
“We believe in democracy...”: Epistemic Modality in Justin Trudeau’s Political Speeches

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates epistemic modality in political discourse. It focuses on modality markers in terms of their word classes, semantic meanings and discourse functions in political speeches. The data were taken from three speeches delivered by the 23rd Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The results show that the markers found in the three speeches are of five different types, i.e., lexical verbs, modal adjectives, modal adverbs, modal auxiliary verbs and modal nouns, with meanings ranging from possibility, probability, to certainty. The markers also indicate the speaker’s commitment whose degree reflects the function in the social context. The speaker’s commitment is divided into three degrees of engagement, each of which serves as a means to be polite, to be diplomatic, and to be persuasive. The findings suggest that Trudeau tends to use reasonable judgment expressions to sound diplomatic and persuasive in his speeches.

Keywords: *discourse functions; epistemic markers; epistemic modality; Justin Trudeau; political speech; speaker’s commitment*

INTRODUCTION

Political speeches made by political figures can serve more than just as a means of delivering messages. They also serve as “one of the most important means by which an ideology is communicated to the public” (López, 2012, p. 39). They are often composed so as to have intended effects on the audience or to form an expected image of the speaker. According to Schäfer (2017), political speeches are characterized by simple and understandable sentence structures, with a lot of main clauses and rhetorical stylistic devices, which conjure up images for the audience. This kind of speech tends to be persuasive, as the speaker aims at the minds of the audience to concede. Thus, choice of words becomes a prime factor in composing a political speech.

As a way to achieve the intended effects, political speeches make use of a variety of linguistic devices. One of these devices is modality. This linguistic device is an important means of expressing not only interpersonal

functions, but also social roles of the speaker and the hearer (Halliday, 1970). Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) argue that modality “refers to the area of meaning that lies between yes and no—the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity” (p. 691). They further add that modality indicates “different ways of construing the semantic space between the positive and negative poles” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 692).

Because of its important role in social communication, modality has been approached from such different viewpoints as language philosophy (e.g., Fine, 2005), pragmatics (e.g., Klinge, 1993; Stubbs, 1986; Turnbull & Saxton, 1997), and semantics (e.g., Boland, 2006; Leech, 2004; Palmer, 1986, 2001; Perkins, 1983). In addition to these varying perspectives from which modality has been viewed, various attempts have also been made to categorize it, especially in terms of its semantic meaning (see, e.g., Bybee & Fleischman, 1985;

Coates, 1983; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Palmer, 1986, 2001; Quirk *et al.*, 1985; Van der Auwera & Plungian, 1998). In general, modality can be categorized into epistemic, and non-epistemic (Depraetere and Reed, 2006), or agent-oriented (Bybee and Fleishman, 1985), root (Coates, 1983), deontic and dynamic (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) modality. In the present research, we focus on the expressions of epistemic modality in political discourse.

A number of studies have been made to examine the use of this type of modality in spoken and written discourse, especially political discourse (see, e.g., Baumgarten & House, 2010; Boicu, 2008; Fetzer, 2011, 2014; Fraser, 2010; Hernández-Guerra, 2016; Lillian, 2008; López, 2012; Milkovich & Sitarica, 2017; O'Grady, 2017; Simon-Vandenberg, 1996, 1997, 2000; Vukovic, 2014ab). Some of these studies have focused on very specific features such as the form, function and distribution of the 'parenthetical' construction (Urmson, 1952) *I think* (Fetzer, 2011; O'Grady, 2017; Simon-Vandenberg, 2000), and *I think, I mean* and *I believe* (Fetzer, 2014). These studies revealed the frequent use of *I think* in political discourse. Moreover, this parenthetical structure serves not only to express uncertainty or lack of commitment, but also to indicate tentativeness and authoritative deliberation (O'Grady, 2017; Simon-Vandenberg, 2000). O'Grady (2017) further argues that *I think* is used to express either commitment to a proposition if it receives an intonational prominence or hesitation if it is followed by a filled pause. Some other studies examined modal (un)certainly in political radio interviews (Simon-Vandenberg, 2000), linguistic devices of epistemic modality used in political statements to persuade the audience (Milkovich & Sitarica, 2017), modal auxiliary verbs as a means of persuasion and manipulation (Lillian, 2008; Hardjanto, 2016), various linguistic exponents used as a hedging strategy (Fraser, 2010) or as a stance-taking strategy (Hernández-Guerra, 2016) and degrees of commitment (Vukovic, 2014ab).

While the studies reported above deal mostly with specific characteristics of modality, particularly epistemic modality, the present research investigates the various linguistic devices used to express epistemic modality in political speeches delivered by Justin Trudeau, the 23rd Canadian Prime Minister, who has captured the world's attention since he was sworn in 2015. We attempt, therefore, to examine his political speeches and focus on his use of epistemic modality markers. In particular, we address the following questions: a) What epistemic modality markers are used in Justin Trudeau's speeches, and what meanings do these markers express in the

speeches? b) What discourse functions do these markers serve in the speeches?

