



MODAL HEDGES USED ON MAIN CHARACTERS' DIALOGUES IN *KNIVES OUT* MOVIE WRITTEN BY RIAN JOHNSON

Fadilah Fadilah, Fiza Asri Fauziah Habibah
Prodi Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Komunikasi dan Bahasa Universitas BSI
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Abstract

This is the study of the use of modal hedge category of hedging that is taken from the main characters' dialogues in Knives Out movie. Knives Out tells the twists and turns of detective in solving a death case involving those closest to the victim. There are total 4 main characters who spoke with modal hedges contained in the dialogues. The method used is descriptive qualitative which describes the situation factually. There are 20 data found which are dialogues containing of modal hedge category of hedging. Researchers use the theory of the category of hedging by Yu which are modal hedges category. From the study, researcher found all kind of modal hedge category of hedging in the dialogues spoken by the main characters there 20 data found from modal hedges which spoke by all four main characters they are could, should, would, probably, maybe, may and might.

Keywords: Hedge, Modal Hedge, Knife Out.

Abstrak

Ini adalah studi tentang penggunaan kategori modal hedge dari hedging yang diambil dari dialog para tokoh utama dalam film Knives Out. Knives Out menceritakan liku-liku detektif dalam menyelesaikan kasus kematian yang melibatkan orang-orang terdekat korban. Ada total 4 karakter utama yang berbicara dengan modal hedges yang terdapat dalam dialog. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif yang menggambarkan keadaan secara faktual. Ditemukan 20 data yang merupakan dialog yang berisi kategori modal hedge kategori hedging. Peneliti menggunakan teori kategori hedging menurut Yu yaitu kategori modal hedges. Dari penelitian tersebut, peneliti menemukan semua jenis kategori modal hedge dari hedging dalam dialog yang dituturkan oleh tokoh utama terdapat 20 data yang ditemukan dari modal hedges yang diucapkan oleh keempat tokoh utama yaitu could, should, would, mungkin, mungkin, may dan mungkin.

Kata Kunci: Hedge, Modal Hedge, Knife Out.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the way of sharing and telling ideas from one person to another or it can be said from the speaker to the listener. Through communication people can understand each other. A good communication happens when speaker and listener meet the same interpretation. However, not all communications can run well and smoothly, moreover, if the communication requires deeper understanding and more consequences the reality. People state something they feel often, but are not sure of the truth or facts. Therefore, people make statements using a biased meaning so that they do not need to be responsible if what is conveyed does not always match the reality. Vague meaning happens in some statements uttered by speaker to avoid errors in providing accurate information during the communication.

Mc Gee (2018:01) "Vague language describes the use of linguistic items including grammar and particularly lexis to modify and make the meaning of communication less precise and less clear." This vague meaning is called hedging, which is the meaning that is contained in a sentence which aims to minimize mistakes in saying something or mistakes in suspecting something but wants to be

expressed in a sentence as an assumption or personal opinion. This opinions and assumptions often come out without full awareness but as a sudden impulse because of the desire to immediately express opinions and share ideas about what is being thought at the time. Hedging consists of several categories, but in this paper, the writers will only discuss the category hedging of modal or modal hedges which is in the dialogue that is in the Knive Out Movie.

In every movie, there are actors who get the role of the main character and supporting characters. Both of the main character and the supporting character cast play an important role in the success of a film, but the main character has its own magnet which becomes the center of attention of the story. The main characters appear more frequently and are also more discussed than the supporting characters. Therefore, in this paper, the author will discuss then modal hedges contained in the dialogue of the main characters. The four main characters are Benoit Blanc who is a detective who became the center of the story because he gets the task by unnamed to solve the mystery of the death of a rich men; Marta Cabrera, who is the care taker and also as the closest person to Harlan, she is also in charge of

Harlan's medicine; Harlan Thrombey, the conglomerate grandfather who committed suicide suddenly; and Hugh Ransom Drysdale, the greatest grandson of the Thrombey family.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Hedging

The uncertain meaning that occurs in communication can be controlled with hedging. Lakoff and Zadeh in Hashemi and Shirzadi (2016:33) stated that hedges are linguistic devices that control the degree of fuzziness in communicating messages.

