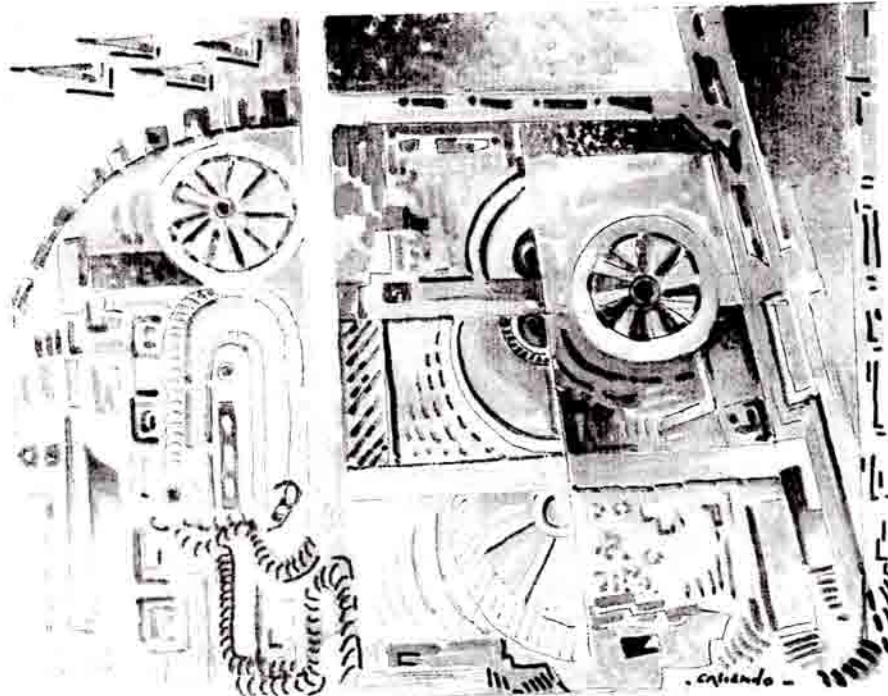


Genre(s) on the Move
Hybridization and Discourse Change
in Specialized Communication



SRIKANT SARANGI, VANDA POLESE, GIUDITTA CALIENDO (eds)



Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane

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A Diachronic Corpus-based Analysis of Epistemic Adverbials in the White House Press Briefings*

1. Introduction

This study is part of a wider project aimed at outlining the evolutionary trends in the White House press briefings as a genre. These briefings, where the White House press secretary¹ and the press meet almost daily, are the main information conduit for the White House. They can be hypothesised to present features not only of institutional, but also of political and media discourse. In the framework of the same research project, previous research on genre hybridization² in the briefings across the Clinton and George W. Bush presidencies has shown variation in the distribution of key clusters, mainly in the discourse of the podium.

The presence of the podium as an individual was found to be more prominent in the interaction with the press in Clinton's first term than in the following years. The dominant key clusters included mental and cognitive verb phrases (e.g. *I don't believe; I think*) expressing a hedging function that is less salient in Bush's briefings. Assuming the contextual factors as the main variable responsible for the greater visibility of the podium in the Clinton briefings, in this paper we focus on 'stance

* This study is part of the MIUR-funded research project of national interest (PRIN) *Tension and Change in English Domain-specific Genres* (Prot. No. 2007JCY9Y9). National coordinator: Professor Maurizio Gotti (University of Bergamo); local coordinator: Professor Gabriella Di Martino (University of Napoli Federico II).

The authors conceived the paper together but for practical reasons, Giulia Riccio is responsible for sub-sections 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4, Cinzia Spinzi is responsible for sections 1 and 2 and sub-sections 4.2, 4.5, 4.6. Section 3 and conclusions were written together.

¹ We will henceforth use the word 'podium' to refer to the White House press secretary, following Partington (2003).

² See A.M. Cava, S. De Candia, G. Riccio, C.G. Spinzi and M. Venuti, *The Evolution of Institutional Genres in Time: The Case of the White House Press Briefings*. Paper presented at the Corpus Linguistics 2009 conference (University of Liverpool, UK – 21-23 July 2009).

adverbs', which were found to be prominent collocates of those key mental clusters. Since text is nothing but phraseology of one kind or another (Sinclair 2008), our aim is to uncover recurrent phrases in this type of genre to look at their diachronic variation and at the variables determining it. In other words, our main objective is to analyse how the discourse preferences constructing the podiums and the press in their way of projecting the referenced context and their subjectivity vary across 16 years.

In order to achieve these results, this study relies on corpus-based techniques, which will provide information about the relative frequency of the stance adverbials and their distribution over time as well as indications of variables such as the setting, the political context, the communicative strategies or the media market evolution, fuelled by technological developments and economic globalization (Blumler/Kavanagh 1999).

The main contribution of our research comes from the investigation of spoken discourse and in particular of those resources which help outline features of the White House press briefings as a genre – the “political chess game” where the two main participants, the podium/soldier and the wild press/animal, face a “wrestling match” (Partington 2006a: 16). Furthermore, by investigating linguistic variation in naturally occurring discourse, it is possible “to identify systematic differences in the functional use of each variant” (Biber *et al.* 2007: 3). Disregarding the distinction between ‘genre’ and ‘register’ (Biber 1988), we will be looking at both as referring to “situationally-defined varieties described for their characteristic lexico-grammatical features” (Biber *et al.* 2007: 9).

