

**Q“GENDER AND HEDGES IN POLITICAL PUBLIC SPEAKING:
A CASE STUDY ON BARACK OBAMA AND JILL STEIN IN US
PRESIDENTIAL PUBLIC ELECTION 2012”**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with hedges uses by Obama and Stein in their perspective campaign speeches. The purpose of this study was to explore hedges in political discourse, more specifically the ones used by the said candidates in their perspective campaign speeches back in the United States public election held in 2012. The methods chosen for this research were field study, critical discourse analysis and quantitative analysis. The study accommodates that the use of hedges were higher in Obama’s speeches with total 342 cases, meanwhile 150 occurrences were found in Stein’s—meaning 492 hedges in the form of words and phrases were found. It also shows that Obama and Stein gave preference to hedges in the type of modal lexical verbs with 257, followed by approximators, and adjectival, adverbial and nominal phrases—111 and 44 cases, respectively. Other hedges: modal lexical verbs, introductory phrases, conditional clause and relation hedges, were quite varied in number.

Keyword: *hedges, gender and language, political public speaking*

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini meneliti tentang penggunaan *hedges* oleh Obama dan Stein dalam pidato kampanye mereka. Tujuan dari studi ini adalah untuk menjabarkan *hedges* dalam wacana politik, khususnya *hedges* yang digunakan oleh kedua kandidat tersebut dalam kampanye pemilihan presiden Amerika pada tahun 2012. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini ialah analisis wacana kritis dan kuantitatif. Studi ini mengakomodasi bahwa penggunaan *hedges* yang lebih tinggi ada dalam pidato Obama dengan jumlah 342 kasus, sementara 150 kasus hanya ditemukan di pidato milik Stein's. Maka, sebanyak 492 *hedges* dalam bentuk kata-kata dan frase telah ditemukan dalam penelitian ini. Hal ini juga menunjukkan bahwa Obama dan Stein memberikan preferensi untuk *hedges* dalam jenis verba modal leksikal dengan 257, diikuti oleh approximators, dan kata sifat, adverbial dan frase nominal sejumlah 111 dan 44 kasus, masing-masing. *Hedges* dalam bentuk lainnya: verba leksikal modal, frase pengantar, klausa kondisional dan hubungan *hedges*, cukup bervariasi jumlahnya.

Keyword: *hedges, gender and language, political public speaking*

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Pembimbing 1

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1. Introduction

It is in women's nature, that they are more focused on building intimacy than independence when communicating; therefore, it is to be known that women are inclined to see communication as a way of developing connections and intimacy; whereas, men are not quite fond of the idea of talking too much before doing something. They see it as an act reflecting dependence—they prefer the exact opposite term, independence.

The starting point of language sexism is when Lakoff proposed a theory about women's language in their professional in 1973. Hedges, one of linguistics features that she claimed to be women's language are referred as words played upon unbinding an intended meaning to sound less unfriendly and less assertive and that hedges show women's uncertainty as well as politeness (Lakoff, 1973).

The two puzzle pieces: women's and men's distinct attitudes and Lakoff's theory, thus, inspires this study to examine how male and female politicians (i.e. Barack Obama and Jill Stein) differ from one other in terms of hedges uses. The increasing number of woman politicians, taking parts in the politic field nowadays has also required to be taken into account as the reason why this study is conducted. For, if we have to look at the nature of women's language—that they tend to act rather tentatively—then, naturally the question occurs, how they manage to be a part of government official where they are demanded to be as assertive, persuasive as men generally. Besides, politicians are demanded to gain mass's trust and support in leading their people. Out of the achievement of the candidate itself, his or her ability to persuade the public is another crucial ability that the candidate needs to possess—which closely correlate with the prosperity in arranging his or her language use into a well accepted and public friendly oratory speech. Therefore, this study is conducted in order to examine the use of hedges by man and woman politicians and is entitled *Gender and Hedges in Political Public Speaking: A Case Study on Jill Stein and Barack Obama in US Presidential Public Election 2012*. This study applies Lakoff's theory regarding language and gender as a starting point to determine whether hedges as women's speech marker still can be found after more than four decades after its discovery.