Lakoff (1972:195) stated hedges as "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. It is Livytska (2019) stated that since Lakoff introduced the notion of hedges into linguistics by defining them as "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. It is added by Livytska that hedges have been given different definitions by different researchers (Crompton, 1997; Hyland, 1996, 1998; Myers, 1989; Salager-Meyer, 1994, 1997).

Hedging element in the sentence conveyed, can make the meaning contained in it biased.

Things conveyed by speakers in sentences containing of hedging, make speakers do not need to commit to the correctness of their

words. According to Hyland (1996b:478), "A hedge is any linguistic means used to indicate either (a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth of an accompanying preposition or (b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically. This thing certainly can help speakers from saying incorrect or uncertain meaning or fact from the statement.

Modal Hedges

Carter & McCarthy (2006:898) stated that in English particularly, modality is commonly expressed through the use of modal auxiliaries. These auxiliaries are generally used to express "degree of certainty" and "degree of obligation"

Yu (2009:77) distinguishes four broad hedging categories, namely modal hedges, performative (mental) hedges, pragmatic-marker hedges, and quantificational hedges. The category of modal hedges includes modal auxiliary verbs (e.g. *may*, *might*, *could*, *can*), modal adjectives (e.g. *possible*, *likely*, *probable*), modal adverbs (e.g. *possibly*, *perhaps*, *probably*, *maybe*), modal nouns (e.g. *possibility*, *chance*). The category of mental hedges is generally represented by lexical verbs with epistemic meaning (e.g. *think*, *suppose*, *guess*, and *believe*). Quantificational hedges encompass those devices that indicate quantity, fre-

quency and degree (e.g. *some, about, nearly, approximately, almost, quite, sort of, kind of*, etc.). Pragmatic-marker hedges (implicit hedges), which are “apparently a feature of oral rather than written discourse” (Yu, 2009:93), include such expressions as *actually, in fact, generally speaking, in my opinion, for me, in other words, I suppose, I mean, if you like, you know, etc.*

a. Modal hedges

1. Modal auxiliary verbs: *may, might, could, can*

E.g. *It may be said that the commitment to some of the social and economic concepts was less strong than it is now.*

2. Modal adjectives: *possible, likely, probable*

E.g. *There is possible to make new English report before tomorrow.*

3. Modal adverbs: *possibly, perhaps, probably, maybe*

E.g. *just to train and such. It probably won't be any more than that. I'm going to need you to look after your mother while I'm away.*

4. Modal nouns: *possibility, chance*

E.g. *There is a very little chance winning the competition without practice*

III. METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method which describes a situation systematically or area of interest factually and accurately. It is a line with Sherman and Webb (1988), “Qualitative research is concerned with meaning as they appear to, or is achieved by persons in live social situation.” It is useful for describing information that has facts. The related theories to the topic by the experts are also used to empower the explanation of the modal hedge category of hedging. The data used are taken from the dialogues which utter by main characters in Knives Out movie. The steps of data collecting is done by the following; 1. Watching the movie; it is done to understand the story and decide which utterances will be used; 2. Taking utterances; this activity is done by watching the movie and collecting the dialogue utters by the main characters such as Marta, Blanc, Harlan, and Ransom; 3. Identifying the modal hedge category of hedging; this is the last step to classify the utterances by the category of hedging based on the experts’ theories. The major objective of this research is to analyze the modal hedge category of hedging used in illocutionary acts.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The story begins with the death of a grandfather who is a conglomerate who allegedly died of suicide. However, apparently this death aroused suspicion for members of this family. Therefore, one of the family members hired a private detective to investigate the case and find out the real cause of the grandfather's death.

Situations that occur tend to bring up assumptions and thoughts that make the characters have to produce sentences that have a meaningful bias which can be seen in some of the data below:

Data 1

Harlan : "I know my daughter, and she **would** want to know."