This article is structured as follows: section 2 introduces the theories behind this work; the methodology and the corpus will be described in section 3; the analysis starts in section 4 which, after a quantitative investigation, deals with an investigation of the individual cases. Conclusions will be drawn in the last section.

2. *Theoretical background*

Tied to professional and societal practices, genre boundaries are becoming less clear-cut in response to various forms of external pressure such as changes in the structure of institutions and the accretion of knowledge. This results in an extensive and pervasive hybridity in terms

of textual realization (Poppi 2007). In an attempt at accounting for this phenomenon, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) proposed "intertextuality" as a fertile route for the migration of textual features.

Conrad and Biber (2000: 58) observed that certain categories of adverbials show a preference for specific patterns and positions in the clause, depending on the register in which they occur. The starting point of our work is Biber *et al.*'s (1999) comprehensive corpus-based analysis of 'circumstance, stance and linking adverbials'. It is from this taxonomy – which includes three categories of adverbs, further divided into sub-groups – that we mainly derived information on current uses of stance adverbs in different registers (Biber *et al.* 1999: 853). Our analysis focuses on the 'doubt and certainty' sub-category, which was found to be the most frequent in English, although their function may also be realized through other formulations such as prepositional phrases and finite clauses. As Biber *et al.* (1999: 766-767) maintain, the main function of stance adverbs is "to convey [speakers'] judgements and attitudes, to claim the factual nature of what they are saying, and to mark exactly how they mean their utterances to be understood".

Similarly, Martin and White (2005: 104-105) include these adverbs in the category of "entertaining" formulations in that they constitute one of a number of possible standpoints by which speakers make assessments of likelihood.

In literature, stance adverbials are also categorized as 'disjuncts', which are associated to the "speaker's authority" and differ from 'conjuncts' in that they express "an evaluation of what is being said either with respect to the form of communication or to its meaning" (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 440). Chafe (1986) uses "evidential" as a broader term to refer to these adverbials and includes them in the "expectation" category together with hedges. In his model, evidentials are categorized according to such criteria as data source, reliability and expectation and they express attitudes towards knowledge.

Despite the different categorizations, it is widely agreed that evidential markers are related to epistemic modality (Aijmer/Simon-Vandenberg 2007) and mark a deviation from a proposition characterized by "an ideal knowledge status" (De Lancey 2001: 308) seen as "what is assumed to be certainly true, and is fully consistent with the rest of the speaker's knowledge of the world". This proposition is regarded as the unmarked form. We assume that adverbials mark a deviation from this ideal status presenting the information in a(n) (un)certain way.

3. Data and methodology

The present study is based on the Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (henceforth *CADS*) approach which, as outlined by Partington (2004), focuses on the analysis of specific discourse types, by combining the use of quantitative and qualitative research tools. A corpus comprising the over 4,000 briefings dating back to the Clinton's two presidential terms (1993-2001) and to the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009) was compiled, totalling over 18,000,000 running words³. The corpus will be henceforth referred to as *DIAWHOB* (DIAchronic White HOuse Briefings). The scope and size of this specialized corpus make it a powerful tool to study the evolution of these briefings as a genre. XML mark-up incorporating information about individual speakers and their roles, date, briefing details and text structure has been added to the whole corpus in order to make it possible to easily carry out comparisons within the corpus.

The *Xaira* package, which is freely available⁴ and allows the user to perform XML-based queries, was chosen to conduct the investigation.

Since one of the most important features of the *CADS* approach is that it requires the researcher to carry out comparisons (Partington 2006b: 269), we have identified a corpus to be used for comparative purposes in this study: the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (henceforth *COCA*)⁵, containing over 400 million running words of spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic discourse.

Our analysis was carried out in three steps: comparing the relative frequency of the stance adverbs for each presidential term in the podium's discourse and in the discourse of the press; observing recurrent patterns and their functions in the use of these adverbs in the discourse of the podium and of the press; comparing the use of these adverbs in *DIAWHOB* to their use in *COCA* and in its sub-corpora.

For practical reasons capital letters followed by numbers will be used throughout this paper when referring to the four sub-corpora: C1 and C2 for Clinton's first and second term, B1 and B2 for Bush's two terms.

³ Briefings are available online at: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/press_briefings.php (Last accessed: 2 April 2010).

⁴ *Xaira* is freely available online at <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/rts/xaira/> (Last accessed: 2 April 2010).

⁵ Developed by Mark Davies, *COCA* is available online at: <http://www.american corpus.org> (Last accessed: 2 April 2010).

4. Stance adverbials of the doubt/certainty type: data analysis

4.1. Distribution across the corpus

According to Biber *et al.* (1999: 853-856), the most common stance adverbials of the doubt/certainty type across registers (academic discourse, conversation, fiction, American and British news) are *of course*, *perhaps*, *maybe*, *probably*, *certainly* and *definitely*. Their findings show that *probably* ranks first in conversation, immediately followed by *maybe*; *perhaps* and *of course* are more frequently used in fiction, whereas *certainly* and *definitely* are the least frequent across the genres considered.

These six adverbials were the ones chosen for investigation in this study. In this section, we outline frequency data for the six adverbials in *DIAWHOB* and *COCA*. All comparisons are based on relative frequency data per 1,000,000 words.

