Modalisation and pragmatics in simultaneous TV interpreting. A case study: American presidential debates

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Abstract

"Politics is quintessentially a language game", as Geis (1987: 13) wrote. As such it has its own rules, which politicians are expected to abide by, especially when addressing a television audience during a debate. Interpreters having to cope with media events[1] *are required to act professionally while remain pragmatically and interactionally aware of the situation. Therefore, they may use a number of linguistic strategies and devices primarily aiming at accomplishing specific communicative functions. However, such process may lead to a change in the pragmatic level of the interpreted text (IT) if compared to the original one (OT).*
This paper aims at analysing the impact discourse modalisation has on ITs. The research carried out on simultaneous interpreting (SI) of five American presidential debates ranging from 1984 to 2008 would suggest that modality markers used in the target language may emphasise the pragmatic level of ITs, whereas omissions and inaccurate renditions of speakers' statements would determine a mitigation of the emotional impact as perceived by interpretation users.

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1   The term is used with reference to events having a particular "grammar": they are characterised by "elements of monopoly, being broadcasted live, and being remote". Moreover, "they put a full stop on everything else on the air; [...] they speak of the greatness of the event". And, pragmatically speaking, "the interruption of the sequence of television puts a stop to the normal flow of life" (Dayan/Katz 1992: 10-1).

Introduction

There is certainly no need to recall here the well-known role interpreters play in a communicative event and the responsibility they have as language and cultural mediators (cf. Rucci 1999: 152-153). However, the very notion of mediation entails a 'filtering process', whose (linguistic) consequences may be worth considering. This author humbly believes that in spite of theory, in practice interpretation is never completely unbiased – no matter how desirable. Additions and omissions are to be expected, as simultaneous translation implies mental processing and modulation.

Interestingly, when associated with sensitive events and speeches, such process may bring about unexpected consequences, for instance a different nuance in meaning or tone. This is particularly evident in televised political discourse during electoral campaigns[2], where a single word, body language or tone of voice can determine a contender's victory. George Orwell (1946) caustically asserted that "political language [...] is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind". Is it legitimate to ask whether it applies also to interpreted speeches or not? In other words, can interpreters' lexical choices contribute to shape (unintentionally) the candidates' image and if so, to what extent? And can discourse modalisation, i.e. the aforementioned filter, affect interpreted-mediated interactions?

This research tries to answer the previous questions through a qualitative and quantitative study of five TV-broadcasted American presidential debates – material selected from a wider corpus named CorIT (Corpus di Interpretazione Televisiva, *Italian Television Interpreting Corpus*) (cf. Straniero Sergio 1999a, 1999b, 2005, 2007; Falbo 2009, 2012).

As regards the organisation of the paper, a few short initial paragraphs will serve as theoretical reference in order to better identify the key concepts dealt with. A methodology description and examples will follow. Finally, results will be presented and discussed.

1.   A short guide to modalisation.

Bally (in Tucci 2008) synthetically describes discourse modalisation as "l'atteggia-mento del parlante sulla propria locuzione [speaker's attitude towards his utterances]". He underlines the speaker's wish to express his/her individuality through speech. Bazzanella (2001: 48) corroborates his view when she explains that modality refers to "l'espressione di atteggiamenti soggettivi del parlante in

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2   Political discourse is built around a number of recurring linguistic and metalinguistic pillars: persuasive tone, smart rhetoric and creativity – which is why it is highly responsive to the slightest lexical change. As regards the emotive function of language, cf. Nida (1990).

relazione [...] al contenuto proposizionale [the expression of speaker's subjective attitudes with reference to the propositional content][4]".

Such a device is largely used in everyday talk, and it is extremely powerful in political speeches – the latter being centred upon modulation, prosody and strategic lexical choices[5]. However, it should not be the case of interpreters, given their gatekeeper[6], non person nature. Yet interpretation is not the equivalent of mechanic translation. On the one hand, language mediators are indeed qualified professionals, and as such they are required to render a complete and accurate delivery with no alterations nor omissions. On the other, they are aware of (and comply with) communication needs, which include interactional pragmatics, emotional dimension, event management and audience orientation[7]. Therefore, it is plausible that they occasionally adopt discourse modalisation devices too – reasons include professional ethics (e.g. bridging a conceptual gap in the target language) and the need for a better rhetoric-stylistic rendition.

In particular, when dealing with television interpreting, modality markers aim primarily at enhancing communication between message sender (in the case studied, the politician speaking) and recipients (TV viewers), a task entailing spectacularisation and ordinary language amplification[8]. But how are they used, and with what results?

Strategies are numerous, and are indeed part of daily, unplanned communication. A good example is the use of discourse markers – lexical items that "costellano il discorso quotidiano [are an integral part of daily speech]" and are adopted "per lo più inconsapevolmente dal parlante [mostly without the speaker being aware of it]" (Bazzanella 1994: 146).

