

# Hedging in Political Discourse: Evidence from the Speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan

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*This paper reports on the findings of a study that aimed to identify the linguistic items which act as hedges in the speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan, as well as to examine the pragmatic functions of these devices. Twenty-five political speeches of King Abdullah II, randomly selected from the official website of King Abdullah (see Appendix), were analyzed adopting Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy. The study revealed that the most frequently used hedging device in King Abdullah's speech is modal auxiliaries, and the most frequently used hedging device subcategory is the modal auxiliary "can". The findings suggest that these hedging devices fulfil several pragmatic functions. These findings contribute to understanding that speaking a second language (Arabic, in the case of King Abdullah II) neither affects the types of hedging devices nor the functions these devices perform. Moreover, contrary to scientific discourse (e.g., medicine), the research concludes that political discourse as a non-scientific genre resorts to hedging devices to express indirectness, politeness, lack of commitment and probability.*

## Keywords

Hedges; political discourse; political speech; pragmatic functions; politeness

## 1. Introduction

The term "hedge" was first introduced by Lakoff in 1972 to mean "words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy" (195) and was used to imply a number of related concepts, such as tentativeness, politeness, lack of full commitment, indirectness, possibility, approximation, indeterminacy and vagueness (Zuck and Zuck; Brown & Levinson; Salager-Meyer; Hyland; Martín-Martín; Fraser). In 1986, Zuck and Zuck defined hedging as "the process whereby the author reduces the strength of what he is writing" (172). Brown & Levinson, in 1987,

defined hedges as “a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is partial or true only in certain respects, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected” (145). Salager-Meyer (1994) stated that hedges are associated with “purposive vagueness and tentativeness” (150). Hyland (1998) defined hedging as “the indication, by linguistic means, of an unwillingness to make a complete commitment to the truth of a proposition, particularly in the case of new knowledge claims” (428).

In 2008, Martín-Martín reported that hedges are expressions that “make messages indeterminate, that is, they convey inexactitude, or in one way or another mitigate or reduce the strength of the assertions that speakers or writers make” (134). Fraser, in 2010, claimed that hedging is “a rhetorical strategy” which “signals a lack of a full commitment either to the full category membership of a term or expression in the utterance (content mitigation), or to the intended illocutionary force of the utterance (force mitigation)” (201).

Different classifications of hedges have been suggested. One of the most important ones is that of Hyland. Hyland suggested three types of hedging: “content-oriented” hedges, “reader-oriented” hedges and “writer-oriented” hedges. Content-oriented hedges are further subdivided into “accuracy-oriented” and “writer-oriented” hedges. Accuracy-oriented hedges are used to “qualify the accuracy of a part of the proposition, while writer-oriented hedges are used to “reduce the commitment of the speaker to the proposition in order to protect against the threat of negation”. On the other hand, a “reader-oriented” hedge is “an acknowledgement of the reader’s right to make judgments and to engage in a dialogue” (430).

In general, the functions of hedges are not totally agreed upon by scholars since each hedging device provides specific functions fulfilled by a particular device (Lakoff; Hyland; and Salager-Meyer). Lakoff (in 1972 and 1975) specified two main functions of using hedging words: showing some kind of uncertainty and showing politeness. Hübler stated that hedges are valuable linguistic devices that serve many functions, such as expressing politeness, showing uncertainty and indirectness. For Brown and Levinson, hedges allow the avoidance of confrontation between opinions, and they are considered a negative politeness strategy, which aims at saving the face of the interlocutors. Similarly, Hyland suggested that hedging devices have two major functions, viz., showing that you are cautious while you are expressing your thoughts, and negotiating the claims in a diplomatic way. Furthermore, Fraser reported that hedges are used for many purposes, such as showing both positive and

negative politeness, protecting one's ego, avoiding confrontation, getting rid of responsibility, showing mitigation, and appearing modest and less powerful (205). Rabab'ah (195) in his study about the use of hedging devices in scientific and non-scientific texts, found that humanistic and non-scientific genres use more hedging devices to indicate lack of precision, especially in the case of modals. Therefore, he recommends "a clear awareness of the pragmatic effect of hedges and the ability to recognize them in texts is crucial to the acquisition of rhetorical competence in any discipline".

Based on the above-mentioned, the researchers of the present study believe that political discourse as a non-scientific genre is different from any scientific genre (medicine). Scientific genre is usually characterised by its writer's precision and certainty, while the non-scientific genre is usually characterised by expressing probability, lack of certainty and commitment on the part of the speaker or writer. Thus, the present research aims to look at hedges as rhetorical devices to examine whether political discourse is really similar to other kinds of non-scientific discourse, and find out what functions hedging devices perform.

## 2. Hedging in political discourse

Several researchers have investigated the use of hedges in political discourse (e.g., Fraser; Miššíková; Majeed; Alavi; Laurinaityte; Taweel et al.; Al-Rashady; and Pellby). Fraser explored hedging in the 2007 Press Conferences held by President George W. Bush. The study revealed that many hedge-type linguistic items did not serve as hedging devices. Moreover, Fraser noticed many instances of "neutral hedging" which did not affect the topic being argued. Fraser asserted that there was no indication that hedging was used "for evasion or politeness purposes but rather conveying a lack of precision".