Certainly, which according to the *Oxford American Dictionary*⁶ (henceforth *OAD*) means "undoubtedly; definitely; surely", but can also be used in answer to a question or command, is the most frequent epistemic stance adverbial of the doubt/certainty type in the *DIAWHOB* corpus, with 9903 occurrences. It occurs much more often during the briefings dating back to C1 and C2 than in B2 and, more significantly, in B1, both in absolute and relative terms. This stance adverbial occurs almost seven times more often in the podium's words than it does in those of the press. It may be therefore regarded as a feature of podium discourse, which, however, is less common during the Clinton years.

Moreover, *certainly* is over three times as frequent in *DIAWHOB* as it is in *COCA*. The relative frequency of this adverbial is higher in the spoken sub-corpus than in the other sub-corpora of which *COCA* is made up, thus appearing to be a feature of spoken rather than written American English. However, its relative frequency in *DIAWHOB* and, in particular, in the podium's words, is significantly higher than its relative frequency in *COCA* spoken.

Of course has three basic functions according to the *OAD*: "to introduce an idea or turn of events as being obvious or to be expected; to give or emphasize agreement or permission; to introduce a qualification or admission". This is the second most frequent epistemic stance adverbial

⁶ Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (Last accessed: May 2010).

of the doubt/certainty type in *DIAWHOB*, with 5692 occurrences. In relative terms, its occurrences are quite evenly distributed throughout the corpus, except for B1, where they are found to be about one and a half times more frequent than in other presidential terms. In relative terms, this stance adverbial is almost five times more frequent in the podium's words than it is in those of the press. Its relative frequency in *COCA* is slightly lower than the one in *DIAWHOB*. Its relative frequency in *COCA* spoken, however, is significantly higher than the one in *DIAWHOB*, and even slightly higher than in the podium's words. Moreover, *of course* is also slightly more frequent in *COCA* fiction than it is in *DIAWHOB*.

Probably, which according to the *OAD* means "almost certainly; as far as one knows or can tell", is slightly less frequent than *of course* in *DIAWHOB*. It indeed occurs 5634 times in the corpus. Its relative frequency is significantly higher during the Clinton presidency than it is in Bush's and, in particular, in B1. In relative terms, this stance adverbial occurs three and a half times as much in the words of the podium as it does in those of the press. Its relative frequency in *COCA* is slightly lower than in *DIAWHOB*. Its relative frequency in *COCA* spoken, however, is significantly higher than in *DIAWHOB*, and only very slightly lower than in the podium's words. Moreover, the relative frequency of *probably* in *COCA* fiction is only slightly lower than its relative frequency in *DIAWHOB*.

Maybe, which according to the *OAD* means "perhaps; possibly", is the fourth most frequent epistemic stance adverbial of the doubt/certainty type in *DIAWHOB*, with 3666 occurrences. In relative terms, its occurrences are quite evenly distributed throughout the corpus, except for B1, where they are found to be rarer than in other presidential terms.

Unlike the adverbials discussed above, *maybe* is almost twice as frequent – in relative terms – in the words of the press as in the words of the podium. Once again in relative terms, it is also more frequent in *COCA* than it is in *DIAWHOB* – but not more frequent than in the journalist's words in *DIAWHOB*. As regards *COCA* sub-corpora, the relative frequency of *maybe* is significantly higher in *COCA* fiction and also higher in *COCA* spoken than it is in other sub-corpora.

Perhaps is the fifth most frequent epistemic stance adverbial of the doubt/certainty type in *DIAWHOB*, with 2604 occurrences. According to the *OAD*, it is "used to express uncertainty or possibility" and, in particular:

when one does not wish to be too definite or assertive in the expression of an opinion; [...] when making a polite request, offer, or suggestion; [...] to express reluctant or qualified agreement or acceptance.

In relative terms, *perhaps* is significantly more frequent in the briefings dating back to Clinton's presidency and, in particular, to C1, than it is in those dating back to the days of George W. Bush. The relative frequency of this adverbial is three times as high in the words of the press as it is in the words of the podium. *Perhaps* is therefore more a feature of the discourse of the White House press corpus than it is of the podium. Its relative frequency in COCA is higher than the one in DIAWHOB, but lower than the one in the words of the press. Amongst COCA sub-corpora, its relative frequency is higher in COCA fiction and COCA academic than in the others.

Definitely is remarkably rarer in DIAWHOB than the other epistemic stance adverbials of the doubt/certainty type, with only 369 occurrences. Similarly, this adverbial is significantly less frequent than the others of the same type in COCA. According to the OAD, it means "without doubt" or "in a definite manner, clearly". In the former case, it is "used for emphasis". This adverbial is most frequent in C1 and least frequent in B1. It is twice as frequent in the words of the press as in those of the podium. As regards COCA, *definitely* is found above all in the spoken sub-corpus.

Relative frequency data illustrated above and summarised in Figure 1 show that these six adverbials, taken together, are much more frequent in the Clinton presidency briefings than in those of the George W. Bush presidency. In particular, they are most frequent in C1 and least frequent in B1. *Certainly* is the most frequent epistemic stance adverbial of this type in all presidential terms except for B1, where *of course* prevails and *certainly* ranks second. In both C1 and C2, *probably* ranks second, while in B2 it is *of course* that ranks second: there is less room for doubt during Bush's presidency.

