

**HEDGING DEVICES USED IN “*ROOM FOR DEBATE*”
IN NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE WEBSITE**

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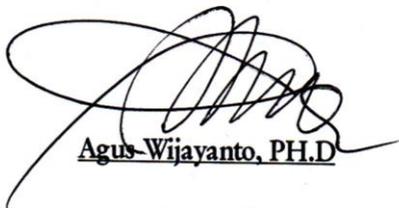
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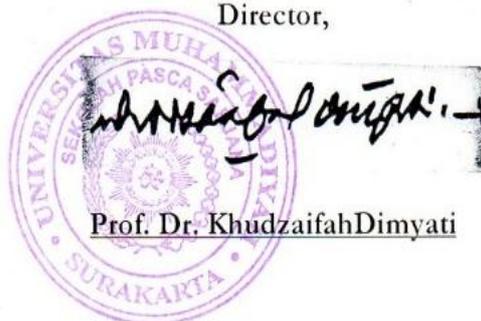
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HEDGING DEVICES USED IN “ROOM FOR DEBATE”

IN NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE WEBSITE

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti tentang jenis dan frekuensi penggunaan hedge di kolom “*Room for Debate*” yang ada di website surat kabar New York Times. Selain itu, penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menganalisis fungsi dari hedge di kolom tersebut. Ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan data yang digunakan terdiri dari 150 artikel pada website New York Times dengan mengambil enam topik yakni bisnis, ekonomi, politik, ekonomi, kesehatan, and teknologi dengan total jumlah kata yaitu 55,015. Metode pengumpulan data adalah dengan dokumentasi yang meliputi pengumpulan dan pemilihan artikel di kolom “*Room for Debate*” di website New York Times. Kemudian data tersebut dianalisis berdasarkan taksonomi surface features dan model poli-pragmatik dari Hyland (1998). Berdasarkan teori ini, proses analisa data meliputi kodifikasi, identifikasi, klasifikasi, analisis, deskripsi dan penarikan kesimpulan.

Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada 978 hedge yang ditemukan di artikel di kolom “*Room for Debate*” di website New York times dengan prosentase sebagai berikut : *modal auxiliary* 413 (42.2%), *epistemic adverbs* 186 (19%), *epistemic lexical verbs* 140 (14.3%), *hedging numerical data* 83 (8.5%), *epistemic adjectives* 43 (4.4%), *passive constructions* 55 (5.5%) dan *hypothetical condition* 48 (5%). Namun penulis jarang sekali menggunakan tipe hedge seperti *epistemic noun*, *direct questions* dan *reference to limited knowledge* karena prosentase keduanya kurang dari 1 %.

Dalam penelitian ini, juga ditemukan bahwa ada tiga fungsi dari penggunaan hedge di kolom “*Room for Debate*”, antara lain: (1) accuracy-oriented hedge: membantu penulis untuk menyampaikan pendapat atau opini secara cermat ; (2) writer-oriented hedge : mengurangi komitmen dalam menyatakan pendapat dan menghindari tanggungjawab tentang kebenaran suatu masalah; dan (3) reader-oriented hedge : membantu penulis dalam rangka mengajak pembaca untuk terlibat dan bersedia merunut informasi tentang suatu masalah.

Kata kunci: Hedging, New York Times, Model Poli-Pragmatik

Abstract

This study attempted to examine the types and frequencies of hedging devices used in “*Room for Debate*” posted in New York Times online website. Further, this study was conducted to investigate the possible functions of hedging devices in “*Room for Debate*”. This research was conducted by using qualitative method. The data consists of 150 opinion articles posted in the New York Times, particularly in “*Room for Debate*” representing six disciplines including business, economy, politic, environment, health, and technology. The total numbers of words of the

six sections were 55,015. The data were obtained by using documentation by collecting and selecting articles posted in the New York Times, especially in “*Room for Debate*” during the recent five years (2012-2015). Afterward, the data were analyzed in accordance with surface features taxonomy and poly-pragmatic model from Hyland (1998). According to this model, analysis of hedging in writing involves coding, identifying, classifying, analyzing, describing and concluding.