The result of this study is expected to explain: i) What are the differences and/or similarities between hedges used by Obama and Stein; ii) What are the most common use and meaning of hedges by Obama and Stein?; and iii) Who is dominant in using hedges between Obama and Stein?

Based on the research questions, this study aims to:

- a. To identify the similarity and/or difference in the use of hedges by Obama and Stein.
- b. To identify the most common use and meaning of hedges by Obama and Stein.
- c. To identify who uses hedges the most between Obama and Stein.

The results of this study are expected to:

- 1) Give contribution in the field of applied linguistics, more specifically gender-related linguistic studies.
- 2) Change most people's mindset that being different does not mean that one side could act inconsiderate to the other, rather it will only be a beauty of nature when we see it as a harmony that complete both sides.
- 3) Boost one's confidence in public speaking regardless of the gender.

2. Review of Related Literature

Hedges are also used to convey uncertainty of the speaker, modal auxiliary verbs, for instance. This is in accordance with Hyland's (1996, cited in Laurinaitytė, 2011) claim that modal auxiliary verbs express lack of knowledge, of the speaker as well his/her uncertainty and help to avoid direct criticism. In sentence 1b for example the hedge used, i.e: *possible*, expresses *possibility* of the statement to be true or the other way around.

According to Grice (1975) as well as Valeika and Verikaitė (2010) (cited in Laurinaitytė, 2001), there are four principles of hedges:

1. Quality hedges, dealing with accurateness: *as far as I know, I guess, I may be mistaken,*
2. Quantity hedges deal with quality of information: *as you probably know, to cut a long story short, I won't bore you with all details,*
3. Relation hedges: *, I don't know if it's important, but, not to change the subject, oh, by the way, anyway, well, anyway, as for/to, speaking of/talking of,*
4. Manner hedges: *but I'm not sure if this makes sense, this may be a bit confusing, but I don't know if this is clear at all.*

There are three main functions of hedges: i) as a form of face threatening act of the speaker to the listener as well as to signal distance also to avoid absolute statements; ii) as strategies to reflect speaker's certainty of knowledge accurately; and iii) as politeness strategies (Salager-Meyer, 1997; cited in Nivales, 2011). Accordance with these functions, some researchers divided hedges into some big categories:

1. Modal auxiliary verbs
2. Modal lexical verbs adjectival
3. Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal verbs
4. Hedging by passive voice
5. Introductory phrases
6. Conditional clause

3. Research Methods

This research, by nature, is a quantitative study as it explores the quantity data of hedges occurrences in Obama's and Stein's speeches. Furthermore, the study was conducted in three phases: pre-research, research and post-research. Pre research was a stage where the subjects of this study are determined. In this case, they are Barack Obama and Jill Stein who actively participate in politics fields of government and states in the United States of America.

The second stage was research. In this stage, the writer gathered all the data needed. The data were obtained on the internet in form of video recording and the transcripts of both candidates' campaign speeches. Finally, the last stage was post research, in which the writer did all the counting and analyzed the result of data collected.

Data Collection

First of all, the primary data from subjects collected are in the form of videos uploaded on the internet via YouTube. There was no distinguish specification of the data—for both candidates have different style of doing the oratory as well as other condition in

term of the audience, length of speech. These data are Jill Stein and Barack Obama's campaign speech recorded back in 2012. The length of these video are varied from 13-40 minutes.

Next, after downloading these videos, the study was focused on gaining the authentic transcription of these videos. These texts were also gathered from the internet from the candidates' official websites and America's official governments. In addition, in order to gather the most reliable data, the transcription of those speeches was crosschecked by watching the videos and reading through them simultaneously with constant pausing when editing was necessary.

Finally, the total number of 14,330 words was found in all four speeches; 9,031 and 5,299 words used by Obama and Stein respectively, excluding audiences' responses. Furthermore, secondary data of the study were in the form of electronic books, and articles on the internet. These supported the researcher's job in conducting the study in the most objective way.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data of a study is considered as one of the most principle work of the researcher, as the veracity and objectivity of the scholar are truly desired.

- Identification

First step of data analysis was identifying all hedges based on categorization opposed by Salager-Meyer that were used by both candidates in their campaign speeches. The study identified words or phrases the candidates used that are considered as hedges based on the categorization within the complete sentences, followed by presenting the number of appearances in form percentages.

