Could Have, *Should Have,* *Would Have*. The Speaker's Attitude in Expressing Hypothetical Past Alternatives in English and Italian by Means of Pragmatic Markers and Modality in EU Parliamentary Debates

Could Have, Should Have, Would Have Europos Parlamento kalbėtojų požiūris, atsispindintis per modalumą ir vartojant pragmatinius žymeklius debatuose apie hipotetines praeities alternatyvas anglų ir italų kalba

SOCIOLINGUISTICS / SOCIOLINGVISTIKA

Paola Gaudio

Aggregate Professor of English Language and Translation, University of Bari "Aldo Moro", Italy.

This is a corpus-based study of the debates held in the European Parliament. The focus is on determining what kind of attitude governs parliamentary debates when reference is made to past issues that could have, would have, should have or might have been handled differently. Pragmatic markers and modality are key elements in the expression of the speaker's attitude, therefore the whole study revolves around the co-occurrence, within a set context horizon, of past conditionals and pragmatic markers. Modality is necessarily involved in both the expression of the speaker's attitude and in the formation of past conditionals, and can therefore be considered a *trait d'union* between the discourse-oriented pragmatic markers and the syntax-based conditionals.

After an outline of the theoretical framework in which the present research belongs, a few hints are given as to the nature of the texts analysed, and consequently of the institution producing them. Following these introductory sections, an explanation is provided of the aims of the present research and of the methodology applied. Finally, results are analysed in detail in section 6 and the main points are summed up in the conclusions.

KEYWORDS: European Parliament debates, modality, pragmatic markers, MEPs' speeches, English translation, Italian translation.

Theoretical Background

Defining pragmatic markers and describing their main features would require a theoretical discussion that goes well beyond the scope of this paper. Differences in scholars' opinions are in fact many and manifold and the spread of pragmatic markers in everyday speech as well as in formal texts seems to be so wide as to make their boundaries extremely difficult to draw. Hence, without turning this article into a theoretical piece of writing, suffice it to focus exclusively on those theoretical elements that can be useful for the topic addressed in this paper.

The definition and features of pragmatic markers that will be considered throughout the article are therefore instrumental to the aim of the research question it addresses, and the more general theoretical issues they imply will not be tackled.

For the present purpose, pragmatic markers are considered to be all those lexical or syntactic items that provide information as to the speaker's attitude toward an event or action. More specifically, since the topic concerns the expression of hypothetical alternatives in the past, they indicate the degree to which the speaker believes that, had things been done differently or had the event been somehow influenced or acted upon, the outcome would have been different too and presumably better in its consequences.

Generally speaking, pragmatic markers are lexical indicators of the speaker's attitude and carry out a pre-eminently interpersonal or textual function. The pragmatic markers specifically considered in this article are lexical indicators of the speaker's degree of confidence in relation to some event or action taken in the past. Besides, the function fulfilled by the pragmatic markers hereby analysed is conspicuously interpersonal because they are meant to be signals that allow the addressee(s) to correctly interpret information that goes beyond the objectivity of facts (i.e., the propositional meaning) and regards instead the speaker's subjective perception of what is being said.

> Modal expressions are those which signal a particular attitude on the part of the speaker to the proposition expressed or the situation described (typically in a statement). So, for instance, in *It's probably the case that imported versions are cheaper,* the words *It's probably the case (that)* indicate the speaker's assessment of the likelihood of the proposition *imported versions are cheaper* being true. Other modals indicate the degree of desirability (or otherwise) of a proposition becoming true: *I think you should ask John about it first.* Here the speaker indicates his assessment of the merit of bringing about the truth of the proposition *you ask John about it first* (Cruse, 2000, p.286).

On the basis of Cruse's definition, modality is particularly relevant to the topic addressed in this article because of the focus it provides on the speaker's attitude. So, modality comes into play both because it is directly associated with the pragmatic markers that have been selected, and also because it is deployed in the formation of past conditionals.

These two functions – signalling the speaker's attitude on the one hand, and forming past conditionals on the other – make modality a prominent presence to be found throughout this research article.

The European Parliament and its Debates

Since the texts analysed here are of a very specific nature in that they are the verbatim reports of European parliamentary debates, it seems necessary to give a general outline of how the European Parliament works and, in the following section, of the role debates play in its activities.

The European Parliament, with its 751 Members (MEPs), is one of the six main institutions of the EU to have the power of making decisions regarding its 28 Member States (including the UK, as of February, 2018). Together with the Commission and the Council of the European Union, it constitutes the core of decision making in the EU. Whereas the European Commission represents the general interests of the Union, and the Council of the European Union represents the Member States, Parliament represents the nearly 512 million European citizens. For this reason, it is democratically elected once every five years by direct universal suffrage (voting age is 18, except for Austria, where it is 16). The President of Parliament, assisted by 14 Vice-Presidents, is elected instead for a renewable term every two and a half years.

As far as legislation is concerned, Parliament's powers stand on an equal footing with the Council of the European Union, therefore the standard legislative procedure – known as co-decision procedure – requires that an agreement be reached between the two institutions if a legislative act is to be adopted or amended. Depending on the legal basis and on the nature of the area of legislation, there can also be other procedures, like the consultation procedure, where Parliament has only an advisory role, or those procedures requiring Parliament's assent – as is the case of the accession of a new Member State.

However, Parliament's powers are not limited to its participation in the legislative process. It also has the power of the purse, which it shares with the Council of the EU, together constituting the Budgetary Authority. The Budgetary Authority adopts a budget on an annual basis and maintains oversight over it.

In addition to this, Parliament has several powers of control over the executive, it has the right of petition, it appoints the Ombudsman, and it can appeal to the Court of Justice.

Politically, Parliament is a truly international forum which addresses issues concerning foreign policy, the defence of its citizens' interests in a globalized world, and – in a wider worldwide horizon – it is actively involved in the defence of human rights, both inside and outside the Union.

Parliament undoubtedly plays a key role within the European Union, a role that, with an ever increasing European integration, has been more and more enforced since its first meeting in 1958 (at the time it was known as European Parliamentary Assembly). The Single European Act (SEA, signed in 1986) made official its designation as European Parliament, then the Maastricht Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty, and, more recently, the Nice Treaty in 2001 all contributed to increase the powers of the European Parliament.

If, then, the scope of Parliament's roles in the EU is so wide and far reaching, the centre stage where decisions are taken and opinions are discussed is occupied by the plenary sessions. These are meetings of the MEPs.