Besides, there is the subgroup of hedges, typically associated with the expression of modality as they are linguistic devices used to mitigate the impact of an utterance. Although they are generally used as fillers, in fact they have the power to intensify not only contents but also emotional involvement conveyed by words (cf. Lakoff in Markkanen/Schröder 1997: 4).

For instance, speakers use hedges to mitigate a negative face threatening act[9] (e.g. English expression *what you might call*) or to express the degree of certainty

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4   All the translations from Italian into English are of the author of the present paper.
5   Cf. Eco (1973: 93); Tosi (2001: 106). On mediatised political discourse cf. also Fairclough (1995).
6   On the interpreter's role of "reporter", "responder", "recapitulator" and "gatekeeper" cf. Wadensjö (1998).
7   On interpreters' creativity cf. Riccardi (1998) and Alexieva (1990).
8   It is worth noticing that modality markers (e.g. *sostanzialmente, praticamente, diciamo che* [basically, practically, let's say]) have become part of the ordinary vocabulary of mainstream TV and consequently of 'the man in the street', who uses them extensively in daily talk. As a result, such expressions have been popularised yet often deprived of their semantic value, which is why speakers commonly view them as interchangeable 'empty' fillers.
9   *Negative face* is linked to personal wish of autonomy and independence (Goffman's notion of preserving one's own territory); thus, *negative politeness* strategies are connected to mitigation of any *face-threatening act* (e.g. an order). Cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992: 167-8).

of a statement (e.g. adverbs *maybe, probably*, verbal expressions such as *I believe, it seems to me*). Here, modalising function applies (cf. Heino *et al.* 2002: 134-5).

The use of hedging as modalisation strategy is a relatively new study topic. It was firstly explored in the second half of last century and has flourished since. Zadeh (1965) and Weinreich (1966) pioneered the field, initially describing hedges as *metalinguistic operators.* Their definition was later complemented by Lakoff (1972), Fraser (1975) and Brown/Levinson (1978, 1987), the latter specifically applying the concept of hedging to politeness in verbal interaction. In the eighties, research was further developed by House/Kasper (1981), who established a connection bewteen these items and the expression of modality, and Prince *et al.* (1982) who distinguished two main groups within the category, i.e. *approximators* and *shields.* Most recently, Salager-Meyer (1994), Yule (1996) and Markkanen/Schröder (1997) contributed to the analysis of hedging expressions in English[10].

Given the large number of relevant articles and publications, this author does not presume to review here all literature in the area, but hopes to have sufficiently outlined the theoretical basis for this study. Building upon it, precise criteria may be identified.

2. Research criteria

Specific guidelines were set for the purpose of this ad-hoc corpus analysis. The whole group of discourse modalisation markers was taken into account and considered according to the classification suggested by Straniero Sergio (2007: 498, 501):

· modal adverbs (*forse, probabilmente, magari, un po', almeno, un pochino, tutto sommato*, etc. [maybe, probably, perhaps, a little, at least, a bit, all things considered, etc.]);
· phrasal adverbs (*ovviamente, sostanzialmente, praticamente*, etc. [obviously, basically, practically, etc.]);
· prepositional phrases (*in qualche modo, in un certo senso, una specie di, una sorta di, tra virgolette*, etc. [somehow, in a way, a kind of, a sort of, in inverted commas, etc.]);
· phrasal expressions (*direi, mi sembra, diciamo, per così dire, devo dire che*, etc. [I would say, let's say, so to say, I must say that, etc.]), including subcategories as performatives modified by verbs (*mi è consentito dire, mi permetto di*, etc. [allow me to say, I dare to, etc.]) and by adverbs (*se così vogliamo dire, dico semplicemente, chiamiamola così*, etc. [if we may say so, I simply say, let's call it this way, etc.]);
· adjectives (*cosiddetto, un certo*, etc. [so-called, a certain (something), etc.]).

The aforementioned mitigating devices are further complemented by strengthening ones, aimed at emphasizing originally neutral speech parts. In this respect, Straniero Sergio (2007: 514) considers two groups:

10 For an extensive bibliography on hedging research, cf. Schröder/Zimmer (1997).

- *certainty markers*, aimed at asserting the truth and which include two subgroups, the emphatic (*veramente, sicuramente, letteralmente, in realtà, addirittura, etc.* [truly, surely, literally, in fact, even, etc.]) and assessment (*interessante, notevole, purtroppo, etc.* [interesting, remarkable, unfortunately, etc.]);
- *saliency markers*, aimed at pointing out the core content of the statement (*in sostanza, fondamentalmente, esattamente, proprio, etc*. [substantially, essentially, exactly, really, just, etc.]).

The textual analysis consisted of three phases: initially, the OT was compared with its interpreted counterpart (IT) for each debate of the chosen corpus. The objective was to identify the parts of the Italian transcript where the modalising elements listed above were deliberately added – i.e. without a correspondence in the source text.

Then, data were considered quantitatively. During this stage the recurrence frequency of the markers was noted and cross-correlated with further criteria (e.g. pragmatic functions, perceived textual mitigation and strengthening, etc.). Finally, data were presented in a tabular form for a better overall view.