EPISTEMIC MODALITY IN ENGLISH DISCOURSE

Lyons (1977, p. 452) defines modality as "the speaker's opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes." Grammatically, modality, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), refers to the intermediate degrees between the extreme positive and the extreme negative. As an intermediate degree, modality can objectively express the speaker's judgment on a topic. Furthermore, it can show the social role relationship, the scale of formality and power relationship (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

In his functional framework, Halliday (1970) states that modality derives from the interpersonal function of language and is frequently expressed by the verbal and lexical items. The verbal items cover modal auxiliaries, such as *will* and *would*, and the lexical items cover adverbs, adjectives, nouns and verbs. In addition to these lexical items, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, pp. 173-175) add past tense, clause types, especially imperatives and interrogatives, subordination and parentheticals.

As mentioned previously, modality has been classified differently by different scholars. Yet, in general, it can be categorized into epistemic and non-epistemic modality (Depraetere & Reed, 2006), or sometimes called root modality (Coates, 1983) or deontic modality (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Palmer, 1986). Also belonging to the non-epistemic modality what is sometimes called dynamic modality (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Palmer 1986, 2001, 2013). While deontic modality is concerned with "the speaker's attitude to the actualisation of future situations" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 178), epistemic modality is concerned with "the speaker's assumptions, or assessment of possibilities, and in most cases, it indicates the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed" (Coates, 1987, p. 112), or with the speaker's explicit qualification of "his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters, whether this qualification is made explicit in the verbal component (...) or in the prosodic or paralinguistic component" (Lyons (1977, p. 797), or "with the speaker's attitude to status of the proposition" (Palmer, 2013, p. 7), or with the speaker's lack of knowledge about the truth of the proposition (Perkins (1983, p. 10). In addition, dynamic modality is concerned with ability and disposition (Palmer,

1990). Palmer (1990) argues that unlike epistemic and deontic modality which relate to the speaker, “dynamic modality is concerned with the ability and volition of the subject of the sentence” (p. 7). See also Huddleston & Pullum (2002, p. 178) and Palmer (2013).

Etymologically, the word “epistemic” comes from the Greek word *epistēmē* meaning “knowledge” (epistemic, n.d.). Thus, epistemic modality has something to do with the speaker’s knowledge or belief. Palmer (1986, 2001) interprets epistemic modality based on its etymology as indicating the status of the speaker’s knowledge. Palmer (1990, p. 50) also states that epistemic modals function “to make judgments about the possibility, etc., that something is or is not the case”. It is considered as the modality of propositions rather than of actions, states, or events. Therefore, epistemic modality contains assumptions. As it comes from the speaker’s assessment based on knowledge, Verstraete (2001, p. 1525) argues that epistemic modality is always subjective. Lyons (1977, p. 739) argues that subjectivity is important for the purpose of understanding modality. It may help figure out why the speaker is certain or uncertain towards the proposition.

Epistemic modality can be expressed either grammatically or lexically. Grammatically, Palmer (1986) suggests the use of modal verbs, mood, as well as clitics and particles to mark epistemic modality. Lexically, as Kärkkäinen (2003, p. 20) contends, “epistemic modality can be expressed by a variety of linguistic forms, such as epistemic phrases, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, lexical verbs and participial forms.” Liddy, Rubin and Kondo (2006, p. 5) add that English frequently expresses certainty with “reportive means such as attributive adverbials (e.g., *supposedly*, *allegedly*) and reporting verbs (e.g., *claim*, *suggest*).”

Modal auxiliary verbs, which are commonly called modal verbs or modals, belong to a class of verbs which have meanings related to modality. The literature on modality (Coates 1983; Perkins 1983; Lyon 1977; Palmer 1986, 2001) suggests that modals can serve to reveal the speaker’s knowledge, to indicate the speaker’s certainty, or to show the speaker’s tentativeness and non-commitment to the truth value of the propositions. Thus, modals are frequently classified, according to their primary meanings, into possibility modals (*can*, *may*, *might*, *could*), necessity modals (*ought*, *should*, *must*) and predictive modals (*will*, *would*, *shall*) (Someya, 2010; See also Collins, 2009; Depraetere & Reed, 2006).

Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) contend that modal verbs and lexical verbs cannot be clearly distinguished. Some non-modal lexical verbs

can sometimes function as modal verbs. These forms are then classified into marginal auxiliary verbs and semi-modals or quasi-modals. Marginal auxiliary verbs possess some characteristics of modal verbs, such as having similar negative and interrogative forms. The verbs include *need to*, *dare to*, *used to*, and *ought to*. Semi-modals or quasi-modals include (*had*) *better*, *have to*, (*have*) *got to*, *be supposed to*, *be going to*. These verbs not only can express modality, but they can also be marked for person and tense. They can also be used together with modal verbs (Biber *et al.*, 1999). Modal lexical markers can replace modal auxiliary verbs with equivalent meaning, or co-occur with modal auxiliary verbs as hedging.