Miššíková examined the association between Grice's Maxims and the use of hedging devices. She investigated hedges in English and Slovak speeches that were delivered by Tony Blair and Mikuláš Dzurinda in order to examine the particular usages of hedging devices and to explore the conversational strategies that are used in each political speech. The study asserted that hedging in political discourse was an indicator of "diplomacy, politeness and respect". On the other hand, Miššíková reported that the vast majority of hedging items were those concerned with "truth-telling", by using phrases such as *a sort of*, *actually*, *kind of*, etc. The second group of hedges is concerned with

indicating the awareness of quantity maxims where these devices differentiate between more or less information along with showing the quality maxim. On the other hand, the minimum numbers of hedges indicate the maxim of manner and relation, such as “*as I said before*” (76-79).

Al-Rashady analyzed the three presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 US election cycle in order to identify the most frequently used hedging devices and the functions that these devices serve. The researcher concluded that “modal auxiliary verbs; modal lexical verbs; adjectival, adverbial, nominal modal phrases and approximators” are the most dominant hedging devices. Furthermore, the intention and purpose of the speaker play a significant role in determining the function that is served (30).

Abdul Majeed focused on identifying hedging items in terms of their functions and their grammatical categories, such as adverbials, epistemic verbs, modal verbs, etc. He analyzed the first presidential debate between Senator Barak Obama and Senator John McCain on the campus of the University of Mississippi in order to specify and classify the linguistic items that act as hedging devices along with identifying their semantic functions. The study concluded that politicians used hedges in order to show “uncertainty and non-commitment to an utterance”. Moreover, using hedges reflects “an inherent component of fuzziness” (768). Abdul Majeed also asserted that hedges can be used as a way of expressing points of view but in a soft way.

Laurinaityte investigated the use of hedging in 12 political speeches delivered by Barack Obama and George W. Bush: pre-election and post-election ones. The study revealed that hedging is used more in pre-election speeches than in post-election ones. Laurinaityte (*ibid.*) asserted that “modal verbs, modal lexical verbs, special passive voice constructions, and introductory phrases” are used more in pre-election speeches while “approximators and adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases” are used more in post-election speeches.

Similarly, Jalilifar and Alavi explored the use of hedges in four political interviews, which were selected from CNN and BBC websites. The interviews were conducted with George W. Bush (U.S. President), Jimmy Carter (the former U.S. President), David Coltart (a senior member of Zimbabwe’s main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change), and Sarah Palin (McCain’s running mate for the position of Vice President). They were interviewed in February 2008, December 2002, October 2006, and October 2008, respectively. The study revealed that there is a relationship between the quantity and quality of hedging devices and the degree of political power. The

researchers concluded that the types of questions that the interviewers asked and their attitude towards the interviewees influence the patterns of hedges that are used by speakers. Jalilifar and Alavi revealed that the use of hedging devices in the political interview is an indication of the use of positive and negative politeness strategies.

Jalilifar and Alavi analyzed hedges and boosters used in the televised debates of the winners of American and Iranian presidential elections, namely, Obama and Ahmadinejad. The study revealed that the two political leaders used these linguistic devices differently as the frequency and the functions served by these devices vary significantly.

Taweel et al. (2011) analyzed seventeen randomly selected televised interviews in Arabic and English with a number of Arab politicians and leaders during the Third Gulf War in order to investigate three aspects of hedging in spoken political discourse, viz., means of expression, quantity of lexical and syntactic markers, and pragmatic functions. The study revealed that avoidance that characterises spoken political discourse is the most used strategy (194). This research showed that expressing something in an indirect way can justify the use of hedges. The researchers concluded that all hedging devices, in a wider or narrower scope, convey politeness. The data revealed that hedging devices were used as in the examples below:

1. If we fight Iraq for its short illegal occupation of Kuwait, then why don't we fight others for their long illegal occupation of our lands?
2. I think there will be no end for this war.
3. I believe that this is not a fair war.
4. The war may last for two weeks.
5. To some extent this is not true.
6. It is probably the beginning of a comprehensive war that transfers us from bad to worse. (185)

On the other hand, Truong went further and investigated the topic of hedges in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Truong examined 56 inaugural addresses that were delivered by 44 US Presidents (from 1789 to 2009) in order to identify the most common distinctive linguistic features of hedges in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The results showed that the US Presidents used the following structures "S + V+ (O) that ....., the pattern It + be + past participle, the combination of the subject 'It' with an adjective to produce hedges modifying assertions of many types". Truong also found

that the US Presidents employed the “passive form”, and the verb “think” as hedges to satisfy the maxim of quality; they used the verb “*know*”, the noun “*summary*” to satisfy the quantity maxim; they used the speech filler “well” to satisfy the relation maxim; and they used “If clauses” to satisfy the maxim of manner. Truong provided some implications for learning and teaching hedges, such as providing real examples of hedges and hints that allow learners to assign these devices, and giving learners some assignments to assign hedging devices in a novel, story or a political speech (23-24).

The relationship between gender and the use of hedging devices was also studied by many scholars (Lakoff; Holmes). Lakoff proposed that women used hedges more than men in order to show “uncertainty”. Holmes (*ibid.*) found that women used hedges and tag questions more than men, and asserted that hedges had many functions depending on the context and intonation. They could show politeness in some situations while uncertainty in other ones.

Pellby investigated the use of hedges in political discourse in the Tampa City Council in Florida in order to find out whether or not women hedge more than men in this domain. She used a taxonomy based on the different functions of hedges, viz., *the epistemic modal function, the affective function, hedges which seek confirmation and shields*. She concluded that women hedge more than men for some reasons, such as signalling uncertainty. The researcher indicated that the mostly used hedging devices on the part of women are “the epistemic modal function and hedges which seek confirmation, indicating that women signalled uncertainty and wanted confirmation more often than men” (29). The results also showed that men dominate the political discourse more than women as men are given more time for speaking than women during the council meeting in question.

