



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

## **Modal verbs and politeness strategies in political discourse**

Boicu, Ruxandra

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Journalism and Communication  
Studies

14 December 2007

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/45913/>  
MPRA Paper No. 45913, posted 07 Apr 2013 02:28 UTC

# MODAL VERBS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

RUXANDRA BOICU\*

## ABSTRACT

This research consists in the analysis of one of Ashley Mote's political speeches, from the point of view of the speaker's use of the modal verbs that contribute to the mitigation or the aggravation of the illocutionary forces released by the speech acts they belong to. The analysis focuses on the two main semantic values of modal verbs in English, the epistemic and the deontic. Mote's discursive strategies are mainly underlain by directive speech acts, due to their "competitive" character (Leech 1983), while "convivial" acts (commissive and expressive) are not manifest in his speech. According to Searle, commissive acts can be successful only if the speaker meets the preliminary condition of credibility. The politician's independent status does not enable him to perform successful commissive acts.

In exchange, in his speech all the directive acts that contain modal verbs are potential face-threatening acts.

By their intrinsic meaning, modal verbs attenuate the illocutionary force of the directive speech acts in both ways. Due to context, their pragmatic meaning either mitigates this force through positive or negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) or aggravates it using the same resources.

The same speech act may mitigate and so protect Mote's political allies faces, while aggravating and so damaging his political opponents' faces. There is an interesting control of the modals meaning gradation, in the analyzed text.

**Keywords: modality, deontic, epistemic, mitigation, aggravation**

## 1. Introduction

**1.1.** This research reveals the role that the speaker's intentional, selective use of modal verbs plays in the articulation of directive speech acts. These directive speech acts are interpreted as Face-Threatening Acts (Brown and Levinson 1987) subordinated to the specific strategies of political discourse of discrediting the political opponent and flattering the political allies and the audience.

---

\* Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, University of Bucharest

Represented as an instance of spatially and temporally identified verbal interaction, the political locutor's intervention dialogically contains the possible reaction of the actual or virtual public, conceived as interlocutor.

After the presentation of the lexical, semantic and pragmatic differences manifest within the grammatical category of modal auxiliary verbs, the research concerns the pragmatic principle of politeness, and the concept of face-work, the way they were approached in specialized literature.

The speech acts that contain modal verbs are divided into mitigating face-threatening acts and aggravating face-threatening acts, analyzing both main semantic values of modal verbs, epistemic and deontic, and following the semantic gradation from absolute to relative meaning.

## **1.2. The Political Speech Analyzed**

Ashley Mote, a British independent nationalist politician, an MEP belonging to the political group *Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty*, uttered his allocution on October 21, 2006, at a one-day conference organized by Right Now magazine, on "The Making and Meaning of Britishness". His public proper could not have been numerous; it could have been made up of historians, right-wing personalities, nationalist politicians, sympathizers, etc. Yet, the organizers hoped the "Right Now" magazine readership would be more numerous.

## **2. Modality and the Modal Verbs**

Language was first subject to the truth conditional laws of logic, until intensional logic accepted that there is truth relativity in language (speech), an idea that led to the notion of 'possible worlds', in order to explain modal or temporal operators, among other linguistic aspects that rely on the 'points of view' difference between language (grammar) and discourse.

Charles Bally (1932) took over the mediaeval proposition analysis. Proposition used to be decomposed into *modus* and *dictum*: *dictum* corresponds to the propositional content, while *modus* stands for the speaker's subjective attitude towards *dictum*. The linguist points out that modality may be both explicit and implicit and the relation between *modus* and *dictum* is represented by a scale, having the explicit at one of its ends and the implicit or synthetic at the

other, where modality is incorporated in *dictum*. Modal verbs are implicit morphological manifestations of modality.

## 2.1. The Meanings of the Modal Verbs: Semantic and Pragmatic

**2.1.1.** Out of the numerous interpretations of the system of meanings attached to modal verbs, several start from the assumption of semantic indetermination, or even ambiguity and polysemy: “Les auxiliaires modaux sont polyvalents: ils peuvent exprimer plusieurs valeurs modales suivant le contexte et, dans certains cas, ils admettent même une plurilecture” (Cristea 102).

