

Research Article

Demystifying the Mitigation Devices in Philippine Presidential Speeches: A Political Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: This study examines the use of mitigation devices – specifically, hedges, euphemisms, and parenthetical verbs – in the speeches of Philippine presidents to reveal how linguistic strategies shape political discourse. Through a detailed political discourse analysis, this research identifies the critical functions of these devices in moderating assertions, deflecting responsibility, and managing audience perception. Hedges such as attribution and plausibility shields, euphemistic abbreviations, and parenthetical verbs like “I think” and “I believe” emerge as essential tools that enable leaders to introduce ambiguity, express tentativeness, and reduce the forcefulness of statements. These devices not only soften potentially controversial or sensitive information but also reinforce the speaker’s credibility by allowing space for interpretive flexibility. Findings highlight that mitigation devices are integral to the rhetorical frameworks employed by Philippine presidents, facilitating a careful balance between assertiveness and adaptability in high-stakes communication. Implications for political communication suggest that these linguistic tools serve not merely as rhetorical flourishes but as strategic elements in fostering trust, empathy, and relatability with the public. The study concludes with recommendations for further research in cross-cultural political discourse and audience perception of mitigation strategies, underscoring the broader applicability of these devices in shaping effective political communication.

Keywords: linguistics; presidential speeches; political discourse analysis; mitigation devices

1. Introduction

Political speeches, especially presidential addresses, play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and guiding national discourse. One linguistic strategy often employed in these speeches is the use of mitigation devices – linguistic tools aimed at softening the impact of direct statements, thereby reducing the risk of confrontation or rejection. Mitigation can be seen as a crucial element of political rhetoric, serving to maintain rapport with the audience while subtly managing face-threatening acts, especially in highly publicized contexts like presidential speeches (Haverkate, 1992; Flores-Ferrán & Lovejoy, 2015; Obenza & Baradillo, 2023). Research on mitigation strategies has predominantly focused on political interviews and debates, examining how speakers use hedges, parenthetical verbs, euphemisms, and other linguistic devices to achieve persuasive, yet non-confrontational, communication (Vlasyan & Shusharina, 2018; Bull & Miskinis, 2015; Obenza et al., 2024).

Politicians use various sub-strategies for pragmatic mitigation, such as pragmatic empathy, hedges, vague deictics, indirect speech acts, and political euphemism, to balance relationships and achieve political goals. In crisis communication, mitigation strategies such as transcendence and differentiation are used to shape public perception and construct meaning. These strategies help political actors present their efforts as effective and hard-working (Chepurnaya, 2021).

Although studies have extensively covered mitigation in Western political contexts, particularly in American and European political speeches (Haverkate, 1992; Bull & Miskinis, 2015), limited research has explored how these devices are used in the unique political landscape of the Philippines. Philippine presidential speeches often involve not just conveying policy but also navigating a complex cultural terrain marked by expectations of politeness and indirect communication. Mitigation, in this context, is a crucial rhetorical device that allows

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politicians to address contentious issues without overtly alienating their audience. The lack of in-depth analysis of these mitigation strategies in Philippine political speeches presents an important gap in the literature that this study aims to address.

This research seeks to demystify the mitigation devices employed in Philippine presidential speeches by analyzing the linguistic strategies used to soften or mitigate the illocutionary force of these speeches. By examining a corpus of selected presidential speeches, this study will identify the key mitigation strategies – such as hedges, tag questions, and indirect speech – and evaluate their functions in the context of Philippine political communication. This study not only aims to contribute to the understanding of political rhetoric in the Philippines but also adds to the global body of knowledge on the strategic use of language in political communication.

In this study, Bruce Fraser's (1990) theory of mitigation is used as the primary theoretical framework. Fraser's work on mitigation provides a well-defined lens for examining how Philippine presidents employ specific linguistic strategies to soften, attenuate, or modify the illocutionary force of their speech acts, particularly within the complex dynamics of political discourse. By examining the language choices that serve to mitigate speech, this study aims to reveal how language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a strategic tool to influence and persuade audiences.