- Classification

In this stage, the data were classified based on hedges categorization by Salager-Meyer approach, after noting hedges used by both subjects of study. The study also exerted frequency counts. Frequency counts were employed to show the percentage of the use of hedges by both candidates.

- Description

The last stage was description. After classifying the data the most common hedges used are naturally known. In which the study, then, described what hedges appear on Obama's speeches that do not appear on Stein's, and vice versa.

- Explanation

The final step was explanation. This study is expected to explain: i) what is the most frequently occurred hedges in both candidates speeches, ii) who of the two candidates used hedges the most, iii) what those hedges imply to the speaker's mind and feelings towards what they are talking about, and iv) where the differences and/or similarities between hedges used by Obama and Stein lie.

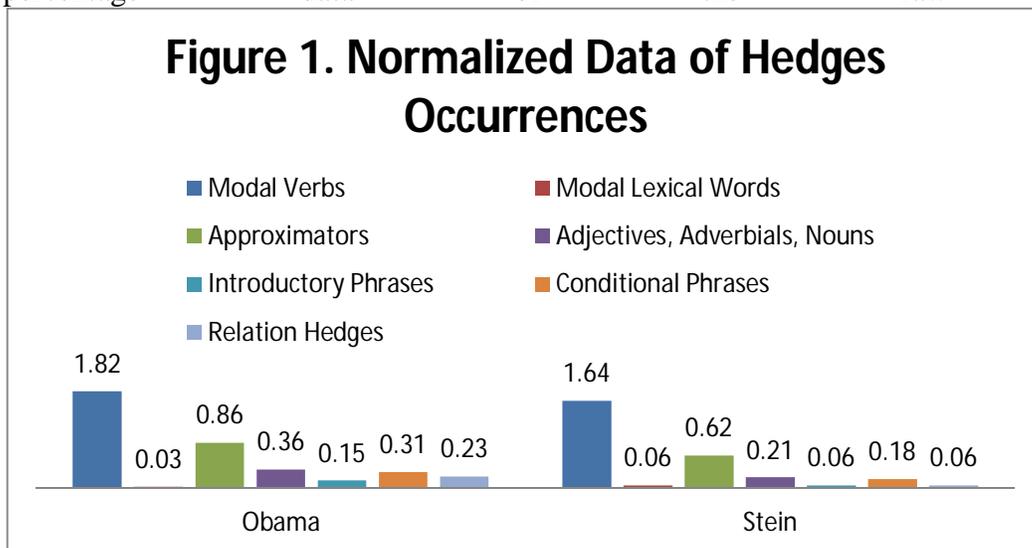
4. Findings and Discussions

From the total of four speeches, two speeches for each candidate and containing 14,330 words, a total 492 hedges in various types were found. Raw data those hedges are as followed:

Table 1. The Frequency of Hedges Occurrences

	Obama	Stein	Total
Modal Verbs	165	87	252
Modal Lexical Verbs	3	3	6
Approximators	78	33	111
Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Phrases	33	11	44
Introductory Phrases	14	3	17
Conditional Clause	28	10	38
Relation Hedges	21	3	24
TOTAL (Raw)	342	150	492
Normalized	3.78	2.83	3.43

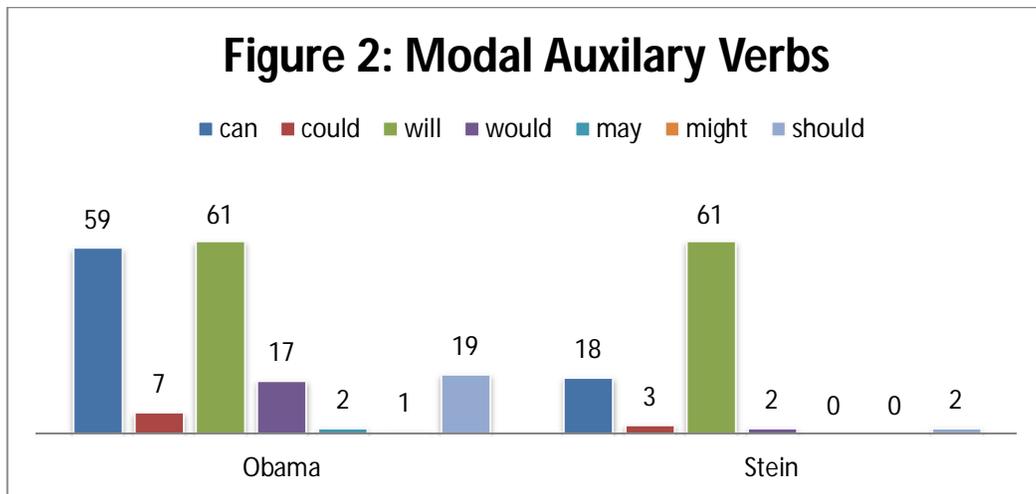
Based on table 1, the occurrences of hedges in modal verb forms are obviously the greatest compared to other types of hedges. From data collected several hedges outside the ones suggested by Salager–Meyer are also possible to analyze. *Figure 1* below presents the percentage data of the raw data.