Palmer (2001: 7) operates two binary distinctions: the former separates ‘non-modal’ from ‘modal’ and is associated with the notional contrast between ‘factual’ and ‘non-factual’ or ‘real’ and ‘unreal’, although a more satisfactory terminology has been used in recent years: ‘realis’ and ‘irrealis’. Modality belongs to the ‘irrealis’ domain, along with some tenses and moods.

The second distinction Palmer makes divides modal verbs in keeping with the two main semantic categories: epistemic and deontic.

Halliday (1970), in his systemic grammar, distinguishes between two systems that he calls ‘modality’ and ‘modulation’. The former concerns the utterance through which the speaker subjectively qualifies his involvement in the truth value of the propositional content. It is associated with semantic categories such as ‘probable’, ‘possible’, ‘virtually certain’ and ‘certain’. This system derives from what Halliday considers to be the interpersonal metafunction of language.

Modulation concerns the ideational metafunction of the content and of the conditions that influence it. Its types are defined in terms of ‘permission’, ‘obligation’, ‘ability’, ‘desire’, etc. The cause of ambiguity would be the fact that the two systems are semantically similar, since they both underlie the same group of modal verbs.

Leech (1983: 87) deals with a logical system underlying modality that is apparent in modal verbs: “there are close relations of meaning between the four verbs can, may, must and have to.” The author represents these relations in the following diagram:

<i>Permission/</i>	MAY	MUST	<i>Obligation/</i>
<i>Possibility</i>	CAN	HAVE TO	<i>Necessity</i>

“There is a special kind of meaning-contrast between ‘permission’ and ‘obligation’, and between ‘possibility’ and ‘necessity’: this contrast may be termed INVERSENESS (the two senses may be imagined as opposite sides of the same coin). In this way:

‘permission’ is the inverse of ‘obligation’

‘possibility’ is the inverse of ‘necessity’”

In the case of deontic modals, the author takes into account an additional dimension which concerns the interlocutors’ involvement in the utterance. Consequently, within the inverse relation between ‘permission’ and ‘obligation’, the additional distinction on deontic sources (either the utterer or another person/institution), may explain the difference between MAY and CAN expressing ‘permission’ and, respectively, between MUST and HAVE TO on ‘obligation’.

“What makes it so difficult to account for the use of these words (modal verbs)... is that their meaning has both a logical and a practical (or pragmatic element). We can talk about them in terms of such logical notions as ‘permission’ and ‘necessity’, but this done, we still have to consider ways in which these notions become remoulded by the psychological pressures of everyday communication between human beings: factors such as condescension, politeness, tact, and irony” (Leech 1983: 71).

**2.1.2.** There are also mono-semantic approaches of modal verbs meanings by linguists such as Perkins (1983), Walton (1988) or Groefsema (1991). They rely on the assumption that semantic indetermination of modal verbs is solved by contextual factors. For instance, the semantic meaning of CAN, MAY, MUST and SHOULD is rooted in the notion of ‘potentiality’: they denote potential existence or occurrence of events, acts or circumstances, in the present stage of the actual world, unlike the past forms that concern the same type of potentiality but in a remote stage of the actual world. This would be the adequate semantic foundation to explain their role in the interpretive process.

## **2.2. Modality and Subjectivity**

As stated by the enunciation theory, modality marks are traces of subjectivity at the utterance level. They contain the utterer’s relation with her/his interlocutor and with her/his utterance. Bally considered that modality coincides with the subjectivity of ‘I’ and that this

‘modal subject’ is the utterance subject who reacts before a representation. The modal subject is responsible for epistemic and deontic judgments or evaluations (‘axiological subject’).

There are authors that limit modality to the first person subject. Other authors conceive modality in the broad sense, as the expression of the utterance subject subjectivity, even if the subject may or may not coincide with the utterer.

### 2.3. Classifications and Scales of the Modal Verbs

Hoffman (1993) considers there are four main modalities contained by logical, epistemic, deontic and capacity modals. He puts forward that: “Natural languages have three basic logical modal concepts: [Nec] necessary, [Psb] possible and [Imp] impossible; the first two are defined and given symbols in logic” (112).

The linguist adds: “The big division in English **linguistic** modality is between the epistemic ones which relate propositions one to another, and the others which generally have some subject-orientation” (113; emphasis in the original).

The author analyzes the similarities between the two main series of modal verbs, epistemic modals (MoE) and social deontic modals (MoD) and parallels them with quantifiers (Qnt) and adverbs of frequency (AvF), in a table of seven degrees of ‘strength’ concerning all the four classes of elements.