1.1. Mitigation in Fraser's Theoretical Perspective

Mitigation, as originally described by Fraser (1990), involves the strategic deployment of linguistic devices to reduce the directness or forcefulness of a statement, thereby mitigating potential face-threatening effects. This concept underscores the pragmatic and intention-driven nature of language use, wherein speakers strategically adjust their utterances to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, maintain social harmony, and balance authority with approachability (Fraser, 1990). Recent expansions of Fraser's theoretical framework emphasize mitigation's multifaceted nature as both a rhetorical and relational device, operationalized across domains such as courtroom discourse, therapeutic conversations, and cross-cultural pragmatics. For instance, mitigation in courtroom settings has been identified as a critical tool for managing vulnerability and conflict, often manifesting as anticipatory discourse strategies to handle disagreement and maintain credibility (Martinovski, 2006; Cheng et al., 2023). Similarly, therapeutic settings reveal mitigation as essential in maintaining rapport, where it balances the cognitive-pragmatic goals of face preservation and interactive harmony (Cheng et al., 2023; Marco & Arguedas, 2021).

Recent studies further explore mitigation's linguistic mechanisms, such as hedging, understatement, and modalization, as tools to soften illocutionary force and reduce backlash (Marco & Arguedas, 2021; Bates, 2020). These strategies extend Fraser's initial insights by integrating modern cognitive and affective dimensions of mitigation, showing its application in politically sensitive or socially stigmatized contexts, where mitigation serves both as a politeness strategy and a mechanism to navigate power imbalances (Delbene, 2004; Cheng et al., 2023). The dynamic, context-sensitive application of these strategies underscores their versatility across social and institutional domains.

1.2. Mitigation in Political Discourse

In political discourse, mitigation strategies are crucial tools for leaders who must address contentious issues, manage public perception, and uphold political decorum. Mitigation in this context is employed to reduce the illocutionary force of speech acts, thus allowing leaders to convey directives, criticisms, or contentious views in a less confrontational or more palatable manner (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2001). Within Fraser's framework, such language modifications are seen not as mere rhetorical flourishes but as essential to the function of political discourse, where the stakes of miscommunication or perceived aggression are high.

Political figures, including Philippine presidents, often employ mitigation to manage the impact of their words, protect their public image, and maintain social harmony. This study, therefore, positions Fraser's theory of mitigation as an ideal framework to examine how Philippine presidents navigate linguistic and rhetorical complexity to balance authority and accessibility, convey controversial messages diplomatically, and maintain rapport with a diverse audience.

1.3. Cultural Nuances in the Philippine Context

While Fraser's (1990) theory offers a robust framework for understanding mitigation as a universal linguistic strategy, it is also adaptable to the socio-cultural particularities of Philippine political discourse. Philippine culture is characterized by high-context

communication, wherein indirect language and social harmony, or *pakikisama*, play significant roles in public discourse (Enriquez, 1994). Consequently, mitigation strategies in the Philippine setting may manifest in ways that diverge from Western norms, as cultural expectations influence both the form and function of these devices. For example, presidential speeches in the Philippines may reflect the value of *hiya* (a sense of shame) or *utang na loob* (a debt of gratitude), which could lead to distinctive mitigation strategies that emphasize humility, respect, and indirectness (Cleofas, 2019; Chandler, 1988). These cultural factors enhance the relevance of Fraser's theory while requiring an adaptation to interpret the mitigation devices that Philippine presidents specifically employ.

Fraser's (1990) theory of mitigation offers a comprehensive framework through which to explore the linguistic and strategic dimensions of political discourse in the Philippine context. By examining the mitigation devices present in Philippine presidential speeches, this study aims to elucidate how these leaders employ language as a means of managing authority, maintaining public rapport, and addressing sensitive issues in a culturally resonant manner. This theoretical approach thus positions mitigation not only as a linguistic phenomenon but as a critical rhetorical device that underscores the nuanced relationship between language, power, and culture in political speech.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically leveraging Discourse Analysis to explore the deployment of mitigation devices in Philippine presidential speeches. Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), is concerned with understanding phenomena in natural settings, allowing for in-depth examination of complex social phenomena through language. Shank (2006) underscores that qualitative research is a systematic and empirical inquiry into meaning, enabling researchers to unpack the layers of meaning embedded in communicative acts.

Discourse Analysis, as framed by Wodak and Krzyżanowski (2008), offers a robust analytical framework to investigate how language constructs social realities and addresses sensitive or challenging societal issues. In political contexts, the language used by public figures reflects broader socio-political dynamics and serves as a mechanism to shape public perception, manage crises, and maintain authority (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006). This study thus employs Discourse Analysis to critically examine how Philippine presidents use linguistic mitigation strategies – such as indirect language, hedges, and euphemisms – to tactfully address sensitive subjects, particularly in the context of natural disasters, such as earthquakes.