The six adverbials, taken together, are twice as frequent in the words of the podium as in those of the press. *Certainly*, *of course* and *probably* are much more frequent, in relative terms, in the words of the podium than in those of the press. *Maybe*, *perhaps* and the rare *definitely* are more frequent in those of the press than in those of the podium. *Certainly*, followed by *probably*, is the most frequent amongst these adverbials in the words of the podium, while *maybe*, followed by *perhaps*, is the most frequent in the words of the press.

The six adverbials, taken together, are more frequent in *DIAWHOB* than in *COCA*. Their frequency in *COCA*, however, is higher than their frequency in the words of the press in *DIAWHOB*. Their frequency in *COCA* spoken is significantly higher and their frequency in *COCA* fiction is higher than in *DIAWHOB*, but lower than their frequency in the words of the podium. The most frequent amongst the six adverbials in *COCA* is *maybe*, followed by *probably*. *Perhaps* only ranks fifth. *Maybe* is by far the most frequent of these adverbials in *COCA* fiction, followed by *of course*, which, in turn, is the most frequent in *COCA* spoken, followed by *probably* and *maybe*. *Probably* and *perhaps* are the most frequent of these adverbials both in *COCA* newspaper and *COCA* magazine, and *perhaps* is by far the most frequent in *COCA* academic.

Figure 1 displays the quantitative results of the distribution of the six adverbials across the years while in the following sub-sections a more qualitative perspective is embraced in the analysis of each adverb. Due to the low frequency of *definitely* compared to the other adverbials, its usage was not examined in detail.

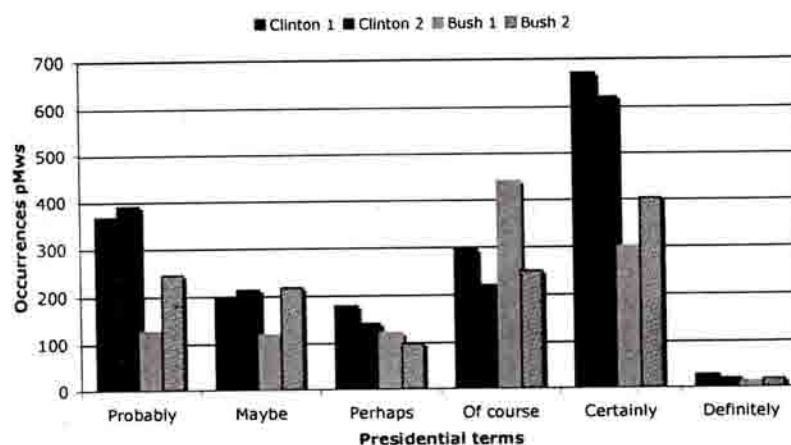


Figure 1. Relative frequency of the six stance adverbials examined in the four presidential terms

4.2. 'Certainly'

As Hunston and Thompson maintain (2000: 6-13), evaluative devices may perform different functions at the same time. Certainty adverbials are a case in point, in that they convey the speaker's assessment to truth-

values and are also used for other purposes, such as setting up an argument, or as emphasizers.

The distribution of *certainly* in the discourse of the podium is almost unstable. From a peak in 1994 and a drastic drop in 1995, we can observe a slight increase in the second term of Clinton's presidency, and a decline again at the beginning of Bush's term. An unsteady behaviour characterizes the remaining years. Ups and downs are also visible in the distribution of this lexical item in the discourse of the press where the occurrences are by far less frequent than in the podium's data.

Despite their apparent function of marking strong conviction (see Biber/Finnegan 1988), the functions of *certainly* seem to vary across the years and the individuals. Interestingly, the adverbial more often co-occurs with the first singular personal pronoun in the first two years of Clinton's presidency to decrease in the following years, where the 'institutional' *we* is preferred. When collocating with '*I*' the adverbial occurs in formulations of 'self-defence', where the podium, acting as a lay person, shows a pragmatic attitude as in *I certainly can't foresee the future*; *I certainly can't comment on expectations* (C1).

In other instances, the podium resorts to it to accept the journalist's position and to gain time for further developments, e.g. *I can certainly take a look at it*; *I can certainly get back to you* (C1). The function here is clearly aimed to engage and maintain a relation with the press by promising a deeper involvement in the issue, but also to take time in order to address the question in the future. In this case the function overlaps with *maybe* (see the following sub-section) even though the podium sounds less reluctant when resorting to *certainly*. This high personal commitment from the podium confirmed by negative constructions (*I wouldn't certainly rule that out* (C1)) is less common in Clinton's second term and in Bush's presidencies, where the adverbial is more frequently used with reference to the president. The higher usage of *certainly* embedded in negative constructions in Clinton's first term shows that the podium negotiates the truth-value of his proposition since an alternative positive position is implied.

The statistical analysis of the collocates highlights a frequent attraction between *certainly* and the epistemic *think*. The most frequent pattern which best exemplifies this result is '*I think + the president (he) + certainly + mental verbs*'. *I think* has the hedging function of introducing the president's degree of certainty about the proposition debated by addressing the journalists in terms of what they are expected to know, e.g. *I think the President*

certainly has wanted to be briefed on this and kept up to date, and wants to do everything we can. More impersonal constructions and nominalizations are instead used when *certainly* is used as an emphasizer (e.g. [...] *and it's certainly our hope that this is an effort that will continue* (B1)).

