



HEDGES IN CLASSROOM SPEECHES BY ENGLISH STUDENTS IN GRADUATE PROGRAM**Arina Yulianti** ✉ **Warsono**English Language Education Postgraduate Program Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

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*Keywords:**hedges, classroom speech, pragmatics***Abstract**

Sometimes, students need to present learning materials in front of the class. In this classroom speech, they need to deliver their speech appropriately so that the information can be accepted well. Consequently, they often hedge their utterances. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyse the ways students use hedges in their classroom speeches. This study aimed at analysing the forms and functions of the hedges and the factors which might constrain the use of the hedges. The subjects were 15 students of graduate program majoring English Language Education in Semarang State University. Their classroom speeches were recorded as source of the data. Based on the findings, it could be identified that the students hedged their sentences during classroom speeches frequently. In average, students hedged around 58% of their entire sentences. Seven forms and four functions of hedges were used by students effectively and significantly. The students mainly hedged their sentences using approximator, introductory phrase, and modal-auxiliary verb forms. Plausibility and attributive shield functions were often used to soften their attitude toward the truth value of the information they presented. It could also be identified that there were five factors constraining the use of the hedges during their classroom speeches.

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✉ Correspondence:

E-mail: yuliantiarina@gmail.com

Kampus UNNES Bendan Ngisor, Semarang, 50233

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INTRODUCTION

English is used by many people around the world to communicate to each other. English is used by them as an international language so that people from different countries are able to communicate. Thus, many people begin to learn English. They can learn English formally in classroom instruction setting or they can possibly begin to learn English automatically since they live in an environment in which English is used as the daily language. In Indonesia, students begin learning English formally in classroom instruction setting since elementary school up until they are in university as English is considered as the first foreign language to learn formally in schools. The main goal of their English learning is to be able to communicate using it. They develop their English skills step by step through various learning activities since they are expected to be able to use it to communicate.

Being able to communicate using English does not mean that they are able to ask and answer using English words only. Students have to understand what utterance they should produce in any certain condition so that the utterance is proper for the situation and suitable for their interlocutor. Many linguists call it as pragmatic aspect of language. In the early study of pragmatics, Levinson (1987:9) states that pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized or encoded in the structure of a language. Language is used based on the existing context so that the aim of using the language can be achieved.

Based on Thomas (2013:1), in the early 1980s when it first became common to discuss pragmatics, the definition of pragmatics was "meaning in use" or "meaning in context". Nowadays, many experts define pragmatics as language in use. It is also stated that pragmatics, as the study of meaning, is not generated by the linguistic system but as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation. Dealing with pragmatic competence, hedging is one language competence that is

related to it. Based on Hua (2011:562), the concept of hedge was first put forward by American linguist George Lakoff (1972:485) in his paper "A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concept" in which hedges were defined as words whose job was to make fuzzier or less fuzzy. The more definition is presented by Wilamova (2005) in her study about pragmatics. She states that hedges are pragmatic markers that annotate or weaken the strength of an utterance.

Based on the above experts' definitions, hedges are related to the way people weaken or soften their utterance. For example, instead of saying "your idea is wrong", learners may hedge their utterance and say "I think, your idea is quite wrong". The adding of the words I think and the changing from wrong into quite wrong are the example of how hedging is done. Hedges make the utterances weaken and soften so that it seems more polite and accepted by their interlocutor. In speaking, advanced learners will sometimes purposefully or spontaneously use hedges to soften their utterances and to make them seem more polite so that their utterances are acceptable. They are expected to be able to hedge their utterances in their writing and speaking because they have already had skills and competences in English.

Therefore, this study was conducted to analyse hedges in speaking done by advanced learners of English. The advanced learners who are the subject of this study are the students of graduate program in Semarang State University, Indonesia. Their oral productions during classroom speeches are the data for this study. This study concerned on identifying deeply the forms and functions of the hedges used by the students. The form and function classification used are based on the recent experts' study and theory. The result of this study also discusses the factors that constrain the use of hedges by the students in their classroom speeches.

Some experts have already conducted the studies of hedges. One of them is the study by Jiang Hua (2011) which aims at presenting a general situation of hedges used in classroom discourses and explore their pragmatics

functions. This study described how English teachers use hedges to achieve their communicative goals in classroom teaching. This study also analyses how better application of hedging devices to teach effectively. The most important finding of this study is the explanation of four real functions of hedges used by English teachers in the classroom. These four functions of the hedges used in the classroom by teachers are described clearly.

