). The next stage was the process of investigating the functions of hedging devices in relation to the concept of face. It was associated with the dimensions of orientation of face within the face negotiation theory developed by Ting-Toomey (1988, 1994, 2005).

1.7 Organization of the Paper

The paper is organized as follows:

1) The first chapter: Introduction

It provides the background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, methodology, and organization of the paper.

2) The second chapter: Literature Review

It discusses the theories and concepts which are employed to answer the research questions.

3) The third chapter: Research Methodology

It deals with the research methodology, discussing the steps and procedures of the study, and clarification of terms.

4) The fourth chapter: Findings and Discussion

It consists of the result of the study and the answer of research questions as well as the discussion and the interpretation of the findings.

5) The fifth chapter: Conclusion and Suggestion

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It contains conclusion and suggestion. This chapter also considers several suggestions for future study.