2.2. Research Corpus

The research corpus comprised six carefully selected speeches delivered by Philippine presidents in response to major earthquakes. These speeches were chosen according to specific criteria to ensure their relevance to the study's objectives, which focus on public addresses that balance empathy with authoritative reassurance. First, each speech was required to have been delivered in response to a significant earthquake impacting one of the three main island groups: Luzon, Visayas, or Mindanao. Additionally, to maintain contextual relevance, each speech had to be delivered by the sitting president at the time of the earthquake event. The content of each speech was another crucial criterion, as it needed to provide ample linguistic material to facilitate a detailed discourse analysis. Finally, the selected speeches were required to address earthquake events of considerable public impact, resonating with a national audience and demonstrating the use of mitigation devices in crisis communication. These criteria ensured that each speech included in the corpus was pertinent to the study's exploration of mitigation strategies in presidential discourse during national crises.

2.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection process involved gathering speech transcripts and video footage from reliable public sources. Publicly accessible speeches were sourced from official platforms, including Radio Television Malacañang (RTVM), ABS-CBN News, INQUIRER, and Manila Bulletin's YouTube channels. Transcripts for certain speeches were obtained from the RTVM and Office of the Press Secretary GOVPH websites. When online transcripts were unavailable, the researchers undertook careful manual transcription, followed by translation

from Filipino and Bisaya to English to ensure consistent analytical clarity. These translations adhered to standard translation practices, as outlined by Temple and Young (2004), to maintain linguistic and cultural accuracy in interpretation.

Data analysis focused on identifying and categorizing instances of mitigation devices within the speeches. Building on Fraser's (1980) framework, the study examined a range of linguistic strategies used to mitigate statements, such as indirect speech acts, hedges, disclaimers, and euphemisms (Lakoff, 1973; Holmes, 1995). This analysis was guided by a close reading of each transcript, with particular attention paid to the social and political contexts of each speech. The categorization followed Fraser's classifications, with adaptations made to accommodate context-specific language use reflective of Philippine political discourse (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Mitigation devices were analyzed based on their function within the speeches, including their role in minimizing face-threatening acts, reducing perceived authority, and fostering public empathy (Goffman, 1967). Such devices are often strategically employed in political communication to balance assertiveness with approachability, aligning public perception with the speaker's intended stance (Chilton, 2004). Following established discourse analysis protocols (Gee, 2014), each speech was dissected line by line, with instances of mitigation annotated and interpreted within the socio-political context in which they were delivered.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researchers maintained strict adherence to ethical guidelines. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest, the analysis of public speeches – especially those delivered by high-profile figures like presidents – requires careful attention to prevent unintended harm or misrepresentation. The analysis was conducted with objectivity, aiming to provide insights into linguistic strategies rather than political critique, thereby respecting the public figures involved and the governmental institutions they represent. Data security and privacy were maintained through password-protected files, and findings were presented in a manner that contributes constructively to an understanding of political discourse in crisis communication.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Role of Hedges in Discourse

In spoken and written discourse, hedges play a vital role in softening statements, indicating uncertainty, and strategically managing speaker responsibility. Hedges are linguistic devices that allow speakers or writers to express ambiguity, doubt, or reduce the impact of their assertions, making statements appear less direct and thereby minimizing potential criticism or offense (Ali & Salih, 2020; Pastukhova, 2018; Ko, 2014). According to Fraser (2009), hedges are often employed as mitigation strategies, which can help speakers navigate the nuances of conveying potentially sensitive information in a manner that is both cautious and adaptable.

Two primary types of hedges, attribution shields and plausibility shields, serve distinct functions in discourse. Attribution shields, such as phrases like “they said” or “we heard,” redirect responsibility to an external source, thus distancing the speaker from the statement's full implications. This allows speakers, particularly in political contexts, to maintain flexibility in their stance without committing entirely to a proposition (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). Plausibility shields, on the other hand, involve terms like “it seems” or “I believe,” which suggest the speaker's subjective belief or tentative stance, creating room for doubt while conveying a sense of cautious assertion. These shields are particularly useful in contexts where the speaker needs to project confidence while simultaneously allowing for alternative interpretations.