3. Selected corpus.

As specified in the introductory section, the research was carried out on a selected corpus comprising five American presidential debates, i.e. Mondale-Reagan (1984), Bush-Dukakis (1988), Bush-Clinton-Perot (1992), Bush (George W.)-Kerry (2004) and the most recent McCain-Obama (2008). It has to be recalled that in 1984 and 1988 two TV-broadcasted debates were organised, whereas in 1992, 2004 and 2008 there were three. However, for research purpose, only one per electoral campaign has been selected.

As regards their brief description, the main features of the texts and recordings are listed in the table below:

Debate	Broadcast time and mode	Interpreters' team
1. MONDALE-REAGAN	wholly and pre-recorded	4 interpreters (3 men and 1 woman)
2. BUSH-DUKAKIS	wholly and pre-recorded	3 interpreters (2 men and 1 woman)
3. BUSH-CLINTON-PEROT	wholly and live	4 male interpreters
4. BUSH (G. W.)-KERRY	wholly and live	1 female interpreter
5. MCCAIN-OBAMA	wholly and live	2 male interpreters

total time of SI analysed: =/-7 hours

Figure 1. Corpus features overview

It has to be stressed that the choice of the debates was not based upon these elements (broadcast time and mode, interpreters' team). Nevertheless, in debate 4 the team composition was worth considering, especially if related both to the number of the event participants (three men) and to the transmission mode (in Italy the whole debate here considered was broadcasted live and interpreted entirely by one, unassisted woman). It goes without saying that in this instance

modalising features were easily identified and ascribed to the only performer. Hence, individual *style* clearly emerges.

4.   Qualitative analysis.

Research involved an initial exam of the target language text, although light was mainly cast upon OT-IT comparison. Efforts were aimed primarily at detecting modality markers and strategies[11]. Furthermore, the initial hypotheses needed to be verified, i.e. whether or not modalisation occurs and if it has repercussions on the interpretation users' perception.

For the purpose of this paper, a number of examples featuring different mechanisms have been selected.

To begin with, here is an excerpt from debate 1, where the interpreter of former President Reagan introduces modal adverbs in a number of occasions. According to ordinary language habits, adverbs such as *chiaramente, naturalmente* [clearly, naturally] would be very popular among Italian speakers and would be often used as qualifiers in communication. Under certain circumstances, they have the potential to intensify speakers' statements, as shown in the examples below:

Example 1

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
we're not in the habit of assigning guilt before THERE HAS BEEN PROPER EVIDENCE PRODUCED AND PROOF OF THAT GUILT. *But if guilt is established, whoever is guilty we will treat with that situation then, and they will be removed*	*non siamo soliti attribuire la colpa prima che non si siano prodotte le prove* CHIARAMENTE *della colpevolezza ma una volta stabilita [...] chi [...] risulta colpevole* NATURALMENTE *dovrà tenere in considerazione questa cosa*	*we are not in the habit of assigning guilt before there has been proof clearly of the guilt but once it is established, whoever is guilty of course will have to consider this*
we're retaliating with THOSE WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE *for the terrorist acts*	*colpire* VERAMENTE *i responsabili*	*we will hit those responsible indeed*
no, Morton, I don't agree to all of those things	*no* PROPRIO *non mi sento di sottoscrivere quello che lei dice*	*no, I definitely cannot endorse what you are saying*

In IT, Ronald Reagan's declarations are notably strengthened through the interpreter additions – a choice likely to affect the Italian-speaking audience

11   Notably, Palmer (in Raynaud 1992: 129) describes modalisation "grammaticalizzazione degli atteggiamenti e delle opinioni (soggettive) del parlante [gramaticalisation of speaker's attitudes and (subjective) opinions]", whereas Lewandowski (in Raynaud 1992: 129) defines it "una categoria inclusiva ed estensiva [...] morfosintattica e semantico-pragmatica (comunicativa) [...] e può essere realizzata grammaticalmente e/o lessicalmente, intonazionalmente, retoricamente ecc. [an inclusive and extensive morphosyntactic and pragmatic-semantic (communicative) category, which can be expressed through grammar and/or lexicon, intonation, rhetoric, etc.]".

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perception too, as the candidate appears more clear-headed than he really is. However, results can be opposite when modality markers are used improperly, e.g. bringing about the unintended mitigation of what happens to be the debate key statement. Here, the choice of the conditional mode does not seem to mirror the assertiveness expressed by the future tenses originally used:

Example 2

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
I WILL NOT MAKE *age an issue of this campaign.* I AM NOT GOING TO EXPLOIT, *for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience*	*io non* FAREI *dell'età una questione in questa campagna io non* SFRUTTEREI *questa situazione per motivi politici*	*I would not make age an issue in this campaign I would not exploit this situation for political reasons*