“These seven degrees of ‘strength’ range from [Nec] (necessary) down to [Imp] (impossible) and are found in many guises in most languages, though specific words may well be missing (as in MoD, and especially for the capacity modals) for intermediate terms. Quantifiers form the most complete scale in most languages” (Hoffman 1993: 111).

The correlation among the above-mentioned categories is shown in the following Table (Hoffman 1993: 112):

	<b>MoD</b>	<b>MoE</b>	<b>AvF</b>	<b>Qnt</b>
[Nec]	must	must	always	all, every
[Apx-Nec]	should	should	usually	most
	-	may/could	often	many, much
[Psb]	can	may	sometimes	some

	-	might	occasionally	a few
[Apx-Imp]	should not	should not	seldom, rarely	few
[Imp]	must not	must not, can't	never	none, no

### 3. The Pragmatic Principle of Politeness

**3.1.** *Leech* (1983: 143) makes a thorough presentation of the politeness principle (PP) and brings arguments in favor of the importance and the place that politeness should have in pragmatics. He accredits the idea that PP is as important as Grice's cooperative principle (CP); if CP plays a regulating part in conversation, PP plays the more important part of keeping social balance and constructing friendly relations between interlocutors. That is the basis on which interlocutors are supposed to become cooperative.

Concerning the relation between speech acts and politeness *Leech* (175-177) prefers to call Searle's 'directive' acts 'impositive' in order to designate the 'competitive' nature of these illocutions. 'Negative politeness' characterizes this competitive category of acts, whose most direct linguistic manifestation is the imperative mood. Its use implies there is no alternative for the hearer than obey.

As for 'commissive' speech acts, they tend to be convivial and convey 'positive politeness', the same as 'expressive' acts that are intrinsically polite, excepting the case when the speaker's psychological attitude expresses blaming or accusing in relation to the hearer. For declarative acts, politeness is irrelevant.

*Leech* considers 'tact' to be one category of politeness which concerns impositive and commissive speech acts, while politeness is presented as a maxim in interpersonal rhetoric, along with other maxims such as 'generosity' or 'relation' that are meant to keep the balance between 'costs and benefits'.

**3.2.** The concept of 'face' conceived by *Goffman* (1967: 9) signifies: "la valeur sociale positive qu'une personne revendique effectivement à travers la ligne d'action que les autres supposent qu'elle a adoptée au cours d'un contact particulier." He calls 'face-work' all the actions undertaken by a person in order to avoid losing her/his face or making the others lose theirs.

With Brown and Levinson (1987: 66), the notion of ‘face’ is defined as a person’s public self-image, “something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction.” Two types of face are distinguished: the negative face - the person’s desire to preserve her/his freedom of acting (‘territory and self-determination’) and the positive face - the person’s desire to see her/his self-image respected by the others. Every speech act is a potential ‘face-threatening act’ (FTA): it potentially threatens either the speaker’s or the hearer’s faces or both. According to the authors, more than information exchanges, conversations concern face maintenance and redress.

Politeness strategies have the function of avoiding FTAs or of diminishing their consequences. There are two kinds of politeness as they are meant to protect either the participants’ positive or negative faces.

“Positive politeness is approach-based; it ‘anoints’ the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S (speaker)’s wants are H (hearer)’s wants (e.g. by treating him as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants (desires to preserve one’s face) and personality traits are known and liked. [...] Negative politeness ... is essentially avoidance-based, and realizations of negative politeness strategies consist in assurances that the speaker recognizes and respects ... the addressee’s freedom of action” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 75).

**3.3.** A useful approach for the present research is *Kerbrat-Orecchioni’s* (1992) theory of ‘verbal taxemes’, high or low places or positions that the locutor/speaker imposes onto her/himself or onto her/his interlocutors in verbal interactions, by controlling turn-taking, the duration and volume of interventions, interruptions and intrusions, thematic content, content interpretation, etc.

The taxemic value of speech acts is conceived as the most complex and important category within the set of verbal markers of place (position) relations (94-95). It may be correlated to the speech acts function of ‘Face-Threatening Acts’.