00:18:56 – 00:18:57

In this situation, Harlan was confiding in Martha his anxiety about the marriage of his first daughter. He found out that Linda's husband was having an affair. He felt and believed that Linda would be happier if she knew the truth. Harlan felt that being honest with Linda about her husband's affair would be better for Linda. Harlan's sentence is not stated with certainty but based on his own assumptions, it can be seen from the category of modal hedges used "would" which if interpre-

ted will have the meaning possibility. Harlan does not state with certainty by saying "she would want to know" rather than "she wants to know." It shows that Harlan is not really sure about his feeling at all. Therefore, the sentence is included in hedging.

Data 2

Marta : "Can I just wait inside? I feel like I **shouldn't** be here."

00:27:33 – 00:27:34

Marta was nervous when the investigation team, which included Detective Benoit Blanc, asked her about the facts about the Thrombey family. She felt she was better off not in that place with them. However, the fact is that Marta is obliged to assist the investigation, therefore she thinks for herself if she is not allowed to be there. This reason makes the writers state that the sentence stated by Marta is included in the hedging category of modal hedge category "shouldn't" which the negative shape of "should". Marta chose the word "shouldn't" by saying "I feel like I shouldn't be there," rather than "I must not to be here," because she realized that she should be there but if she could, she would not want to be there.

Data 3

Harlan : “You know, sometimes I think that everything I’ve been given my family, I’ve done *maybe* without knowing or *maybe* to keep them beneath me... I certainly *should* have... I don’t know encouraged Walt to write his own stories, not just be a caretaker of mine.”

00:34:35 – 0:34:56

The word “maybe” which is the hedging category for modal hedges, appears a lot in the sentences stated by Harlan in this dialogue. In his sentence there is a lot of uncertainty as a manifestation of his regret for his attitude so far. He wished that he had not done anything in the past, “maybe” things would have been better. All these possibilities are just assumptions on his own, as is evident from Harlan’s choice of the word “maybe”. If he believes in what he said then Harlan will say “I have done without knowing or to keep them beneath me ...” rather than “I have done maybe without knowing or maybe to keep them beneath me ...” in real of his dialogue.

Data 4

Harlan : “And I *could* have been kinder to Linda and Ransom.”

00:35:04 – 00:35:06

In this situation, Harlan still regretted, where he felt that what he did in the past was wrong. He should have changed everything from the start, so that today when he is old and may soon die he can be kinder to his daughter, Linda, and his first grandson, Ransom. In this case, it is clear that Harlan’s character uses the modal hedges category “could” because this is a personal assumption and is also the fruit of regret on what he threatened his family. If he can confirm with certainty he will prefer to say “... I must be kinder ...” than “... I could have been kinder ...”

Data 5

Harlan : “The ambulance *would* take at least 15 minutes to arrive and then it *would* be too late.”

00:37:43 – 00:37:47

Harlan and Marta are in a precarious situation where they are involved in a tense debate. Marta insisted that she desperately needed to call an ambulance as soon as possible in order to save Harlan’s life. However, on the other hand Harlan was too concerned about Marta’s condition which would be the target of Thrombey’s family members if it was proven that she had given her the wrong medicine. Here, Harlan tried to convince Marta that calling an ambulance will only be use-

less because according to his own estimation he predicted the ambulance would arrive in fifteen minutes or more. It is something that he was not sure of himself. Therefore, he used the modal hedge of hedging category by expressing, "The ambulance would take at least 15 minutes ..." Likewise when he said, "It would be too late ..." It shows that Harlan can not make it sure by saying "It is too late."

Data 6

Marta: "I have it because it comes with the kit, so it **should** be here. It has to be."

00:38:02 – 00:38:03

Marta is till trying hard on fixing the mistake she made so she would be able to save Harlan's life, or at least to delay the worse possibility to what will attack Harlan. But unfortunately, what she was looking for was not in the place it should be, he has even looked for other places that she might have it neglected to put it. She tried to convince herself by saying, "... so it should be here ..." but the word "should" itself which she used there showed herself that she was actually not sure if it was there. That is why Marta used modal hedge there on her sentence, because if she is sure that it is there she will definitely say, "So it was here ..."

Data 7

Harlan : "Some of you **may** be surprised by the choice I've made here."