The literature on the use of hedging devices in political discourse has primarily focused on identifying the linguistic expressions that function as hedges, and examined them in terms of syntax, semantic and pragmatic functions. Despite the extensive research carried out on hedging, there are just a few studies that addressed the issue of hedging in political discourse. Moreover, most of these studies addressed hedging in political discourse produced by American and European leaders. As far as the literature review is concerned, none of these studies has analyzed an English spoken discourse produced by Arab leaders or politicians, except for Taweel et al.

To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, the present research is going to be the first to investigate hedging in English political discourse, as a non-scientific genre, produced by an Arab leader, who is a native speaker

of English and whose oral production might be affected by his learning of Arabic as a second language. As a matter of fact, King Abdullah II started learning Arabic at the beginner's level only when he was crowned the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The researchers think that His Majesty's use of hedging devices might be influenced by the second language, Arabic. Moreover, most of the previous research was conducted on political interviews, debates, meetings and conferences, except for Laurinaityte who studied hedging in political speeches. Therefore, the present research explored hedging devices in political speeches as a non-scientific discourse, and the functions such rhetorical devices perform in order to have a clear picture about this phenomenon. Since studies concerning this kind of discourse are lacking, the findings of the present research are expected to shed more light on these devices and their functions.

### **3. The present study**

#### **3.1 Aims and Questions of the Study**

Language plays a crucial role in political discourse since politicians use this valuable tool in a way that enables them to persuade people, to shape other's thought and to achieve certain political goals. In particular, political discourse depends heavily on fuzziness and hedging devices, such as *I think, probably, possible, I believe, sort of, may, can*, etc. The primary concern of this study is to investigate the use of hedging devices in political discourse. More specifically, the study aims to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most commonly used hedging devices in the speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan?
2. What are the pragmatic functions of the hedging devices used in His Majesty's speeches?

#### **3.2 Data collection procedure and analysis**

Twenty-five political speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan, were randomly selected, and downloaded on March 25, 2014 from the official website of King Abdullah (for more, see the Appendix). The speeches were fully transcribed and analyzed to find out the hedges used, and to arrive at conclusions regarding their patterns and their pragmatic functions. This research is both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, frequencies and percentages of

hedging devices were found and tabulated. Qualitatively, the researchers presented an explanation of how and why such hedging devices are used. The adopted model for analysis was Salager-Meyer's, presented in Table 1. This model was adopted because it includes the most widely used hedging categories expected to be found extensively in political speeches. This model presents hedges in relation to their grammatical categories as shown below.

*Table 1. Salager-Meyer's Taxonomy of hedging words*

Table 1. Salager	
# Category	Hedging words
1. <i>Modal auxiliary verbs</i>	may, might, can, could, would, should
2. <i>Modal lexical verbs</i>	seem, appear, believe, suggest, assume, indicate
3. <i>Adjectival, adverbial and Nominal modal phrases:</i>	
a) <i>Adjectival modal phrases</i>	possible, probable, un/likely
b) <i>Nominal modal phrase :</i>	assumption, claim, possibility, estimate
c) <i>Adverbial phrase : e.g.,</i>	perhaps, possibly, probably, likely, presumably
4. <i>Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time.</i>	approximately, roughly, about, often, generally, usually
5. <i>Introductory phrases</i>	I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that
6. <i>If clauses</i>	If true, if anything
7. <i>Compound hedges</i>	
a) <i>Double hedges</i>	(it may suggest)
b) <i>Treble hedges</i>	(it seems reasonable to assume that)
c) <i>Quadruple hedges</i>	(It would seem somewhat unlikely that..)

## 4. Results

### 4.1 The overall frequency and percentages of each hedging category

Table (2) presents the complete list of hedging words identified in the twenty-five speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan. It shows that King Abdullah II has a tendency towards using some hedging devices rather than others.



Table 2. Frequency and percentage of hedging categories in the twenty-five speeches

Hedging device category	Frequency	Percentage
Modal auxiliaries	372	53.37%
Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time	239	34.28%
If – clause	29	4.16%
Modal lexical verbs	6	0.86%
Introductory phrases	33	4.73%
Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases	18	2.58%
Compound hedges	0	0%
Total	697	100%

Table 2 shows that the most frequently used hedging device in the speech of King Abdullah II was modal auxiliaries, accounting for 53.37% of all the hedges found in the data. This emphasises the relationship between hedging and modality. According to Lyons, the main function of modals is to show lack of full commitment, hesitation and doubtfulness. On the other hand, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, such as, *about*, *often*, *almost*, *some*, etc. were the second most frequently used hedging devices. Salager-Meyer proposed that approximators are used when we are not sure about the exactness of certain figures or when the speaker does not have enough knowledge in order to be precise and accurate (7). However, not a single instance of compound hedges was found in the twenty-five speeches. This means that the use of compound hedges is rare and insignificant, which might be due to their complexity.

## 4.2 Frequency and percentages of hedging subcategories

### 4.2.1 Modal auxiliaries

Salager-Meyer stated that modal auxiliary verbs are “the most straightforward and widely used means of expressing modality in English” (109). The dominance of these modal auxiliaries, “can”, “would”, “may” and “should”, respectively, is expected since they soften and mitigate the speaker’s commitment to certain propositions. Similarly, Hyland pointed out that modal verbs are used as means of “expressing an attitude of uncertainty”. Hyland showed that most texts use “*would*, *should*, *can*, or *may*” under a topic such as “conditionals” (246).