“Le principe general du fonctionnement taxémique des AL [actes de langages] est le suivant :

(1) L1 (locuteur) se met en position haute par rapport à L2 lorsqu’il accomplit un acte potentiellement menaçant pour l’une ou l’autre des faces de L2,

- face négative : ordre, requête...c'est-à-dire toute la série des <directifs>, qui constituent pour L2 des espèces d’incursions territoriales;

- face positive : critique, invective, moquerie, raillerie, désaccords en tous genres...c'est-à-dire tout l'ensemble des comportements vexatoires, qui sont susceptibles d'infliger à L2 une blessure narcissique plus une moins grave" (95).

Under (2), the linguist's analysis is completed with the speech acts through which L1 places herself/himself in low positions by promising (negative face-threatening) or thanking (positive face-threatening) acts.

As to the interpersonal relations ('relationèmes'), due to the interlocutors' respective status, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992: 123) conceives two axes, a horizontal one that concerns the expression of 'distance' and a vertical one that expresses 'hierarchy'. Here is the synthetic way the two axes are articulated:

[égalité] + [distance]	[égalité] + [intimité]	[hiérarchie]+[distance]	[hiérarchie]+[intimité]
------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------	-------------------------

There is a complex correspondence between linguistic manifestations and politeness types. For instance, for negative politeness that affects L2, the linguistic means employed have an attenuating function. They are softeners that mitigate or downgrade illocutionary forces, either substituting indirect speech acts for direct ones, or adding elements (modal verbs too) to direct acts.

#### 4. Politeness Strategies in Ashley Mote's Political Speech

In political discourse, politeness is strategically used to substantiate the general objective of legitimizing the political speaker and discrediting her/his opponents. Language is put in the service of ideology, it is a vehicle for power relations. As García-Pastor (2001: 47) shows, "social relationships are constituted in and through communication, hence faceless communication does not exist".

Within text linguistics tradition, Van Dijk (1977) introduced the notion of 'macro-face-threatening acts' (MFTAs) defined as "sequences of various speech acts [that] may be intended and understood, and hence function socially, as one speech act". From this perspective, Ashley Mote's speech is a macro-face-threatening act of warning. He warns the British against the dangers implied by immigration.

In the analyzed discourse, there are two main categories of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), following the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987):

- Mitigating FTAs, that soften both the illocutionary force and the propositional content of an act sequence in order to protect the hearer (H)'s self-image and avoid potential conflict.

- Intensifying FTAs, that increase the act illocutionary force and propositional content.

In their turn, intensifying speech acts may be:

- = non-aggravating FTAs and

- = aggravating FTAs.

The former intensifying acts enhance the Speaker (S)'s concern with the H's positive and negative face wants. Consequently, they are performed for the protection of the H's self-image. The latter intensifying speech acts aggravate or enhance the threat to the H's positive or negative face up to the conflict limit.

Aggravation interrelates with the interlocutors' strives for power. Political discourse is, essentially, a conflictive (agonal) interaction, but politicians as locutors are aware they have to win the public's votes. That is why they often negotiate between aggravation and mitigation.

Essentially, politeness is conceived as a major mitigating function.

The present analysis focuses on the directive acts in Mote's speech. In the inventory of the modal verbs belonging to the two main semantic groups, deontic and epistemic, there are no commissive or expressive speech acts linguistically supported by modal verbs. In fact, there are no commissive acts at all in Ashley Mote's discourse. A possible explanation may be that his social status as an independent nationalist politician does not enable him to make promises or offers, according to Searle's preliminary conditions of a successful speech act, that supposes the speaker's possibility of keeping his promises.

**4.1.** Mitigating FTAs are directed to the audience and perform a significant persuasive function in political discourse. They stand for positive politeness strategies whose function is to soften an FTA illocutionary force by establishing solidarity with the public, both present and absent in the communication situation, or negative politeness strategies whose function is to minimize the imposition of an FTA (García-Pastor: 50)

In contrast, in the absence of modals, FTAs are not softened and are linguistically rendered by the imperative:

*Restore our border controls.*

*No amnesty for illegals. Out. And out now.*

#### **4.1.1. The Deontic Use of the Modal Verbs:**

*...we have to say it loud: Islam is the problem. We have to ask if there can ever be such a person as a British Muslim?*

Besides the use of the inclusive ‘we’, the politician relies his politeness strategy of ‘involving’ the audience in an act of justice on the objective necessity imposed by an external source of authority that the modal ‘have to’ expresses. A paraphrase could be “we are forced by moral laws to say it loud...” .