In order to highlight its epistemic value the adverbial is often combined with modals (*will* and *would*) above all when *hope*, which ranks first as mental verb in the data, follows as the most frequent collocate. A more 'volitional' attitude seems to be conveyed in these cases where objectives and choices are put forward. Thus, we can safely state that the adverbial is used both epistemically and dynamically.

The most frequent function in Bush's terms is 'encouraging solidarity'. In the instances that convey this function *certainly* is placed in initial position in the sentence, following the discourse marker *well*:

- (1) Mr. Fleischer: Well, *certainly*, the more pressure that is brought to bear on al Qaeda and on the Taliban, the more difficult it becomes for them to engage in any type of military operation. But it doesn't negate the ability for them to engage in operations. That's why terrorism does things that nation-states don't do.

In example (1), by reformulating the journalist's claim, the podium endorses his perspective on the issue of terrorism leaving no space for doubt. The presence of the counter *but* does not diminish the force of his argument; on the contrary it increases the degree of attachment to the truth-value. This function is also evident when concessive clauses are worded impersonally (e.g. *It is certainly a mistake but it is not a firing offence*). This agreement/concession + counterpairing is a strategy used by podium, above all in Bush's second term (C1 13%; C2 14.5%; B1 9%; B2 16.4%), to concur with the press by anticipating any disagreement on their part (see Martin/White 2005: 125).

Less flexible are the functions of *certainly* in the journalists that defiantly resort to it mainly for two reasons:

- to provocatively induce the podium to give answers to highly truth-committed questions which cannot be avoided (e.g. *Certainly, you can tell us who was there* (C1));
- to simply emphasize some knowledge-based comments (e.g. *You are certainly talking in generalities* [...] (B2))

It is worth noticing that the function is associated to the position of *certainly*, that is at the beginning of the sentence in the first case and after the subject to achieve the second aim. These two functions do not

show relevant differences across the years and the presidencies and consistency was also found as far as collocates are concerned with *but* ranking first.

As already noticed, the frequency of *certainly* is higher in *DIAWHOB* than in *COCA* whose spoken part is quantitatively closer to the data related to the podium. This may be due to the conversational aspect of the White House Press Briefings where there is less space and time for more argumentative formulations. With reference to the collocates, it is worth noticing the main association in *COCA* with the hedge *almost* occurring more frequently in the magazine section. This combination, which downtones the strength of the adverbial, occurs only once out of one million words in *DIAWHOB*. On the contrary, the mental verb *hope* which ranks third in *COCA* is shared by our corpus where, as already mentioned, *certainly* expresses a high degree of truth commitment conveying the dynamic function of trusting the future optimistically.

4.3. 'Of course'

The quantitative results of *of course* show that its distribution in the discourse of the press is much more constant than its distribution in the discourse of the podium, where a peak can be observed in 2001-2003.

The most striking feature that emerges from the analysis of collocates of *of course* in the podium's words is that 13.8% of the occurrences of this stance adverbial are found in the proximity of *will* or its contracted forms *'ll* and *won't*. This association is frequent in particular in 2001 and 2003 and is almost non-existent in 1993, 1999, 2000, 2004 and 2005. By contrast, *will*, *'ll* and *won't* collocate with *of course* in only 3.1% of its occurrences in *COCA*, mainly in the magazine, newspaper and spoken sub-corpora.

Be is the most frequent amongst the verbs found to the right of the *of course* + *will* pattern, occurring particularly in 2001 and 2003. Different functions are performed by this combination in the podium's words ranging from providing an explanation (*Well, the details, of course, will be up to the commission to take a look at*) to reassuring about priorities (*There will be a series of issues they want to talk about, but energy will, of course, be at the top of the list*) or about actions being taken (*And we, of course, ourselves will be monitoring their deployments very, very carefully*), and to informing the press about the president's schedule (*And, of course, the President will be having dinner Sunday night with the*

governors). The latter function, where *be* is generally part of future continuous verb phrases, is more frequent in Clinton's two terms and in Bush's second term. In Bush's first term, on the other hand, what prevails is the reassuring function, which is also expressed by the same pattern followed by the collocate *continue*, occurring almost exclusively in 2002 and 2003, in formulations like *we/he will continue to / work / monitor / talk / call on them / support / supervise / consult and talk / consult and inform*.

Often *he* or *the president* are the subjects of this pattern again including verbs like *be*, *have*, *talk*, *discuss*, *continue*, *work* and *want*, with a very significant presence of the preposition *with*. A strong preference for the semantic category of cooperation (*consulting*, *agrees*, *accordance*, *dealing*, *bilaterally*, *work*, *closely*, *cooperate*, *constituencies*) and the positive semantic load – mostly in 2001–2003 – put the emphasis on agreement-seeking processes.

Summarizing, the use of *of course* in the podium's words is quite strongly oriented to the future and, more specifically, to the purpose of reassuring the press and the public about both priorities and plans. A comparison with COCA shows that the above illustrated features are typical of the briefings – and of specific chronological phases such as Bush's first term – and do not necessarily characterise the use of this adverbial in general American English.