The other study related to Hedges is done by Rosa Alonso, et al (2012). This study aims at analysing the role of pragmatics transfer in the use of the rhetorical strategy of hedging in academic writing in English as a second language. The results of this study show that Spanish researchers still apply pragmatics transfer, either failing to identify hedges in L2 or considering them as negative evasive concepts. They often failed in hedging since their first language does not use hedges much. Hedges in academic English are perceived as indicators of negative lack of commitment by those Spanish learners. Something important from this study is that it is stated that pragmatic transfer makes the choices of hedges differ in both languages, their first and second languages.

Ali WanasLafi, et al (2011) explains the principle of formality and difference as suggested by Lakoff. This study is intended to show how the speakers use the strategies of indirectness to save negative face of the addresser and addressee. It is found out that hedging is effectively used in illocutions to hide some negative ideas in the presence of another party. The results of this study give important assumption for this current study is that learners generally underuse hedges in comparison with native speakers, although learners at the highest proficiency level use hedges as significant as native speakers. This statement gives an early assumption that advanced learners would probably use hedges in their utterances. What makes the current study different is the method of the study which is used. Lafi only does comprehensive theoretical review.

Bruce Fraser in the year of 2010 studies hedges in the recent development based on

theoretical review from many researchers. It explains evolution of the concept of hedging and the relationship of hedging to other discourse effects. It is stated that pragmatic competence is needed in order to communicate effectively in a language. This pragmatic competence includes mastering the art of hedging. The important statement from this study is that not only does hedging appropriately help us achieve our communication goals, but also failing to hedge in which it is expected or failing to understand the meaning of the hedging will probably create miscommunication. Generally, this study emphasized the hedges as an important part of pragmatic competence.

The other study related to the hedges is done by Wulandari (2010). This study deals with hedges in the conversations employed by the main characters in the novel and relates them with Grecian maxims and mimetic theory based on qualitative-descriptive study. In this study, hedges are described as politeness strategies used to soften utterances. The findings showed that most of the main characters employ hedges in the form of modal auxiliary verbs addressed to maxim of quality. They used these hedges mainly as the softener in order to negotiate sensitive topic, weaken statements and also to smoothen disagreement. From this study, it can be concluded that hedging is a part of politeness strategy in minimizing the impact of the speakers' utterances.

PRAGMATICS

Thomas (2013) states that pragmatics was often defined as meaning in use or meaning in context. In this definition, pragmatics refers to the meaning which is created during communication based on the context existed. Words does not mean their literal meaning only, they create another meaning which is beyond them. The words are associated with the context in which they are created.

Furthermore, Levinson (1983) in the early study of pragmatics presents a theory of Carnap which discusses the scope of pragmatic study. It is stated that if in an investigation explicit

reference is made to the speakers, or in more general term, to the user of the language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics. Pragmatics covers those linguistics investigations that make necessary reference to aspects of the context, in which the term context is understood to cover the identities of participants, the temporal, and the spatial parameters of the speech event and the beliefs, knowledge, and intentions of participants in that speech event.

Hedges

Salager-Meyer (1997) defines hedging as a linguistic resource which conveys the fundamental characteristics of science of doubt and scepticism. He also affirms hedges as a means a threat minimizing strategies used to deal with certainty of knowledge that include politeness strategies in the social interactions and negotiations between writers (speakers) and readers (listeners).

Fraser (2010) also states that when non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate. It means that using hedges can be really useful for them. Furthermore, Alonso (2012) proposes that the use of hedging is conditioned by the subjectivity of the individuals on the particular contexts where the communication is established.

Forms of Hedges

One of the most used classifications is established by Salager-Meyer in the year of 1997. This classification is also strengthened by Boncea (2013). Based on the classification proposed Salager-Meyer (1997), the forms of hedges used to analyse the data are: modal-auxiliary verb; modal-lexical verb; adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases; approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time; Introductory phrases/ discourse epistemic/ evidential phrases; If clauses; and compound hedges.

Functions of Hedges

Hua (2011: 563) presents a classification of hedges based on their functions made by an American linguist E.F. Prince, et al. Hedges are divided into four functions: adaptors; rounders; plausibility shields; and attributive shields.