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of the six modal auxiliaries found in the data, namely, *may*, *might*, *can*, *should*, *would* and *could*.

*Table 3. Frequency and percentages of modal auxiliaries*

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentages
May	14	3.76%
Will	149	40.05%
Could	8	2.15%
Might	2	0.53%
Would	22	5.91%
Can	163	43.81%
Should	14	3.76%
Total	<b>372</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 reveals that the modal auxiliary “can” recorded the highest frequency (163 occurrences), accounting for 43.81%, while “might” registered the lowest frequency (2 instances), accounting for 0.53%. The extensive use of “can” might be attributed to the fact that this modal auxiliary is associated with possibility. Moreover, “can” was used significantly and more frequently in the King’s speeches because these speeches were delivered to European countries in which His Majesty discusses the Middle East affairs including the Palestinian Conflict, and expresses his future expectation about the situation in this region and the world as a whole. All these discussed issues and expectations are dynamic and based on possibilities. This might justify why His Majesty relied heavily on this modal verb. The use of “can” is illustrated in the following excerpts taken from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (1) The Arab Spring *can* be an opportunity to institutionalize positive change, change that is necessary for a strong, secure, prosperous future.
- (2) Your commitment *can* help bring great trust to a Palestinian-Israeli settlement.
- (3) Our partnership *can* create a historic transformation, and a rich harvest – years of peace and prosperity, that will benefit our peoples and our world.

It is noticed that the modal auxiliary “can” is used as a hedging device in order to add a certain kind of uncertainty. King Abdullah II shows that there is a possibility that the Arabic Spring can initiate a positive change. Also, His Majesty shows how working together can lead to the possibility of achieving the needs of the Middle East and the world. This might show some kind of uncertainty regarding achieving these goals in addition to softening the commitment. The use of “would”, “may” and “should” can be illustrated in the following excerpts taken from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (4) In a land weakened by division, the field would be open to extremists seeking influence in the Middle East and beyond. Such a situation *would* raise the potential for dangerous arms races and competition – threatening the region, its neighbors, and the world.
- (5) There was tremendous hope that a final and comprehensive settlement of all the issues *would* be achieved.
- (6) Questioning of the West’s effectiveness, and commitment, *may* grow.

The modal auxiliary “would” in 4 and 5 is associated with uncertainty and doubt. The use of “*would*” which adds some kind of uncertainty in excerpt 4 reduces the strength of the claim that sectarian division in Iraq, which would increase the number of extremists in the Middle East and beyond, would increase the danger and threaten peace in the whole region and the world. Without the use of “*would*” the sentence would be too firm.

The use of “may” in 6 above is associated with possibility and probability. As shown in excerpt 6, there is a possibility that questioning of the West’s effectiveness, and commitment may grow. As a result, growth might not have happened.

The modal auxiliary “should” is linked with speculation and this will reduce the strength of the claim as manifested in excerpt 7 that we should share the goal of restoring Iraq as a sovereign, secure ....., etc. This differs from the use of *must*.

- (7) Today, we *should* share the goal of restoring Iraq as a sovereign, secure, and unified nation with a home-grown democratic government that will respect the rights of all communities and a reconstructed infrastructure and economy that can offer people freedom and hope.

The modal auxiliary “will” is used to predict something in the future. As shown in excerpt 8 below, His Majesty predicts that spreading peace in the region will have an important influence on other issues, such as creating new strategic space and solving poverty problems.

- (8) Achieving such a peace *will* also make a substantial impact on other issues. Within the region, it *will* create new strategic space, allowing the resolution of other serious issues, from poverty to proliferation.

The use of “could” and “might”, which were the least frequently used modal auxiliaries, can be manifested in the following excerpts:

- (9) We urged a new commitment to the two-state goal and a targeted process that *could* achieve it with tight timelines, measurable requirements and milestones for action.

The modal auxiliary “could” refers to a possibility in the past or future. In excerpt 9, “could” refers to a possibility in the future in which a new commitment and a targeted process could possibly achieve the two-state goal.

The modal auxiliary “might” also expresses possibility. Excerpt 10 shows that the easiness for the audience to think of the Middle East as very far away when they are looking at Aspen’s great mountain country.

- (10) Looking at Aspen’s great mountain country, it *might* be easy for you to think of the Middle East as very far away.

#### 4.2.2 Modal Lexical verbs

Salager-Meyer proposed that modal lexical verbs are speech act verbs used to perform acts such as doubting and evaluating rather than merely describing the varying degree of illocutionary force (109). The use of this hedging device shows that what the speaker says is just his/her personal opinion or when we quote or report what others said. Table 4 below presents the frequencies and the percentages of certain modal lexical verbs, namely, *suggest*, *assume*, *view as*, *claim*, *believe*, and *promise*, which were recorded in the speech of His Majesty, King Abdullah II.

Table 4. Frequency and percentages of modal lexical verbs

Modal Lexical verbs	Frequency	Percentages out of all modal lexical verbs
Assume	1	16.66%
View as	1	16.66%
Claim	1	16.66%
Suggest	1	16.66%
Promise	2	33.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 shows that the modal lexical verbs did not record high frequencies. All verbs recorded only one instance, except for “promise”, which recorded 2 instances. The use of modal lexical verbs is manifested in the following excerpts taken from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (1) That is not to say, that we, in positions of responsibility, do not *assume* some of the blame.
- (2) Give me a leader who *claims* that every decision he ever made was the right one, and I will give you someone who does not accept his own humanness and therefore is not fit to serve humanity.
- (3) The Arab Peace Initiative *promises* security guarantees for Israel, a sovereign, viable, and independent Palestine and a process that would lead to a comprehensive settlement.
- (4) I’m going to be bold tonight, and *suggest* three reasons for confidence.