Normalized data above presents converted number of hedges used by both candidates as they have different numbers of words.

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs were the most frequent compared to other forms of hedges. Out of 252 words in modal verb forms, there were total seven different types of modal verbs that occur: *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *may*, *might* and *should*. The number of occurrences of modal auxiliary verbs used by Obama and Stein were different in term of the variability—Obama used all seven types of modals while Stein only used 5.



Both Obama and Stein preferred using *will* in their speeches. This was probably due to the fact that, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *will* is “used for talking about or predicting the future”. Political speeches, especially the ones delivered before the election, i.e. campaign speeches, in fact deal a lot about predicting the future; therefore, *will* is often used. Obviously, Stein “predicted” the future more frequent than Obama did; the difference was quite significant: 0.48 per one hundred words. Apparently, Stein discussed about probability of changes she offered as a persuasive strategy. For example:

(1) *But it will save trillions by streamlining the massive health insurance bureaucracy and by putting an end to runaway medical inflation.* (Jill Stein, August 12th, 2012)

Finally, despite a great difference between the percentage of the use of *will* by Stein and Obama, he used more modal auxiliary verbs more than Stein did. It is clearly shown in normalized data (see *Figure 1*). Moreover, it was caused by the lack of hedge type variation Stein used, as she did not use some hedges at all. However, there are also similarities of hedges used by both candidates; they used *will* most frequently compared to other modal verbs. In addition, the main meaning modal auxiliary verbs have, i.e. possibility, can account for the popularity of hedges in the form of modal verbs in pre-election speeches such as campaign speeches. Furthermore, a careful analysis of the results showed that modal verbs expressing possibility or probability prevailed over the ones expressing prediction or speculation and likelihood.

Modal Lexical Verbs

Unlike the use of modal auxiliary verbs that were quite varied, only two modal lexical verbs appeared in the total of twelve sentences, i.e. three uses for each candidate. These two words were *think* and *say*. Both raw and normalized data of modal lexical verbs are presented in a *table* below:

Hedges	Obama	Stein	Obama	Stein
Think	2	1	0,02	0,02
Say	1	2	0,01	0,04

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *think* expresses “a particular idea or opinion about something/somebody”. In other words, this modal lexical verb helps

the speaker to express his/her attitude towards the propositional information as an opinion rather than as a fact in order to ensure that he/she is familiar with alternative views on the subject.

(2) *I **thought** that was a good idea.* (Barack Obama, September 12th 2012)

Stein used *say* (i.e. synonyms with *suggest*) as twice more frequent as Obama did.

(3) *As Alice Walker **says**, the biggest way people give up power is by not knowing they have it in the first place.* (Jill Stein, September 10th 2012)

The use of *say* in sentence (3) indicates that Stein was attempting to minimize her involvement personally as the speaker; additionally, this modal lexical verb helps to express the opinion but at the same time does not express it categorically; therefore, Stein's public image is saved, for one of the function of hedges is also as a strategy to save the speaker's own face.

In conclusion, Obama used modal lexical verbs as a strategy to minimize an absolute effect of his speech. Meanwhile Stein did so to save her image as well as self disclaimer involvement to the statement.

Approximators

111 approximators of degree, indefinite quantity, indefinite frequency and time were found in political speeches delivered by Obama and by Stein. It was a great deal of hedges compared to other types of hedges, except modal auxiliary verbs. Perhaps, it is due to the meaning they denote, i.e. indefiniteness. *Figure 4* presents the raw data (see *Figure 4*) of approximators in general.