METHODOLOGY

The source of data was video recording. The video recording took place inside classroom. The students' classroom speeches were recorded so that the data could be obtained. There were 15 students who participated in this research as the subjects of the study. The length of the video recording identified for each student was approximately the same which was around 10 minutes. Therefore, there were 15 video recordings (each recording had 10 minute duration) to be studied as the source of data in this study. Second language acquisition class of the third-semester students from graduate program in this university was the class which classroom speeches were recorded.

The video recording was analysed one by one. The video recordings were identified to find the utterances which contain hedges by doing video transcribing first. Creswell (2012) stated that transcription was the process of converting audiotape recordings into text data. Thus, based on this text data, every sentence produced by the students was identified to find out which sentence containing hedges.

All the sentences produced were put into analysis table. The analysis table contained the hedge type column and hedge function column. The classification of the hedge type used in this study was taken from Salager-Meyer (1997); meanwhile, the classification of the hedge function used was taken from Hua (2011). The total of hedges created was summarized for each type and function. The summary of the total hedges for each type was changed into percentage to make the analysis easier to do. The interpretation of the result of analysing the forms and functions are also further explained to

find out the factors that might constrain the use of hedges in their classroom speeches.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The percentage of the hedged sentences toward the total sentences of 15 students was ranging from 32.39% to 81.53%. It meant that every student hedged their sentences for about 58% during their classroom speeches. 7 students hedged their sentences less than 58% of their overall sentences they created during the classroom speech while 8 students hedged their

sentences more than 58%. In average, the students produced hedges for about 1 to 2 hedges in average in their hedged sentences they created during their classroom speeches.

The Forms of Hedges Used by Students in Classroom Speech

The form of hedges created by the students in their hedged sentences was analysed using a theory established by Salager-Meyer in the year of 1997 (table 3.3). There were 7 forms of the hedges and each of the forms was appeared in their classroom speech.

Table 1: The Average Percentage of the Forms of Hedges

No.	Forms of Hedges	Average Percentage of the Forms of Hedges
1.	Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency, and Time	29.04%
2.	Introductory phrases/ Discourse epistemic/ Evidential phrases	23.42%
3.	Modal-Auxiliary Verbs	19.36%
4.	Compound Hedges	11.32%
5.	Adjectival, Adverbial, and Nominal Modal Phrases	9.61%
6.	Modal-Lexical Verbs	5.05%
7.	If Clauses	2.12%

Salager-Meyer (1997) states that modal-auxiliary verbs reflect the speakers' attitude and help them express ideas indirectly. He included *may*, *might*, *can*, *could*, *should*, *will*, *would*, and *must* in this form. These words display varying degrees of hesitation and tentativeness in avoiding the absolute accuracy of the speaker's statement. In the classroom speeches, the students used this form starting from 10.92% to 31.80%. The most often used modal auxiliary verbs are *will*, *may*, and *might*. They helped them express ideas indirectly. For example, modal-auxiliary verb *will* indicates fuzzy impact and may or might allow them to create fuzzy information and it can also avoid face threatening acts so they will not be too strong to the hearers. This form modifies the statement entirely, not just the truth value of the proposition. Students used the word *may* to hedge the this sentence:

Example (1): *In natural setting, learners may comprise either a focused on an unfocused community.*

Salager-Meyer (1997) states that modal-lexical verbs can express the speakers' strong belief in the truth of the utterance or, on the contrary, the speakers' unwillingness to vouch for understanding the utterance as more than a personal opinion. The words used in this study are *seem*, *appear*, *believe*, *assume*, *suggest*, *tend*, *think*, *understand*, *indicate*, *estimate*, *speculate*, and *suppose*. The use of this form ranged from 0 to 11.42%. In the classroom speech, this form is used to perform act like evaluating, assuming, or doubting.

Example (2): *I think it is such kind of a...psycho test*

Based on Salager-Meyer (1997) adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases are used to diminish the strength of the nouns they determine. They indicate certainty or doubt. The students tended to use simpler words

such as *perhaps*, *maybe* or *possible* in their classroom speeches. Adjectival modal phrase hedges used by students are *possible*, *arguable*, and *likely*. Adverbial modal phrases used are *perhaps*, *possibly*, *maybe*. The examples of nominal modal phrases used are *assumption*, *claim*, *possibility*, *suggestion*, and *estimation*. They used this form starting from 0 to 15.00%.