The result shows that the total number of hedges found in the news articles of “*Room for Debate*” posted on New York Times is 978. The writers of this column were inclined to use *modal auxiliary* as one form of hedges with the frequency of 413 (42.2%). The next considerable type of hedges found in this column is the category of *epistemic adverbs* with the total of 186 (19%) followed by *epistemic lexical verbs* 140 (14.3%) and *hedging numerical data* 83 (8.5%). *Epistemic adjectives*, *passive constructions* and *hypothetical condition* have quite similar number in the column, that is 43 (4.4%), 55 (5.5%) and 48 (5%). On the other hand, the writers of “*Room for Debate*” seem to reluctantly use *epistemic noun*, *direct questions*, and *reference to limited knowledge* for each of them appears less than 1%. The study also revealed that hedging in “*Room for Debate*” performs three pragmatic functions. These are accuracy-oriented hedge that help the writer to present the proposition or statement with greater precision. Meanwhile, the use of writer-oriented hedge is for reducing the writer’s commitment to statement and avoids personal responsibility for propositional truth. The reader-oriented hedge allows the writer to invite the reader’s involvement and personalize the information in the proposition.

Keyword: Hedging, New York Times, Poly-pragmatic Model

1. Introduction

Hedging has acquired considerable scholarly attention in recent years in relation to linguistics studies. In general, hedging has shown to be an essential element of different genres such as research articles (Hyland, 1998, 1999), advertisements (Fuentes-Olivera et al., 2001) as well as newspaper opinion articles (Dafouz, 2003, 2008) and editorials (Abdollahzadeh, 2007). Hedging shows the degree of tentativeness, possibility and/or politeness that writers use in their texts. According to Camiciottoli (2003: 9), hedges help writers to present information in a clear, convincing and interesting way to promote acceptance and understanding, as well as reader-writer solidarity. Hedges can act as persuasive devices to affect and influence the reader’s reactions to texts according to the values and established rules and conventions of a discourse community.

Considering the significant of hedges, there are a large number of studies have been conducted to investigate this phenomenon in academic and scientific discourse. As evidence, the majority of studies on hedging are found to be concerned with academic writing, particularly with research articles genre across different disciplines and different languages (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Meyer, 1997; Skelton, 1997;

Namsaraev, 1997; Crompton, 1997; Hyland, 1994; 1996; 1998; Vartala, 2001; Lewin, 2005; Vold, 2006; Falahati, 2007; Martin, 2008; Vasquez &Giner, 2008). Hedging has also been studied in genres even like architecture project descriptions (Cabanés, 2007) and legal discourse (Vass, 2004).

However surprisingly little attention has been given to the newspaper genre, whilst this genre can be considered as “some of the most adequate examples of persuasive writing” (Connor, 1996 cited in Dafouz-Milne, 2008), where writers should be concerned about the choice of appropriate language to convey the information as clearly and accurately as possible, and what is more important to achieve readers’ attention and trust. It is quite noticeable that there is another important news source in the newspaper which is called “*Room for Debate*” containing opinion articles from experts covered in the form of written debate. New York Times is one of the newspapers which provide this column. In fact, the study on the use of hedges in “*Room for Debate*” is still limited since not all newspaper provides this column and this requires more studies to be conducted. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the hedging devices used in “*Room for Debate*” posted in New York Times online website. In this study, the writer focuses on the types and frequencies of hedge used in articles from group debate in six topics including business, economy, politic, environment, health, and technology. Further, this study will be conducted to find out the possible functions of hedging devices in “*Room for Debate*” published on New York Times online website.

2. Research Method

This research is conducted by using qualitative method. The research object of this study is 150 opinion articles posted in the influential and prestigious newspaper in the United States, New York Times, particularly in “*Room for Debate*”. In addition, their opinion articles cover 6 varieties of topics that include business (abbreviated as Bsn), economy (Ec), politic (Polit), environment (Env), health (Hlt), and technology (Tech). Each topic consists of 25 opinion articles which are from 5 groups of debate. In other words, there are 5 opinion articles in each group. The articles will be selected randomly from “*Room for Debate*” published in New York Times during the recent five years (2012-2015). The following table provides the distribution of length of the article in words across disciplines.

