Means of Expression of Epistemic Modality in Russian Political Discourse

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Summary. This paper discusses the means of epistemic modality used in Russian political discourse. Russian political leaders most often use epistemic modal adverbs and mental state predicates in their speeches for hedging purposes. Modal particles and modal expressions are employed more often than predicatively used adjectives, modal auxiliaries are never used due to the peculiarities of the Russian language. Most commonly used words expressing epistemic modality in Russian belong to the group of modal adverbs. Due to the structure of Russian, groups of particles and modal expressions conveying epistemic modality are analysed. The study reveals that Russian politicians use words with epistemic meanings mainly to convince the listener that the information is reliable, and rarely to mitigate the content of the proposition or to reduce the author's responsibility for what is being claimed. The cognitive processes help to recognize the ideas encoded in epistemic utterances. Those processes are based on the shared knowledge and understanding of the context.
Keywords: epistemic modality; Russian political discourse; modal adverbs; modal verbs; mental state predicates.

Introduction

Modality enables speakers to express their attitude to the content of speech. It makes it possible for speakers to correlate the information conveyed. Epistemic modality is a useful means for speakers to express beliefs, assumptions, doubts or certainties as well as to conceal or hedge. It is employed to state the speaker's relativity of assumptions of the proposition and his/her tentativeness and noncommitting to the truth-value of the proposition. The speeches of politicians are woven out of such modes of knowing such as possibility, probability, or inferred certainty. Thus, the issue of the epistemic modality is particularly significant and has been under constant examination in recent research.

This article endeavours to discuss the means of *epistemic modality* used in contemporary Russian political discourse, using mainly quantitative methods of analysis.

1. Terms and concepts

1.1 Defining epistemic modality

Modality and its types are often misunderstood or confused for one another; it is therefore necessary to establish outright the way in which terminology is used in this study. It is worth noting that different scholars distinguish different subtypes of mainly three types of modality: deontic, dynamic and epistemic. Other researchers, however, differentiate up to seventeen modalities (cf. Leech 1971, Palmer 2001, etc.). Epistemic modality concerns knowledge and belief (Kiefer 1992: 2516, Lyons 1977: 793), "modifies the truth of a semantic proposition" (Lew 1997: 146), concerns "the speaker's assumptions or assessment of possibilities and, in most cases, indicates the speaker's confidence (or lack of confidence) in the truth of the proposition" (Coates 1983: 18), and "truth-oriented, attitude" (Jacobsson 1994: 167). According to Bailey (1981: 182), "epistemic uses are 'logical' uses of modals". Lyons (1977: 797) describes epistemic modality as "any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters […] is an epistemically modal or modalised utterance". Portner (2009: 1) defines modality as "the linguistic phenomenon whereby grammar allows one to say things about, or on the basis of, situations which need not be real", Bybee and others state that "epistemic modality applies to assertions and indicates the extent to which the speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition" (1994: 179). Palmer (2001: 8) makes a distinction between epistemic and deontic modality claiming that both "are concerned with the speaker's attitude to the truth-value or factual status of the proposition (prepositional modality). By contrast, deontic and dynamic modality refer to events that are not actualised, events that have not taken place but are merely potential (event modality)". Finally, Biber (1999: 485) ascribes dynamic to epistemic modality. It is also worth noting that different scholars distinguish various subtypes of epistemic modality: epistemic necessity, epistemic possibility, epistemic possibility (Kiefer 1992: 2518) or see it in terms of the speaker's judgments of necessity and possibility, and evidentiality (1992: 2517).

The confusion between these categories of modality is comprehensible, as they use the same modal words to express entirely different notions. The modal verb *may* can be recognized as epistemic modality when it is conveys to the speaker's judgment of the proposition, whereas the same verb *may* can express deontic modality if it is associated with the speaker's view of a potential event in the future.