During such debates, MEPs discuss the issues as scheduled by the parliamentary agenda, and then each of the members votes on each issue in accordance with the conclusions they have drawn individually (every MEP is free to vote as he or she pleases, regardless of their party's stand on the matter). Plenary sessions then comprise both debates and voting time. Debates represent the most important moment of face-to-face confrontation among the MEPs who can advocate their views and express their opinions.

If we wanted to point out a single feature distinguishing the European Parliament from

all other parliaments all over the world, that would have to be its obligation to generate its legislation and, more in general, communicate with its citizens, in each of its official languages.

Article 21 of the Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and of the Treaty Establishing the European Community, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 29.12.2006, reads:

Every citizen of the Union may write to any of the institutions or bodies referred to in this Article or in Article 7 in one of the languages mentioned in Article 314 and have an answer in the same language – the languages mentioned in Article 314 being those of the countries that at the time constituted the European Union.

In these treaties, every time reference is made to the translation of documents, it is repeatedly pointed out that each version is to be considered *authentic*, regardless of the language it was drawn up into in the first place.

Nowadays, with the accession of Croatia in 2013, the number of official European languages has risen to 24 and, since every European citizen (MEPs included) has the right to address Parliament in an official language of his/ her choice, this means that debates are held in 24 different languages. This means that each speech or document gets translated into 552 language combinations (i.e., 24 times 23). Hundreds of staff interpreters and thousands of freelance interpreters make sure that the whole sessions run smoothly as if each of the 751 MEPs spoke the same language. Flanking the work of interpreters, there are translators – around 700 of them working for the in-house translation service plus freelance translators if need be – who deal with written documents and transcripts.

Taken together, staff members employed in maintaining the European Union effectively multilingual, add up to about one third of the whole administrative employees. Nonetheless, it is not always possible to guarantee that one language be translated into each of the remaining 23, especially when minor languages are concerned. For this reason, English, French and German (along with Italian, Polish, and Spanish when necessary), which are the most widespread languages of the Union, can act as *relay* languages from which all other translations are done. In other words, texts originally written or spoken in a minor language can first be translated into one of the more common languages and then, using this translation as a basis, it gets translated into all other languages.

EU parliamentary discussions as a genre can be considered hybrid because, on the one hand, the kind of language at stake is certainly specialized, i.e., political English, thus belonging in the more general field of ESP. On the other hand, though – *in qua* discussions – they present a strong speaker-oriented colloquial nature.

The result is a hybrid genre in which features of ESP co-exist with those typical of a language oriented towards an interpersonal linguistic exchange rather than focused on a neutral communication of information, such as to be found in specialized articles or in rules and regulations. Put another way, in parliamentary discussions the language used is specialized in nature but targeted at debating, therefore with a strong focus on the addressees so as to convince them of the speaker's point of view and finally reach a common agreement.

Aim

The aim of this study is to identify which and what kind of pragmatic markers accompany modal auxiliaries when they are coupled with the perfect infinitive in the expression of past hypothesis in political discourse. The idea is to take past conditionals as starting points and analyse the pragmatic markers that appear within their context. This with a view to establishing whether, as they take the floor in parliamentary debates, MEPs tend to be as

assertive as they possibly can, or whether they use more subtle rhetorical approaches, deploying hedging strategies or introducing some element of doubt, especially since the propositional meaning expressed has to do with hypothetical realities – something whose validity, eventually, cannot be verified and that, after all, has more to do with mere speculation than with feasible, action-oriented proposals.

The focus is on understanding how confident the speaker is that something could have, should have, would have or might have been different. Translated in linguistic terms, this means to find pragmatic markers that point to the speaker's attitude – pragmatic markers to be found in the co-text of past conditionals and that show a higher or a lower level of certainty on the part of the speaker.

Modal adverbs such as *certainly*, *undoubtedly*, *surely*, etc. work as pragmatic markers indicating that the speaker strongly believes that the situation or the events at stake could have, would have, should have or might have been different provided certain conditions. Conversely, if the pragmatic markers that appear in the co-text are, for example, adverbs such as *possibly*, *probably*, *supposedly*, etc., these can be considered as markers indicating that the speaker is only tentatively describing a situation or events that might have had a different outcome.

The use of this latter group of markers is consistent with hedging strategies. Hedging has sometimes been indicated as a typical trait of formal discourse (see for example Hyland, 1996 and Garzone, 2004), therefore it would not be surprising at all to find instances of hedging in political discourse too – after all, hedging can be viewed as an excellent way to maintain, or at least give the impression of, political correctness.

Hence, when the expression of hypothetical alternatives is accompanied by pragmatic markers, these can provide information as to the speaker's attitude towards what he or she is saying. The speaker can in fact show a degree of certainty or, conversely, of uncertainty in expressing hypothetical past realities. The aim of this paper is to verify the level of confidence English and Italian MEPs have when using past conditionals.

A few examples, taken from the debates, can best show the two kinds of attitude that have been investigated (the English translation is as found in the English version of the debates):

1) *Nel quadro del piano di ripresa, ovviamente, si sarebbero potute aggiungere altre proposte.*

    "Of course, additional proposals could have been included in the framework of the recovery plan" (090401).

2) *L'onorevole Martin Schultz ha senza dubbio ragione nel dire che il pacchetto sociale sarebbe potuto essere più forte.*

    "Martin Schultz is undoubtedly right to say that the social package could have been stronger" (080902).

3) *Un'unica piccola perplessità e rammarico: in materia di appalti forse avremmo potuto fare di più.*

    "I am left with just one small concern and regret: perhaps we could have done more about contracts" (090402).

4) *probabilmente avrebbe creato problemi e, al contempo, sarebbe sembrato un po' strano, visto che lo beviamo in quantità relativamente cospicue*

    "It would probably have created problems and at the same time it would have seemed a little strange, as we drink it in relatively large amounts" (090323).

These sentences clearly exemplify how pragmatic markers influence the strength of what

is being asserted, indicating either certainty, and therefore with an intensifying function, or uncertainty, and therefore with a hedging function. Sentence 1 and 2, with *ovviamente* ('of course') and *senza dubbio* ('undoubtedly'), belong in the former category; whereas sentences 3 and 4, respectively with *forse* ('perhaps') and *probabilmente* ('probably'), belong in the latter.

Methodology

The corpus includes the debates held by MEPs during the last year of the 2004–2009 parliamentary term. It was not possible to include every single debate for a simple reason: in spite of the huge effort on the part of Parliament to keep up with its outstanding standard of complete multilingualism, not all of the debate transcripts had been translated into Italian at the time the corpus was compiled. Therefore, there was no point in including debates recorded in their diverse original languages. However, it should be pointed out that all debates were available in English and many were also available in Italian. Those that were not, were prominently the most recent ones, and this is consistent with the Parliament language policy to publish translations as they become available.