Switching to a different function of discourse modalisation performed through hedges, a defensive use is well exemplified in Bush-Dukakis face-to-face. Here, interpreters seem to be concerned with safeguarding their public image while assuring the smooth message transmission. Indeed, strategic modality markers may help in overcoming linguistic difficulties and preserving effective communication, as well expressed by the following example:

Example 3

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
(Dukakis referring to Bush) *[…] he is gonna be the* JOE ISUZU *of American politics*	*[…] sarà* VERAMENTE UNA SPECIE DI *m- un Pinocchio della politica americana*	*[…] he will be really a sort of Pinocchio of American politics*

The challenge is clear: Michael Dukakis is using a culture-bound term which cannot be literally translated if the Italian-speaking audience is to understand the meaning and the irony of the statement[12]. Therefore, the interpreter wisely chooses a linguistic and cultural adaptation, which requires a few seconds to be uttered. This time is filled with an emphatic expression, a prepositional phrase and a little hesitation – suggesting that markers may carry out a time-gaining[13] and word-searching function, too.

When used with a modalising connotation, verbs and adverbs can partially solve delivery problems, as they would disguise the inaccurate renditions and mark detachment in case of unsatisfactory translations. For instance, in the same

12 During the second half of the eighties, Joe Isuzu became famous as the spokesman of a series of adverts of the Isuzu car company; he was mainly known for the blatant lies used in his overinflated claims – which is the idea Dukakis wants to convey about his opponent's declarations.

13 According to Setton (1999: 185) "interpreters often introduce connectives and/or conative rhetorical phrases" called *stalling devices*, specifying that "some are purely performance variations of spoken discourse […] but others carry meaning […] including adverbs, conjunctions, parenthetical additions and discourse connectives".

IT the verbal expression *diciamo* [let's say] often appears when interpreters face a problematic point in the text (due to e.g. a syntactic structure). Here are some interesting cases:

Example 4

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
full enforcement of the catastrophic health insurance	*applicare pienamente il programma di assistenza sanitaria per eventi* DICIAMO *di emergenza*	*fully apply the health insurance program for events let's say of emergency*
he was moving away from his own record, from what his passion has been over the years	*stava facendo marcia indietro dalla sua storia dalla* DICIAMO *dalle cause che avevano infiammato la sua passione nel passato*	*he was stepping off from his story from let's say from the causes which had fuelled his passion in the past*
in using food as a political weapon	*utilizzando* DICIAMO *gli alimenti come un'arma* DICIAMO *una leva di ricatto*	*using let's say food as a weapon let's say for blackmail*
there are three people on our ticket that are acknowledgeable	*nel mio gruppo* DICIAMO *ci sono tante persone competenti*	*in my group let's say there are a lot of qualified people*

So much for the eighties debates, now for the ninety decade. An excerpt from three-way duel Bush-Clinton-Perot offers the opportunity to explore further an unusual aspect of modalisation, namely its association with gesture and onomatopoeia.

Example 5

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
There was a momentary fear that he might win and that THE MARKETS WENT PHWEE, DOWN LIKE THAT *(accompanying the sound with the gesture of a free-falling hand)*	*i mercati sono crollati* L'AVETE VISTO ANCHE VOI	*markets have crashed you saw it too*

In the example above, former President Bush is commenting on the markets' reaction to the possible victory of Governor Clinton and chooses to support his words with a clear gesture. The interpreter addresses directly the audience adding to the main clause a verbal expression – thus stimulating its active hearing and bringing the conversation on a more intimate level. This choice would appear particularly significant if the context is taken into account: neither the sound nor the gesture can be repeated, hence the verbalisation and modalisation of both a visual act and an acoustic feature through a sort of meta-discourse reference to the words, gesture and onomatopoeia in the OT[14]. Interestingly, semantics is safeguarded, as is rhetoric.

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14 As regards the explicit rendition of deictic gestures, cf. Straniero Sergio (2007: 358).

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A few minutes later, a similar situation has to be dealt with, yet this time the approach is totally different:

Example 6

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
I might say to Mr. Perot, I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED IT [...] but I worked out a deal with Boris Yeltsin to eliminate, get rid of entirely, the most destabilizing weapons of all	*io ho dovuto negoziare con Boris Eltsin per eliminare l'arma più destabilizzante [...]* GLI È SFUGGITO A PEROT	*I had to negotiate with Boris Eltsin in order to eliminate the most destabilizing weapon [...] Perot must have missed it*

In the very beginning of his intervention, Mr. Bush is attacking Mr. Perot using a direct tone and a past conditional, but in the IT the allocution is recalled at the end of the sentence. Specifically, it takes the form of a speaker's comment on his opponent and it involves a pronominal shift from "you" to "he". While the meaning is mostly well expressed, the pragmatic level is slightly distorted, as the original speaker's intentions are conveyed indirectly through a mitigating closing remark.

