



Hedging in Political Discourse

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating and analyzing three aspects of hedging in spoken political discourse: (1) means of expression, (2) density of lexical and syntactic markers, and (3) pragmatic functions. The corpus providing the database for the study consists of seventeen randomly selected televised interviews with a number of Arab politicians and leaders during the third Gulf War, the *Desert Fox*. The questions and comments in all the interviews were centered on the interviewees' positions from the war and the proposed solutions. A body of 13, 168 words was selected for a detailed analysis. For contrastive goals, the first 6573 words were selected from interviews in which Arabic was the medium of communication. The other 6595 words, on the other hand, were selected from interviews in which English was the medium of communication.

Findings have shown that: (i) avoidance is the most commonly occurring strategy of hedging that characterizes spoken political discourse, (ii) conversational and discourse strategies including Grice's maxim's are rarely adhered to in spoken political discourse, and (iii) hedging is directly and widely affected by the recipient design.

Key words: hedges, discourse, pragmatic functions, political discourse

1. Introduction & Review of Literature

While research on hedging and hedges has progressed and expanded enormously over the past four decades, it is still apparent that the semantic category of hedges

has not been precisely defined yet. Perhaps the lack of such a category is attributed to the complexity of the meanings of the hedging devices, a fact that has presented a serious challenge for researchers. A part from the semantic category of hedges, it seems that researchers have a broad consensus on what hedging is. Lakoff (1972) associates hedges with unclarity or fuzziness: “for me some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy.” (p.195). It has been observed that the term hedging which was first used to refer to fuzziness has been widened to cover a number of interrelated concepts, namely indetermination, vagueness, indirectness and approximation (Zuck & Zuck, 1986; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hyland, 1998; Btoosh, 1999; Btoosh, 2004; Varttala, 2001; Vass, 2004; Chavez; 2004; Ayodobo, 2007; Vazques & Giner, 2008, Donesch-Jezo, 2010, among others). In a more comprehensive account of the term, Bruce (2010: 201) associates hedging with all means leading lack of full commitment.

Hedging is a rhetorical strategy. By including a particular term, choosing a particular structure, or imposing a specific prosodic form on the utterance, the speaker signals a lack of a full commitment either to the full category membership of a term or expression in the utterance (content mitigation), or to the intended illocutionary force of the utterance (force mitigation).

The impact of hedging devices in the discourse is measured by their overall effect on meaning or the message of the text oral/written. Hyland (1996: 15) illustrates that hedging devices are used to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically. The same function is found in economics discourse. Pindi & Bloor

(1987) argue that “economics forecasters are shown to have three ways of modifying their commitments to a prediction: by hedging, using such as modal verbs as ‘*may*’ or other lexical items such as possibility and by specifying conditions.” (p. 55).

Hedging may also stem from the inner conflict between intention and desire: “being indirect is a mechanism for dealing with conflicting intentions and desires. The general form of the conflict is that the speaker wants to convey *X* for some reason and he does not want to convey *X* for other reasons. By being indirect he can convey *X* in one sense but not in another.” (Pyle, 1975: 2).

Like English, Arabic does employ lexical, syntactic (conditionals or passive) as well as strategic hedges. However, one of the most common structural hedging devices employed in Arabic discourse is the *conditional sentences*. Safi (1988:2) argues that: “probability is one of the most difficult issues associated with conditionality. In English the use of the different tenses of verbs and modals usually stand for probability whereas in Arabic it is possible for the conditional particles and different tenses of verb to stand for probability”.

A text, of course, is said to have hedging by its having any of the different means that express hedging directly or indirectly. Channel (1994:3) argues that “one of the most useful and enduring insights to come out of the recent study of language use is that speakers and writers tailor their language to make it suitable to the situation (when, where and why?) and the linguistic context (is it gossipy chat, an interview, a story in a popular newspaper?)”.

Hedging use, as the literature shows, is affected by gender. Lakoff (1972:90) asserts that in order to show their femininity, women tend to adopt an unassertive style of communication. That is, they must learn to denude their statements of declarative force. He adds: “women’s speech lacks authority.” The great bulk of

studies devoted to the domain has demonstrated and, roughly speaking, agreed upon the validity of hedging devices in strengthening the arguments by weakening the claims.

As is evident from the literature, it is not unusual to connect meaning with what is called internal pragmatics of utterances. Sandell (1977:5) argues that:

In order to achieve the same effect with different receivers, that is, in order to make them react in a uniform manner, the skilled sender changes his wording with each different receiver so as to conform to their different frames of reference. Still, his conception of the topic of the message is as unchanging as the effect he desires on one part of the receiver. This does not imply, however, that these different wordings would have the same effect on a single individual, which makes it important to distinguish between interindividual and intraindividual identity (or similarity) of functional meaning, and to study if one and the same nominal meaning, differently styled in a message, will produce intraindividually different functional meanings, particularly as regards those aspects that we call persuasive effects.

By reason of similarity and shared functions, it is possible to purport that indetermination, indirectness, vagueness, and modality are different strategies or means of the same phenomenon *hedging*. To a greater or lesser degree, all these means do share certain pragmatic functions, viz:

- (i) Showing the receiver a degree of uncertainty that the sender has about the proposition.
- (ii) Avoiding the sender's direct involvement in the proposition.
- (iii) Expressing and showing politeness and modesty.

A space will be left for commentary on individual strategies (indetermination, indirectness, vagueness, and modality) when talking about the pragmatic functions of hedging. For illustrative purposes, hedges, as used in this study, refer to all words, expressions and structures that:

1. Express uncertainty and imprecision when the precise information is not available or purposely avoided;
2. Mitigate direct criticism and incitement;
3. Avoid sender's commitment to the truth of the proposition;
4. Express/show politeness and modesty; &
5. Modify the discourse.