Additionally, approximators such as “about” or “approximately” provide a further layer of flexibility, helping speakers convey information that may lack precise accuracy without undermining the message's credibility. As highlighted in Jovic, Kurtishi, and AlAfnan (2023), hedges can also enhance the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos, lending speakers an adaptable toolset for managing the perception and reception of their statements in public communication contexts.

3.1.1. Functions of Hedges in Mitigating Statements



3.1.1.1. Attribution Shields in Presidential Speeches

As shown in Table 1, in the excerpt, President Aquino III employs an attribution shield by prefacing his statement with “we heard,” which redirects responsibility to external sources, thereby minimizing potential criticism directed at him. This mitigation technique aligns with Fraser’s (2009) concept of self-serving mitigation, where the speaker distances themselves from potential repercussions of their words by attributing responsibility to others. This rhetorical strategy is also discussed in Gribanova and Gaidukova’s (2019) study, which highlights that vague attribution can reduce the credibility of a statement and the speaker’s certainty.

Similarly, President Duterte uses an attribution shield in the statement “they said he was already a little deaf,” relying on “they said” as a shield to deflect personal accountability for the claim. Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) categorize such language as a truth-modifying hedge that serves to dilute the speaker’s ownership of the statement, allowing them to transfer some of the possible negative consequences to an ambiguous source.

Table 1. Analysis of hedges in political discourse.

Device Type (Subtype)	Example	Function	Speaker	Theoretical Basis
Attribution Shields	“we heard”	Redirects responsibility to external sources, distancing the speaker from the statement’s implications.	Aquino III	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
	“they said he was already a little deaf”	Deflects accountability by transferring ownership of the claim to an ambiguous source.	Duterte	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
Plausibility Shields	“I believe in the studies of our experts”	Frames the statement as subjective belief, projecting confidence while softening accountability.	Aquino III	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
	“It seems that this is a strong earthquake”	Suggests tentative reasoning, creating interpretive flexibility and reducing finality.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)

3.1.1.2. Plausibility Shields in Presidential Speeches

President Aquino III’s expression, “I believe in the studies of our experts,” illustrates a plausibility shield by embedding his statement within a belief frame. This shield not only projects confidence in expert findings but also deflects direct accountability by framing his stance as subjective belief rather than factual assertion. Fraser (2009) defines this as altruistic mitigation, intended to soften the impact on the speaker’s audience and reduce potential alarm.

A similar usage appears in President Marcos Jr.’s statement, “It seems that this is a strong earthquake,” where “seems” serves as a plausibility hedge. This hedge signals that the speaker is basing his statement on plausible reasoning rather than firm evidence, thereby creating space for doubt and reducing the statement’s perceived finality. Such hedges are commonly used in political rhetoric to maintain flexibility in interpretation and minimize backlash (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019).

3.1.2. Approximators in Philippine Presidential Speeches

3.1.2.1. Rounding

As illustrated in Table 2, President Aquino III uses “about” in “those with damage are about 40,000 homes,” an approximator that communicates an estimated figure while avoiding a concrete commitment. Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) explain that approximators like “about” introduce a degree of vagueness, which aligns with Fraser’s (2009) description of hedges that create ambiguity in truth value, allowing the speaker to distance themselves from precise factual claims.

President Marcos Jr. also uses an approximator in the statement, “at approximately 8:40,” which serves a similar function. By approximating the timing, he suggests the factual basis without asserting precision, creating leeway in his accountability regarding the statement’s accuracy. Fraser (2009) emphasizes this function of approximators in political discourse, where the ambiguity acts as a rhetorical tool to soften potential criticism.

Table 2. Analysis of linguistic devices in political discourse.



Device Type (Subtype)	Example	Function	Speaker	Theoretical Basis
Approximators (Rounding)	“about 40,000 homes”	Introduces vagueness, avoids exact figures, mitigating potential inaccuracies.	Aquino III	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
	“at approximately 8:40”	Suggests a factual basis while maintaining flexibility to reduce accountability.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
Adaptors (Emotional Emphasis)	“really very sorry”	Enhances sincerity and projects emotional engagement, reducing potential criticism.	Duterte	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
Adaptors (Habitual Qualifier)	“usually in the disaster reports”	Signals habitual norms rather than absolutes, moderating the speaker’s stance.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009); Jovic et al. (2023)

3.1.2.2. Adaptors

President Duterte’s statement, “I’m really very sorry,” utilizes “really” as an adaptor to enhance the perceived sincerity of his apology. Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) identify adaptors as hedges that emphasize emotional engagement, often to project authenticity or empathy. Fraser (2009) further elaborates that adaptors serve as self-serving mitigations by accentuating the speaker’s intended emotional state, thus diminishing potential criticism through the expression of relatability and empathy.