As mentioned earlier, in ITs hedges and markers may be combined with imperfect translations – as a matter of fact, they are often to be read as 'warnings' about language uncertainties, as the following examples indicate:

Example 7

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
confirmed addicts	*i tossicodipendenti* DICIAMO *da lungo tempo*	*long-time drug addicts*
DEA	*agenti* DICIAMO *del servizio antidroga*	*officials let's say of the anti-drug service*

Modalisation devices as such must not be confused with their use as discourse fillers. For instance, in the IT of debate 4 the expression *come sapete* [as you know] is recurrently found – it would appear a sort of verbal tic of the interpreter translating alone the whole event. However, under specific circumstances, the results obtained are worth considering:

Example 8

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
The A.Q. KHAN NETWORK *has been brought to justice*	COME SAPETE *abbiamo portato davanti alla giustizia molti terroristi*	*as you know we have brought to justice many terrorists*
as a matter of fact, this is a global effort (talking about fight against terrorism)	*infatti* COME SAPETE *questo è uno sforzo globale*	*as a matter of fact as you know this is a global effort*

In the first case, the double difficulty listening comprehension-name (re)production has to be coped with; the chosen option is a generalisation,

significantly introduced by a hedge marker – as Zecchini (2006) already suggested in her research. Consequently, the politician seems to get closer to the audience and the least-commitment strategy saves the interpreter's face.

In the second, the (properly translated) declarative conjunction is coupled with the verbal expression added by the interpreter. The resulting incipit reinforces the whole idea, since it seems to reflect the speaker's wish to involve the general public in his remark on such a sensitive topic.

Markers analysed thus far primarily affect textual pragmatics, if the latter refers to audience reception of the original message and its effects on the hearers. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that hedging strategies may have an effect not only on the literal meaning of a sentence but also on the implicit declaration of intents to the general public. Suffice it to compare the following OT with the corresponding IT, again from Bush-Kerry TV duel:

Example 9

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
I would hope I never have to. I UNDERSTAND HOW HARD IT IS TO COMMIT TROOPS. *Never wanted to commit troops.*	*spero di non doverlo fare mai* più DOVETE CAPIRE QUANT'È DIFFICILE IMPEGNAR LE TRUPPE *non avrei mai voluto impegnare i miei soldati*	*I hope I will never have to do it again you must understand how hard is to commit troops I would have never wanted to commit my soldiers*

At a first glance the shift is clear: the first person singular is replaced by the second person plural. On the semantic level, it entails a double switch: from the individual level to the community level and from assertion to exhortation. On the emotional level, it may be argued that the speaker is no longer directly involved as the spotlight is put on the audience understanding rather than on his. It is particularly meaningful if two factors are taken into account: the sensitive topic discussed is the military action in Iraq and the sentence appears in between two short, powerful statements all referred to the pronoun I – correctly kept in the Italian translation. In such a case the omission (or rather the switch) of the personal pronoun 'breaks' the lexical continuity of the OT and results in a slight detachment of the 'interpreted candidate' of the IT from his original attitude.

Discourse markers are best known for their contribution to textual cohesion and expression of speakers' views, which are key aspects of all communication but especially of politics. Therefore, when interpreting a presidential candidate speech, their use in OTs should be noticed, rapidly analyzed and conveyed accordingly – as the issue at stake might be the informal, inspired and charismatic image of themselves which politicians wish to project.

It is the case of the McCain-Obama debate, which is built around colloquial expressions, crosstalk, overlaps and direct appeals to the middle-class electorate through the constant reference to *Joe the plumber*[15]. Yet, all these elements are often

15 Maurizio Molinari (2010) writes that "di Joe l'idraulico si è parlato per ben 26 volte in 90 minuti di dibattito, rispetto alle 16 occasioni in cui si è trattato dell'economia, il tema centrale delle elezioni, e le nove volte in cui si è affrontato il tema dell'Iraq [Joe the plumber was mentioned twenty-six times in a 90-minute debate, whereas

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omitted in IT, as are those defining speakers' views – i.e. verbs of opinion, modal adverbs, etc. As a consequence, when drawing a comparison between the original and the interpreted version, the impact of the personal component seems greatly reduced.

However, interpreters of debate 5 are not immune to modalisation strategies. On the contrary, they use them in a number of cases with repair and expansion functions:

Example 10

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
(talking about Sarah Palin) *she negotiated with the oil companies and faced them down, a $40 billion pipeline [...] that's going to relieve the energy needs of the United*	*si è messa intorno a un tavolo con le aziende petrolifere e ha rifiutato* O MEGLIO *ha costruito un oleodotto che* CHIARAMENTE *andrà ad aiutare gli abitanti americani*	*she sat at a negotiating table with oil companies and she refused, or rather, she built a pipeline that will obviously help American people*
it's mortgaging our children's future	QUESTO SIGNIFICA *ipotecare il futuro dei nostri figli*	*this means mortgaging the future of our children*
I am a free trader	*io sono* ASSOLUTAMENTE *a favore del libero mercato e del commercio*	*I am absolutely in favour of free market and trade*

Significantly, in the first instance the initial inaccuracy is swiftly corrected through a reformulation and a subsequent modal adverb which aims at casting light upon the second part of the sentence.