Both speech acts achieve double mitigation due to the modal ‘have to’, selected instead of the absolute normative ‘must’. The audience as interlocutor see their positive face saved through the positive politeness strategy of solidarity and, at the same time, the Muslims’ positive face, although threatened by the offence (an aggravating FTA) is less affected than it would have been in case ‘must’ had been used.

Conveying the authority of social norms of national impact, the acts containing ‘have to’ may also be interpreted as intensifying non-aggravating FTAs.

Mitigation of the directive illocutionary force relying on the use of ‘should’ is assignable to the deontic meaning of the modal: it expresses moral obligation (advice); thus it is less categorical than ‘must’:

*Perhaps we should remind these advocates of death...*

*But we are British...and that’s the way it should remain.*

In the first example, besides ‘solidarity we’ meant to legitimize the politician, the use of ‘perhaps’ softens the imposition illocutionary force. It is a speech act of advice whose source is internal, since it expresses the subjectivity of the modal subject.

The second FTA releases more illocutionary force and thus becomes more aggravating than the former: it simultaneously threatens the allied interlocutor’s negative face, limiting their freedom of action and, indirectly, threatens both negative and positive faces of the opponent (The

Islamists), since the locutor instigates all the British against them, not just a group of nationalist or right-wing politicians and sympathizers, as in the former.

‘Need to’ involves the interlocutor’s interests. The modal subject counts on his interlocutor’s reaction.

*You don’t need me to dwell on the consequences.*

The above-mentioned speech act is meant to flatter the interlocutor’s positive face. The audience is perceived as able to judge for themselves in the line of the speaker’s ideology. His politeness strategy implies appearing modest and encouraging the interlocutor’s negative reaction against their common adversary. The intrinsic meaning of the modal is of mild obligation imposed on the interlocutor by the modal subject:

“In terms of meaning, *need to* is half way between *must* and *ought to* (or *should*): it asserts obligation or necessity, but without either the certainty that attaches to *must* or the doubt that attaches to *ought to*” (Leech 1987: 101).

*Mr. Bari needs to stop encouraging Muslims...He needs to stop claiming that...He needs perhaps to remember...*

This sequence of speech acts releases the force of a menacing FTA. The specification of the opponent’s name aggravates these face threatening acts, affecting the interlocutors positive and negative faces.

#### **4.1.2. The Epistemic Use of the Modal Verbs**

Under the meaning of possibility of the modal ‘might’, the utterer’s intention is to warn his opponent (The Islamists) about the possibility of a violent British reaction against them. But unlike ‘may’: “The effect of the hypothetical auxiliary, with its implication ‘contrary to expectation’, is to make the expression of possibility more tentative and guarded” (Leech: 127).

Mitigation is performed by the very use of possibility ‘might’, instead of certainty ‘must’ or stronger possibility ‘may’.

*It [a civil war] might start with simple, lawful objectives... But it could spark a reaction which escalates... Muslims stone their own women-folk to death without the slightest pretence of administering what might be regarded as even basic justice.*

Mitigation and aggravation combine in the second example. ‘Might’ is used with the epistemic value of vague possibility, determining the aggravating act of offence addressed to Muslim culture. On the other hand, the locutor’s selection of ‘might’, the weakest of the epistemic modal series, indicates his intention of applying the negative politeness strategy of distance from the interlocutor that will feel rejected on the ground of cultural difference.

## **4.2. Aggravating FTAs affect the interlocutor’s negative face.**

### **4.2.1. The Deontic Use of the Modal Verbs**

Asley Mote uses the modal ‘must’ only three times, while ‘the softer’ deontic modals occur six or seven times each. It is an indication of his mainly mitigating politeness strategy in relation to both allies and adversaries.

*...they (Muslim community) will rule them (the terrorists) out quickly and with vigour. We can’t – they must.*

The above quoted speech acts imply an opposition between the illocutionary force determined by the deontic value of ‘can’t’ and the absolute obligation contained by ‘must’ and imposed onto the opponent by the locutor as modal subject. It is an unambiguous attack at the interlocutor’s negative face: ‘a territorial intrusion’, an ultimatum.

*...the nation is a natural unit for stability, and must be defended at all costs...*

Although the use of the passive voice leaves out the agent of the second clause, the agent referent, the British, is inferred in the discourse context. The British, as collective interlocutor, see their negative faces affected by this ‘impositive’ FTA.