In another example, Marcos Jr. employs the term “usually” in “usually in the disaster reports,” which functions as an adaptor hedge, signaling habitual rather than absolute norms. Jovic, Kurtishi, and AlAfnan (2023) discuss how such adaptors are employed to convey routine without full commitment, effectively moderating the speaker’s stance.

3.1.3. Forms

Hedges are linguistic tools that allow speakers and writers to express statements with a degree of uncertainty, politeness, or approximation, reducing the assertiveness of their claims. These devices are particularly useful in sensitive or formal communication contexts, where softening statements can mitigate potential criticism or maintain flexibility. Among the most common forms of hedges are adverbials and modal auxiliary verbs, each serving distinct but complementary functions in discourse.

Adverbials, such as “probably,” “likely,” and “somewhat,” function by subtly altering the intensity or certainty of a statement. These adverbial hedges allow the speaker to convey an impression of caution or tentativeness, which can make assertions appear less confrontational or more open to interpretation. In political and diplomatic language, adverbials serve as a means of indicating a respectful stance towards uncertain or controversial topics (Fraser, 2009).

Modal auxiliary verbs like “may,” “might,” and “could” also play a critical role in hedging. These verbs allow speakers to propose possibilities rather than certainties, which is essential in contexts where absolute statements might be seen as overconfident or risky. Modal verbs create a space for alternative interpretations, softening the impact of claims and allowing for a more nuanced expression of intent (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019).

By employing these forms of hedges, speakers can communicate ideas with flexibility and caution, aligning their language with the rhetorical goals of managing audience perception and maintaining credibility in uncertain contexts. These strategies are particularly effective in political and diplomatic speech, where maintaining a balance between assertiveness and openness is crucial.

3.1.3.1. Adverbials

Hedges in the form of adverbs are a common linguistic device used to signal uncertainty or suggestiveness, enabling speakers to soften their statements and avoid absolute commitment. The adverb “maybe” frequently appears in political discourse to introduce a degree of uncertainty, allowing leaders to convey their thoughts without asserting complete confidence.

As shown in Table 3, for example, in President Aquino III’s statement, “And maybe for the – we heard some news in Manila, there is a newspaper that says the entire province of Bohol will sink into a sinkhole” (Excerpt 24, p. 57, par. 1), the use of “maybe” acts as an adverbial hedge. This not only conveys uncertainty about the claim but also deflects



responsibility by attributing the information to a source in Manila. This dual-layered hedge combines an adverbial form with an attribution shield, exemplifying what Fraser (2009) refers to as a “complex hedge,” where multiple hedging strategies are layered to further mitigate responsibility.

In another instance, President Duterte uses “maybe” in the statement, “It’s heavy because there’s really money in it, maybe in 100-peso bills” (Excerpt 25, p. 67, par. 5). Here, “maybe” introduces a suggestion rather than a firm assertion about the currency denomination. According to Fraser (2009), adverbial hedges like “maybe” can function as rhetorical strategies that signal reduced commitment, thus allowing speakers to manage their credibility while acknowledging uncertainty.

Similarly, President Marcos Jr. employs “maybe” in the statement, “And maybe I can schedule a trip perhaps tomorrow as soon as possible” (Excerpt 26, p. 82, par. 4). This usage signals both uncertainty and flexibility, indicating the president’s tentative stance without committing fully to the timing of his visit. Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) suggest that adverbial hedges like “maybe” often help political figures appear cautious and adaptable, while simultaneously reducing the risk of audience disappointment if plans change.

Table 3. Analysis of hedges in political discourse.