Epistemic modality is tightly connected with hedging. According to Coates (1983: 49), "epistemic modality is always a hedge". Thus, sometimes, it is rather difficult to say which one is an umbrella term. Hedging as a type of mitigation means is directly related to epistemic modality. The terms 'hedge'/'hedging' introduced by Lakoff (1973), thus far do not have a complete, conclusive definition; indeed, they have been employed by a variety of disciplines among which pragmatics and discourse analysis studies, and modified to evaluate the truth-value modifications of the fuzzy inference of the proposition. Most notably, over the years, the concept of hedging has also evolved to identify the expressions that alter the category membership of a predicate. The hedges come to be seen as modifiers

of the speaker's commitment to the truthfulness of the entire proposition, not merely a part of it. These changes in the concept of 'hedge' make it necessary to distinguish between two types of hedges. Prince (1982) named them 'approximators' and 'shields'. The approximators influence the truth-conditions of propositions, while shields "do not affect the truth-conditions but reflect the degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth-value of the whole proposition" (Prince 1982). A number of different interpretations of the concept of hedge have led to its overlap with other linguistic concepts, of which epistemic modality is an example.

Finally, it should be noted that the cognitive aspect of the complex phenomena of hedging and epistemic modality, involves various cognitive processes related to the perception of epistemic modality, such as attention, memory, perception, reading, reflective thinking, learning, and reasoning. The cognitive process in which the ideas and objects are recognised is based on the writer's and the reader's, or the speaker's and the listener's shared background knowledge and the context in which the exchange takes place (Nemickienė 2015).

1.2 Political discourse and epistemic modality

Altikriti (2016) rightly states that language is the most ancient and powerful device of persuasion and it is the most potent tool used for interaction or transaction in different situations, especially in the political environment. When they speak in public or answering questions, politicians select language carefully avoiding spontaneity. The language of *political discourse* is based on inferences the listener or reader is expected to make, in other words all the implied messages need to be interpreted. The use of modality protects politicians making it possible for them to formulate vague, ambiguous, imprecision, general, as the utterance may allow more than one interpretation. Modality has different categorisations: syntactic, semantic, functional, pragmatic or cognitive. Nevertheless, the pragmatic approach – on its own or combined with others – is the most useful one.

The term *political discourse* can be defined as a formal, oral or written discussion of different actors starting from politicians and organizations to citizens. Political discourse makes use of a variety of methods of impact pursuing the aim to influence cleverly and supervise the population. The subconscious manipulation methods such as graduation, distraction, mediocrity or infantilization, require different levels of language (Timsit 2011). Political discourse poises between the effective and epistemic levels. On the one hand, it tries to control and influence every day life, and on the other to employ epistemicity, which constantly biases the audience to interpret information single-mindedly (Mushin 2001; Aikhenvald 2006; Arrese 2011 et al.).

Dunmire (2012) states that political discourse analysis comprises inter- and multi-disciplinary research, which focuses on the linguistic and discursive dimensions of political texts, spoken or written. The present research focuses on political texts, which are tightly related to the use of specific language means aiming at creating a specific impact on society. Chilton (2008: 226) characterises political discourse as "the use of

language to do the business of politics" and further explains that it includes "persuasive rhetoric, the use of implied meanings, the use of euphemisms, the exclusion of references to undesirable reality, the use of language to arouse political emotions and the like". According to Orwell (1946: 13), "political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible". In view of the above, it seems plausible to suggest that politics uses a specific type of language, where words are particularly significant and a mere ambiguity or, on the contrary, evidence, overstatement or understatement of one's statements may lead to alleged promises to the public that one cannot keep. Therefore, mitigation means such as epistemic modality are often used in political discourse, for persuasive purposes.

Epistemic modality is a useful tool in political discourse as the latter employs communication. This form allows to loosely delineate the power and interests of discourse participants. Epistemic modality helps to monitor the audience's apprehension of truth, allowing them to undertake a certain degree of personal responsibility and to estimate the degree of validity of the information shared with other participants in the political discourse (Nuyts 2001).