#### 4.2.3 Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases

Varttala indicated that adjectives that express possibility or probability, and show uncertainty are closely related to the modal adverbs. The use of adjectival and adverbial modal phrases reduces the strength of the claims since they denote possibility, probability and uncertainty (135). The following excerpts (1-2) taken from the speeches manifest the use of adjectival modal phrase:

Table 5 presents the frequencies and the percentages of adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases that were registered in the speeches of His Majesty King Abdullah II.

*Table 5. Frequency and percentages of adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases*

Adjectival Modal Phrase			Adverbial Modal Phrase			Nominal Modal Phrase		
Hedging device	Frequency	Percentage	Hedging device	Frequency	Percentage	Hedging device	Frequency	Percentage
Possible	7	87.5%	Perhaps	5	62.5%	Potential	2	100%
Likely	1	12.5%	Possibly	2	25.0%			
			Potentially	1	12.5%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>			<b>8</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>

As shown in Table 5, adjectival and adverbial modal phrases are used more frequently than nominal modal phrases as they registered 8 instances for each, while nominal modal phrases recorded only 2 instances. It also reveals that the most frequently used adjectival modal phrase is “possible” which recorded the highest frequency (7 instances), accounting for 87.5%. However, “likely” was used only once.

- (1) If we cross the line where the two-state solution is no longer *possible*, Israel will be further than ever from real security.
- (2) Indeed, sectarian division is *likely* to bring worse violence, both in the near and in the long term.

Table 5 also indicates that “perhaps” registered the highest frequency (5 instances), accounting for 62.5%. While the occurrence of “potentially” was rare and insignificant since it was used only once. Navrátilová reported that the adverbial modal phrases function as “content disjuncts” where the speaker evaluates the certainty or the uncertainty and the truth or falsity of the propositions (44). These adverbial modal phrases express some degree of probability and uncertainty. The following excerpts (3-5) taken from the data manifest the use of adverbial modal phrase:

- (3) What is required, *perhaps*, is an Israeli Policy Spring that will see its politicians break free from the siege mentality and engage with its neighbors as equals.

- (4) Global divisions will not only endure but also *possibly* deepen.
- (5) The dangerous combination of new technology, terrorism and the drastic consequences of economic underdevelopment, all continue to add to a *potentially* catastrophic situation on the ground.

Regarding nominal modal phrase, “potential” was the only nominal modal phrase found in the speeches (2 occurrences). This hedging device implies a certain degree of probability. Furthermore, this nominal hedging device is related to nouns of tentative likelihood, such as possibility, likelihood and tendency. The following excerpts (6-7) are taken from the data:

- (6) Such a situation would raise the *potential* for dangerous arms races and competition – threatening the region, its neighbors, and the world.
- (7) As public confidence in the peace process has dropped, the cycle of crises is spinning faster, and with greater *potential* for destruction.

#### 4.2.4 Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time

Salager-Meyer stated that “[n]ot all approximators serve to make things vague – some are indeed used when exact figures are irrelevant or unavailable or when the state of knowledge does not allow the scientists to be more precise” (7). Approximators, such as *quite* and *somewhat*, are titled as “adverbs of indefinite degree” in Varttala.

This category represents the second largest category of hedging devices used in the twenty-five speeches. Table 6 shows the frequency and the percentage of approximators concerning degree, quantity, frequency and time that were revealed as hedges in the speeches of His Majesty King Abdullah II.

*Table 6. Frequency and percentage of approximators concerning degree, quantity, frequency and time*

Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time	Frequency	Percentage
About	1	0.41%
Almost	6	2.51%
Often	2	0.83%
Quite	2	0.83%

Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time	Frequency	Percentage
Some	28	11.71%
Many	38	15.9%
Several	1	0.41%
Always	3	1.25%
Ever	8	3.34%
Never	11	4.60%
Much	21	8.78%
Few	10	4.18%
Little	2	0.83%
Less	4	1.67%
More	100	41.84%
At least	1	0.41%
Over	1	0.41%
Total	239	100%

Table 6 shows that “more” which is an approximator of indefinite quantity recorded the highest frequency (100 instances), accounting for 41.84%. Next comes “many” (38 occurrences), accounting for 15.9%. While the use of “about”, “over”, “at least”, and “several” was insignificant since they were recorded only once. Varttala reported that the use of these adverbs makes the proposition “less than absolute”. Martin-Martin suggested that approximators “indicate an unwillingness to make precise and complete commitment to the proposition expressed” (138-139). This can be illustrated in the following example:

- (1) I have been looking forward to coming to the Aspen Institute for *quite* some time.

Varttala suggested that approximators, such as *almost*, *about*, *nearly* are used mainly with numerical expressions (132). As a result, it shows vagueness. This can be manifested in the following excerpts (2-5) from the speeches of His Majesty:



- (2) In my region, out of a total population of 325 million people, *more* than 60 percent are 24 or younger.
- (3) Jordan is hosting *almost* three-hundred-thousand Syrian refugees.
- (4) *About* 90 percent of government-owned companies have already been privatized, and our goal is 100 percent.
- (5) It could reach one million, *some* 20% of our population, by next year.