The kind of corpus complied is a parallel one: to each English file (one per debate sitting) corresponds its Italian version. Since individual sittings last one day, they are referred to by date, and so are the files that comprise them.

Being these texts inherently multilingual, both the English and the Italian versions are to be considered translations from the multifarious languages in which they were originally produced – except, of course, for those bits actually spoken in Italian or in English to begin with – since, as already pointed out, MEPs have the faculty of addressing Parliament and its members in whatever official language they prefer.

As to the quantitative features of the corpus, there are 32 English files and 32 Italian ones, one per every daily sitting. They span from July 2008 to June 2009, amounting to 2,595,752 tokens and 27,247 types (type/ token ratio of 1,07) for English and 2,597,420 tokens and 45,461 types (type/ token ratio of 1,78) for Italian, with an overall total of 5,193,172 tokens and 64 files.

Assuming that perfect conditionals are the most obvious way to refer to hypothetical past realities, the starting point of this study is pre-eminently syntactical. Hence, the first step was to find out how many past conditionals were in the corpus, and then look for patterns in the pragmatic markers accompanying them.

A similar procedure was carried out with the Italian corpus. In place of *would have*, *could have*, *should have* and *might have*, there are the Italian equivalents *avrei*, *avrei potuto*, *avrei dovuto* or – with the auxiliary *essere* depending on the requirements of the main verb – *sarei*, *sarei potuto* and *sarei dovuto*, with their respective conjugated forms.

It should be pointed out that, when the operator is *essere*, it is mandatory to specify the gender and number of the subject it refers to. The same does not hold true if the operator is *avere*, where the past participle always ends with the suffix –o because no gender nor number agreement is required between *avere + past participle* and its subject.

Since the question driving this research concerns the degree of confidence shown by MEPs in expressing past hypothetical alternatives, the pragmatic markers that would give this kind of information are those expressing either certainty (therefore with an intensifying function), or uncertainty (possibly linked to a more general hedging strategy). The two categories of pragmatic markers that were eventually taken into consideration comprise expressions and modal adverbs denoting either certainty or uncertainty, as listed in tables 1 and 2.

The choice of these specific pragmatic markers was not random. As far as the English corpus was concerned, two steps were taken in selecting them. First, a list was compiled of all

Table 1

Intensifying pragmatic markers denoting certainty

English	Italian
Absolutely	A mio avviso
Certainly	A mio parere
Clearly	Assolutamente
I believe	Certamente
I do believe	Certo
I do not for one second believe	Chiaramente
I do not think	Crediamo
I think	Credo
In my opinion	Decisamente
Indeed	È evidente che
No doubt	Non vi è dubbio
Of course	Ovviamente
Really	Penso
Sure	Ritengo
Surely	Riteniamo
Undoubtedly	Secondo me
We believe	Senza dubbio
We think	Sicuramente
Without doubt	Veramente

Table 2

Hedging pragmatic markers denoting uncertainty

English	Italian
Hardly	Difficilmente
I wonder	Forse
Perhaps	Mi chiedo
Probably	Probabilmente
Relatively	Relativamente

potential pragmatic markers indicating either certainty or uncertainty. Then, a file containing these potential pragmatic markers was uploaded and run in Wordsmith Tools Summary Statistics utility. This utility allows to see at a glance if and how often the words contained in the pre-compiled text file appear in the corpus.

Summary Statistics was therefore a straightforward tool to get rid of all those potential pragmatic markers that in fact were not present in the corpus. The final selection resulted in a list of words (mainly modal adverbs) and expressions where each item falls into either one of the two categories of pragmatic markers.

Regarding the Italian corpus, the selection procedure was very similar, but special attention was given to observing how English pragmatic markers were translated into Italian.

The number of occurrences within the corpus of each pragmatic marker was recorded individually and only those occurrences which had either *should have*, *would have*, *could have* and *might have* as their context words were taken into consideration. Negative forms were also included in the overall results (e.g., *should not have*, *would not have*, etc.), as well as perfect conditionals interspersed with adverbs (e.g., *should probably have been*, *sarebbe forse stato meglio,* etc.). A reasonable choice of context horizon for the search words was deemed to be ten words to the left and ten words to the right. This allowed to get rid of all markers that never occurred within the selected context horizon and it also allowed to calculate the percentage of times markers from each category appear within the context of past conditionals in relation to their presence in the corpus as a whole, regardless of context.

However, before working out any percentage, occurrences were cleaned of all those cases in which *should have*, *would have*, *could have*, and *might have* were not followed by a past participle – as for example in the following sentence[1]:

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1   Page numbers in this as in all the following examples refer to the pdf files of the debates published on the official website of the European Parliament.

5) To prevent them from obtaining employment where they <u>would have</u> direct contact with children (03-02-2009, p.60);

where *would have* is not followed by a past participle and therefore is simply a present conditional. This becomes evident in the Italian translation, where there is not even a conditional at all:

6) *ed evitare che queste persone possano accedere a posti di lavoro in settori che comportano il diretto contatto con i bambini* (03-02-2009, p.67).

What we have in the English version is the structure *ov*, where *o* stands for *operator* and *v* stands for *verb*. What we are looking for instead is the sintagmatic sequence *oxv* or *oxxv* where *x* stands for *auxiliary*. In (7) the sequence is *oxxv*, whereas in (8) it is *oxv*:

7) Recommendations <u>would have been given</u> due examination (18-02-2009, p.79);

8) Parliament <u>should have played</u> a much more decisive role (03-02-2009, p.72).

The operator and auxiliary functions should not be confused. By operator we mean the very first auxiliary, the one that provides information regarding tense, modality, number and person. This can be followed by one or more auxiliaries (see Downing, 2002, p.15).

Once the output file was filtered so as to only comprise the sintagmatic sequences *oxv* or *oxxv*, data were ready for comparison and percentage calculation.

As shown in tables 3 and 4, four columns were obtained: per each pragmatic marker (column 1) its overall frequency in the whole corpus was worked out (column 2). Column 3 records the frequency limited to those pragmatic markers appearing within the context horizon. Column 4 shows the percentage of occurrences of each pragmatic marker in relation to the totality of pragmatic markers occurring within the context horizons of perfect conditionals (i.e., column 3).

Once percentages are worked out, they easily lend themselves to a comparison between the values in the two categories of certainty and uncertainty. At this stage, conclusions could be drawn.