METHODS

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to investigate epistemic modality markers used in Justin Trudeau’s political speeches. For this purpose, this research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Qualitative methods were applied to examine very closely the various forms, meanings and functions of epistemic modality that Trudeau employed in his speeches. Moreover, quantitative methods were also used to reveal the frequency as well as the distribution of the use of epistemic modality markers in the speeches.

The data for this study were taken from the transcripts of three speeches delivered by Justin Trudeau, which were obtained from the official website of the Prime Minister of Canada (see Appendix). The three speeches, two international addresses and one national address, were chosen as they contain the Prime Minister’s views and hopes regarding his policies.

The data of this research were utterances in the form of sentences containing epistemic modality markers found in the three speech transcripts. “Epistemic modality markers” are here defined as “linguistic elements, whose main function is the qualification of the writer’s commitment (boosters) or lack of commitment (hedges) to the truth of the proposition” (Vázquez and Giner, 2008, p. 173). Each sentence containing an epistemic modality marker was coded according to the type of epistemic markers (LV for lexical verb, MAdj for modal adjective, MAdv for modal adverb, MAux for modal auxiliary, and MN for modal noun), the speech from which the data were taken (UNGA for United Nations General Assembly, CD for Canadian Day speech, EP for European Parliament) and the data number, as shown below.

- (1) But our efforts **will** not truly be successful until those refugees have become established, full-

fledged members of the Canadian middle class. (MAux-UNGA 13)

The code 'MAux-UNGA 13' indicates that *will* in the example above was the 13th epistemic marker belonging to the class of Modal Auxiliary found in the United Nations General Assembly speech from which the utterance was taken.

The collected data were analyzed syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. The first stage of analysis is the identification of the epistemic modality markers. The epistemic modality markers were identified according to Palmer's framework (1986, 2001) on epistemic modality. Palmer (1986, p. 51) holds that "The term 'epistemic' should apply not simply to modal systems that basically involve the notions of possibility and necessity, but to any modal system that indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he says. In particular, it should include evidentials such as 'hearsay' or 'report' ... or the evidence of the senses." These criteria were used to identify and collect the data.

The second stage involves syntactic and semantic analysis. The epistemic markers found were analyzed syntactically by classifying them based on their word classes. As pointed out previously, the epistemic modality markers are in the form of grammatical and lexical units. Once the data were grouped, they were analyzed quantitatively by recording the frequency of each word class. Next, the data were analyzed based on the degree of engagement. This was done based on the theory by Palmer (1986, 2001). The meaning of each word class was analyzed by examining the degree of engagement and confirming the lexical meaning in the dictionary. The third stage involved analyzing the pragmatic characteristics of the epistemic modality markers. By analyzing the choice of markers and the social context of the speeches, the interpretation of what message Trudeau attempted to convey in relation to the audience was carried out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms and Meanings of Epistemic Modality Markers

A total of 96 epistemic modality markers were found in Trudeau's speeches, 30 from United Nation General Assembly speech, 40 from European Parliament speech, and 26 from Canadian Day speech. The markers were then classified according to their word classes and meanings as well as their degrees of engagement. The table below shows the frequency of epistemic modality markers used in the speeches.

Table 1. Frequency of epistemic modality markers in the speeches

No.	Modality Markers	No.	%
1.	Lexical Verbs	33	34.4
2.	Modal Adjectives	11	11.5
3.	Modal Adverbs	17	17.7
4.	Modal Auxiliary Verbs	33	34.4
5.	Modal Nouns	2	2.1
Total		96	100.0

The table shows that Trudeau most frequently used modal auxiliary and lexical verbs to express his judgments. The frequent use of these two classes might be related to their meanings and flexibility. The modal auxiliary verbs are more easily identified, understood, and accepted compared to other verbs. This is because at the time of listening to the speeches, the audience almost has no time to reflect (Wang, 2010). As for the lexical verbs, Trudeau used them frequently since they provide a much more variety of verbs to express modality compared to other word classes. Besides, lexical verbs modify personal pronouns, so they can also be easily identified by audience. It is understandable then why modal auxiliary verbs and modal lexical verbs are favored by Trudeau in his speeches. In the following sub-sections, each of the markers is discussed in detail.

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

The use of modal auxiliary verbs is one of the two most common ways to express epistemic modality (34.4%). Despite this common use, only four auxiliary verbs were used, i.e., *will*, *would*, *should*, and *may*. The marker *will* appears the most frequent (28 or 84.8%), while the other markers are significantly less frequent, with *would* and *may* appearing twice (6.1%), and *should* only appearing once (3%).