Moving on to a brief analysis of the use of *of course* in the discourse of the journalists, where its frequency is much lower than in the discourse of the podium in relative terms, this stance adverbial co-occurs with *but* in 7% of its occurrences in the words of the press. Although a similar ratio is found in the words of the podium (6.8%) and in COCA (7.6%), here the function of this pattern is very specific: to strongly challenge the clarity or correctness of what the podium stated.

A pattern which is significantly more frequent in the discourse of the press than in the podium's words (9% as opposed to 2% of the total occurrences of this adverbial in the two sets of speakers) is the one where *of course* co-occurs with forms of the verb *say*. Here, a statement by the President, the administration or another actor on the political scene (e.g. Dole, Karzai, the Republicans) is reported and often contrasted to another statement and/or followed by a question, e.g. example (2), where *of course* is used to emphasise that shared knowledge about government policy exists between the podium, the press and the wider audience:

- (2) Journalist: Back on Turkey and the PKK. The State Department concedes the recent cross-border attacks by the PKK. Members of the Turkish parliament say what they want to do is simply apply the President's policies in fighting terrorism. Mr. Bush, *of course*, has said that he is fighting the terrorists in Iraq so that we don't fight them here. They say likewise, they want to fight the PKK in Iraq, so they don't have to fight them in Turkey. So why are they wrong? (B2)

This pattern does not appear to be a typical feature of spoken American English, as it is only found in 3% of total occurrences of *of course* in COCA spoken – and 4% in the whole COCA, where its frequency is higher in the fiction sub-corpus. Similarly, *of course* collocates with *you* more often in the discourse of the press than in the podium's words, when a journalist reports a statement by the podium and challenges it, or asks for clarification. A similar ratio is found in COCA spoken and fiction (10%), while this pattern is much rarer in the other sub-corpora.

Finally, *of course* collocates with *which* in 8% of its occurrences in the discourse of the press (as opposed to 3% in the discourse of the podium, and 2% in COCA and 3% in COCA spoken). Here, negatively loaded formulations (*does not include*, *is not true*, *have denied*, *have never taken place*, *is badly underestimated*) usually follow *which*. This structure is used to highlight that the journalist's statements are based on shared knowledge.

4.4. 'Probably'

Like *of course*, which is only slightly more frequent than *probably* in DIAWHOB, *probably* is remarkably more frequent in the discourse of the podium than in the words of the press. It is, in particular, a feature of the discourse of the podium during the Clinton presidency.

What emerges first of all by looking at the list of collocates of this adverbial in the discourse of the podium is that, again, as noted in the analysis of *of course*, the use of this adverbial is characterised by a strong orientation to the future. *Probably* collocates indeed with *will* and its contracted forms such as *won't*, *he'll* and *I'll* 1085 times. This is one-fourth of the total occurrences of this adverbial in the words of the podium, as opposed to one-ninth in COCA, where the ratio, however, is higher (one-sixth) in the newspaper and magazine sub-corpora. More

specifically, the frequency of the pattern where *probably* is found to co-occur with future verb forms hits a peak in 1993-94 and is rare in the Bush administration briefings. This pattern collocates in turn with words related to time (*sometime, tomorrow, Friday, Wednesday, afternoon, early, later, until*), quantity (*some, more, little, something*) and plans (*event, leave, travel, spend, happen*). The example below, dating back to Clinton's first year in office, shows how this pattern was used in contexts where the podium was unable to firmly state what the administration's intentions were. In the example below the focus is on spending cuts:

- (3) MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: The President has said throughout the campaign and still maintains an interest in some line-item veto, perhaps an enhanced rescission of some sort, and we expect to continue to look at that.
 Journalist: Right. But are you doing to ask for it? Are you going to press for it? The opportunity is coming up in the next series of legislative —
 MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I think the President is still committed to it, and we'll **probably** have something soon. But I don't have anything firm. (C1)

In contrast, the use of this pattern by Bush's podiums appears to refer less to the administration's intentions on policy issues and more on logistical details, in such phrases as: *I think it will – probably by midday or so; we will do a conference call probably sometime after 3 p.m. today.*

Another recurring pattern in the use of *probably* in the words of the podium is the one where it co-occurs with mental verbs such as *think / expect / guess / imagine / suspect / suggest / assume*. This pattern is found in one-fifth of the total occurrences of *probably* in the podium, as opposed to a much lower ratio in COCA (one-twentieth in the whole corpus and one-ninth in the spoken sub-corpus). This appears therefore to be another typical feature of the discourse of the podium in this corpus. Its occurrences, however, are more evenly distributed than the ones of the *probably + will* pattern and they are more frequent – in relative terms – in the Bush administration briefings (from 2003 onwards in particular) than in the Clinton administration ones.

The subject of these verbs is mostly the podium's *I* and this pattern also combines with the *probably + will* one. Example (4) shows how this pattern is used to emphasise the role of the podium in mediating the truth-value of statements or the likeliness of a future event:

- (4) Journalist: The technical thing — Terry's question — how long the opening statement and how long the whole thing?

MR. MCCURRY: I'm never — we're always cautious when predicting the length of anything, but I think the President **probably** will talk about — probably no longer than five minutes at the opening, and I want to get in at least a good half-hour of questions. The President has suggested he will try to answer things briefly so we can move swiftly through the questioning (C1).