The method followed to calculate values and percentages in the Italian debates was the same as that followed with the English corpus, and the results are those shown in tables 5 and 6.

Before proceeding to analyse the data thus obtained, three remarks should be made in connection with the four lists of pragmatic markers.

1 in the certainty category, there are pragmatic markers such as *I think*, *in my opinion*, *I believe*, etc. (or for the Italian, *penso*, *a mio avviso*, etc.). The idea on the basis of which these expressions were selected is that, whatever statement someone makes – unless he or she specifically points out that what is being said is someone else's opinion – is assumed to be the speaker's opinion. By making this very basic assumption explicit, the perceived effect on the addressee(s) is that of emphasis. In other words, by saying *I think*, the speaker signals that what follows (or precedes) is his or her point of view, and if someone *thinks* something, that is considered a marker of certainty: what is being said is the speaker's opinion, and the speaker wants to make it clear. With other expressions, such as *I believe* or *credo* and *ritengo* in Italian, the intensifying effect is even stronger, because beliefs are more deep-seated in a speaker's *Weltanschauung* than general thoughts.

2 the lists only show those markers that were found within the context horizons of past conditionals – markers that gave information as to the speaker's attitude in terms of certainty/ uncertainty. Other pragmatic markers were of course observed within the same context horizons, but an analysis of all of them would have reached far beyond the scope of a single research paper. Therefore, they were not taken into account. Consequently, the lists provided are not to be considered exhaustive of all pragmatic markers, but only of those relevant to the present study and occurring within the set context horizon.

3 results comprise both positive and negative forms, like for example, *I believe* and *I do not believe*, *I think* and *I do not think* (which, by the way, in English are enlisted as different items, whereas in Italian verbs enlisted in the pragmatic markers tables comprise both positive and negative forms without differentiating between them). The same applies to all past conditionals: all final data take into account both positive and negative forms, as well as interrogatives and affirmatives. Similarly, the possibility that there might be one or two adverbs in between operator and auxiliary was also considered, and such cases have all been included in the data provided.

Results

In the English corpus, pragmatic markers indicating certainty are strikingly much more numerous than those indicating some degree of tentativeness or an underlying hedging strategy. In fact, just a tiny part of all potential hedging pragmatic markers were actually used by MEPs in their debates, and an even tinier percentage was found in connection with past conditionals. This seems to suggest quite strongly that MEPs avoid hedging strategies and do their best to get their message across as forcefully and straightforwardly as they can, even when dealing with past hypotheses which, for their very nature, cannot be verified.

The percentage of overall markers to be found within the context of past conditionals was thus distributed as follows:

_ intensifying pragmatic markers denoting certainty (66.97 %)
_ hedging pragmatic markers denoting uncertainty or tentativeness (33.03 %)

However, if we consider the relationship between the number of pragmatic markers in the corpus regardless of contextual boundaries and the number of pragmatic markers occurring near past conditionals, something unexpected is revealed: whereas, in the certainty category, only 0.85 % of all markers occur within the context of past conditionals (table 3, third column, last row), in the uncertainty category the percentage rises to 3.41 % (table 4, third column, last row), that is exactly four times as much. This means that the proportion of

Table 3

English intensifying pragmatic markers denoting certainty

Pragmatic marker	Overall freq.	Freq. w/ context words	% relative to same-category PMs w/ context
I believe	1401	14	19.18
I think	1508	13	17.81
Of course	1225	9	12.33
Really	887	7	9.56
Certainly	578	5	6.85
Indeed	707	5	6.85
Clearly	839	4	5.48
In my opinion	249	3	4.11
Absolutely	378	2	2.74
I do not think	107	2	2.74
No doubt	171	1	1.37
Undoubtedly	149	1	1.37
We believe	196	1	1.37
Surely	113	1	1.37
We think	75	1	1.37
I do believe	21	1	1.37
Without a doubt	11	1	1.37
I do not for one second believe	1	1	1.37
I am one of those who think that	1	1	1.37
TOT	8617	73 (0.85 % of overall freq.)	99.98 %

pragmatic markers that happens to occur within the context of past conditionals is four times bigger if the pragmatic markers at stake indicate uncertainty or tentativeness rather than certainty.

Hence, on the basis of these data, it can be assumed that, whenever MEPs make use of pragmatic markers denoting uncertainty, they do this with a much higher frequency if they are making reference to past hypothesis, therefore using a past conditional. In other words, MEPs do not seem to favour the use of hedging pragmatic markers but, if they do use them, this will be more likely to happen within a context expressing hypothetical past alternatives, with a frequency four times as big as that observed for the intensifying pragmatic markers.

As far as intensifying pragmatic markers are concerned, if we consider their variety, those that are used most often are the generally widespread *I believe* (19.18 %) and *I think* (17.81 %), followed by *of cour*se (12.33 %), *really* (9.56 %), *certainly* and *indeed* (6.85 % each). The rest are less conspicuous and the remaining 12.33 % are evenly distributed with a 1.37 % each (see figure 1).
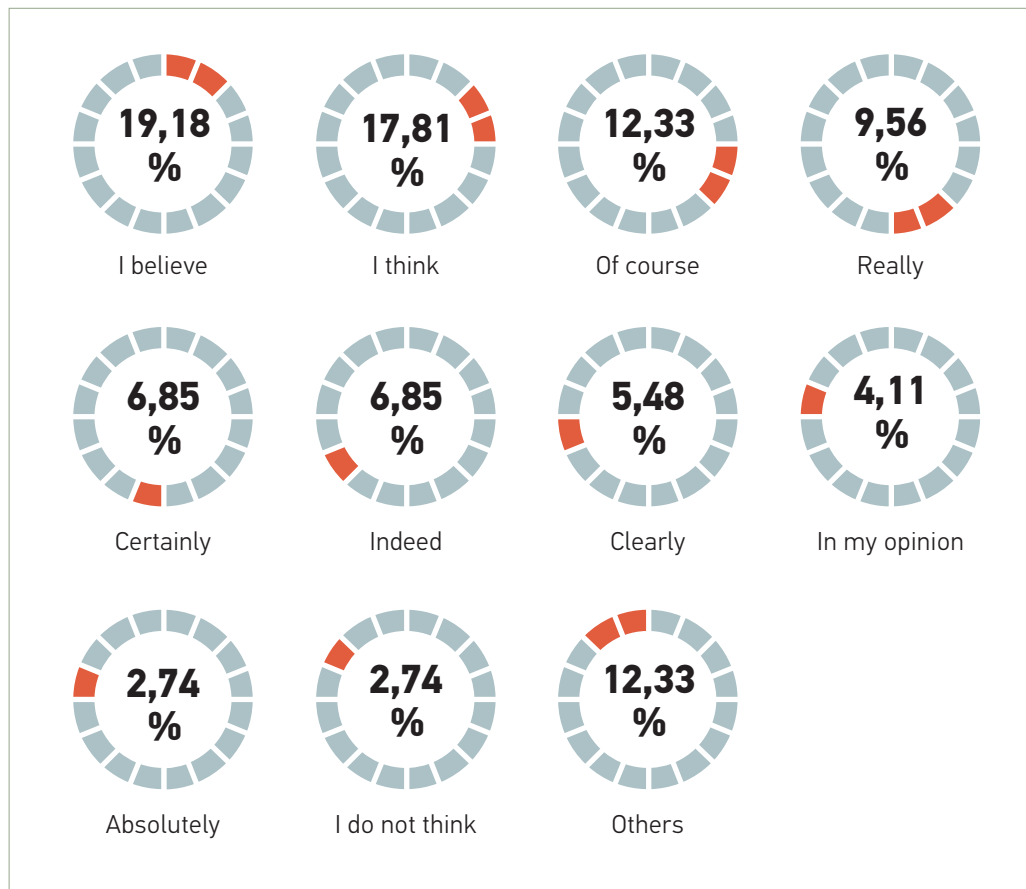