Topic	Business	Economy	Politic	Environment	Health	Technology	Total
Length	8.812	10.325	9.480	8.647	9.337	8.414	55015

One of the main objectives of the present study is to identify and classify the form of hedging devices used in “*Room for Debate*” in New York Times online website. Another aim is to analyze the functions of identified hedges. In order to achieve these objectives, the present study bases on theoretical framework proposed by Hyland (1998: 99).

According to this model, analysis of hedging in writing involves the following levels of linguistics description and inquiry:

1. Quantitative surface-level analysis of hedges employed in the particular genre.
2. Pragmatic analysis of their functions (Hyland, 1998: 99)

The purpose of quantitative analysis is to characterize the extent of hedging and its major forms in a representative sample of texts, while pragmatic analysis seeks to identify the purposes served by items in particular cases.

3. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

- a. The Forms and Frequencies of Hedging Devices Used in ‘*Room for Debate*’ Posted on New York Times Online Websites

The form of hedges analysis in this study refers to the ten types of hedges composed by Hyland (1998). Those ten categories are called surface features taxonomy. Essentially, the findings of the present study strongly indicates that news articles in “*Room for Debate*” published in New York Time online website employs ten types of hedges that can be seen through the following table.

Table 1.1 The Types and Frequency of Hedging Devices

Hedging Forms	Bsn	Eco	Polit	Env	Hlt	Tech	Total	%
Modal Auxiliaries	57	81	53	70	96	56	413	42,2%
Hedging	15	10	13	17	22	6	83	8,5%

Numerical Data									
Epistemic Lexical Verbs	30	27	28	17	20	18	140	14,3%	
Epistemic Adjectives	7	6	6	6	12	6	43	4,4%	
Epistemic Adverbs	36	32	40	16	40	22	186	19%	
Epistemic Noun	None	None	None	1	1	None	2	0,21%	
Hypothetical condition	6	6	10	3	7	16	48	5%	
Direct Question	None	None	1	None	3	1	5	0,5%	
Reference to limited knowledge	None	None	None	None	2	1	3	0,3%	
Passive constructions	4	15	12	10	12	2	55	5,5%	
Σ	155	177	163	140	215	128	978	100%	
%	15.8%	18.1%	16.7%	14.3%	22%	13.1%	100%		

The result shows that the total number of hedges found in the news articles of “*Room for Debate*” posted on New York Times is 978. The writers of this column are inclined to use *modal auxiliary* as one form of hedges with the frequency of 413 (42.2%). The next considerable type of hedges found in this column is the category of *epistemic adverbs* with the total of 186 (19%) followed by *epistemic lexical verbs* 140 (14.3%) and *hedging numerical data* 83 (8.5%).

Epistemic adjectives, *passive constructions* and *hypothetical condition* have quite similar number in the column, that is 43 (4.4%), 55 (5.5%) and 48 (5%). On the other hand, the writers of “*Room for Debate*” seem to reluctantly use *epistemic noun*, *direct questions*, and *reference to limited knowledge* for each of them appears less than 1%.

b. The Possible Functions of Hedging Devices in “*Room for Debate*” Posted on New York Times Online Website

The pragmatic analysis was carried out to identify the possible functions of hedging devices which was in accordance with the adapted classification from an approach, namely Hyland’s (1998) poly-pragmatic model of hedging functions. The resulting working classification recognized three functional types of hedges that will be discussed more in detail in the following.

1) Accuracy-Oriented Hedges

As has already been noted, this functional strategy is concerned primarily with “writer’s desire to express proposition with greater precision” (Hyland, (1998: 162). The category of accuracy-oriented hedge shows some interesting finding. The principal forms used for this are for instances certain kinds of attribute type and reliability type.

Attribute hedges help writers to specify more accurately how far their results “approximate to an idealized state” (Hyland, 1998: 164). This hedge has contribution for emphasizing what the writer’s believe to be correct.

- a) Furthermore, movements of big lobsters make them more *likely* to be in the “right place” to avoid adverse conditions, including unfavorably warm waters; better able to reseed areas where stocks have been depleted. (Env, 604)

Some items in this relatively small class of adverbs therefore indicate that a generalization is being made (Quirk et al, 1972:509) and therefore hedge the accompanying statement:

- b) Although prescription drugs are heavily marketed, the F.D.A. *generally* requires that ads disclose side effects. (Hlt, 810)

Quirk et al (ibid: 452f) refer to a category of intensifying adjuncts they call ‘downtoners’ which have a “lowering effect on the force of the modified verb”. The purpose of downtoners in formal academic prose is to restrict the meanings and reduce the qualitative and emotive implications of verbs, adjectives, and abstract nouns (Hyland, 1998: 135).