The modal auxiliary *will* generally expresses reasonable judgment and futurity (Palmer, 1986, p. 62; see also Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 188; Coates (1983, p. 169) calls it prediction). Reasonable judgment means judgment that is based on known facts on what is usually the case. As for futurity, according to Lyons (1977), it includes prediction or some related notion. Reasonable judgment of *will* can be paraphrased "as you will find that ..." (Palmer, 1986, p. 62) or "a reasonable conclusion is that ..." (Palmer, 1981, p. 153), or "a reasonable inference is that ..." (Palmer, 1990, p. 57). Furthermore, as Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 190) argue, as an expression of futurity, *will* expresses

“a significant amount of modal meaning”. They further contend that

“our knowledge about the future is inevitably much more limited than our knowledge about the past and the present, and what we say about the future will typically be perceived as having the character of a prediction rather than an unqualified factual assertion” (p. 190).

The majority of *will* occurs in positive sentences as shown in (2) below, while there are five cases of negative form and four occurrences of interrogative. The modal auxiliary *will* in this example expresses reasonable judgment. Here, Trudeau expresses his belief that those who exploit fear do not solve the problems, based on his knowledge that fear has never provided for families nor created jobs.

- (2) Fear has never fed a family nor created a single job, and those who exploit it **will** never solve the problems that have created such anxiety. (MAux-UNGA 26)

Being the most frequently used modal auxiliary, *will* also occurs in more variations than the others, as it can be found in positive, negative, and interrogative structures. Moreover, the reasonable judgment meaning it contains makes this modal auxiliary verb the most flexible to use. Using *will* most frequently in his speeches, Trudeau expresses his assurance without raising the audience’s hopes.

Next, the modal auxiliary *would* can express temporal and hypothetical meaning (Palmer, 1986). It is formally the past form of *will*, but the degree of engagement is weaker as it is more tentative than *will*. While it means the same as *will* in the past setting, *would* is more commonly used to express wishes and unreal conditionals.

- (3) As part of our commitment to implementing that agreement, we announced that Canada **would** invest \$2.65 billion over five years to fund clean, low-carbon growth in developing countries. (MAux-UNGA 13)

Example (3) is a report to what has been announced before, thus it is in the past form of *will* as required by the grammatical rule. It expresses Trudeau’s judgment in the past about future events. Like *will*, it carries the meaning of reasonable assumption as the investment is a plan which has been formally discussed before.

Two occurrences of the modal auxiliary *may* in the

speeches express the same meaning, which is possibility. Unlike *will*, *may* is weaker possibility, and it indicates a possible judgment (Palmer, 1986). The following is one of the two cases of the occurrences of *may*.

- (4) We **may** be of every colour and creed, from every corner of the world [...] but we embrace that diversity, while knowing in our hearts that we are all Canadians, and that we share a common pride in that red and white flag. (MAux-CD 17)

This example talks about the shared nationality despite the differences. Trudeau uses *may* to indicate the possibility that the differences are their colors, creeds, and birthplaces. Those differences are not necessarily true. Thus, Trudeau uses *may*, a modality with low engagement, to make a point.

The modal auxiliary *should* with epistemic meaning only occurs once, and it is in positive form. Although *should* is formally the past tense of the modal *shall*, it has epistemic certainty meaning as does *must*, only less strong. The marker *must* indicates that the proposition has to be the case, but *should* indicates that the proposition will be likely to be the case. However, other than merely being a more tentative and weaker form of *must*, the modal *should* contains some notion of conditionality (Palmer, 1986, p. 63).

- (5) [...] we’re breaking records here on Parliament Hill. And we **should** be, because today, together, we’re celebrating Canada 150! (MAux-CD 2)

In (5), *should* is used to express inference and has conditionality meaning. By using *should*, Trudeau judges that provided things are as he expects them to be, the Canadians are indeed breaking records. He uses the tentative form rather than *must* since his belief is based on his only knowledge that they were celebrating Canada’s 150th independence.

Modal Lexical Verbs

A number of modal lexical verbs were used to express judgment, report, factuality, assertion, and other aspects classified as epistemic modality. They were used as frequently as modal auxiliary verbs. However, the realization of the lexical verb category is more varied than that of the modal auxiliary category. Table 2 presents the occurrences of modal lexical verbs used in the speeches.

Modal lexical verbs may indicate that the speakers present “information as opinion, conclusion, report or based on the evidence of their senses ... lexical verbs offer the most transparent means” of conveying this information

(Hyland, 1996, p. 259). Epistemic lexical verbs can be classified into judgmental verbs and evidential verbs (Palmer, 1986; see also Hyland, 1996, 1998).