Figure 1

English intensifying pragmatic markers

Regarding the hedging pragmatic markers denoting uncertainty or tentativeness (see table 4 and figure 2), it has already been pointed out that they are remarkably few as compared with the certainty category. However, it can be observed that *perhaps*, which is the single most frequent pragmatic marker denoting uncertainty, occurs 23 times, making it the most widespread pragmatic marker of all – whether from the certainty or uncertainty category.
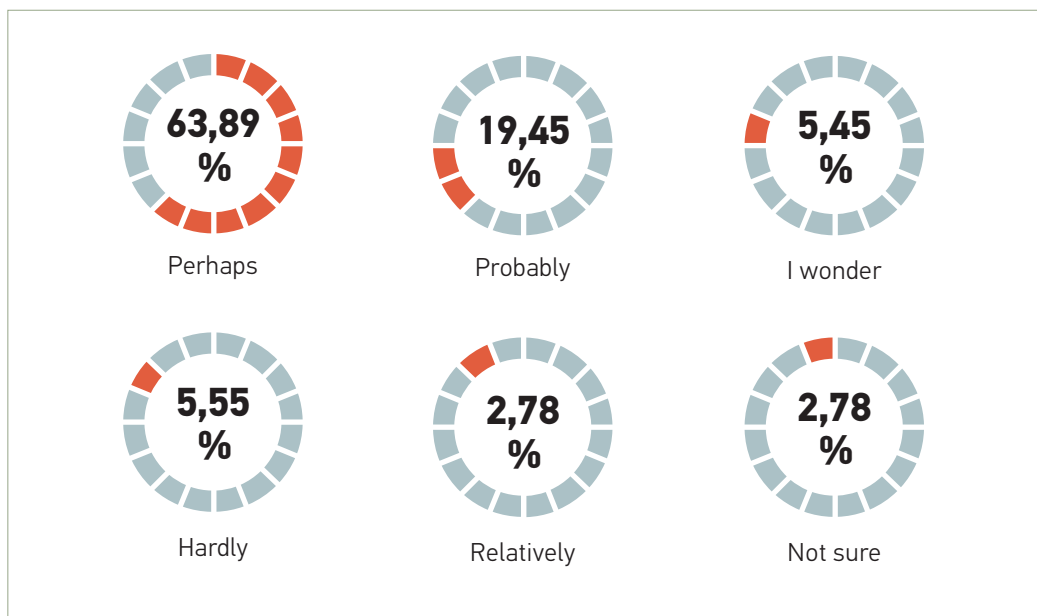
Pragmatic marker	Overall freq.	Freq. w/ context words	% relative to same-category PMs w/ context
Perhaps	603	23	63.89
Probably	220	7	19.45
I wonder	45	2	5.55
Hardly	70	2	5.55
Relatively	92	1	2.78
Not sure	27	1	2.78
TOT	1057	36 (3.41 % of overall freq.)	100

The striking prominence of *perhaps* can be seen at a glance in figures 2 and 3, the former showing how *perhaps* is relevant within the uncertainty category, the latter showing how it is still remarkably prominent when the two categories are combined together.

Along with *perhaps*, the presence of *probably* does not go unnoticed, with a 19.45 % (see figure 2). However, apart from these two, the rest of the hedging pragmatic markers are negligible in frequency and significance.