Device Type (Subtype)	Example	Function	Speaker	Theoretical Basis
Adverbials	“And maybe for the—we heard some news in Manila, there is a newspaper that says the entire province of Bohol will sink into a sinkhole” “maybe in 100-peso bills”	Conveys uncertainty, deflects responsibility by attributing information to a source.	Aquino III	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
		Introduces a suggestion rather than a firm assertion, signaling reduced commitment.	Duterte	Fraser (2009)
	“And maybe I can schedule a trip perhaps tomorrow as soon as possible”	Indicates uncertainty and flexibility in scheduling intentions.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009); Gribanova & Gaidukova (2019)
Modal Auxiliary Verbs	“But you can expect, whether I’m here or not, we’re constantly talking with your good Governor and other local government officials...”	Reassures audience while subtly limiting commitment to specific outcomes.	Aquino III	Fraser (2009)
	“When he says something, he will do it, you can depend on him to fulfill his promise of 1600”	Presents a less assertive commitment, allowing room for variability.	Duterte	Kadhim & Mewad (2024); Fraser (2009)
	“And maybe I can schedule a trip perhaps tomorrow as soon as possible”	Reduces assertiveness, signaling consideration for audience expectations.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009)

3.1.3.2. Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs, such as “can,” “might,” and “may,” are another prevalent form of hedging, often used in political and diplomatic discourse to indicate possibilities rather than certainties. By using modal verbs, speakers can reduce the forcefulness of their statements, allowing room for alternative outcomes.

In President Aquino III’s statement, “But you can expect, whether I’m here or not, we’re constantly talking with your good Governor and other local government officials, and we’re constantly following up with the entire Cabinet to make sure that what you need is acted upon...” (Excerpt 27, p. 59, par. 11), the modal verb “can” serves as a hedge. This choice of language reassures the audience about government support while subtly limiting his commitment. Fraser (2009) describes such modal usage as an “altruistic mitigation device,” aiming to soften the impact of the statement on listeners by suggesting potential rather than guaranteed outcomes.

President Duterte also employs a similar hedging strategy in his statement, “When he says something, he will do it, you can depend on him to fulfill his promise of 1600” (Excerpt 28, p. 68, par. 8). Here, “can” acts as a hedge that presents Señor Escalada’s commitment in a less assertive manner, allowing room for potential variability. Kadhim and Mewad (2024) note that hedging through modal verbs in political discourse can reflect politeness and humility, as it enables the speaker to maintain credibility by not committing absolutely to

outcomes.

Finally, in President Marcos Jr.'s statement, "And maybe I can schedule a trip perhaps tomorrow as soon as possible" (Excerpt 29, p. 82, par. 4), the use of "can" mitigates the certainty of his scheduling intentions. Fraser (2009) categorizes this as an "ethical mitigation technique," which reduces the assertiveness of the speaker's statement and signals a consideration for the audience's expectations.

3.2. *Euphemisms*

Euphemisms are linguistic strategies that allow speakers to address potentially sensitive or controversial topics in a more palatable, indirect manner. Functioning as mitigation devices, euphemisms soften the impact of statements, thereby reducing the likelihood of offense and managing the speaker's social image. This form of language is especially valuable in political and formal discourse, where it helps leaders address complex or uncomfortable issues without provoking strong emotional responses from their audience.

One prevalent form of euphemism in political language is abbreviation, which condenses lengthy terms into concise, widely recognized forms. These abbreviations not only streamline communication but also reduce the perceived formality and rigidity associated with bureaucratic titles, making the speaker appear more accessible. Ali and Salih (2020) describe abbreviations as effective mitigation strategies that help maintain social harmony by minimizing social distance between speaker and audience, facilitating smoother communication in politically sensitive contexts.

Another significant form is apocoptation, where longer titles or phrases are shortened to signal familiarity and immediacy. Such euphemistic strategies, according to Fraser (2009), can diminish the intensity of the speaker's message, presenting information in a way that lessens the likelihood of negative reactions or alienation. Apocoptation therefore serves as a powerful tool for political figures, enabling them to maintain a relatable tone while discussing official matters that might otherwise appear detached or overly formal (Fraser, 2009).

Beyond their role in reducing formality, euphemisms also help veil harsh realities and mitigate potential conflicts between speakers and listeners. By softening statements and avoiding direct language, euphemisms support constructive dialogue and allow political figures to address contentious issues without alienating their audience. Pastukhova (2018) emphasizes that euphemisms, by subtly altering the presentation of information, can effectively shield both the speaker and the audience from uncomfortable truths, thus fostering a more receptive communicative environment.

Through the strategic use of abbreviations, apocoptations, and other euphemistic forms, speakers in political and formal settings can control the tone and perceived intensity of their messages, facilitating constructive interactions and reducing the risk of backlash. As integral components of mitigation strategies, euphemisms remain essential in navigating complex social dynamics and maintaining positive speaker-audience relations (Ali & Salih, 2020).