Table 2. Frequency and Distribution of Modal Lexical Verbs

No.	Lexical Verb	No.	%
1.	Believe	10	30.3
2.	Guess	1	3.0
3.	Hear	2	6.1
4.	Hope	1	3.0
5.	Know	15	45.5
6.	See	1	3.0
7.	Tell	2	6.1
8.	Think	1	3.0
Total		33	100.0

Epistemic lexical verbs which express judgment cover speculative and deductive categories. Speculative verbs express some speculation about the truth of a proposition (Hyland, 1996). Unlike speculative verbs, deductive verbs mark inferential reasoning or calculation, and thus expressed as deductions or conclusions. Six different judgmental verbs were found, namely *know*, *believe*, *guess*, *hope*, *see*, and *think*, but no deductive verb was found in the speeches. Below are three examples illustrating the use of the judgmental verbs *know* (6), *believe* (7) and *think* (8).

- (6) I **know** that all our citizens will be better served for it. (LV-EP 37)
- (7) You see, collectively, we **believe** in democracy, transparency, and the rule of law. (LV-EP 11)
- (8) And I **think** we can all agree – CETA was an enormously ambitious undertaking, and will prove to be one of our greatest successes. (LV-EP 17)

The verb *know* in (6) may express definitive truth as well as knowledge or strong belief. According to Hooper (1975, as cited in Palmer, 1986, p. 142) *know* is assertive and semi-factive. Thus, this verb can have epistemic modality meaning with strong degree of engagement. The meaning of *know* expressing definitive truth is distinguished from the epistemic belief. In example (6), the combination of *know* and the modal auxiliary *will* shows Trudeau's strong belief towards the possibility. In other words, Trudeau uses *know* to convince the audience

that the proposition that follows is strongly believed to be the case.

Believe and *believe in* are treated as the same, with both stating an acceptance that something is true without absolute certainty. According to Hooper (1975 as cited in Palmer 1986, p. 142), the verb *believe* states non-factivity with weak assertiveness, and is a form of reports of modal judgments. Being non-factive and weak assertive, *believe* shows a degree of engagement in between low and high. The use of *believe* in example (7) demonstrates that Trudeau includes his audience in believing that democracy, transparency, and the rule of law is right or desirable. Moreover, the use of "you see" emphasizes Trudeau's engagement to the proposition.

Like the verb *believe*, *think* is a non-factive verb with weak assertiveness. *Think* expresses belief or judgment that has been formed in the mind. Judging from its degree of engagement, *think* expresses doubt or uncertainty. The only occurrence of *think* here is in the form of *I think*, which, according to Perkins (1983, p. 147), expresses "simple subjective uncertainty or politeness/ deference". In example (8), Trudeau uses *think* to express both low certainty and politeness. Although the next clause states Trudeau's strong believe with the use of *will*, he is not sure whether the audience agrees. Thus, he uses the hedge *think* to express his low certainty and to avoid forcing the audience to believe as he does.

Unlike judgmental verbs, evidential verbs, according to Hyland (1996), refer to lexical verbs with evidential justification, which covers the speaker's senses (sensory verbs) and the reports of others (quotative verbs). The sensory and quotative verbs are equally used by Trudeau to express evidentiality, with each only occurring twice. The sensory verb found is *hear*, and the quotative verb is *tell* as shown in the examples below

- (9) I **heard** from women and girls who still face inequality in the workplace and violence just because they are women, even in a progressive country like Canada. (LV-UNGA 3)
- (10) [Young Canadians who were frustrated] **told** me that they couldn't get a job because they don't have work experience, and they couldn't get work experience because they don't have a job. (LV-UNGA 2)

The two occurrences of the verb *hear* in the speeches were in the past form and expressed evidentiality. This type of epistemic marker serves evidence, in this case, in the form of what other people said. *Hear* indicates

a non-visual evidential, which shows Trudeau's belief as he lays out a piece of information, but qualifies its validity for him based on his type of evidence (Palmer, 1986, p. 54). In (9), *heard* indicates a non-visual observation by Trudeau regarding the inequality faced by women and girls. Trudeau uses *heard* to offer a piece of information and qualifies its validity by showing that the proposition is based on his hearing observation. Here, the use of *heard* shows Trudeau's low engagement to the proposition since he needed other people's statement to convince the audience.

As in the case of *hear*, *tell* is an epistemic 'hearsay' marker. Serving evidence in the form of what other people have said is an indication of the speaker's low engagement, because the speaker feels the need to support his view with 'secondhand' information. In (10), it can be seen that Trudeau wants to show the audience the unemployment problem, and while the information is obtained from other people's saying, he was there in the field to hear their complaint directly. In this case, Trudeau does not intend to justify the proposition, but instead shows how he got the evidence.

Modal Adverbs

Modal adverbs occurred 17 times. Five different epistemic adverbs were used in the speeches. The modal adverb *only* is the most frequently used (35.3%), then followed by *maybe* (29.4%), and *indeed* (23.5%), while the other two adverbs, *obviously* and *really*, occur only once (5.9%).