What strikes most in the comparison between English and Italian is the perfect balance in the number of pragmatic markers from the certainty category (19 items each). Similarly, in the uncertainty category, there are 6 pragmatic markers in English and 5 in Italian. This balance cannot always be explained in terms of a literal translation of each item. As a matter of fact, even though the two corpora are indeed parallel, it is not possible to merely consider these pragmatic markers as direct translations from English or from whatever language they were originally translated from, because each pragmatic marker tends to be translated in different ways, and sometimes they are not translated at all.
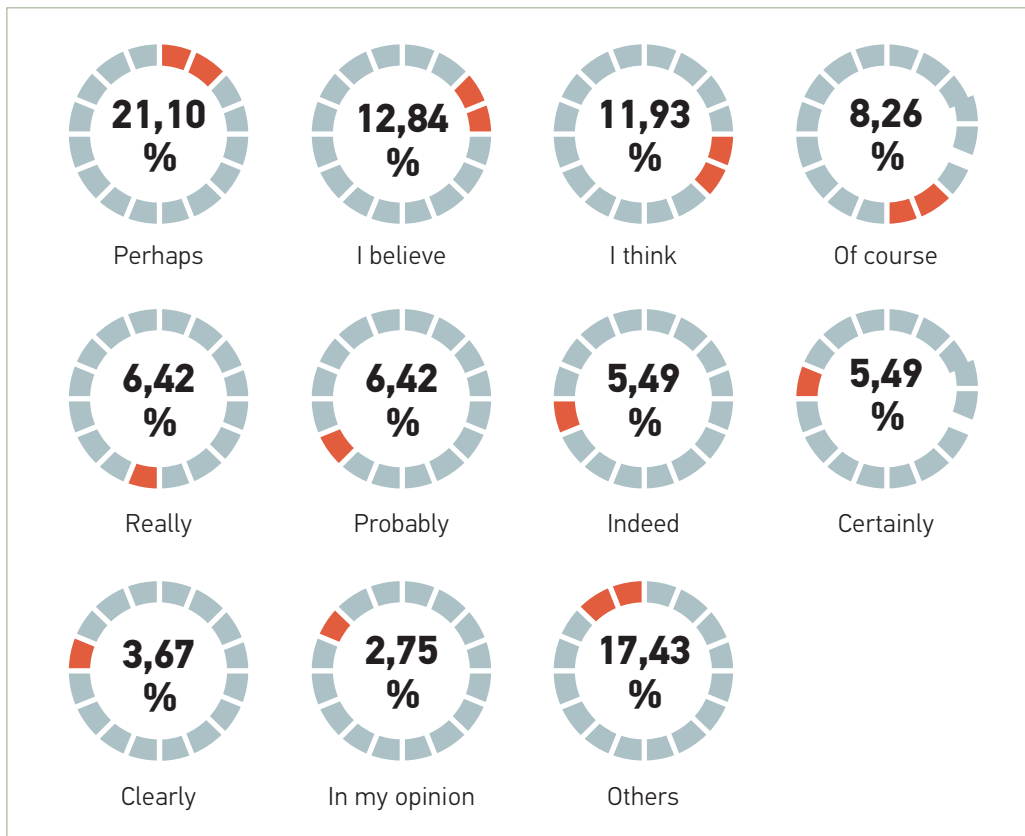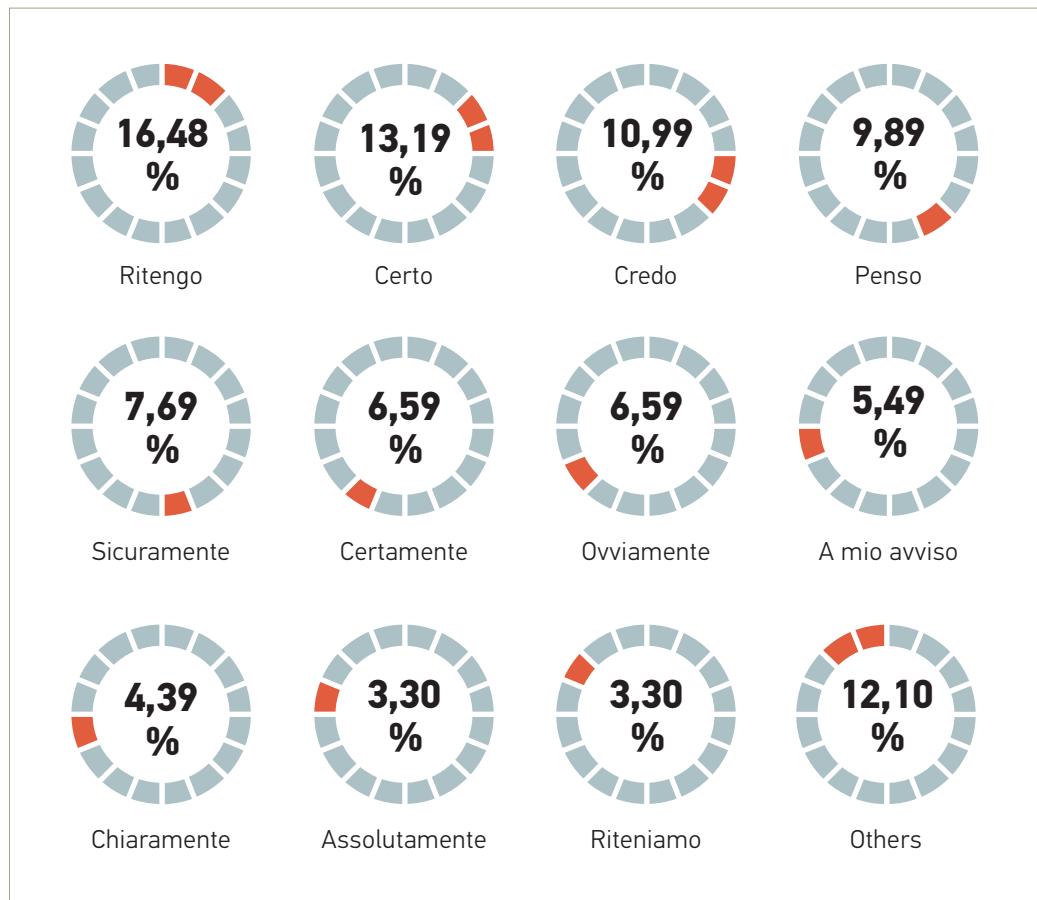
Figure 3

English pragmatic markers from both categories combined

Pragmatic marker	Overall freq.	Freq. w/ context words	% relative to same-category PMs w/ context
Ritengo	1438	15	16.48
Certo	681	12	13.19
Credo	1535	10	10.99
Penso	638	9	9.89
Sicuramente	357	7	7.69
Certamente	378	6	6.59
Ovviamente	678	6	6.59
A mio avviso	349	5	5.49
Chiaramente	596	4	4.39
Assolutamente	481	3	3.3
Riteniamo	283	3	3.3
Crediamo	125	2	2.2
Decisamente	108	2	2.2
Senza dubbio	241	2	2.2
È evidente che	35	1	1.1
Non vi è dubbio	31	1	1.1
Veramente	305	1	1.1
Secondo me	77	1	1.1
A mio parere	214	1	1.1
TOT	8550	91 (1.06 % of overall freq.)	100

Table 5

Italian intensifying pragmatic markers denoting certainty

Figure 4

Italian intensifying
pragmatic markers
denoting certainty

16,48 % Ritengo	13,19 % Certo	10,99 % Credo	9,89 % Penso
7,69 % Sicuramente	6,59 % Certamente	6,59 % Ovviamente	5,49 % A mio avviso
4,39 % Chiaramente	3,30 % Assolutamente	3,30 % Riteniamo	12,10 % Others

The aforementioned balance is also not consistent with the higher type/ token ratio to be found in the Italian corpus. Such higher ratio would rather point to a greater lexical variability in the Italian corpus – which is clearly not the case, at least with the pragmatic markers from the two categories at stake.

However, this phenomenon can be explained in terms of the function proper to pragmatic markers of this kind, which is precisely that of signalling the speaker's attitude: lexical items may be differently translated from a strictly literal point of view, but their pragmatic function stays the same.