Examples two and three show how hedges may be used as introductory elements. In this capacity they emphasize the value of the statements – especially in the third case, where the concise nominal expression requires a further explanation to be properly conveyed in the target language.

The aforementioned cases are indeed a subset of all the occurrences which emerged from the comparison OT/IT. They have been selected with the aim of identifying the range of functions, effects and textual/pragmatic implications of modalisation strategies.

The qualitative stage proved helpful in the initial description of the studied topic. Yet a quantitative follow-up was needed to make sense of the information gathered and to establish connections.

5.   Presentation of results and discussion

Numerical data were analysed as follows: for each text, the frequency of use of the described modality markers was firstly counted separately, then figures were grouped in three macro-categories and summed up. This enabled a plainer visual representation of results:

economics, the main topic in the elections, was mentioned sixteen times and Iraq nine".

	Categories	Adverbial expressions	Phrasal expressions	Discourse markers
Debate				
1. Reagan – Mondale		42	17	12
2. Bush – Dukakis		44	36	25
3. Bush – Clinton – Perot		20	21	26
4. Bush – Kerry		49	50	11
5. McCain – Obama		20	10	24
Total		175	134	98

Figure 2. Modality strategies distribution within the analysed presidential debates.

The table provides a clearer insight of the phenomenon, as it shows clearly the primacy of adverbs – among which, certainty markers (e.g. *veramente* [really], *sicuramente* [certainly]) prevail upon saliency ones (e.g. *in sostanza* [in substance], *fondamentalmente* [basically]), in a 6:1 ratio.

Once qualitative and quantitative research outputs were combined, it became evident that within specific text sections markers carry out a number of functions. According to available data, they may be classed into four different groups:

· micro-planning and stalling;
· interpretation imperfection and detachment marking;
· repair (aimed at "disguising" a mistake or an imperfection);
· 'simple' adding which does not accomplish any of the aforementioned functions.

At this point, it was possible to establish a relation between the markers use and their roles. The following pie chart visually exemplifies it:
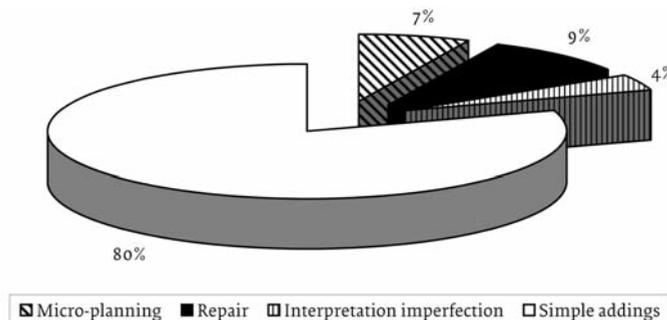

Figure 3. Markers frequency sorted by function.

As clearly shown, modality markers not accomplishing a specific function are used the most. Given that they do play neither a pragmatic nor a syntactic role in the IT, this author suggests that they might be considered 'simple' additions to the source text. Repair-oriented markers rank second, with a few percentage points difference than micro-planning. Lastly, interpretation imperfections correspond to four percent – a percentage value not extremely significant from the statistical point of view but still suggesting that modalisation is one of the face-saving strategies used in case of inaccuracies.

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Once the markers' roles were spotted, attention was drawn to the contribution of each macro-category (i.e. adverbs, discourse markers and phrasal expressions) to modalisation. In particular, the focus was placed upon the relation between the functional groups listed above and the modal categories of figure 2. The column chart below sums up the total figures for the three classes and the relevant occurrences in the target texts:
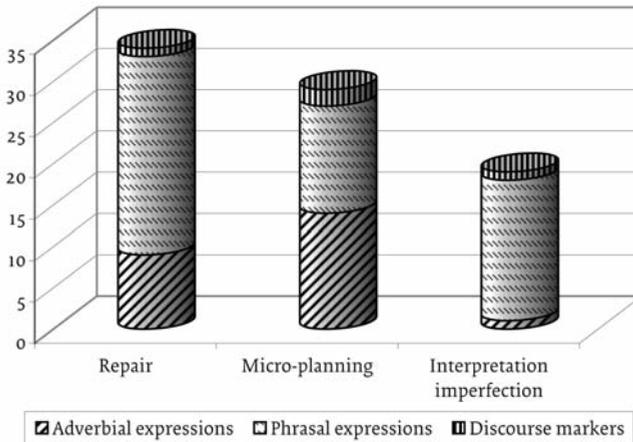

Figure 4. Modality markers functional contribution - grouped by category.

Looking at the first and at the last column, phrasal expressions appear to have the largest share (which is also due to the fact that the category includes both phrasal and verbal idioms, and there were fifty of them in debate 4 only, hence the higher figures).