		Obama	Stein	Obama	Stein
Approximators of Degree	approximately	0	0	0	0
	about	0	0	0	0
	roughly	0	0	0	0
Indefinite quantifiers	more (than)	33	11	0.36	0.24
	many/much	5	4	0.05	0.07
	less (than)	7	1	0.07	0.01
	little/a little	3	0	0.03	0
	most	1	3	0.01	0.06
	over	2	6	0.02	0.11
	a few/few/fewer	2	1	0.02	0.02
	some	1	0	0.01	0
	several	0	1	0	0.02
	at least	0	1	0	0.02
Indefinite frequency and time	never	8	5	0.08	0.09
	always	3	0	0.03	0
	sometimes	2	0	0.02	0
	ever	11	0	0.12	0

More has a meaning of indefiniteness and no one claiming to know the exact number it is meant; therefore, it is fairly appropriate to use in political speeches, especially for ones delivered before the election such as these campaign rallies in promising something in indefinite quantity. For example:

- (4) *You can choose a future where **more** Americans have the chance to gain the skills they need to compete, no matter how old they are or how much money they have.* (Barack Obama, September 6th 2012)

Finally, despite the fact that some approximators prevailed in Obama's and Stein's speeches, apparently, the campaign speeches deal with what may or may not happen in the future as well as indefinite quantities of something; moreover, politicians tend to speak about indefinite frequency and time; therefore, the usage of approximators was quite great. *Table 2* also shows that Obama was a little bit more indefinite than Stein though the difference is not that significant.

Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Phrases

44 cases of adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases are found in Obama's and Stein's speeches.

		Obama	Stein	Obama	Stein
Nouns	-	0	0	0	0
Adjectives	possible	4	0	0.04	0
	so/very	14	10	0.15	0,18
	the very + superlative	1	0	0,01	0
Adverbs	quite	0	0	0	0
	maybe	4	0	0.04	0
	somehow	2	0	0.02	0
	nearly	5	1	0.05	0.02
	almost	3	0	0.03	0

Nearly is a hedging device which, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, has the meaning of "almost; not quite; not completely"; therefore, it fulfils one of the main functions hedges have, i.e. fuzziness. For example:

- (5) *It's been such an honor and an inspiration to get to know all of you, or at least **nearly** all of you over this past year.* (Jill Stein, September 10th 2012)

In case of Obama, *possible* is the most used adjective carrying the meaning of capable of happening or it is likely for something to happen in the future. For example:

- (6) *Eight years later that hope has been tested by the cost of war, by one of the worst economic crises in history and by political gridlock that's left us wondering whether it's still even **possible** to tackle the challenges of our time.* (Barack Obama, September 6th 2012)

Maybe which is "used when someone is not certain that something will happen or that something is true or is a correct number" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary) was used by Obama only. Obviously there is no case of *maybe* in Stein's speeches. *Somehow*, which also denotes uncertainty like *maybe*, was used more frequently by Obama in both speeches.

This modal adverb attenuates the strength and effect of this statement and minimizes the threat it may cause to the face of the speaker. Apparently, if there were no *nearly*, the statement would sound as an absolute statement.

In conclusion, adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases were used as hedges far more frequently by Obama than Stein who hardly used any (see Figure 4). It is rather hard to explain why but perhaps this happened due to the different styles of the two candidates, wherein Obama spoke without having text and vice versa for Stein that caused Stein to be engaged with what is written on her paper rather than using and expressing the material of her speech freely.

Introductory Phrases

Only 14 cases (0.15) of introductory phrases were found in the two political speeches of Obama; moreover, only one kind of introductory phrase was used: believe. Stein did, on the one hand, not use any introductory phrases at all.

Only 14 cases (0.15) of introductory phrases were found in the two political speeches of Obama only; moreover, only one kind of introductory phrase was used: *believe*.

(7) ***I don't believe*** that rolling back regulations on Wall Street will help the small-businesswoman expand, or the laid-off construction worker keep his home. (Barack Obama, September 6th 2012)

Due to the usage of this hedge in the form of an introductory phrase, i.e. *I believe*, in sentence (7), the statement is presented as an opinion rather than as a categorical, indisputable statement.