Example (3): *Perhaps, but I am not sure about that.*

Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time are used to weaken the meaning of the speech part they accompany based on Based on Salager-Meyer (1997). Such hedges are employed when the exact amount is not known or is irrelevant. They students often used approximator form *about*, *much*, *some*, *several*, *various*, *kind of*, *a number of*, *rather*, *quite*, *really*, *actually*, *such*, *a bit*, and *more or less*. The students tended to use these approximators when they had to present something which was not precise. The hedged 10.00% - 57.14% of total hedges they created in the classroom speeches placing this form as the most favourable form to use. The word *rather* in this following example modifies the truth value of the word *personal*.

Example (4): *That's rather personal.*

Salager-Meyer (1997) states that introductory phrases/discourse epistemic/evidential phrases are used to mark the source of knowledge as indicator or hearsay. This form is also used to indicate general knowledge. They are also used to indicate the author's doubt and hesitation regarding the truth of the information. For example, the students often used *according to the expert*, *based on the book*, *expert stated*, *expert said*, *from that statement*, and etc. They also used *it is stated that*, *we know*, *let us*, *as we all know* and etc. They try to find evidence and supporting fact by including another party in stating the statements. They used in 9.67% to 45.00% of the total hedges.

Example (5): *And Abraham and Fance stated that...or found evidence that relationship that*

belief might affect learning outcomes in case of study learners.

If clauses imply uncertainty along with any other markers which may occur inside them to enhance the speakers' distrust in the truth of the utterance based on Salager-Meyer (1997). The information in the statements can be true if the conditional fact is fulfilled. The reason why if clause can be one of the forms of hedges is that the speakers can use if clause to invoke potential barriers in the way of their future or past actions which could help them disclaim responsibility for the absoluteness of their statements. This form is used from 0 to 6.89% or rarely used to hedge their sentences.

Example (6): *If setting does take place, this can be taken as the evidence for the continued existence of UG.*

The last form is compound hedges are also called as harmonic combinations. Salager-Meyer (1997) states that compound hedges describe the combinations of modal-auxiliary verbs or other forms and another modal word expressing the same degree or type of modality. Compound hedges can be created by combining two or more forms. They were less used since the students only used this form of hedges when they need to further emphasize the fuzziness of the statement. They used compound hedges form *actually a bit*, *actually this expert said*, or *may sometimes seem*. The students used this form ranging from 0 to 20.00% of the total hedges.

Example (7): *Fossilized form may sometimes seem to disappearr.*

The Functions of Hedges Used by Students in Classroom Speech

The functions of hedges by the students in their hedged sentences was analysed using a theory from Hua (2011:563) who presented a classification of hedges based on their functions established by an American linguist E.F. Prince, et al. There were 4 functions of the hedges and each function was appeared in the students' classroom speech.

Table 2: The Average Percentage of the Functions of Hedges

No.	Function of Hedges	Average Percentage of the Functions of Hedges
1.	Plausibility Shields	36.28%
2.	Attribution Shields	28.86%
3.	Adaptors	26.28%
4.	Rounders	7.68%

Adaptors can be regarded as modifiers to terms to suit a non-prototypical situation. Hua (2011) states that adaptors help speakers express the degree of correctness. Adaptors hedge the truth value of the quality of the proposition. Adaptors were created as modifiers which helped them express the degree of truth value of the proposition while they were having classroom speeches. Adaptors include various approximators and some of the adjectival phrases form. They hedge the degree of correctness of the adjectives or noun they modified. They do not modify the attitude of the speaker toward the information in the statement. The students used the words *about, much, about, kind of, sort of, rather, almost, quite, really, such, more, less, relative* or *likely* in creating adaptor function to hedge the quality of the correctness of the proposition. Adaptor function in the classroom speeches was used by the students ranging from 11.62% to 53.57% of the total hedges they used.

Example (8): *So, the definitions of strategy, techniques, actions are quite similar.*

Rounders indicates the inexact preciseness of numbering data according to Hua (2011). They are often used to measuring, especially if the exact data is missing or precise information in unavailable. They hedge the degree of the truth value of the quantity of the proposition. Rounders make the numbering data or measurement less precise. In the classroom speeches, the students used *some, several, around, a number of, approximately, roughly, and about* as rounder function. They were not able to present precise information of numbering data. Rounder function was less used since the classroom speeches they did were more about theory and explanation rather than measurement and numbering data. Rounder function was only

used by the students starting 0% to 17.56% in their classroom speeches.