2. Epistemic modality research in the English and Russian languages

This study deals with Russian Political Discourse, a task of which requires specific knowledge about the usage of epistemic modality in this language.

The theoretical basis of epistemic modality laid out by Palmer (2001, 2014), Lyons (1977), Leech (1971), Perkins (1983) has served as a starting point to many other researchers, who have developed new classifications of the linguistic phenomenon, which makes the object of the present paper. Thus, Nuyts (2001) outlines new categories of classification and a different manner of conceptualising epistemic modality in his monograph *Epistemic Modality, Language, and Conceptualization*. Following Nuyts (2001), for the purpose of this study epistemic modality is seen as an evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration will occur, is occurring, or has occurred in a possible world, which serves as the universe of interpretation for the evaluation process.

Nuyts (2001: 24) divides these categories into *epistemic modality*, *deontic modality*, and *dynamic modality*. The basic point here is that only epistemic modality is 'speaker-oriented', while the other types are 'agent-oriented'. Although these types of modality are clearly different, they are interrelated and have common elements.

Bybee (1994) and Palmer (2001, 2014) attribute *evidentiality* to the notion of epistemic modality and Nuyts (2001: 27) sees a strong connection between the two notions. Nevertheless, according to him, "evidentiality concerns the speaker's indication of the nature of the evidence invoked for the state of affairs expressed in the utterance and does not involve any explicit evaluation in terms of the state of affairs being true or not".

Nuyts (2001: 29) distinguishes several linguistic form types that can express epistemic modality and provides examples of each group: modal adverbs (such as *maybe, probably, certainly*), predicatively used modal adjectives (*it is possible, probable, likely, certain*), mental state predicates (such as *I think, believe, e.g.)* and modal auxiliaries (*they may,*

might, must). All of these are relevant in the present research. Epistemic modality can also be expressed by nouns, modal particles, tenses, and moods.

In addition to the above, Nuyts (2001: 33) discusses the distinction between subjective and objective epistemic evaluation. The concept of epistemic evaluation was initially introduced by Lyons (1977: 797ff) who states that "the objective epistemic modality expresses an objectively assessable chance that the state of affairs is true or not, while subjective epistemic modality involves only a subjective guess regarding its truth". However, Nuyts (2001) argues that there is no need to base an assumption on evidence as people often express false evidence that the other party may see as true evidence. Therefore, utterances are always subjective.

It is interesting to compare Nuyt's approach to epistemic modality with Palmer's rather different. In his book *Modality and the English Modals*, Palmer (2014) examines epistemic modality just from the point of view of modal auxiliaries. Palmer's study focuses on the six prime modal verbs – *will, shall, may, can, must, ought to* – and a few others that also express epistemic modality – *dare, need, have to, be able to, be willing to, be bound to, is to and be going to* (2014: 3). Palmer initially distinguishes two basic types of modality, the *epistemic* and the *deontic* and explains that "most of the modals are used in both senses, and are not themselves either epistemic or deontic" (2014: 8). Later he introduces a third type, *dynamic* modality (2014: 36), and claims that there could be a fourth, i.e., *neutral* (circumstantial) modality (ibid, 37).

Palmer's (2014: 8) elaboration on the notions of *possibility* and *necessity* suggests that *may* and *must* can be explained in terms of possibility and necessity, and that the epistemic modality can be understood as 'possible/necessary that'. Later, Palmer refers to the subjectivity of epistemic modality and supports his proposition that *epistemic modality* is subjective by stating that "the epistemic and deontic modals of English have no past tense/past time forms" (ibid, 10).

To sum up, although *epistemic modality* may be apprehended in different ways, an agreement seems to emerge about a number of core aspects. Above all, it is evident that *epistemic modality* is subjective and expresses the speaker's evaluation of the possibility of a certain state of affairs. Furthermore, epistemic modality can express both possibility and necessity. Finally, there are several ways to express epistemic modality, modals being by far the most important one.