According to Varttal, adjectives and adverbs of indefinite frequency, such as *usually*, *often* are used “when the language user – for one reason or another – does not want to indicate the precise extent to which the information applies” (128). This is illustrated in the excerpts (6-8) taken from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (6) *Often*, you have the greatest opportunities to design effective partnerships that will benefit both sides.
- (7) The outcomes have not *always* been what we wanted.
- (8) This was *never* a gathering about ideas alone.

Varttala asserted that the use of these approximators will “hedge the strength of the predicate” (133). The following excerpts (9-11) which include a number of approximators, such as *some*, *many* and *several* are extracted from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (9) In *some* countries, debate and consensus are in the air.
- (10) Too *many* people have lost faith in our ability to bring them the peace they want.
- (11) This year, in Amman, we succeeded in getting negotiators back to the table *several* times.

#### 4.2.5 Introductory phrases

Salager-Meyer mentioned that introductory phrases, namely, *we know*, *we believe*, *to our knowledge*, express “the authors’ personal doubt and direct involvement” (7). Martin-Martin stated that the strategy in which first personal pronouns (*I/we*) are followed by verbs of cognition (*think*, *believe*) or performance enhancing verbs (*suppose*, *suggest*) is called “Subjectivization” strategy (138). This strategy is used when the speakers want to show what they say is their personal points of view. Furthermore, it indicates that the speaker

wants to involve the listener in communication, and he/she wants to show some kind of respect to the listeners' opinions. Introductory phrases, namely, *I believe* and *I/we know* were identified in the speeches of King Abdullah II. Table 7 shows the frequency and the percentage of these phrases.

Table 7. Frequency and percentage of introductory phrases

Introductory phrases	Frequency	Percentages out of all
I believe	14	42.42%
We believe	4	12.12%
I know	7	21.21%
We know	7	21.21%
You know	1	3.03%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 7 indicates that “I believe” registered the highest frequency (14 instances), accounting for 42.42%. While “you know” recorded the lowest frequency (1 instance). Such hedging devices are clearly manifested in the following excerpts (1-3) taken from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (1) *I know* that in this election year, Americans are in the midst of a national dialogue, about global challenges and US policy, especially in the Middle East.
- (2) *We believed* that, after years of worsening crisis, a change of strategy was required.
- (3) And, as *you know*, from Iraq, terror was exported to our capital one year ago.

#### 4.2.6 If clauses

Salager-Meyer stated that “if clauses” show uncertainty or doubt concerning a proposition (109-110). Quirk et al. reported that *if clauses* can sometimes be linked with tentativeness, while sometimes they are not. *If clauses* registered 29 instances, accounting for 4.16% of the total number of hedging devices recorded in His Majesty's speeches. His Majesty used *If clauses* to express uncertainty as in the following excerpts:

- (1) As in Iraq, *if* it continues unchecked, we can expect a situation that is far more radical and uncontrollable and many more years of violence before the parties get back to the peace tables, *if* ever.
- (2) What are the implications for global stability *if* this continues?
- (3) *If* we miss today's opportunities, peace will be set back, perhaps for decades.
- (4) We cannot teach the value of peaceful process *if* peaceful process repeatedly fails.

### 5.3 Pragmatic functions of hedging devices

Hedging devices are used to perform several pragmatic functions. Identifying the pragmatic functions of hedging devices depends greatly on the context: the occasion, the audience and the aims of the speech. Besides, analyzing the pragmatic functions of hedges in political discourse requires knowledge about the background of the speaker, his/her political purposes, intentions and directions. Hyland asserted that hedging is a poly-pragmatic strategy. Sometimes, one hedging device can fulfil more than one pragmatic function or meaning which is difficult to distinguish. The data of the present research revealed that hedging devices used in the speeches of His Majesty II served five pragmatic functions: (1) mitigating claims by showing some kind of uncertainty, (2) expressing a lack of full commitment, (3) searching for acceptance from the audience and expressing politeness, (4) avoiding direct criticism especially when predicting future events or consequences, and (5) requesting the listeners' involvement. These functions are explained and illustrated in the following sub-sections.

#### 5.3.1 Mitigating claims by showing some kind of uncertainty

The use of different kinds of hedging devices, such as modal verbs, modal lexical verbs, approximators and other devices was mainly to mitigate claims by showing some kind of uncertainty. It seems that His Majesty used more hedging devices when addressing European countries about their responsibilities towards making quick decisions to solve the tension in the Middle East. This can be illustrated in the following excerpts:

- (1) Working together, we *can* achieve what the Middle East needs and the world needs: a future of security for this generation and the generations to come.

Excerpt 1 shows some kind of uncertainty when His Majesty softened his claim by using the modal auxiliary “can” while asking the European countries to work with Jordan and the other Arab States in order to spread peace in the region and to fulfil the needs of its people. In excerpt 2, it is noticed that “perhaps” was used to add a sense of uncertainty, to soften the claim expressed and to reduce the strength of the proposition of what is needed might be an Israeli Policy Spring that will see its politicians break free from the siege mentality, and engage with its neighbours as equals.

- (2) What is required, *perhaps*, is an Israeli Policy Spring that will see its politicians break free from the siege mentality and engage with its neighbors as equals.