If the number of pragmatic markers is equivalent in English as in Italian, what changes instead is the distribution of frequency among them. Whereas in English most occurrences concern the first eight items (adding up to 82.17 %, with the rest only occurring twice or just once), in the Italian corpus occurrences are spread more evenly among more items: in fact, 87.9 % of all occurrences in the certainty category spread among the first 11 pragmatic markers, and the rest only occur twice or once. A similar tendency can be observed in the uncertainty category.

All other results follow very closely the trends highlighted in the English corpus. Thus, the number of pragmatic markers denoting certainty by far exceeds those denoting uncertainty, with a 91:39 ratio (see tables 5 and 6).

In particular, among the former category, *ritengo* (whether or not preceded by a negation)

Pragmatic marker	Overall freq.	Freq. w/ context words	% relative to same-category PMs w/ context
Forse	791	21	53.85
Probabilmente	273	10	25.64
Relativamente	234	3	7.69
Difficilmente	23	3	7.69
Mi chiedo	72	2	5.13
TOT	1393	39 (2.8 % of overall freq.)	100

Table 6

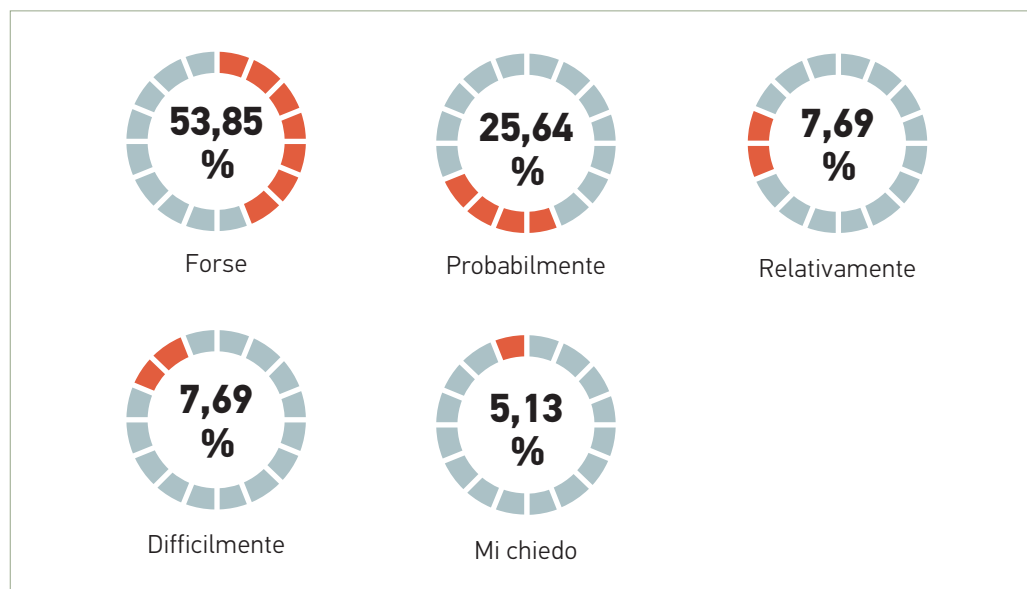Italian hedging pragmatic markers denoting uncertainty

Figure 5

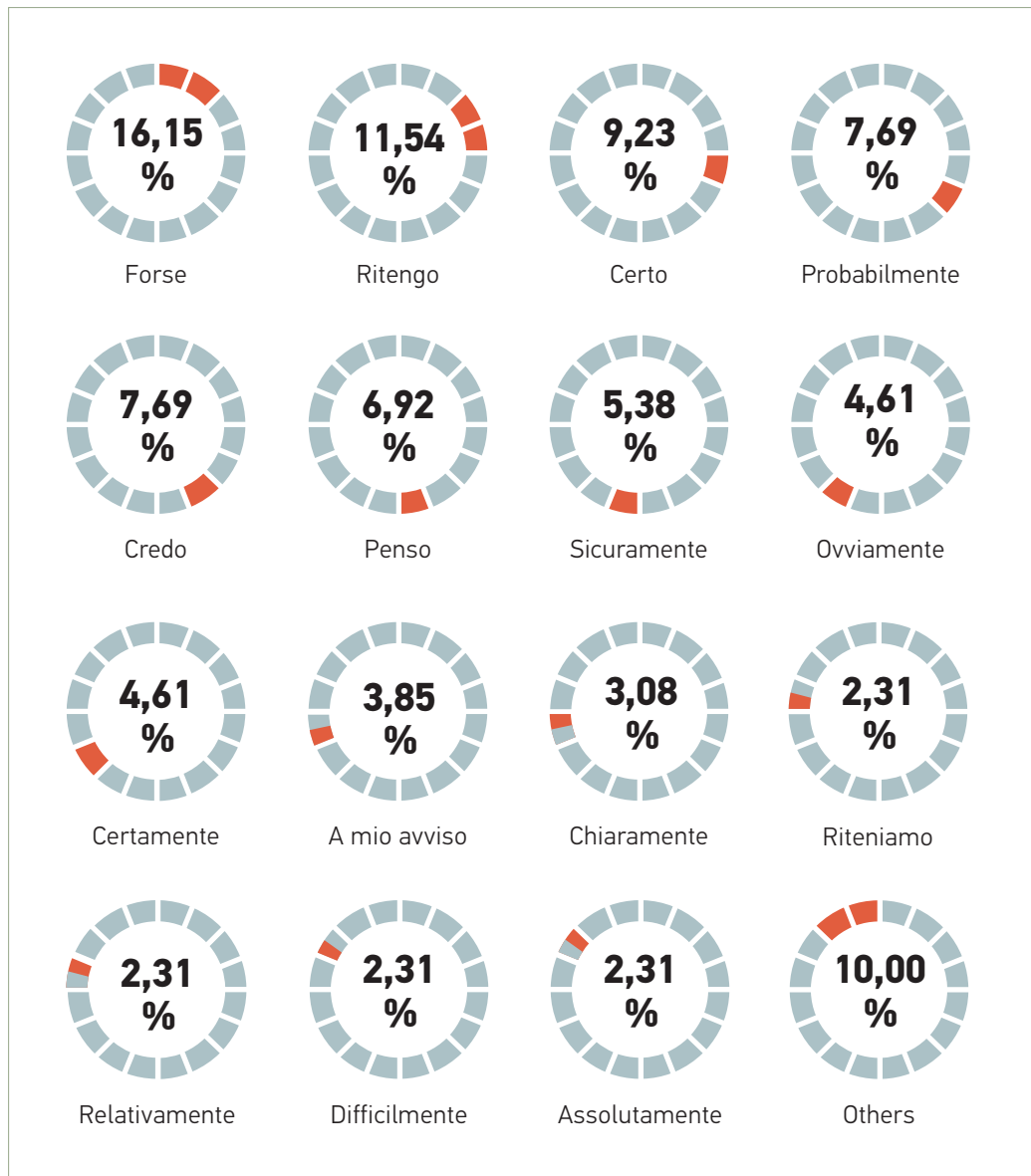Italian hedging pragmatic markers denoting uncertainty

is the most frequent (16.48 %), followed by *certo* (13.19 %) and then *credo* (10.99 %), which ranks third. *Sicuramente* (7.69 %), *certamente*, and *ovviamente* (6.59 % each) also have a significant presence, ranking fifth, sixth and seventh respectively (see figure 4).