- c) Preventing death is *usually* desirable, and we have institutions and professions to serve that purpose.(Hlt, 815)

The underlined words show that the writers tend to modify the assertions that they make by toning down uncertain or potentially risky claims.

Epistemic adjectives serve to reduce the writer’s categorical commitment, the inclusion of consistent with as a hedge being confirmed by a contrast with prove:

- d) The odds are, then, that we’ll end up with a vague textual guarantee. But a vague textual guarantee is *unlikely* to persuade judges to mandate large-scale reform given their cautious nature. (Polit, 430)

2) Writer-Oriented Hedges

Hyland (1998: 170) defined the second category of content-oriented hedges as *writer-oriented hedges*, which are often associated with higher level claim than accuracy-oriented ones". While accuracy-oriented hedges are proposition-focused and writer-oriented hedges are writer-focused and "aim to protect the writer from the possible of negative consequences by limiting personal commitment".

Based on Hyland (1998: 171), the most distinctive characteristics of writer-oriented hedged is the absence of writer agentivity, so the common means of expressing this type of hedge are passive constructions, 'abstract rhetors', epistemic lexical verbs with judgmental and evidential meaning, attribution to the source of claim. This category of hedges "helps minimize writers' personal involvement and allows them to maintain a distance from a proposition".

- a) Historic records at the Municipal Archives *indicate* that New York City ran out of burial space during the Great Depression. (Env, 591)

The writers also need to protect themselves against the hazardous consequences of overstatement. Hedges here help writers avoid personal responsibility for statements in order to protect their reputations and limit the damage which may result from categorical commitments. One way writers achieve this is to employ evaluative *that* structures with modal devices and non-agentive subjects (Hyland, 2005). Most commonly this involves use of 'abstract rhetors' like the following:

- b) Studiesshowthat when inmates are more connected to family members on the outside, they create fewer problems on the inside. (Tech, 925)

Here, hedges are an important mean for anticipating a reader's possible refusal of a proposition and for presenting claims with precision and caution:

- c) It *seems* inevitable that video visitation will become a part of more correctional facilities.(Tech, 927)

According to Hyland (1998), the writer's main motivation for using writer-oriented hedges is to make a shield for the self against any probable falsification of the proposition. This is achieved through writers

minimizing their involvement in the proposition and keeping a distance from it.

3) Reader-Oriented Hedges

The reader-oriented hedges mostly deal with the interpersonal interaction between readers and writers. They make the readers involved in a dialogue and address them as thoughtful individuals who respond to and judge the truth value of the proposition made as the following instances:

Within the judgement subset, speculative verbs indicate there is some supposition about the truth of proposition. It comprises mainly conventional “performative verbs” (cf. Perkins, 1983:94; Brown, 1992) which perform, rather than describe, the acts they label:

- a) To aid--and profit off of--those stymied by decision, I ***predict*** "programming tastemakers," trusted figures who create TV playlists, not unlike a radio D.J. (Tech, 923)

The second types of judgments derive more obviously from inferential reasoning or theoretical calculation than from speculation and are presented as deductions or conclusions:

- b) To end these great inequalities, we've proposed a constitutional amendment to give Americans an affirmative right to vote and empower Congress to protect that right. (Polit,417)

Questions, as exemplified below, signal an important unresolved issue or the tentativeness of a solution, but also they genuinely seek a response. In so doing, they involve the reader more closely in the research and convey the communality of the scientific quest (Hyland, 1998).

- c) ***Would*** the simplified genius of announcing tandems like John Madden and the late Pat Summerall become lost in the technology to a younger fan base unappreciative of historical analysis? (Tech, 976)

2. Discussion

The use of hedges as linguistic units in newspaper articles, more particularly on *Room for Debate* is unavoidable. This is given by the fact that the authors in the news articles especially in *Room for Debate* have used a

variety of terms to express tentativeness and degree of their commitment towards the issue or topic is being discussed. The large number of hedges they used in the news articles was an evidence for their uncertainty in conveying the proposition.