Excerpt 3 illustrates that the hedging device “can” is used to mitigate the claim, and to express some degree of doubt and uncertainty. Without the use of “can”, the proposition would be too firm and assertive. As shown below, His Majesty mitigates the claim that Middle East peace is a global beginning, and will create new possibilities for the region and the entire world.

- (3) *We know* that Middle East peace *can* be a global beginning, creating new possibilities for our region and the entire world.

Some hedging devices were also used with numerical expressions in order to show uncertainty and lack of commitment to the exactness of the expressed proposition as shown in the excerpts (4-5) below:

- (4) This means acceptance; acceptance by key countries, with billions of citizens, representing *almost* a third of the membership of the United Nations. And that opens a shared future of security, peace and new partnerships.
- (5) It could reach one million, *some* 20% of our population, by next year.

“*Many*” was also used to express the meaning of indefiniteness. Therefore, we cannot exactly judge how many countries are facing these urgent needs. In example 6, His Majesty could mention the number of the countries that face urgent needs exactly, and more specifically, but it seems that he wanted to mitigate the statement by using the approximator of quantity “many”.

- (6) *Many* of our countries face urgent needs.

### 5.3.2 Expressing lack of full commitment

Some hedging devices were used by His Majesty, namely, *can*, *may* and *believe* to express lack of full commitment to some propositions. In excerpt 1, His Majesty tried to avoid being fully committed that he would build an international legal order that can protect and empower the people. In excerpt 2, His Majesty avoided being fully committed when he addressed Brazil's experience in alternative and renewable energies. In excerpt 3, he avoided being committed to leaving old conflicts, old inequalities and old ignorance.

- (1) Together, God willing, we *can* build an international legal order that will safeguard and empower the people of our world.
- (2) We *can* look to Brazil's experience in alternative and renewable energies.
- (3) Together, we *can* leave old conflicts, old inequalities, old ignorance, in the past.

### 5.3.3 Expressing politeness and searching for being accepted

The purpose of using hedging devices could be to make their argument/discourse approved by the audience, especially when the speakers provide ideas that may contradict with the listeners' interests. In other words, hedges are used to express politeness as shown in excerpt 1. It seems clear that His Majesty used this hedging device when he asked America to play a central role in spreading peace in the Middle East. As a result, he softened the proposition to be polite and to be accepted because this proposition might contradict his listeners' interests.

- (1) And I *believe* that America, with its enduring values, its moral responsibility, and yes, its unprecedented power, must play the central role.

Excerpt 2 below also shows how His Majesty used the modal auxiliary "can" to express his thoughts in a soft and polite way, especially when asking the international community to create innovative strategies that could help the Iraqis to have a new Iraq that respects their rights and security.

- (2) The international community *can* play a significant role in devising creative strategies towards the fulfilment of these goals.

“Many”, as a hedging device, expresses the meaning of indefiniteness in that we cannot exactly judge how many people have lost faith. Excerpt 3 indicates that His Majesty could approximate the estimated number of people who have lost the faith of the leaders’ ability to achieve peace in the region. However, it appears that he wanted to minimise the threat of being rejected and save face. As noted, approximators can be used to minimise the threat and save face.

- (3) Too **many** people have lost faith in our ability to bring them the peace they want.

#### **5.3.4 Avoiding direct criticism especially when predicting future events or consequences**

King Abdullah II, like other political figures, used hedging to protect himself against being criticised by others. This may explain King Abdullah’s tendency to use some hedging devices, especially when talking about conflicts in the Middle East, and what might happen in the future. Hedging also makes the propositions true. Thus, softening the proposition makes the speaker look like someone telling the truth all the time. This can be illustrated in the following excerpts taken from the speeches of His Majesty:

- (1) Your commitment *can* help bring great trust to a Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

Excerpt 1 shows some kind of uncertainty because His Majesty was softening the expressed proposition. It seems that he used “can” as a hedging device because he predicted something about the future. His Majesty wondered whether the European commitment can bring trust to a Palestinian-Israeli settlement or not. Moreover, His Majesty did not want to be criticised for saying something untrue, so he used this hedging device in order to be a truth teller whatever the results will be in the future and whether this commitment can bring trust or not.

Some introductory phrases, such as *I believe* and *I think* are used in the political discourse in order to protect the political figure from direct criticism because these phrases express the proposition as a personal opinion.

- (2) We urged a new commitment to the two-state goal and a targeted process that could achieve it – with tight timelines, measurable requirements and milestones for action. Second chances are rare, but *I believe* we have come to one.

As shown in excerpt 2, His Majesty tried to protect himself from being criticised in the future if there is not any available chance to achieve the two-state goal. As a result, he expressed his thought in terms of a personal opinion.

- (3) It is through the high reputation of this court, and your influential voices, that our world *may* strengthen international law and civility, creating a firmer path to peace and setting us on the road to a goal that is urgently needed by all.
- (4) *If* those who are striving to do the right thing are left to stand alone, yesterday’s oppressive regimes *may* simply end up being replaced by new – possibly worse – oppression.

### 5.3.5 Requesting the listeners’ involvement

Some hedging devices like introductory phrases are used to involve the listener in what the speaker is talking about. Such devices include “we believe”, “you know”, “we know”, etc. As shown in the excerpts below (1-3), the use of introductory phrases is directed to involve the listeners in what is being discussed. For instance, in excerpt 1 His Majesty requested the listeners’ involvement when he was talking about how terrorism is transferred to Amman by using the introductory phrase “you know”.

- (1) And, as *you know*, from Iraq, terror was exported to our capital one year ago.
- (2) *We believe* that the Arab Spring can be an opportunity to institutionalize positive change, change that is necessary for a strong, secure, prosperous future.
- (3) *We know* that reform that is half-done, is reform that can be undone.