Adverbs are in second place, mainly associated to stalling, whereas discourse markers (DMs) rank third. This might be explained bearing in mind that in ordinary language (which is in fact the source of political language) their role tends to be 'limited' to textual cohesion and coherence. Besides, they carry no propositional content, which is why speakers often consider them 'mere' additions to the conversation. However, in the case of presidential debates interpretation, there seems to be a thin dividing line between DMs translated as part of the faithful delivery of the original message and DMs used as fillers or interpreters' automatisms (such as the expression *come sapete* [as you know] in debate 4). In the latter case, they do not contribute functionally to IT, as shown in the bar chart above, but are likely to fall within the simple addings category of figure 3.

Lastly, changes to the pragmatic level of the IT compared to the OT deserve attention: the chart below exemplifies the number of occurrences in which an emphasis (marked in dark grey) or a down-toning effect (marked in light grey) was noticed. The column on the left refers to the cases connected to discourse modalisation[16], whereas the one on the right to other interpreters' inputs on the

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16 Which is to say, when the strengthening or the mitigation are likely to be due to the use of markers, i.e. hedges.

OT – e.g. omissions, inaccuracies, reformulation strategies, generalisations, inappropriate lexical choices, etc.
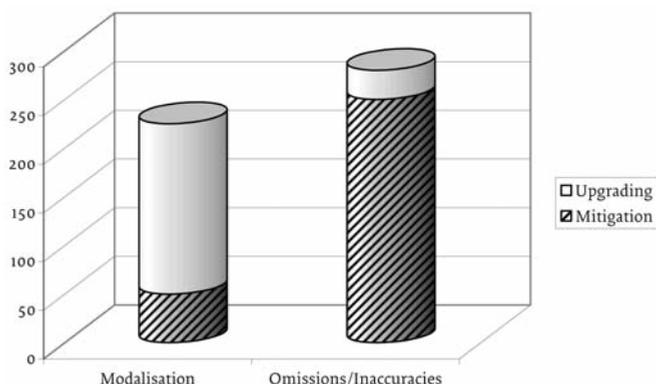

Figure 5. Pragmatic-semantic shift of the OT and possible language-related causes.

Data appear to confirm initial impressions deriving from the qualitative analysis: modalising elements would enhance the pragmatic value of the original text, rendering the tone of those specific IT excerpts more confident and expressive. A good example is the upgrading of the speaker's rhetoric style – e.g. in the Bush-Clinton-Perot debate, there is a subtle change of nuances between the English original and the Italian version:

Example 11

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
And are you at all of a mind that maybe it ought to go to another level, if not to what's advocated by William F. Buckley, Jr. and Milton Friedman, LEGALIZATION, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THERE AND WHERE WE ARE NOW?	*secondo lei la lotta dovrebbe passare a un altro livello se non proprio quello che viene promosso da Milton Friedman e Buckley* OVVERO *la liberalizzazione* SI DOVREBBE ARRIVARE *a una soluzione di compromesso?*	*do you think that the fight should go to another level if not exactly the one promoted by Milton Friedman and Buckley, which is to say liberalisation, a compromise solution should be achieved?*

On the contrary, a careless use of markers may bring about downtoning effects, as shown in this passage from the Bush-Dukakis debate:

Example 12

Original text	Interpreted text	English translation of the interpreted text
THERE'S A MATTER OF FACT *the system that the administration is now talking about is very different from the one it was originally proposed in nineteen hundred eighty-three*	CIOÈ VERAMENTE *il sistema che l'amministrazione ora di cui ora sta trattando è molto diverso da quello concepito nell'ottantatré*	*well really the system that the administration now is now considering is very different from the one conceived in the eighty-three*

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OT formality and clarity are lacking in the IT, mainly due to the inaccurate introductory string "che l'amministrazione ora di cui ora sta trattando [that the administration now is now considering]". Besides, in the Italian rendition the combination discourse marker-adverb at the very beginning does not seem to open the sentence as elegantly and directly as the English original. As a result, the IT appears slightly confused in comparison with the corresponding source excerpt.

Generally, from the contrastive exam OTs/ITs this author perceived a diminished assertiveness as well as a mitigation of speakers' remarks. Furthermore, utterance truth level is often negatively affected. Reasons include the omission of single words or longer clusters, interpretation imperfections, hesitant and unintelligible delivery[17]. In other words, if the Italian-speaking viewers were to give credit to the candidates on the basis of the interpreted version of their interventions in the debates, there would be discrepancies with the English one: some of them would appear deliberately lacking emphasis (Reagan), little clear-minded (Dukakis) and more distant (Obama) than in reality. Others, whose original performance was not particularly brilliant (Bush senior), would be saved (together with their faces)[18] by a "telegenic"[19], skilled interpreter.