Example (9): *And the...it has been proven by a... the some researcher.*

The most often used function of hedges by the students was plausibility shields. Based on Hua (2011) plausibility shields are used to show speakers' own attitude toward a preposition. It was more about the students' attitude toward the information they wanted to present. Plausibility shields expressed students' doubt or uncertainty of the truth value of their statements. In this classroom speeches, this function was created by the use of modal-lexical form such *think, argue or seem*; modal-auxiliary form such as *will, would, may, or might*; adverbial phrases such as *generally, maybe, perhaps* or *commonly*; and if clause which includes the speaker's direct attitude such as *if I am not mistaken* or *If I am not wrong*. While having classroom speeches, their statements needed to be accepted. It was because they were having classroom speeches in which they presented information to their classmates. They were not in mode of teaching but rather they were sharing the information. That was why they often created plausibility shield function in hedging their own attitude in presenting the information. The students used this functions starting from 20.00% to 51.85% of the total hedges they created.

Example (10): *Then, I think this is the relation of learning strategies and techniques.*

Based on Hua (2011), Attribution shields are used to express the attitude of guess of doubt by the attribute the degree of uncertainty toward a proposition to another party. The speakers' attitude is expressed indirectly using other party's statement or general knowledge. This function enables the speaker to entirely avoid the responsibility of the truth value of the presented

information. However, the results were opposite. The statements presented by them using this function became stronger, more factual, reliable, and valid naturally. It happened since they use factual information using established general knowledge starting with *it is said that, it is believed, it is generally known that*, etc. or experts' theory such as *according to, based on, experts said, expert stated, or expert provided*. They strengthened the level of the truth value of the information they presented using this introduction/evidential phrase. The students used this function from 10.71% to 51.16% of the total hedges they used. In classroom speeches, it is really important to present valid and reliable information to their classmates. Therefore, their classroom speeches can be trustworthy. They are worth to be listened. They cannot always present their own opinion or something they do not know precisely all the time while having their classroom speeches.

Example (11): *According to Tomlim 1990, there are two functional views.*

The Factors Constraining the Use of the Hedges

The need of minimalizing the force of the absoluteness of the truth value of the proposition

The students intend to minimalize the force of the statement they created while they are having classroom speeches. They need to be accepted and not too forceful while delivering their speech. Since they are delivering speech in academic context, they cannot present information that they are not really sure about its truth value. They need to be able to weaken or soften their utterance if they have to. They need to clearly state the imprecision of the truth value if they do not have the exact information.

The need of avoiding responsibility of the truth value of the statement

It deals with the source of the truth value. If they need to lessen the responsibility of the truth value of the information, they need to hedge their statements using plausibility shield function. If the students need to really avoid the entire responsibility, they would use attributive shield function such as introductory phrase or if

clause form. This attributive shield function makes them able to avoid the entire responsibility of the truth value of the presented information.

The effort of avoiding giving wrong information

Because they are having classroom speech which is in the academic context, they need to be true and precise. Even if they are not able to present the precise information, they need to state it clearly that they are not sure by fuzzing their statement. Consequently, they hedge their sentence if they cannot present precise information. They avoid giving wrong fact by only presenting partial truth value of the information.

The lack of precision of presented data

This constraint usually deals with the numbering data and measurement. The rounder function is needed to be used so that they can avoid giving wrong information. They need to clearly hedge the numbering data if they do not have the precise.

The need of strengthening the truth value of the information

This constrain is the opposite from the four previous constrain. The previous constrains are about weakening, softening, and avoiding. However, an opposite constrain make them hedge their statement: the need of strengthening the truth value of the information. In classroom speeches, although they need to weaken their statement for the information which they believe having lower level of truth value or in presenting their own personal assumption or opinion, they still need to strengthen the level of truth value by providing valid and reliable information. Thus, their classroom speeches can be trustworthy.

CONCLUSIONS

During classroom speeches, the students used all of seven forms of hedges frequently and appropriately. The students also used all of four functions of hedges purposefully and affectively based on their intention they want to deliver to the hearers in the classroom speeches. Therefore,

the identified factors which constrain the use of hedges in the classroom speeches by the students in this study are as follows: the need of minimalizing the force of the absoluteness of the truth value of the proposition; the need of avoiding responsibility of the truth value of the statement; the effort of avoiding giving wrong information; the lack of precision of presented data; the need of strengthening the truth value of the information.

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