Apparently, introductory phrases in a statement appeared as an opinion, as a personal point of view. However, there was a great difference between the usage of introductory phrases by Obama and by Stein as explained above. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that introductory phrases are not widely used as hedging devices to hedge political speeches.

Conditional Clause

In total 4 speeches, a total 35 hedges in the form of conditionals of nearly all types were found. 24 cases of type 0 were found in Obama's speeches and only 4 cases of type 1. Meanwhile, in Stein speeches there are four cases of type 0 and 2 cases of type 2. *Figure 8* below presents the normalized data in percentage.

Apparently, type 0 conditionals refer to the time of now or always; moreover, although the situation is hypothetical or possible, they are often used to talk about general truths, meaning the result is always true.

(8) *And that was my real wake up call that **if we want to change the broken political system**, what we need is not just a new law, or a new lobbying effort, or a fresh face in the same old corrupt system.* (Jill Stein, September 10th 2012)

The second place was taken by type 1 conditionals. The normalized data shows that type 1 conditionals, which, according to Alexander (2003; cited in Laurinaityte, 2011), are used for "asking/talking about something that is quite possible" were used more often by Obama only. Apparently, Obama preferred referring to the hypothetical future while delivering campaign speeches. For example:

(9) *We will never forget you, and **so long as** I'm commander in chief, we will sustain the strongest military the world has ever known.* (Barack Obama, September 6th 2012)

Type 1 conditional in sentence (27) keeps the balance between the possibility and the likelihood. At the same time the use of this conditional shows adherence to the phenomenon of politeness as it does not impose opinion or will upon the listener. If when had been used instead of if, Obama would have sounded rudely or haughtily; therefore, it attenuates the force of what could possibly be face-threatening.

The last one is type 2, which was used by Stein only. Finally, though the meaning of type 2 conditionals slightly differs from the one of type 3 conditionals in that the former type refers to the imagined situation in the present. They are often considered as a feature of political speeches delivered before the election, which is quite contradictory to the result of this study in which there was barely any type 2 occurrences. In fact, Obama did not use it at all.

Relation Hedges

There was a small amount of relation hedges. Out of all relation hedges *you know* is one of the most used ones. The function of a hedging phrase *you know* is to express uncertainty and appeal to the addressee's reassurance:

(14) *You know, in a world of new threats and new challenges, you can choose leadership that has been tested and proven.* (Barack Obama, September 6th 2012)

The speaker's (i.e. Obama's) uncertainty also appeared even obvious after the occurrence of modal *can*. However, *you know* in the example (29) not only saves the speaker's face, but it also expresses positive politeness, as it indicated speaker's attempt to build a close relationship with the audience and minimize threat.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of 4 political speeches delivered by Obama and by Stein showed that hedges as mitigating devices are often employed because the tentative nature of political speeches does not allow politicians to state their opinions conclusively. Therefore, based on the results of this research, following conclusions can be made.

First of all, both Obama and Stein's speeches were heavily hedged; furthermore, most of the time, they used hedges to convey possibility, showing that both were uncertain with the matter they are saying. Some hedges they used (i.e. approximators of degree) also indicated a great deal of fuzziness. Furthermore, there was a tendency of the two candidates to use some hedges as a device to save their public image. Apparently, there were no significant dissimilarities of hedges used by Obama and Stein. The only difference lays on the use of conditional phrases, wherein Obama used a little of type 1 and null type 2, while it is the other way around in case of Stein—null percent of type 1 and some occurrences of type 2.

Secondly, based on the results of this study modal auxiliary verbs were the most used hedges by both Obama and Stein and followed by approximators. Finally, it was proven in this study that Obama had more hedges in his speeches than Stein did. This is contrast with the theory that states women use more hedges than men do. This can be seen from the proportion of hedges in Obama's speeches presented by 3.63, meanwhile Stein only 2.67 per 100 words. Although, in some types of hedges, *will*, for instance, Stein did use more hedge than Obama did, the types of hedges used by Obama were more varied than Stein—

Obama used a total 37 types of hedges in all 342 occurrences, wherein Stein only applied 24 in the total of 150 uses. Therefore, this study opposes Lakoff's proposal claiming hedges is one of women's language features.

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