A further related aspect is worth considering. Indeed, all modalisation strategies are implemented through additions. Thus, it could be argued that the two categories do not only resemble each other but may also overlap. Literature seems to confirm it: Rucci/Russo (1997: 183) quote Altman in describing additions "che assolvono fini pragmatici [performing pragmatic functions], whereas Falbo (2002) adopts the definitions of understatement and overstatement[20], which can be reasonably matched with the notions of mitigation and strengthening here discussed. In an extensive study on media interpreting, Straniero Sergio (2007) observes that additions having an effect on the semantic-pragmatic level are not an exception but the rule. Finally, Jacobsen (2004: 244) identifies emphasizing and down-toning additions having an impact on the source text, and tries to

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17 Viezzi (2001: 184) correctly advocates that "nella comunicazione politica il senso è non solo e non tanto il *vouloir dire*, ma anche, forse soprattutto, *la façon de le dire* [in political communication, meaning lays not only and not mainly in the communicative intention but also, and perhaps primarily, in the way things are said].

18 The notion of face is to be read according to the approach suggested by Brown/Levinson (1987).

19 Here the concept of telegenic quality refers to "la misura in cui un'interpretazione può considerarsi *televisivamente* fruibile [the extent to which an interpretation performance responds to TV users' needs]", which includes elements as pleasant voice, good pronunciation, fluent and clear expression (Straniero Sergio 2007: 544-46), not to mention wise use of pauses, textual cohesion awareness and the search for equivalent rhetoric strategies (Viezzi 2001: 183-86).

20 Falbo (2002: 121) mentions respectively "an idea in the OT [which] is toned down in the IT" and "an idea in the OT [which] is emphasized in the IT"; moreover, she completes her classification with the notion of intensity, i.e. "emotional and rhetorical features of an OT unit" which can be transferred or not in the IT. It has to be pointed out that in her paper the terms understatement and overstatement are used with reference to a particular information loss inferred from the comparison OT/IT.

explain their use with the specific purpose of "making speakers' intentions available, or more easily available, to end receivers" Jacobsen (2004: 247) – definition that applies also to discourse modalisation purpose.

In conclusion, simultaneous TV interpreters would use modalisation strategies too, and they are likely to do it through additions having a pragmatic effect on the target text. As outlined in the previous paragraphs, markers include:
· hedges (phrasal and verbal expressions)
· prepositional phrases
· modal verbs
· adjectives
· discourse markers

and the functions they carry out may be distinguished between:

· time-gaining
· repair and politeness-oriented purpose
· interpretation imperfection disguise
· verbalisation of a visual act/suprasegmental feature
· marking detachment from an inaccurate translation (defensive use).

Their use may result in:

· either a toning up
· or a toning down

of speakers' statements and therefore of the IT pragmatic surface.

6.   Conclusions

The study drew on the features and effects of lexical *manipulation* mechanisms applied to a specific area of SI: media interpreting. Italian ITs and English OTs were comparatively examined with a view to verify the presence and impact of modality markers (i.e. propositional-content modifiers reflecting speakers' attitudes). Both the corpus (a selection of American presidential debates) and criteria used (modalisation strategies) were deliberately customized.

Initially, the hypothesis was based upon a general remark: every interpreter-mediated interaction entails a filtering process which has an impact on the target text. Indeed, interpreters are professionally committed to excellence and integrity, and their linguistic choices comply with such criteria. Yet, contrary to machine translation, they activate a complex mental process which does not disregard situational factors, interactional conventions and speakers' intentions. Therefore, it is plausible that they make use of discourse modalisation devices in order to accomplish specific communicative tasks.

Data collected during both the qualitative and quantitative stages seem to confirm it: modalisation occurs frequently in TV interpreting and it can take

different forms. Strategies used are various (prepositional phrases, verbs, hedging, phrasal expressions, etc.) yet adverbs seem to be preferred to others.

Indeed, these markers are not used *intentionally*, i.e. interpreters do not *aim* at modifying speakers' utterances but pursue different objectives (cf. fig. 2)[21]. Furthermore, professionally trained interpreters will certainly give priority to discourse comprehension and faithful reproduction of the speakers' image and *vouloir dire*. However, when modalisation techniques are found in IT, a pragmatic effect on the text may be reasonably expected.

Far from claiming that the interpreted version of a televised political debate may affect the candidate's image or his electoral performance, the impact on the IT of such modalising additions needs to be considered. They may tone down sentences, mitigate declarations or intensify the emotional charge of the speech and emphasise the value of a statement.

Similarly, from the comparative analysis of source/target text it emerged that mitigating or omitting OT modality markers may have equal effects. In other words, placing (unintentional) emphasis on a candidate statement would alter as much the text pragmatics as reducing the speaker's assertiveness, verve and irony would. In this sense, this small-scale research would suggest that modalisation applied to SI of TV-broadcasted presidential debates partly contributes to shape the politicians' TV-mediated profile (mainly in terms of language and in the way their discourse impacts the audience). Interpreters whose services are called upon in these particular working circumstances certainly have to be trained properly, to make inferential and interactional efforts and above all to recall one of the profession's golden rules: the weight of words must be always considered. And if there is something that cannot be put into words, then it might need to be kept silent.

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21 Di Giovannantonio (2008) explains in her research on eighteen presidential debates that hedging techniques are greatly used by interpreters when dealing with CBE (culture-bound elements), with time gaining and detachment functions.

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