There are two more occurrences of deontic ‘must’, in the discourses of a religious and a political leaders, quoted by Ashley Mote. Both speech acts convey the absolute prescriptive and intensifying, aggravating force of the FTAs uttered:

*He (Abu Bashir) also told Al Jazeera television that “there is no democracy in Islam. Democracy must be replaced by allah-cracy”.*

By this FTA, the negative ‘face’ of Islam is threatened. It may be deprived of independence but, implicitly, the non-Muslim people feel the menace of terrorism. Consequently, their negative face is threatened too.

[Mrs Thatcher said]:

*We must not fear. We must not fail. We also need to renew...*

By these speech acts, the admired ‘iron lady’ performs some aggravating FTAs, threatening both faces of the interlocutor, the British, perceived as weak and confuse. Nevertheless, there is a gradation in the three above-quoted directive speech acts: the speaker mitigates her imposition. The relation: deontic ‘must’ versus ‘need to’ may be interpreted as a politeness strategy through which territorial or freedom limitation imposed by the FTA is attenuated.

As to Mote’s ‘higher order’ (Brown and Levinson 1987) legitimization strategy of quoting these two aggravating FTAs, the former serves him for intensifying the interlocutor’s perception of Islamic danger, while the latter is meant to use Margret Thatcher’s image for intensifying his message force. His additional strategy of naming the politician ‘Mrs Thatcher’ denotes flattery and familiarity, in-group solidarity, in Brown and Levinson’s terms of positive politeness. Mote seeks legitimacy in order to seduce and persuade the public.

#### **4.2.2. The Epistemic Use of the Modal Verbs**

*...there is no way it ( the Muslim population) can be allowed to hold a moral or actual gun...*

*But however tough we need and want to be, that can’t happen until we leave the EU.*

In the previous speech acts, the aggravating force is increased by the use of ‘can’t’ expressing impossibility. All the more so in the second example where ‘can’t’ is opposed to necessity ‘need to’. If, in the first case, aggravated force threatens the opponent’s positive and negative faces, in the second, it is the British people’s faces that are threatened.

*...a world super-state which the bureaucrats will dominate and from which there will be no escape.*

*...the huge Bulgaria problems of crime and corruption will be exported to the EU”.*

More than the significance of mere future actions, that would confer these acts an assertive illocutionary force (Searle), there is an additional threatening force addressed to the British people as implied interlocutor. In the second case, the European citizens’ faces are threatened. In fact, Leech (1987: 84) puts forward the following: “Usually *will* with this meaning makes reference to the future but there is also a kind of ‘prediction’ that refers to the present or past. [...] The speaker makes a ‘forecast about the present’ concerning an event not directly observable”.

## 5. Conclusions

The use of the modal verbs in Ashley Mote’s speech enhances the illocutionary force of FTAs, as by definition. Considering the extremist character of nationalist ideology that he promotes, his discourse might be expected to be more radical and more illocutionarily forceful. Linguistically, this would mean more occurrences of absolute modals on both semantic and pragmatic scales: deontic and epistemic. The unambiguous mitigating or aggravating force of the modal verbs in Mote’s speech may only be noticed in the use of the absolute prescriptive ‘must’, the strongest on the deontic scale, when used to express obligation or prohibition. As to the epistemic value, only ‘can’t’ is unambiguous.

Mitigating softer ‘should’ and ‘need to’, with deontic semantic values, prevail over the occurrences of other modal verbs.

The mitigation to which the modal verbs contribute is enhanced by the use of personal deixis: Mote uses plural forms as grammar subjects, mainly ‘inclusive we’, a typical legitimization strategy in political discourse, or impersonal phrases, but, in this case, correlated

with soft modal verbs, it erodes his self-image. There is one exception, when the politician makes a declaration on his behalf:

*I am never going to lead a great political party- but I have a few ideas about how we need to change things-and soon.*

Even this declaration is ended by ‘we need to change’, which pragmatically throws the burden of action onto his interlocutors’ shoulders.