A modal adverb as an epistemic modality marker carries the meaning of strengthening or weakening the truth of a proposition. According to Quirk *et al.* (1985), modal adverbs can change the degree of truth in three aspects, namely emphasis, approximation, and restriction. Emphasis is to strengthen a proposition, and approximation has a lower degree of truth than emphasis as it can weaken the truth of a proposition. As for restriction, it limits the focus to certain parts of the sentence as an emphasis. The three aspects are found in the speeches with relatively balanced occurrences.

Emphasis refers to the ability of the modal adverbs to emphasize the negative or positive meaning of a proposition. Thus, modal adverbs with emphasis have the highest degree of engagement among other aspects. *Indeed*, *obviously*, and *really* belong to the emphasis class. Below is an example illustrating the use of *indeed* in the speeches.

- (11) *Indeed*, the whole world benefits from a strong EU. (MAdv-EP 7)

Indeed is a modal adverb used to emphasize the proposition. Such a modal of high certainty strengthens the truth of the proposition. This modal adverb is found in two forms; one occurs as a sole modal in the sentence, and the other occurs with another modal. Trudeau uses *indeed* in (11) to show his strong conviction to the truth of the proposition. In (11), *indeed* is used as the sole epistemic modality marker, emphasizing Trudeau's strong belief that the world benefits from a strong EU.

In contrast to emphasis, approximation functions to reduce the degree of certainty of a proposition. There is only one adverb with approximation aspect in this study, which is *maybe*. The modal adverb *maybe* indicates a lack of certainty or a low possibility. Thus, the use of *maybe* shows that the speaker's belief to what he says is weak. For this reason, in his speeches, Trudeau used *maybe* only in suppositional context, as shown in the example below.

- (12) Now, let's say you're a budding entrepreneur with an innovative product or idea. *Maybe* you're having a tough time getting access to new customers. (MAdv-EP 32)

The use of *maybe* in example (12) indicates a possibility as a result of the supposition "you're a budding entrepreneur with an innovative product or idea". *Maybe* in (12) indicates a tentative possibility, which Trudeau uses as an example to demonstrate that the proposition has a chance to happen. Thus, the use of *maybe* is effective to state his point without sounding self-righteous.

Another aspect which modal adverbs can have is restriction. It is used to emphasize a particular element of the statement. The only case of restriction of epistemic modality marker found in the speeches is *only*. This adverb has a function to lead the audience to focus on a certain part of the proposition. Based on the focus it creates, there are three different functions of *only* out of six occurrences. The first function is to give focus on unexpected or surprising piece of information, as shown in the following example.

- (13) [...] together, your member states represent one of the world's largest economies. Not *only* that, but you are a vital, central player in addressing the challenges that we collectively face as an international community. (MAdv-EP 6)

Only in example (13) is used in the form of a correlative conjunction *not only ... but also*. In this structure, there are two foci which Trudeau attempts to convey, stating that the important proposition is not only one, although the latter is more surprising than the other.

In (13), *only* is used to highlight the noun, with the first noun being "that", and the second being "a vital, central player".

Another function of *only* is to focus on the verb phrase. The following is its sole occurrence in the speeches. By using *only* before the verb phrase, Trudeau wants to point out that the benefits do not cover the other sections of society.

- (14) [...] the current system **only** benefits society's narrow elite. (MAdv-EP 25)

Trudeau also uses *only* to limit the focus in conditional clause. In this case, the conditional itself shows a degree of possibility, and with the additional use of *only*, the degree of engagement is higher. Such an expression is stated by Trudeau in the following example.

- (15) [this anxiety] can be addressed **only** if we ensure that trade is inclusive, and that everyone benefits. (MAdv-EP 29)

In (15), Trudeau has stated a medium degree of engagement of possibility by using real conditional sentence. By using *only*, Trudeau limits the focus to the condition to make it happen. He points out that there is no other way to address the anxiety but to ensure the inclusive trade.

Modal Adjectives

Five different adjectives were used in the 11 occurrences of modal adjectives. The most frequent modal adjective are *confident* (36.4%) and *possible* (36.4%). The other adjectives, *afraid*, *determined*, and *worried*, occurred only once in the speeches.

Modal adjectives used in the speeches are mostly non-assertive, and express certainty and likelihood. Epistemic adjectives expressing certainty are more dominant than those of likelihood, since there is only one adjective of likelihood.

The most frequently used certainty adjective, *confident*, states strong certainty and shows the speaker's high engagement. Thus, this adjective possesses a positive meaning, which can inspire the audience and boost their confidence. Trudeau uses *confident* in the utterance below.

- (16) And I'm **confident** that our new Minister of International Trade, François-Philippe Champagne, will be a strong voice for Canada on the world stage over the coming years. (MAAdj-EP 20)

The use of *confident* in example (16) shows Trudeau's strong belief, which gives the audience assurance although

it is not guaranteed to happen.