While, concerning the types of hedging devices, as it is observed in the table 4.1, the modal auxiliaries are indeed to be the most frequent hedge types used in the news articles. There are six of the modal auxiliaries appear frequently in the articles: *would* (115), *should* (95), *could* (64), *must* (53), *may* (51), and *might* (35). The authors of news articles used this type of hedging device to indicate uncertainty to reflect unforceful statement. In this case the researcher assumes that the authors would like to avoid the absolute statement or claim.

From the analysis to be made on the presence of hedges, it can be assumed that modal auxiliaries are the main element of hedging types used in news articles. Moreover, it can be concluded from the fact that modal auxiliaries are likely to be employed by the authors of *Room for Debate* since these modal auxiliaries are just single-worded and thus are simple, in contrast to probability adjectives, introductory phrases, and “if”- clauses which are more complex.

Concerning on the findings, one might speculate that in delivering opinion particularly in debate, the authors try to convince the reader so that they tend not to use hedges such as reference to limited knowledge frequently. The authors know well if they employ this strategy, it will make the readers doesn't believe about their claims. The authors also modified their opinion text by questioning the reader at the beginning of their text in order to get reader

attention. Nevertheless, they did not often use it since this might be used to vary their text.

The pragmatic analysis reveals that the hedging devices used by the authors in *Room for Debate* have various underlying functions. These pragmatic functions broadly reflect the two main discourse functions of hedging prescribed by Hyland's (1998) model *Content Oriented* and *Reader-Oriented Hedges* that is in line with Buitkiene (2008). On his/her finding, the data showed instances of use of hedges where *accuracy-oriented hedges* and *writer-oriented hedges* that belong to *content-oriented hedge* and also *reader-oriented hedges* were employed.

The functions of hedging devices as one of the objectives of this study may become the primary finding of the present study since it gives us the significant insight that the use of hedges particularly in newspaper articles is important. Besides, the above research findings and discussion enhance our knowledge that the use of hedges cannot be separated from written text. The hedging devices were indeed necessary to use in every genre even newspaper articles. However, the form and the frequencies of hedge employed must be different in each because it was influenced by some factors such as the authors and the topic is being discussed. In this study, for example, showed different findings from the previous research although there were also some similarities.

Additionally, it should be emphasized that the use of hedges is the writers' conscious choice which is driven by willingness to perform three pragmatic functions that has been discussed. It might be realized that the use of hedging devices will help the authors to express their uncertainty as well as a lack of

commitment about the proposition. Thus, the authors used these devices in delivering their opinion.

4. Conclusion

The overall results of the present study have shown that hedging phenomenon is not merely used in academic or scientific discourse that has already been indicated by numerous studies, but it also present in other genres, particularly in the online newspaper. In this case, the hedging devices are used in “*Room for Debate*” on New York Times which is regarded to be well-established and respectable newspaper. The result shows that the writers of this column are inclined to use *modal auxiliary* as one form of hedges. On the other hand, the writers of “Room for Debate” seem to reluctantly use *epistemic noun*, *direct questions*, and *reference to limited knowledge* for each of them appears less than 1%.

As regard, it can be said that modal auxiliaries do not only becomes the most commonly hedge used, but these become an important type of hedge in news article as well. Moreover, the finding shows that hedges are becoming the main features in news articles since the writers in every discipline used these epistemic devices in conveying their proposition.

Essentially, the finding reflects the fact that news article express three main functions of hedging devices, as follows:

1. Accuracy-oriented hedges

These are used to help the writer to present the proposition or statement with greater precision. These accuracy hedges are classified into two types, such as attribute hedges that have function to specify how far a term accurately describes the reported phenomena whereas reliability hedges are enable the writer to state the her/his assessment of the certainty of the truth of the proposition.

2. Writer-oriented hedges

It is functioned to reduce the writer’s commitment to statement and avoid personal responsibility for propositional truth. In other words, it is for showing a lack of full commitment to the propositional content.

3. Reader-oriented hedges

This allows the writer to invite the reader’s involvement and personalize the information in the proposition.

Dedication

This research is dedicated for God Allah SWT, Prophet Muhammad SAW, My parents, my father (Hartini) and my mother (Hartini), my both brothers (VianAdiwicaksono and AdisetiawanNugroho).

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