3.2.1. Shortening

Euphemisms, particularly abbreviations, are frequently used in political discourse to streamline communication and manage the speaker's social perception. Shortening long, formal titles or names through abbreviations allows speakers to maintain conversational flow and avoid cumbersome terminology, which can otherwise detract from the message's clarity and accessibility.

In the statement in Table 4, "Because we consulted both PHIVOLCS and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau to find out if there is an immediate danger for you here" (President Aquino III, Excerpt 30, p. 57, par. 1), the term "PHIVOLCS" (Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology) serves as an abbreviation that enhances communication efficiency. Ali and Salih (2021) defines euphemisms as alternative expressions that mitigate the impact of statements, particularly when full terminology might be unwieldy or potentially face-threatening. By using "PHIVOLCS," President Aquino III avoids the need for lengthy explanations, which aids in quick information delivery.

Similarly, President Duterte employs the abbreviation "PSG" in the phrase, "Later, the PSGs were running around" (Excerpt 31, p. 68, par. 10). "PSG," short for Presidential Security Group, streamlines the statement by condensing the name of the security agency. According to Fraser (2009), abbreviations like "PSG" function as mitigation devices, helping speakers present information concisely and reducing the potential for criticism by sidestepping verbose expressions that may detract from the speaker's authority.

President Marcos Jr. also utilizes abbreviations effectively, as seen in the statement, "The



Secretary of DSWD, Secretary Erwin Tulfo, is not here with us because he is already there” (Excerpt 32, p. 82, par. 3). “DSWD” (Department of Social Welfare and Development) replaces a lengthy organizational title, making the statement more concise. Ali and Salih (2021) highlights that such euphemistic abbreviations not only facilitate clearer communication but also prevent possible criticism by avoiding repetitious full titles that may distract or frustrate listeners

Another form of shortening known as apocoptation is employed by President Marcos Jr. in, “Perhaps because of the terrain structure as explained to us by Usec. Solidum, it might have different land in the towns in La Union” (Excerpt 33, p. 87, par. 10). Here, “Usec” is a shortened form of “Undersecretary,” which Fraser (2009) identifies as a mitigation tool that signals familiarity or closeness, often used to streamline titles within official communications. This abbreviation conveys a sense of immediacy, reinforcing a sense of informal rapport with the audience while minimizing formality.

Table 4. Analysis of euphemisms in political discourse.

Device Type (Subtype)	Example	Function	Speaker	Theoretical Basis
Euphemisms (Abbreviation)	“PHIVOLCS” (Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology)	Streamlines communication by condensing lengthy terms; reduces formality.	Aquino III	Fraser (2009); Ali & Salih (2021)
	“PSG” (Presidential Security Group)	Reduces verbosity, presents information concisely, and avoids distractions.	Duterte	Fraser (2009); Ali & Salih (2021)
	“DSWD” (Department of Social Welfare and Development)	Simplifies communication, preventing criticism by avoiding repetitious titles.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009); Ali & Salih (2021)
	“Usec” (Undersecretary)	Signals familiarity and immediacy; reduces formality while maintaining accessibility.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009)

3.3. Parenthetical Verbs

Parenthetical verbs, such as “I think,” “I believe,” and “it seems,” serve as essential mitigation devices in political discourse, introducing a layer of uncertainty or subjectivity that softens the impact of statements. These expressions enable speakers to present assertions as personal perspectives rather than unequivocal facts, thus reducing the strength of their claims and managing potential criticism (Ali & Salih, 2020; Flores-Ferrán & Lovejoy, 2015). The use of parenthetical verbs is particularly strategic in political settings, where statements are subject to intense scrutiny. Embedding phrases like “I think,” speakers communicate their views while creating space for alternative interpretations, mitigating the risk of backlash or rigid interpretation (Fraser, 2009).

As key elements within broader mitigation strategies, parenthetical verbs are used to temper the illocutionary force of speech acts. Fraser (2009) categorizes these verbs as instrumental in signaling a tentative stance, helping speakers retain credibility by conveying caution or ambiguity. By framing statements with expressions like “I think,” the speaker subtly shifts responsibility for the claim, thereby allowing it to be perceived as a subjective observation rather than a definitive conclusion. This indirect approach is a valuable rhetorical tool, enabling leaders to communicate flexibility and openness, particularly in politically sensitive or uncertain contexts (Fraser, 2009).