The Russian linguist Vinogradov (1975) was the pioneer of research on modality in the Russian language. He describes *modality* as a semantic category, which expresses the relationship between a statement and the extra-linguistic reality from the point of view of the speaker. According to him, any kind of thoughts, emotions, etc. reflect reality by systemic means of a given language; also, they convey additional syntactic meanings, which form the category of *modality* (Виноградов 1975: 57).

Overall, Russian linguists categorize modality into objective and subjective. Objective modality expresses the relationship between the content of the utterance and reality, whereas subjective modality – the speaker's relationship with the utterance itself. In order

to understand better the notion of subjective modality, Russian scholars distinguish three subcategories: *epistemic, alethic* and *deontic modality*.

A detailed outline of epistemic modality is presented by Averina and Bloch (Блох, Аверина 2011). Demjankov (Демьянков 2017) argues that the epistemic modality of a sentence is a means to express the speaker's opinion about the stated proposition, taking into account what is, was, or will be in the real world. Demjankov distinguishes subjective and objective epistemic modality, while other scholars, such as Krushelnickaja (Крушельницкая 1970), Nagornyj (Нагорный 2014), Bulygina and Shmeliov (Булыгина, Шмелев 1997) agree with characterization of epistemic modality.

Krushelnickaja (1970: 373) does not use the term 'epistemic modality'; instead, she describes the phenomenon in terms of 'possibility' and 'conjecture'. This is compatible with Nagornyj's (2014) view that epistemic modality is subjective and that assumption (conjecture) is not possibility itself. According to him, these two semantic entities are different in nature. Unlike possibility, an assumption is always subjective; indeed as he points out "it refracts exclusively through the individual 'I', while possibility depends not so much on the subjective factor as on the conditions that exist outside of it in the objective reality" (translation mine) (Блох, Аверина 2011: 32).

Bulygina and Shmeliov (1997) introduce new concepts by separating two implications of modal words – 'uncertainty' and 'hypothetical character'. The modal words possessing a hypothetical meaning are used only when the speaker does not have precise information about the truthfulness of the proposition and a hypothesis based on logic or intuition. Furthermore, they discuss the concepts of 'ontological possibility' or, in other words, 'potentiality', and 'epistemic possibility', or 'problematical character' (Ibid, 32).

To sum up, modality is a complex linguistic category, and Russian scholars add to its interpretation. The differences between English and Russian apprehend the phenomenon are undoubtedly linked to differences between the languages themselves. Thus, the interpretation of this phenomenon often depends not only on the language differences but also on the interpreter and therefore never totally objective.

3. Means of Expression of Epistemic Modality in Political Discourse

The study draws on empirical data collected from political discourse in the Russian language and endeavours to caver all the types of epistemic modality in this language.

The data consists in speeches by politicians, meeting the following criteria: (1) all of the transcribed speeches are provided by government sources, such as http://kremlin.ru/, or authorized sources, such as, http://tass.ru; (2) all the speeches are delivered by Russian native speakers. The place of birth, nationality and the current residency of all the speakers were taken into consideration; (3) the speeches were delivered between 2008 and 2018; (4) the topics discussed are terrorism threats, wars and potential threats to national prosperity, new laws and future prospects. The length of the texts varies from 392 words to 28 509 words.

The analysis of the data draws on Nuyts's (2001) categories of classification and understanding of epistemic modality in his monograph *Epistemic Modality, Language, and Conceptualization*. The main categories are *modal adverbs*, *predicatively used modal adjectives*, *mental state predicates*, and *modal auxiliaries*, *particles* and *modal expressions*.

3.1 Epistemic modality in Russian political discourse

Ten speeches were selected for the purpose of this study amounting to a total of 47 368 words. The author's translation of the Russian language may create slight variations in their meaning connotations. In total, 136-word forms expressing epistemic modality were identified. They were divided into separate categories, and their frequency of occurrence is indicated in *Table 1*.