01:08:50 – 01:08:51

Although Harlan did not say it verbally but through writing, this sentence was still the sentence uttered by Harlan in his will read by his lawyer. In his statement, Harlan used the modal hedge "may" because when writing the will, Harlan only imagined what would happen, not directly seeing what happened. all of that is just the conjecture and feelings of Harlan who already know the characteristic of his family. This is included in hedging category because if the statement is certain Harlan will choose to use the phrase "Some of you must be surprised ..." rather than "Some of you may be surprised ..."

Data 8

Blanc : "And in the meantime. I'd **maybe** run."

01:11:32 – 01:11:33

The situation at the Thrombey's house become chaotic after the reading of the will stating that all inheritance did not go to family members but to Harlan's care taker, Marta Cabrera. The whole family railed against and put Marta's condition under the threat, therefore according to Blanc based on his own thin-

king, it was best to leave the place. This is hedging because Blanc put himself in Marta's position at that time, he would have run away, but he stated with the supposition that he used the word "maybe" in the sentence "... I would maybe run" which makes the meaning inconclusive instead of saying "I must have been running."

Data 9

Ransom: "I think this **could** be the best thing to happen to all of you."

01:12:30 – 01:12:32

Ransom teased his family for trying to persuade Marta. He appeared carrying Marta from the crowded situation that occurred moreover when she was about to run, Marta's car did not turn on and made Marta trapped in this precarious situation. When Ransom succeeded in bringing Marta away, Ransom uttered a sentence by using the modal hedge category "could" in the sentence of "I think this could be the best thing ..." because Ransom stated something based solely on his personal opinion. If it is true that what happened is the best then Ransom will say with the sentence "This is the best thing ..."

Data 10

Ransom: "... and I know I **shouldn't** say this out loud, but when he told me, I... I **could** have killed him.

01:14:09 – 01:14:15

Ransom is trying to divert the atmosphere and also trying to win Marta's sympathy by putting herself into a wounded and disappointed person. He seemed to regret having to say this by using the phrase "... I shouldn't say this ..." which shows that he is not fully aware of this situation and he does not have to say this to Martha.

Data 11

Ransom: "**Maybe** you and I were the only two who knew him, so you are not gonna bullshit me on this because ..."

01:14:56 – 01:15:00

The word "maybe" in the sentence of "Maybe you and I were ..." is a modal hedge category of hedging because in this sentence it shows that the utterer only guessed what had happened. This sentence would not be a hedge if Ransom did not use the word "maybe" in his expression. That is why the meaning he expressed will avoid the vague meaning. However, since everything he said was only a conjecture and he could not provide concrete

evidence that this opinion was correct, he had to use the meaning of bias in his sentence.

Data 12

Marta: "You **could** just turn me in right now and still get your cut of the inheritance."

01:19:22 – 01:19:23

Marta is not at all sure what Ransom said and with the solution given by him. She felt very well acquainted with Ransom, so he was unsure of the favor Ransom was offering. In a situation full of uncertainty, Marta must continue to express her opinion. Therefore, he chose to use the word "could" rather than make it more definitely by not using the modal hedge category but directly with the sentence "You turn me in right now ..."

Data 13

Marta: "**Maybe**, Alice I don't know."

01:22:39 – 01:22:40

Marta's sister wakes up Marta who is sleeping. It took Marta by surprise. Marta became even more surprised when her sister immediately asked "If they were rich." Marta answered casually because she was still not sure what was going on. First, she just woke up and was not fully into the discussion. Second, the chaotic situation at Thrombey's house the day before still shocked her and she was not sure what she was going through at the

moment, because for her, all of this was too sudden and for no apparent reason. Therefore Marta answered "Maybe, Alice I don't know" instead of saying "Yes, we are rich. We are billionaires now."

Data 14

Blanc: "But I **would** imagine that age deepens all feelings."

01:23:36 – 01:23:38

Blanc met Mrs. Thrombey, Harlan's mother, to ask a few questions. Poor Blanc, because of Mrs. Thrombey who is very old, Blanc felt that he needed to make an approach or pleasantries at first. Blanc started with small talk where he tried to cement himself in the position of Mrs. Thrombey at this time. Therefore, Blanc used the word "would" in his sentence because he is imagining himself to be someone else.

Data 15

Ransom: "**Maybe** it did mean something."