Applying Searle’s theory on speech acts conditions, we may conclude that Ashley Mote’s status of an independent politician who is not an MP in the national parliament cannot enable him to utter commissive speech acts or stronger directive ones. Our suggestion is to consider politeness strategy as prudence strategy in his case. If he intends to be credible, and to save his self-image, he cannot afford performing unsuccessful speech acts, in Searle’s terms.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benveniste, Émile, 1969, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Benveniste, Émile, 2001, « L’appareil formel de l’énonciation » in Vlad Alexandrescu (ed.), *Pragmatique et théorie de l’énonciation : choix de textes*, București, Editura Universității din București.
- Bidu-Vrânceanu, A., et al., 2001, *Dicționar general de științe ale limbii*, București, Ed. Științifică
- Chilton, Paul, Christina Schäffner, 2005, “Discurso y politica” in T. A. van Dijk (ed.). *El discurso como interacción social. Estudios sobre el discurso*, Barcelona, Gedisa, pp. 206-235.
- Cristea, Teodora, 1982, “Les modalités en français contemporain” in *De la linguistique à la didactique*, București : T.U.B, pp. 98-113.
- Cruse, Alan, 2000, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*, London, Oxford University Press.
- Ducrot, O., & Schaeffer, 1969, *Noul dicționar enciclopedic al științelor limbajului*, București, Edit. Babel.

- Fairclough, Norman, 2001, *Language and Power*, London, Longman.
- García-Pastor, M. D., 2001, *Pragmatics and the 2000 US Elections*, Valencia, University of Valencia, SellMonographs 10.
- Goffman, Erving, 1974, *Les rites d'interaction*, Paris, Minuit.
- Ghiglione, Rodolphe, 1994, « Paroles de meeting » in A. Trognon, J. Larrue (eds.), *Pragmatique du discours politique*, Paris, Armand Colin.
- Gosselin, Laurent, 2005, *Temporalité et modalité*, Bruxelles, Editions Duculot.
- Halliday, M.A.K., 1994, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar (Second Edition)*, London, Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K., 2005, *Studies in English Language*, London, NY, Continuum.
- Hoffman, Th. R., 1993, *Realms of Meaning*, New York, Longman.
- Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana, 2003, *Limba și comunicare*, București, Ed. All.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine, 1988, *Echanges sur la conversation*, Paris, Editions du CNRS.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine ; 1980, *L'énonciation. De la subjectivité dans le langage*, Paris, Armand Colin.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine ; 1992, *Les interactions verbales*, Paris, Armand Colin.
- Leech, Geoffrey, N., 1987, *Meaning and the English Verb*, London and New York, Longman.
- Leech, Geoffrey, N., 1983, *Principles of Pragmatics*, London and New York, Longman.
- Lyons, John, 1977, *Semantics 2*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, John, 1995, *Introducere în lingvistica teoretică*, București : Ed. Științifică.
- Palmer, F. R., 2001, *Mood and Modality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Tuțescu, Mariana, 2005, *L'auxiliation de modalité : dix auxi-verbales modaux*, București, Editura Universității din București.
- Valor, Luīsa Gea, 2000, *A Pragmatic Approach to Politeness and Modality in the Book Review Articles*, Valencia , Sell Monographs 6, Universidad de Valencia.
- Van Dijk, Teun, A., 1977, *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse*, London, New York, Longman.
- Van Dijk, Teun A., 2000, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, London, Sage.
- Vion, Robert., 2004, "Modalités, modalisations et discours représentés", *Langages* 156, pp.396-409
- Xxx 2005, *Gramatica limbii române*, București, Editura Academiei.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Bally, Charles, 1932, *Linguistique générale et linguistique française*, Paris, Leroux.
- Brown, Penelope, Levinson, Stephen C., 1987, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Culioli, A, 1979, « Valeurs modales et opérations énonciatives » in *Modèles linguistiques*, Lille, Tome1, Fasc. 2, P.U. Lille, pp. 39-59.
- Ducrot, Oswald, 1993, "À quoi sert le concept de modalité ?". In N. Dittmar & A. Reich (eds.). *Modalité et acquisition des Langues*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, pp. 11-129.
- Groefsema, M., C.J. Fox and N. Obeid, 1991 "Can, May, Must and Should: A division of Labour", in LAGB, Somerville College, Oxford.
- Halliday, M.A.K.,1970, "Functional diversity in language as seen from a consideration of modality and mood in English". *Foundations of Language* 6 (3).
- Palmer, F.R., 1979, *Modality and the English Modals*, London and New York, Longman.
- Perkins, Michael, R., 1983, *Modal Expressions in English*, London, Frances Pinter.
- Von Wright, E.H., 1951, *An Essay in Modal Logic*, Amsterdam, North Holland.
- Walton, A., 1988, *The Pragmatics of English Modal Verbs*, PhD. Dissertation, University of London.