The uncertainty category instead presents fewer items. However, in spite of the absolute majority of intensifying pragmatic markers over the hedging ones, the pragmatic marker to appear with the greatest frequency is *forse* ('perhaps'). In fact, it occurs substantially more often than any other marker from both categories – as illustrated in Figure 6. Figure 6 represents the frequency of all pragmatic markers regardless of which category they fall into (these results are consistent with those provided for the English corpus). Also to be noticed in figure 6 is the remarkable presence of another hedging marker: *probabilmente*, which – with its 10 occurrences – ranks fourth in the overall pie chart. This result strengthens the impression that, although fewer as a category, certain hedging pragmatic markers are heavily used whenever they occur near past conditionals.

Finally, regarding the proportions between the two categories, these are very similar to the results observed in the English corpus, with a 70 % of intensifying pragmatic markers and a 30 % of hedging pragmatic markers – the similarity with the English corpus being unquestionable and self-evident.

Forse	Ritengo	Certo	Probabilmente
16,15 %	11,54 %	9,23 %	7,69 %

Credo	Penso	Sicuramente	Ovviamente
7,69 %	6,92 %	5,38 %	4,61 %

Certamente	A mio avviso	Chiaramente	Riteniamo
4,61 %	3,85 %	3,08 %	2,31 %

Relativamente	Difficilmente	Assolutamente	Others
2,31 %	2,31 %	2,31 %	10,00 %

Conclusions

In the process of gathering data for this research paper, some patterns were noticed, patterns that concern a range of linguistic behaviours broader than those involved in the straightforward answer to the question driving this study. The information gathered points at complex discoursive strategies on the part of the European MPs, and gives some hints about the translation strategy adopted by the translators at work in Parliament.

The first pattern consists of the English and Italian pragmatic markers that served the purpose of emphasizing or, conversely, attenuating the speaker's belief in what could have, should have, would have, or might have been done. A diachronic study of the debates might as well reveal other pragmatic markers or a diverse configuration of them. Therefore, these lists are to be considered tentative in nature rather than definitive. Still, they were compiled on the basis of a 5 million-word parallel corpus, hence results lay on a solid framework.

Then, there are the translations. These were not tackled *in qua* translations because this was not the purpose of the paper, besides, translations of individual items are not always

consistent. *I believe*, for example, is translated in 5 different ways (as *credo*, *crediamo*, *ritengo*, *a mio avviso*, *penso*, and once it is not translated at all. This leads to wonder whether such differences in the long run do affect the overall meaning conveyed by the MEPs' speeches, especially on a pragmatic level. The propositional meaning of each translation may indeed be very similar to the original text, as is their function as pragmatic markers (i.e., to signal the speaker's attitude), but the question remains: to what point do differences in translation affect the linguistic exchange? And what about those – although few – cases in which the pragmatic marker is dropped altogether? These are the questions that still need to be answered and that call for further research.

Third, data have proven that MEPs do not favour hedging strategies. They tend to emphasize, possibly to overstate, what they want to communicate, even when talking about hypothesis that belong in the past and that cannot be verified for this very reason.

However, the presence of *perhaps* and *forse* represents an undeniable and remarkable evidence that some degree of tentativeness on the part of the speakers is there indeed, on condition though that such tentativeness concern past hypothesis.

Taken together, these results point to the need for further research from a variety of standpoints. It would be of great interest, for example, to investigate why there are so many more past conditionals in the Italian corpus rather than in the English one. This could be easily verified by a two-way analysis of how English past conditionals are translated into Italian, and vice versa.

Finally, it would also be interesting to explore the dynamics of hedging markers, so as to find out whether self-doubt and tentativeness are traits at all present in our MEPs' speeches when discussing sensible issues that concern the more than 500 million European citizens.

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Santrauka

Paola Gaudio. *Could Have, Should Have, Would Have* **Europos Parlamento kalbėtojų požiūris, atsispindintis per modalumą ir vartojant pragmatinius žymeklius debatuose apie hipotetines praeities alternatyvas anglų ir italų kalbomis**

Europos Parlamento debatuose reguliariai aptariami teisės aktai ir svarbūs sprendimai, turintys įtakos daugiau nei 500 milijonų Europos piliečių gyvenimams. Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamos EP narių kalbos atsižvelgiant į praeities šalutinių sąlygos sakinių vartojimą kartu su pragmatiniais žymekliais, rodančiais kalbėtojo požiūrį į propozicinę prasmę, išreikštą praeities šalutiniais sąlygos sakiniais. Aktualūs pragmatiniai žymekliai buvo suskirstyti į žyminčius tikrumą ir žyminčius netikrumą ar abejojimą, o paskui atitinkamai palyginti. Kadangi tai

yra tekstynu remtas tyrimas, taip pat buvo galima palyginti angliškas ir itališkas pasisakymų versijas siekiant patikrinti, ar pragmatinių žymeklių vartojimas nustatytame kontekste yra šiose kalbose pastovus. Rezultatai rodo, kad sąšvelnio pragmatinių žymeklių naudojimas lyginant su stiprinančiais žymekliais yra nereikšmingas, išskyrus žodį *perhaps* (liet. *galbūt*) ir itališką jo atitikmenį *forse*. Kita vertus, vertimai ne visada yra nuoseklūs; visgi nuoseklumo trūkumas neturi įtakos bendroms pragmatinių žymeklių vartojimo tendencijoms, išryškėjusioms abiejuose tekstynuose.

About the Author

Paola Gaudio

Aggregate Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Bari "Aldo Moro", Italy.

Academic interests

Translation theory and practice, specialized languages, corpus studies, anglophone literature.

Address

Dipartimento di Economia e finanza, Università degli studi di Bari "Aldo Moro",
Largo Abbazia S. Scolastica, 53 (già via C. Rosalba, 53) 70124 Bari, Italy.

E-mail:

paola.gaudio@uniba.it