01:30:02 – 01:30:03

Ransom and Marta are discussing an anonymous letter sent by an unknown person to Marta. According to Ransom, the letter could have had a specific purpose, but neither Marta nor Ransom knew it. Therefore, modal hedge "maybe" was used by Ransom because

he wanted to show Marta that he did not know exactly who the sender of the letter was.

Data 16

Blanc: "We got a **possible** murder suspect."

01:32:09 – 01:32:10

A new clue has appeared; unfortunately the clue is trying to be destroyed by certain people. At that time, Marta, who still really trusted Ransom, tried to see one of the pieces of evidence in a laboratory, but an unexpected thing happened, the building had been set on fire by someone. At that time, they were spotted by Blanc and the other detectives. Marta, who was influenced by Ransom, finally decided to run away from that place. This actually made Blanc suspicious and tried to catch up with Ransom and Marta. During the chase Blanc asked the officers to help in the chase because he suspected that one of them might be the murderer. Because it is still a conjecture, Blanc stated it with the word "possible" which is included in the modal hedge category of hedging.

Data 17

Blanc : "I think that it **would** be better if we were to gather again and get this over with."

01:41:05 – 01:41:07

Marta and Blanc returned to Thrombey's house to settle things after Marta finally

told everything what really happened to Blanc. Upon arrival at the Thrombey family home, all family members were waiting for them with great enthusiasm. Blanc felt that it would be better if all family members gathered in one room so that Marta's announcements would be clearer and Marta could explain everything comfortably.

Data 18

Blanc : "**Perhaps** we deserve each other."

01:42:14 – 01:42:15

When Blanc makes some kind of joke or it is Blanc's hope that they can be together because Blanc feels they are match to each other. Unfortunately, Blanc is uncertain about Marta's feelings on him. One thing for sure, from his point of view, he felt that all this time he was very compatible with Marta. Apart from being unsure about Marta's view of him, Blanc also does not seem too confident about being with Marta. If he is sure and confident, of course he will not use modal hedge but directly says, "We deserve each other."

Data 19

Blanc : "... you **might** tell us all why you hired me."

01:46:42 – 01:46:43

Blanc asks Ransom for an explanation as to why he assigned himself to solve the

mystery of Harlan's death. With the situation that occurred at that time, Blanc suspected that the mastermind behind all the events that occurred was Ransom, because otherwise Ransom should have honestly and openly declared himself when he hired Blanc as a detective to unravel the mystery behind Harlan's death. Blanc uses the word "might" which is a modal hedge to provoke Ransom's will admit it. Therefore he said it not by the sentence of "You must tell us ..." instead of saying "... you might tell us ..."

Data 20

Marta : "I **should** help them, right?"

01:03:53 – 01:03:54

At the end of the story after it all ended, Marta still felt like she had to help Harlan's family, but she still was not sure about it. Marta was indeed kind and gentle. He has received so much ill-treatment from the Thrombey family's children and grandchildren, but she still cannot allow the family to be in trouble because even though this family has also helped her a lot so far. Harlan had decided to hand over all his inheritance to Marta and Harlan had also instructed Marta that there is nothing he would give to his family members by reason of letting his family to be able to stand on their own ability. However, in fact,

Marta still could not let the family suffer. Marta is uncertain about what to do, whether to stick to Harlan's decision to give nothing to his family or keep helping them. That was the discussion she was having with Blanc about what was in his doubtful heart. Therefore, she tried to ask for an opinion by stating her own opinion through the sentence of "I should help them, right?"

V. CONCLUSION

There are 20 data of modal hedges found and analyzed by the writer. The modal hedges found are **would**, **could**, **should**, **shouldn't**, **may**, **might**, **maybe**, **possible**, and **perhaps**. The most used modal hedge is **maybe**. The data were taken from four main characters that is specifically described by the table box below:

Main Characters	Modal Hedges Uttered	Total Data Found
Benoit Blanc	<i>maybe, would, possible, would, perhaps, and might.</i>	6
Marta Cabrera	<i>should, maybe, could, should, and shouldn't.</i>	5
Harlan Thrombey	<i>would, maybe, should, could, and may.</i>	5
Hugh Ransom Drysdale	<i>maybe, shouldn't, and could</i>	4

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