Table 1. The distribution of linguistic form types that express epistemic modality in Russian political discourse

Modal adverbs	Predicatively used modal adjectives	Mental state predicates	Modal auxiliaries	Modal particles	Modal expressions
67	0	45	0	12	12

3.1.1 Modal adverbs

Modal adverbs make the biggest group of expression means of epistemic modality used in Russian political speeches in the corpus. Their variety and frequency are the following: *конечно* (of course) (29 cases of use) 21.3%, *безусловно* (certainly/ unconditionally) (15) 11%, *видимо* (must have been/ seemingly/ apparently) (3) 2.2%, *наверное* (probably, most likely) (5) 3.7%, *действительно* (indeed, really) (3) 2.2%, *очевидно* (obviously, evidently) (4) 2.9%, *естественно* (naturally) (1) 0.7%, *вероятно* (must be, likely) (1) 0.7%, *возможно* (probably) (2) 1.5%, *несомненно* (undoubtedly) (1) 0.7%.

The most commonly used word in this group was *конечно* (of course). The adverb was used 29 times out of 67 modal adverbs found in total. The speaker uses it in an attempt to strengthen the assumption that the statement is true. The adverb expresses the degree of the speaker's confidence or false confidence in the statement based on the admission of an allegedly indisputable fact. The modal *должна (should)*, on the other hand, makes the statement seem less reliable. For example, (♦) *[...] ООН должна соответствовать этой естественной трансформации ([...] the UN should conform to this natural transformation).*[1]

The second most commonly used adverb is *безусловно* (*certainly*). It was traced fifteen times in the corpus. It is no wonder that the adverb is among the most frequently used in political speeches, as politicians tend to use this particular word to display about their

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[1] The examples in Russian are translated by the author.

knowledge. It is also used to convey the speaker's certainty about the plausibility of the proposition. The modal *нужно (it is necessary)* makes a statement even less reliable. To give an example: (♦) <u>*Безусловно*</u>, <u>*нужно*</u> *гарантировать равные права конкуренции в экономике для всех* (<u>*Certainly*</u>, <u>*it is necessary*</u> *to guarantee equal competition rights in the economy for all).*

Очевидно (*obviously*) is the third most commonly used adverb in the corpus speeches by Russian politicians. *Очевидно* shows a high level of confidence in the uttered proposition, though with a degree of subjectivity (♦) *Уже* <u>*очевидно*</u>, *что возникший в ряде стран Ближнего Востока и Северной Африки вакуум власти привёл к образованию зон анархии […]* (*It is already* <u>*obvious*</u> *that the power vacuum that has arisen in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa led to the formation of zones of anarchy […]).* The statement implies that the speaker possesses information, which confirms the potentially threatening situation.

Another group of adverbs *видимо* (*seemingly)*, *наверное* (*probably*), *действительно* (*indeed*) express certain probability and are used less frequently. Thus for instance: (♦) *Однако ясно, что и к прежней [...] России, наполненной двойными стандартами модели взаимоотношений возврата,* <u>*видимо*</u>, *не будет* (*However, it is clear that to the former [...] Russia, filled with the model of dual-standard relationship,* <u>*apparently*</u>, *there will not be any way back).* (♦) *И,* <u>*действительно*</u>, *это важно и полезно напрямую вести диалог [...] для того чтобы прояснить наши позиции* (*And,* <u>*indeed*</u>, *it is important and useful to directly engage in dialogue [...] in order to clarify our positions).* The adverb *наверное* in the following sentence expresses low certainty and mitigates the author's position. He does not take responsibility for the future events, but merely expresses the possibility that the statement will be true. To illustrate this: (♦) *В ней,* <u>*наверное*</u>, *будет меньше мучительных дискуссий о поиске общих ценностей [...]* (*There will* <u>*probably*</u> *be less painful discussions about the search for common values [...]); (♦) Предыдущая встреча в таком же составе у нас состоялась только шесть лет тому назад и,* <u>*действительно*</u>, *это важно [...]* (*The previous meeting of the same composition took place only six years ago and,* <u>*indeed,*</u> *it is important [...]).* In the later example, *действительно* shows the speaker's confidence in the proposition.