The only adjective expressing likelihood is *possible*, which Trudeau uses four times. The adjective *possible* indicates the meaning of what can be done but not certain to happen, or apparently valid. Since *possible* is non-assertive, using it indicates a low belief to the proposition. However, its use with another kind of epistemic modality can modify the degree of the speaker's commitment. Out of four occurrences, there are two cases with harmonic combinations to emphasize its epistemic meaning.

- (17) Canadians know that better is always **possible**. (MAAdj-CD 23)

The use of *possible* in (17) is preceded with *know*, and highlights the speaker's judgment that the case is likely to happen. However, the use of *know* slightly change the meaning, since it gives the utterance higher degree of certainty.

Modal Nouns

Nouns can be used to express epistemic modality, and often have the same meaning as their modal verb forms. However, not every modal noun has its verb form, nor every noun which has its modal verb form has modality meaning. The nouns which express modality are only those followed by complement clause as the proposition. In this study, the modal noun category is not a common way of expressing epistemic modality, since it was used only twice in the speeches. The nouns *anxiety* and *worry* are both found in Trudeau's European Parliament speech. The two nouns can be regarded as uncommon epistemic modality markers.

Anxiety can be used as an epistemic marker since it has a meaning of concern about some uncertain event or unwelcomed possibility. By using *anxiety*, the speaker views the proposition that follows as an unfavorable possibility. Its possibility meaning marks the low value of engagement towards the proposition.

- (18) This **anxiety** towards the economy and trade [...] can be addressed only if we ensure that trade is inclusive [...]. (MN-EP 26)

The modal noun *anxiety* in (18) does not take the *N-that* clause form, instead it takes the form of prepositional phrase. However, it can be paraphrased using *that* as in "The anxiety that the economy and trade only benefits the elites [...] can be addressed only if we ensure that trade is inclusive [...]". The use of *anxiety* does not only indicate the possibility that the economy and trade cannot

benefit everyone, but also the people's negative attitude towards the possibility.

Worry has the same meaning as *anxiety* as an epistemic modal marker. As *anxiety* does, *worry* also indicates the speaker's uncertainty towards the proposition. In the only occurrence of *worry* below, the proposition is in the complement clause.

- (19) [...] the **worry** that our kids won't have access to the same jobs and opportunities that we have – can be addressed only if we ensure that trade is inclusive, and that everyone benefits. (MN-EP 27)

In (19), Trudeau uses *worry* to show his uncertainty if the kids might or might not have access to the same jobs and opportunities as the elders did. The epistemic meaning is highlighted by the combination of modal auxiliary *will* in negative form.

The Functions of Epistemic Modality Markers

Epistemic modality shows the speaker's attitudes towards a proposition. However, in spoken discourse like political speeches, epistemic modality can also show the speaker's attitudes towards the audience. Based on the contextual meanings, the epistemic modality markers used in the speeches function mostly as politeness strategies.

Political speeches as the means to get the audience's support towards the speaker need expressions which protect the audience's as well as the speaker's face. As Coates (1987, p. 120) argues, "epistemic modal forms are a very important means of expressing addressee-oriented meaning". Moreover, Coates (1987) further adds that they "are commonly used in English as negative politeness strategies, as ways of respecting the addressees' need not to be imposed on. Thus, epistemic modality in Trudeau's political speeches was meant to achieve this. The functions to achieve this are varied based on the context and the degree of commitment or engagement. Thus, further analyses of the use of the markers were conducted by classifying the markers based on their degrees of engagement.

The markers were grouped into three degrees of engagement as suggested by Palmer (1986, p. 61). The three degrees of engagement are referred to as low, medium, and high. Out of the 96 epistemic modality markers used in the speeches, 45.8% were used to express a medium degree of engagement. The frequent use of medium engagement is understood to be the safest way for Trudeau to express his judgment, as he does not need to lean in a certain extreme. Then, 29.2% were used to

express high engagement, and 25% low engagement. This seems to suggest that Trudeau shows his strong enough commitment towards what he was saying in the speeches.

Medium engagement epistemic modality includes epistemic markers with the meaning of probability. Trudeau uses the markers with medium engagement as his middle way. Expressions of probability give high certainty to a proposition, but not as certain since the speaker does not guarantee that it is the case. Such expressions are enough to convince the audience without giving much hope. The modal auxiliary *will* with the most occurrences among other markers serves this purpose, as illustrated in the example below.