Table 5. Analysis of parenthetical verbs in political discourse.

Device Type	Example	Function	Speaker	Theoretical Basis
Parenthetical Verbs	“I think in fact I already know a source where we can immediately get them”	Mitigates assertion strength, suggesting tentativeness and allowing flexibility.	Marcos Jr.	Fraser (2009); Ali & Salih (2021)
	“I believe this will be the right course of action”	Conveys subjectivity, softens definitive claims to reduce criticism risk.	Hypothetical Example	Flores-Ferrán & Lovejoy (2015); Fraser (2009)
	“It seems that the matter is under control”	Introduces uncertainty, signaling caution and managing audience expectations.	Hypothetical Example	Ali & Salih (2020); Fraser (2009)

In political communication, parenthetical verbs not only manage the speaker’s

accountability but also allow for a nuanced interaction with the audience. For instance, as illustrated in Table 5, in President Marcos Jr.'s statement, "I think in fact I already know a source where we can immediately get them" (Excerpt 34, p. 100, par. 28), the use of "I think" mitigates the strength of his assertion, suggesting a degree of tentativeness that shifts some interpretative responsibility to the audience. Ali and Salih (2021) emphasizes that this use of parenthetical verbs allows speakers to temper commitment, offering a flexible, less assertive form of expression that is particularly suited to high-stakes dialogue. By framing the statement as a subjective perspective, President Marcos Jr. manages to convey intent while retaining flexibility to adapt if the situation evolves.

Therefore, the strategic deployment of parenthetical verbs enables political figures to balance the conveyance of information with interpretive space, a critical element in managing both credibility and audience expectations. Embedding statements with tentative language, speakers can carefully navigate complex social dynamics, ensuring that their discourse remains adaptable and receptive to differing viewpoints.

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that the strategic use of mitigation devices, specifically hedges, euphemisms, and parenthetical verbs, is integral to the rhetoric of Philippine presidential speeches. These devices enable leaders to frame statements with calculated ambiguity, soften direct assertions, and convey empathy while managing audience expectations and minimizing potential backlash. Employing these devices, Philippine presidents create a flexible communication environment that allows for nuanced interpretations and supports their credibility without committing to definitive claims. Overall, the findings highlight that political language is deliberately constructed, leveraging subtle linguistic forms to cultivate rapport, manage accountability, and sustain audience trust in uncertain or sensitive situations.

Future research should compare mitigation strategies across different political and cultural contexts to better understand how cultural values shape the use and perception of linguistic devices in political discourse. Such comparative analyses could reveal patterns and variances in rhetorical strategies that are culturally contingent, enriching global political discourse studies.

Investigating how audiences perceive and interpret these mitigation devices can offer additional insights into the effectiveness of political discourse. Audience-centered research may reveal the nuances of public trust in political communication, particularly regarding how these devices shape perceived honesty, empathy, and credibility.

The study on mitigation devices in Philippine presidential speeches provides several valuable insights into political discourse, particularly regarding how political leaders manage public perception, accountability, and credibility. Demonstrating the strategic use of hedges, euphemisms, and parenthetical verbs, this study reveals that these linguistic devices are not merely stylistic choices but serve critical functions in constructing and moderating political messages. The findings imply that political rhetoric in the Philippines – like in many global contexts – employs language as a tool for balancing transparency with restraint, thus shaping public expectations and emotional responses.

Moreover, the results underscore the adaptability of these devices in reinforcing the ethos, pathos, and logos appeals necessary for public trust and credibility in political figures. For public communication experts and political analysts, these insights suggest that mitigation strategies are essential for maintaining a nuanced, responsive communication style that can effectively address the diverse concerns of a nation. This study could therefore inform training and development programs for political and public relations practitioners, equipping them with the linguistic strategies needed for impactful, sensitive communication.

While this study provides a robust analysis of mitigation devices in the speeches of Philippine presidents, it is limited by its exclusive focus on formal presidential discourse. The scope did not include other types of political communication, such as informal interviews or debates, where mitigation strategies might differ. Additionally, the study's reliance on textual analysis of prepared speeches may overlook spontaneous elements of language used in live settings, which could yield additional insights into the role of mitigation devices in real-time political discourse. Future studies may expand the dataset to include a wider variety of political speech contexts to capture a more comprehensive view of these rhetorical strategies in action.

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