Adverbs such as *вероятно (must be, likely)* and *возможно (probably),* were not frequent and were traced only once or twice. These parenthetical modal words express a subjectful opinion, related to the speaker's subjective, uncertain evaluation of the state of affairs, which makes the object of their comment. Thus, for instance, probability in (♦) *Сейчас очень важный и,* <u>*возможно*</u>, *критический момент* (*It is a very important and* <u>*perhaps*</u> *critical moment now)* and *вероятно* in the next sentence express the author's assumption about the fact. (♦) <u>*Вероятно*</u>, *всех нас хотят поставить перед фактом [...]* (*Probably they want us face with the fact [...])* The speaker does not have any concrete information and, therefore, expresses a degree of uncertainty.

3.1.2 Mental state predicates

This group is significantly smaller than the previous one. A total of 45 mental state predicates expressing epistemic modality were found in the corpus. Their variety and frequency in political speeches is the following: считать (consider/ assume) (thirteen occurrences) 9.6%, думать (think/ speculate) (13) 9.6%, верить (believe) (1) 0.7%, знать (know/understand) (4) 2.9%, полагать (suppose) (1) 0.7%, рассчитывать (count on, upon/expect) (1) 0.7%, and two past participle propositions быть уверенным (sure) (4) 2.9%, and быть убеждённым (convinced) (8) 6%.

The two most commonly used epistemic words in this group are *думать* (think) and *считать* (consider/ assume). The respective meanings of both of them are very similar in Russian and express the speaker's subjective view of the situation. To give some examples: (♦) *Искренне* <u>*считаем*</u>, *что, если мы не нормализуем ситуацию в Сирии [...] терроризм станет новым видом войны. (We sincerely <u>assume</u> that if we do not normalize the situation in Syria [...] terrorism will become a new kind of war)*. As can be seen in the example above, the author uses the word *считать* (*to assume*) in the plural, thus reducing personal commitment about the question at hand. Politicians often use other modal words in the same manner to hedge their personal responsibility.

The epistemic cognition verb or mental state predicate *думать* (*think*) in the phrase does not, in itself, imply a process of cognition. The statement is assumed but there is no claim it is not categorically correct. This verb can be easily substituted by 'imply' or 'infer': (♦) <u>*Думаю*</u>, *что все собравшиеся здесь эту логику хорошо понимают и поддерживают (I <u>think</u> that everyone gathered here understands and supports this logic well.)*

The words *уверен* (sure) and *убеждён* (convinced) were assigned in the present research to the group of mental state predicates, whereas in a sentence they perform the function of a predicate and can be used interchangeably. The word *убеждён* (convinced) is used quite frequently (eight occurences) and *уверен* (sure) only four times. Thus, for instance, (♦) *Твердо* <u>*убеждены*</u>, *что без подлинного партнерства [...] управление современным миром невозможно (We <u>firmly believe</u> that without a true partnership [...] management of the modern world is impossible)*. Politicians tend to use the plural in statements they make in order to hedge themselves. Although words like *убеждён* (*convinced*) express a strong conviction in the proposition, the plural shifts the responsibility away from the author alone.

To sum up, modal adverbs are used most frequently to express epistemic modality in the Russian political texts included in the corpus which makes the object of the present study. Most often than not, politicians use words that express knowledge and a high degree of certainty in the statements they make.

3.1.3 Modal particles

Modal particles are a group that expresses epistemic modality in Russian and does not exist in the English language. In the corpus, there are only three words *разумеется* (*of*

course), *неужели* (*really/ indeed/is that so?*) and *вряд ли* (*hardly*) that can be assigned to this group. They are difficult to translate, as they do not have straightforward equivalents in English. The word *разумеется* (*of course*) expressing degree of certainty is used as often as ten times, which makes 7.4%, while the words *неужели* (*really*) and *вряд ли* (*hardly*) expressing doubt and ironical disagreement are each only used once.