- (20) We've done all this—and **will** do much more—because we believe we should confront anxiety with a clear plan to deal with its root causes. (MAux-UNGA 15)

In (20), Trudeau expresses Canada's intention to take part in solving the world's problems. The use of *will* here does not merely show the future intention, but also entails a "neutral" commitment. "Neutral" here means not bending towards a certain extreme. It can be understood from the setting of the speech. Example (20) is from Trudeau's first speech in the UN General Assembly as a prime minister. In order to make a good impression as well as strengthening Canada's position, Trudeau states Canada's commitment. However, the use of *will* indicates that the commitment is subject to change. It lessens Canada's weight in the promise while still showing a form of assurance.

Epistemic modality markers expressing high engagement include those with the meaning of certainty. Judging by their meanings, the markers with high degree of engagement serve a persuasive function. The use of high engagement epistemic modality markers in political speeches is understood as the means to inspire full confidence to the audience. This matches one of the characteristics of political speeches, which is persuasive. The most frequently used marker with a high degree of engagement is the modal lexical verb *know*, as shown below.

- (21) We **know** that, in an increasingly connected world, we must choose to lead the international economy, not simply be subjected to its whims. (LV-EP 14)

The lexical verb *know* in (21) emphasizes Trudeau's persuasion that both Canada and EU share the same views and objectives. As it is a speech talking about the recent signing of CETA (Comprehensive Economic

and Trade Agreement) by both parties, Trudeau wants to make sure the audience is convinced that the agreement is the right decision and that their shared views will come to realization through the agreement.

Epistemic modality with low engagement expresses uncertainty, impossibility, improbability, tentative possibility, and hypothetical possibility. Such expressions function as an attempt to be polite to the audience as to avoid offending them. This can be seen from the most frequently used epistemic marker with a low degree of engagement, which is the adverb *maybe*, as shown below.

- (22) And what if you're a consumer looking to buy imported goods, but the cross-border costs are too high? *Maybe* you've had your eye on Manitobah Mukluks, a Canadian, Indigenous-founded company whose products are currently subject to a 17 percent tariff in Europe. (MAdv-EP 33)

The meaning of *maybe* in (22) can be understood as Trudeau's way of making his point without offending any parties. Using presupposition means it does not actually happen to someone, but is a possible occurrence. However, Trudeau involves the audience in the supposed situation by using the pronoun *you*, which may offend the audience. Therefore, Trudeau uses *maybe* to lessen the imposition.

Other markers which do not have supposition meaning also serve as downtoners to avoid offending the audience. This is the case with the modal lexical verb *think* in example (8) above. This verb does not only show Trudeau's lack of certainty, but also enable him to avoid being offensive to the audience, who are the representatives of the European Union country members. Historically, the CETA, which at the moment of the speech was just signed by both Canada and EU, was taking a long and difficult way to be realized. Political disputes with some EU country members impeded the agreement. Thus, there might be some countries which were still in doubt if the agreement was an enormously ambitious undertaking, and would prove to be one of their greatest successes. Looking from its social context, Trudeau wants to show respect when speaking in the European Parliament.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have examined the forms, meanings and functions of epistemic modality markers in Justin Trudeau's political speeches. We have shown that Trudeau employs a variety of epistemic modality markers, especially modal auxiliary and lexical verbs,

to express his judgments. He commonly employs the modal auxiliary *will* to express his opinion in his speeches to build rapport with his audience and give assurance without raising the audience hopes. Furthermore, Trudeau utilizes the various epistemic devices for politeness purposes to gain the audience's support. These devices were employed to protect not only the audience's but also the speaker's face. In short, we can conclude that the use of epistemic modality markers in the speeches serves to persuade the audience. This is in line with what Jowett and O'Donnell (2006) call informative discourse which counts as persuasion. They argue that both informative discourse and persuasion focus on the audience "by allowing them to acquire information, understand the environment, and learn" (Jowett & O'Donnell 2006: 30). They further contend that despite the speakers' clear interests in having their audience agree with their points of view, their interests do not take over those of the audience (Jowett & O'Donnell 2006: 31-32).

On the basis of its meanings and functions, epistemic modality plays important roles in political speeches. It shows the speaker's commitment towards the truth of his utterances, which can save the speaker's image in front of the audience. At the same time, by using epistemic modality, the speaker cannot be fully committed to what he says, thus cannot be blamed if his proposition turns out to be wrong. In other words, epistemic modality is a political device to sound convincing.

This study has focused primarily on the forms, meanings and social functions of epistemic modality markers in three political speeches delivered by Justin Trudeau. Future research might examine a larger sample of political speeches not only by Justin Trudeau but also other important world figures to better understand how epistemic modality as well as other types of modality are exploited to communicate messages to persuade the audience. Another interesting line of research might include investigation of stance in political discourse and how stance is expressed to indicate the speaker's positioning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for her/his illuminating and invigorating comments and suggestions.

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APPENDIX

1. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Address to the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, retrieved from <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/09/20/prime-minister-justin-trudeaus-address-71st-session-united-nations-general-assembly>.
2. Address by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to the European Parliament, retrieved from <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/02/16/address-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-european-parliament>.
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