When it comes to features that *COCA* and *DIAWHOB* have in common as far as the use of *probably* is concerned, the most outstanding one is this stance adverbial collocating with *most* and other superlatives in similar ways in both corpora. One-twentieth of total occurrences of *probably* in *COCA* are found to co-occur with superlatives and a similar percentage is found in *DIAWHOB* for both podium and press. Whereas in *COCA* the relative frequency of this pattern is higher in the academic sub-corpus than in the other ones, in *DIAWHOB* it is found in particular in the podium's words in C2 and in the discourse of the press in B1. Both in the discourse of the podium and of the press this pattern collocates in turn with such adjectives as *important*, *significant*, *serious*, *complicated*, *vibrant* and *extraordinary* in contexts where the speaker is emphasising the importance of an issue, of a decision or of an event.

Finally, one feature which is more significantly present in the discourse of the press than both in *COCA* and in the discourse of the podium is the co-occurrence of *probably* with *would*. This pattern is found in 14% of the total occurrences of *probably* in the press, as opposed to 7% in the podium's words and 11% in *COCA*. Concordance analysis shows that this feature is used by journalists when they either report statements expressing people's intentions or estimates, or when they ask a question with a view to putting pressure on the podium to say that a particular decision is going to be made (e.g. MR. MCCURRY: *We would probably consult with the parties and make a reasoned assessment and a good decision* (C2)).

4.5. 'Maybe'

Maybe (188 occurrences per 1,000,000 words) is the fourth most frequent stance adverbial of the doubt/certainty type in *DIAWHOB* followed by its near-synonym *perhaps* (134 occurrences per 1,000,000 words). As noticed in the previous section, in the *OAD* these two adverbs

present similarities in function and variation in register with *perhaps* as being more formal.

From a quantitative point of view, *maybe* is more frequent in the podium rather than in the press whereas in COCA it was found as being the most frequent in the fiction. In relative terms, the occurrences of *maybe* are quite evenly distributed throughout the Clinton's sub-corpora, whereas there is a dramatic drop in Bush's first term followed by a boom again in his second term.

By looking at the occurrences of *maybe* in the four different terms the drop concerns Bush's first administration and in particular the podium in the year 2003. The podium resorts to *maybe* as a single word more frequently than *perhaps* to give a response to a remark or a question conveying uncertainty. Therefore, it functions as expression of the author's stance, as in the following instance from Clinton's first term: *I don't know, yet, maybe*. Apart from this rather informal usage, in order to establish the different functions of this adverbial and its recurrent formulations we need to trace its collocational profile which brought about the following results: in a small group of concordances *maybe* was found to modify a numerical figure, such as percentage or a period of time. This function is evenly distributed across the four terms and it is not particularly meaningful so it may be disregarded for the purpose of our analysis.

Guided by the criterion of frequency, in most of the instances *maybe* collocates with personal pronouns (*we*; *I*; *you*) often in company of epistemic modality (e.g. *can*), mental verbs like *think* and *know* and with indefinite adjectives or pronouns (e.g. *some*, *something*) indicating vagueness. This association between the plural subject pronoun, interestingly used as an inclusive-*we*, the modal and the adverb realises the first function glossed as 'claiming apparent solidarity', which decreases from 13.3% in C1 to 8.2% in B2 (e.g. *I'll have to check, or maybe we can get some people who know more about that* (C1); *Maybe we can discuss that further* (B1)).

A metalinguistic function can also be noticed in the concordances where verbs like *check*, *come back*, *try again*, *find out* are in the right cotext of the adverbial. This is a strategic use from the podium that avoids the answer and, in order to keep control of the audience, promises to get back to it in the future. The podium seems not to know the answer and tries to put it off to some unspecified time in the future. This function is also evident when the podium resorts to *I*. Indeed, the following set of concordances realise 'false deferentiality' (Bayley 2007:

125). Evidence illustrates a negative pragmatic meaning given by either the colligation⁷ with the negation (*no*, *didn't*) or by negative items such as *missed*, *wrong*, *misled* as in *I think maybe I missed it* (C1) or *No. Maybe I didn't explain it clearly enough* (B2).

As Bayley maintains (2007: 126), this hedging function, which was also highlighted by Hyland (2000: 88), as expressing modesty or deference in academic discourse, is a feature of parliamentary debate where sarcasm is sometimes at play. We can safely state that the hedging function of *maybe*, as well as of *perhaps*, features the press briefings as a genre, which thus manifests traces of hybridization.

Another group was identified in those lines where *maybe* is strongly associated with *even*, which we have sub-categorised as 'illusive'. The speaker is expanding his position and is adding something more fruitful with respect to what has been stated previously, e.g. in the example from the podium: *They'll probably be gone five days or maybe even slightly longer than that* (C2).

This association, which is even stronger in Clinton's second term, serves the aim of introducing the audience into a hypothetical world where the speaker's predictions may come true. The podium is clearly flattering the crowd by speculating about an immediate temporal solution to the problem. It is worth saying that in 2003, which marks a drop in the use of *maybe* from the podium, the adverb is mainly embedded in subjectivized patterns to formulate hypothesis.

Another feature worth mentioning is the association with negative polarity in Clinton's terms (4.7% C1; 8.2% C2) if compared to its low percentage in B2 (2%) and to the only two instances in B1. This combination mitigates the podium's contracting position as in the following instance: *a quite important issue, although maybe not quite familiar to all of you*.