Разумеется (*of course*) in the sentence (♦) *Разумеется, мы не можем быть удовлетворены нынешним состоянием наших отношений* (*Of course, we cannot be satisfied with the current state of our relationship*), expresses the author's conviction in the proposition and that there is no doubt about the truthfulness of the utterance. While, for example, *неужели* (*really*) and *вряд ли* (*hardly*) respectively express doubt and uncertainty, as in the examples (♦) *Но неужели нам нужна еще одна, третья мировая встряска [...]?* (*But do we really need another, the third global upheaval [...]?*); (♦) *Обстановка в мире остается сложной, подвижной, и мы сегодня вряд ли сможем сделать какие-то претендующие на завершенность выводы* (*The situation in the world remains difficult, unsteady, and today we can hardly make any conclusions that pretend to completeness*). The particle *неужели* (*really/is that so*?) is most commonly used in questions as the phrase itself has an interrogative connotation. *Вряд ли* expresses subjectivity, doubt and formal presentation of the author's point of view.

To conclude, modal particles are a group that does not occur in the English language, and it is not a very significant one in Russian.

3.1.4 Modal expressions

Modal expressions are another important group. The phrases that were assigned to this category and the frequency of occurrence in the corpus are the following: *можно быть уверенным* (can be sure) (1) 0.7%, *представляется очевидным* (it seems obvious) (2) 1.5%, *на мой/наш взгляд* (in my/our opinion) (8) 4.4%, *можно констатировать* (can state) (1) 0.7%, *по нашему мнению* (in our opinion) (2) 1.5%.

The meanings of the expressions in this group are similar to the meanings in the *mental state predicates* group, for example *я уверен* (*I am sure*)*, на мой взгляд* (*in my opinion*) – *я считаю* (*I assume*) or to *modal adverbs*, like *представляется очевидным* (*it seems obvious*) – *очевидно (apparent, obvious)*. Nevertheless, these modal expressions indicate that the author does not have any firm opinion regarding the discussed topic: (♦) *Можно быть уверенными, что будущее преподнесет нам немало сюрпризов, [...] меняющих правила игры ([We] can be sure that the future will give us a lot of surprises [...] that change the rules of the game.);* (♦) *Представляется очевидным, что международное развитие не будет линейным [...] (It seems clear that international development will not be linear [...]).* The use of the plural form weakens the speaker's responsibility for the presented facts even more and converts it into a collective responsibility. Thus, for instance, (♦) *На наш взгляд, речь должна идти о формировании пространства равной и неделимой безопасности [...] для всех (In our opinion, we should talk about the formation of a space of equal and indivisible security [...] for all).*

Conclusions

Russian politicians use epistemic modality in their speeches on a constant basis. The political texts in the corpus employed 136 epistemic words, which represents 0,3% of the total words used.

The most frequently used words expressing epistemic modality in the Russian speeches are the particle *конечно* (21.3% of all the words that express epistemic modality in the corpus) and the adverb *безусловно* (11%) expressing the degree of certainty, as well as the verbs *считать* (9.6%) and *думать* (9.6%).

To express *epistemic modality*, Russian politicians employed modal adverbs such as *конечно, безусловно, очевидно, наверное* and mental state predicates like *думать* and *считать*. However, the most popular means of expression of epistemic modality in the corpus are modal particles – *разумеется* expressing the degree of certainty, uncertainty in the proposition. Modal particles is the means of expression frequently used in Russian language speeches in general. Russian political discourse displays a tendency towards set modal expressions, such as *можно быть уверенным, представляется очевидным, на мой/наш взгляд, можно констатировать, по нашему мнению* (*you can be sure, it seems obvious, in my / our opinion, we can state, in our opinion*).

Russian politicians use words with epistemic meanings for multiple reasons: often in an attempt to convince the listener that the information is reliable, but sometimes to reduce their own responsibility and to mitigate the content of the proposition.

The comparative analysis of the means of *epistemic modality* used in English and Russian political discourse is the aim of further research.

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