## 6. Discussion

The present research aimed to investigate the use of hedging devices in political discourse by analyzing 25 speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan. In answering the first question “What are the most commonly used hedging devices in the speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan?”, the analysis revealed that the most frequently used hedging device was modal auxiliaries. The second most frequently used hedging device was “approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, followed respectively by “introductory phrases”, “if-clause”, “adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases”, and finally “modal lexical verbs”. The data also showed that the use of compound hedges was insignificant since no instance of their occurrence was observed. In contrast, the most frequently used hedging subcategory was the modal auxiliary “can”. The domination of modal auxiliaries was expected since they soften and mitigate the speaker’s commitment to certain propositions. These findings are in support of Laurinaityte’s study, which concluded that modal auxiliaries were the most dominant hedging device in the speeches, and the modal auxiliary “can” was the most frequently used. This study also lends some support to Al-Rashady, who found that modal auxiliaries were the most commonly used hedging devices and compound hedges were the least favoured ones. In support of Rabab’ah, the study revealed that political discourse as a non-scientific genre uses hedging devices more than any scientific genre.

This study also sought to answer the question “What are the pragmatic functions of the hedging devices used?” The findings suggest that His Majesty King Abdullah II had certain well-defined intentions that he always tried to achieve, and clear messages that he wanted to convey to the world in every speech he delivered, such as spreading peace in the Middle East region, fighting terrorism and ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The analysis revealed that the choice of hedging devices in the political discourse is not a random process for native speakers of two languages like King Abdullah II. The data revealed that King Abdullah II chose the most appropriate hedging device in order to convey a particular pragmatic function that helped His Majesty to politely convey his messages to the world, and in a way that protects him from being criticised. The hedging devices in the speeches of King Abdullah II were used to perform five pragmatic functions, which were prominent in monolinguals’ speeches revealed in previous studies: mitigating claims, expressing lack of full commitment, expressing politeness and searching for



being accepted, avoiding direct criticism especially when predicting future events or consequences, and requesting listeners' involvement. This finding is consistent with the previous research studies reporting that hedging is used to add some degree of uncertainty, indirectness, fuzziness and lack of complete commitment, and that hedging enables politicians to soften their claims, to express politeness, and to avoid criticism (Majeed; Taweel, et al.).

## 7. Conclusion

The findings of the present research support previous studies that politicians use a wide range of hedging devices to avoid commitment and express politeness or fuzziness. They also show that political discourse, as a non-scientific genre, is similar to any other social or humanistic discourse in terms of its use of such devices to express fuzziness and lack of precision. However, the study shows that the second language (i.e., Arabic in the case of King Abdullah II) does not have an effect on the King's use of hedging devices or the functions they perform. It is noticed that the devices used by His Majesty King Abdullah are similar to the major subcategories of hedging devices found in previous studies conducted on other native speakers of English (Majeed). The results of the present research also suggest that politicians, whether they are monolinguals or bilinguals, use hedges as rhetorical devices to perform various pragmatic and rhetorical functions. Politicians also use them to mitigate claims, express lack of full commitment to their propositions, express politeness, attempt to be accepted, avoid direct criticism, and request listeners' involvement.

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## Appendix

The following list of the speeches of King Abdullah II were downloaded from the official website of King Abdullah II ([http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en\\_US/speeches/listing/cid/2.html](http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/speeches/listing/cid/2.html)).

1. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before Members of the European Parliament Strasbourg, France, 12 December 2007.
2. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before Members of the US Congress Washington, DC, US, 7 March 2007.

3. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the International Court of Justice The Hague, The Netherlands, 31 October 2006.
4. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting Davos, Switzerland, 25 January 2013.
5. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University Princeton, New Jersey, US, 29 February 2008.
6. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ottawa, Canada, 13 July 2007.
7. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland London, UK, 7 November 2006.
8. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Arab and American Action Forum New York, US, 19 September 2006.
9. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Plenary Session of the 68th General Assembly of the United Nations New York, US, 24 September 2013.
10. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of South American and Arab Countries Lima, Republic of Peru, 2 October 2012.
11. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the European Parliament Strasbourg, France, 18 April 2012.
12. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce London, UK, 15 November 2011.
13. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the World Leaders Forum at Colombia University New York, US, 23 September 2011.
14. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the 66th Plenary Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York, US, 21 September 2011.
15. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at IBM Centennial "THINK" Forum New York, US, 20 September 2011.
16. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II before the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York, US, 23 September 2010.
17. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the High Level Plenary Meeting on Millennium Development Goals New York, US, 20 September 2010.
18. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Ceremony hosted by

- President Obama at the White House to Launch Direct Palestinian-Israeli Negotiations Washington, DC, US, 1 September 2010.
19. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the UN Dialogue of Civilizations New York, US, 12 November 2008.
  20. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Jordan-Brazil Investment Forum Sao Paulo, Brazil, 24 October 2008.
  21. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Luncheon Hosted by the President of the Republic of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva Brasilia, Brazil, 23 October 2008.
  22. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the National Congress of Chile Santiago, Chile, 21 October 2008.
  23. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Aspen Institute Aspen, Colorado, US, 21 July 2008.
  24. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at Oxford University, Oxford, UK, 4 June 2008.
  25. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Opening Session of the 7th German Foreign Trade Congress Bremen, Germany, 13 November 2007.

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