The confrontation of the podium with the press lends this genre a more adversarial look confirmed by the association of these two adverbs with the counter-expectational *but* (see Martin/White 2005: 120-122). In the combination when *but* comes first, *maybe* serves to set up adversative clause relations by which the reporters, much more frequently than the podium, make ironic hypothesis: *but maybe he is reluctant to come; but maybe it's only me* (C1).

⁷ The term 'colligation' refers to recurrent associations of lexis and grammar (see Sinclair 1998).

Also in the press, the main group of collocates is given by the personal pronouns but with *you* floating to the top. A scan of the concordances clearly brings to light the function of 'criticism'. The journalists are provocateurs and resort to *maybe* to express their suggestion with an epistemic modal value as in *You clearly do know, but maybe you can't tell us* (C2). In other instances criticism is even stronger and overt: *but Scott, no, maybe you don't understand* (B2)

The second function in the press is that of 'claiming ignorance' (cf. Partington 2003: 238) for strategic purposes. In other words, journalists use this adverbial in combination with the first personal pronoun to claim deprecation: negative self-criticism emerges from the right context through the use of negative pragmatically loaded verbs (e.g. *misunderstand*).

In relative terms, *maybe* is less frequent in *DIAWHOB* rather than in *COCA* where the top collocates (*should, think, something*) seem to indicate 'suggesting', 'vagueness' and 'epistemicity' as main functions. From the comparison with the different sections of *COCA*, we might infer that, by sharing vagueness and epistemicity functions, press briefings are closer to the 'fiction' section, but their peculiarity lies in the podium's usage of the metadiscursive function.

4.6. 'Perhaps'

Let us now move to the quasi-synonym *perhaps* which, on the contrary, is used less in the podium and again more frequent in fiction in *COCA*. *Perhaps* is significantly more frequent in the briefings dating back to Clinton's presidency and, in particular, to his first term whereas it decreases in the Bush sub-corpora. With a relative frequency that is three times as much in the words of the press as in the words of the podium, *perhaps* is therefore a feature of the discourse of the White House press corpus rather than of the podium.

Perhaps in the podium shows a strong attraction with the mental *think* with which it forms epistemic phrases working as a modifier of the illocutionary strength. The most frequent pattern is given by *perhaps* + superlative/comparative (*most/more*) + adverb (*vividly, importantly, significantly*) which carries an 'emphasizing' function, shared by the academic discourse in *COCA*.

Impersonality seems to be a feature of the concordances of *perhaps* in the press. Unlike *maybe*, *perhaps* is clustered in patterns such as: (somebody) + verbal process + *that* + *perhaps* where it works as evidential

of the 'hearsay' typology (Chafe 1986). This means that the press avails itself of 'what has been said' in order to get answers from the podium as in: *Because we had heard that perhaps you were contemplating doing that* (C2).

Perhaps in the press is embedded in a more articulated discourse indicating a more formal register with respect to *maybe*. This might be a predictable feature in the discourse of the press where journalists resort to some kind of pre-written questions. *Perhaps* does not show great variation across the years except for the attraction with the negative item *concern* in the Bush's first term, where the collocate appears for the first time.

Summing up, we can say that Bush's first term seems to be the 'inconsistent' term if compared with the others as far as these two adverbs are concerned and this may be due to contextual factors as the emergence of new collocates demonstrate. Above all in Bush's last term, *perhaps* is placed in fairly direct questions more frequently than in Clinton's terms, indicating needs for clarity. Furthermore, we can safely state that *maybe* combined with subjectivization is used with the deliberate intention of marking a lack of sense of understanding both in the press and in the podium. In the press, it seems to express a necessity of reframing the question so as to get more precise answers. The strategy employed is the same but with different purposes: the press aims to draw attention to the question whereas the podium aims to evade it.

Following Martin and White (2005), *maybe* and *perhaps* are clearly used to 'entertain', namely to make dialogic space for other positions. These stance adverbs enact social relations between the ideational and interpersonal. Their function changes according to co-textual conditioning but it is surely of the epistemic type when the proposition foregrounds informational meanings.

5. Conclusions

From a quantitative perspective, the findings show that these 'stance adverbs' are more frequently used in Clinton's administration where the podium's stance seems to be more represented, as the association of *certainly* and *I* has demonstrated. Most of the collocates of these adverbs are the same as those found in everyday language (the emphasising function of *perhaps*) and we can safely state that stance adverbs in this genre reflect the patterns they construct in everyday language and share

patterns with the spoken sub-corpus showing a preference for a more conversational style.

Since this type of adverbs are indexical (see Aijmer/Simon-Vandenberg 2007), they convey information which is implicit in the context, such as information about solidarity and politeness, or features referring to the way in which speakers take up interpersonal positionings such as countering (see *but* with *of course* and *certainly* and *even* with *maybe*) or challenging (*maybe* embedded in structures conveying self-criticism). Other factors include social acts such as manipulating (see the use of *maybe* to reframe the question and obtaining the answer), activity types such as debating (see the use of *of course*).

The different distribution of the items investigated does not speak in favour of an evolution of the White press briefing as a 'genre' since the trend is not consistent, but variation and hybridization are at work certainly linked to the role of the podium and his personality.

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