2. Objectives and Methodology

Three aims, as mentioned before, have been set for analysis in this study. First, it aims to identify the different strategies and markers of hedging used in spoken discourse. Secondly, it examines the density of both lexical and syntactic hedging devices used in the corpus. Thirdly, it attempts delineate the pragmatic functions that can be conveyed by such devices.

There can be little doubt that unless the context is given, intentional meaning

remains vague. This, of course, presupposes that context is not any less importance than words or expressions used to convey the message. The ignorance of the context is sometimes expected to lead to a local or global misunderstanding between what is said/written and what is intended. Drawing on such factors, the seventeen randomly selected interviews which form the corpus of this study, have undergone a very detailed contextual analysis to ensure that the extracted devices are hedges by function, rather than by form. Table (1) illustrates the number and medium of the conversations in question.

Table (1) Medium & number of the interviews

Language	Medium of Interview	No. of interviews
Arabic	Face to face	5
Arabic	Over the phone	1
English	Face to face	11

Two reasons, however, are attributed to data selection. The above-mentioned interviews, on the one hand, contrast in their recipient design and medium. Thus, any differences in terms of the discourse factivity are possibly and directly attributed to the nature of the recipient design. Moreover, hedging is much more used in political discourse than in other types of discourse such as medical or legal discourse.

Data analysis procedures involve a careful investigation into the hedging markers and strategies used in the aforementioned data.

- (i) Transcribing the interviews in order to extract all hedging devices.

- (ii) Classifying the extracted hedges into three categories: invisible strategies, lexical, and syntactic markers.
- (iii) Establishing frequency count and percentage of each of the lexical and syntactic markers.
- (iv) Exploring the effect of the recipient design on the discourse factivity.
- (v) Exploring the main types and strategies of hedging employed in the data.
- (vi) Analyzing the basic pragmatic functions of lexical and syntactic hedges as used contextually in the data.

3. Results & Discussion

I. Invisible Hedging Strategies

Before attempting to engage in the discussion of the quantitative results, it seems useful to start the section up by commenting briefly on the most outstanding strategies of hedging that characterizes political spoken discourse, namely the *avoidance strategy*. Albeit having no specific strategies as other hedges do, avoidance strategy is not always obscure. As a matter of fact, this strategy usually has three different means: (i) *topic-shift*, to move from a subject to another unrelated one, (ii) *generalization*, to avoid mentioning any specific answer, and (iii) *ignorance*, to purposely ignore the question/topic completely. In what follows, an attempt is made to spotlight on all aspects of this vital strategy. For the sake of clarity, a space is also left for commentary on certain aspects related to the violations of the conversational and discourse strategies including the Grice's maxims.

Q.1. Do you believe that Iraq has implemented all the United Nation resolutions related to the second Gulf War?

A. Undoubtedly, the United Nations resolutions should be implemented

completely everywhere...the people may understand the effect of this war and the previous one in the future....

Q. 2. It is said that if Iraq had implemented the United Nation Resolutions, there would have been no further attacks. Is it true?

A. Can you give me one example about the use of force to implement the United Nations resolutions in the region (Middle East)?

Q. 3. It is believed that the current war will not last for a long period of time and after that we will enjoy a peaceful life. What do you think?

A. Could anybody argue for this slogan? If it is true, then who can interpret what is taking place in Lebanon, West Bank, Sudan, Libya?

Q.4. If you were asked to send forces to fight against Iraq, what would be your answer?

A. We always side with what we believe is right.

Q. But are you with or against the current campaign?

A. Of course, we don't want to see a new Bosnia here.

Q.5. Prior to the second Gulf war in 1991, there were promises to put an end for the struggle in the Middle East but we have seen nothing yet. Do you believe that this reflects the double measure policy practiced in the region?

A. I believe that the peace process should continue to end the most dangerous issue in the region.

Examples such as the ones just mentioned are not totally uncommon in political discourse and particularly in the spoken form. For politicians, language is always a powerful tool to lose or to win. This is, however, the very fact that makes politicians think twice before answering questions. The reason behind the vague or general answers is usually attributed to the self-protection strategy. Politicians resort to imprecision to protect themselves against any future possible criticism if proved wrong later on.

Examples 1 through 5 illustrate even a more complicated situation, where context plays an influential role in the interpretation process. The continuing disagreement about how to distinguish hedged propositions from the non-hedged ones and drawing on the different interpretations of one and the same hedging device in different contexts, the present paper illustrates that hedges are context-dependent devices. It goes without saying that syntactic hedges presented in examples 2 & 3, are mainly used not only to hedge what is stated but also to draw the receiver's attention to the unspoken message(s).

Before going any further, let's pause a little to examine what is called *Flouting the Maxims*, a situation in which the maxim is completely and purposely disobeyed, with the intention that the receiver understands/recognizes the meant point. Example 1, for instance, flouts the maxims of Quantity & Relevance simultaneously. Clearly, the sender has flouted the maxim of quantity by saying more than what is required. The sender has purposely resorted to provide more information than is required to avoid the yes/no answer. This indicates that politicians disfavor direct answers. The second half of the answer flouts the maxim of relevance by providing a statement that has no relationship to the question. There is yet another strategic element in this

example. The sender has begun his answer by an emphatic/persuader word considering his answer as a fact rather than just an opinion. Oftentimes, this strategy is used to avoid personal attribution.

Comparing questions to answers, one may conclude that interviewers and interviewees have different strategies. The interviewers, on the one hand, attempt to have a well-organized turn-talking model by limiting the options in front of the interviewees (yes/no questions). The interviewees, on the other hand, try to avoid direct answers by following the avoidance strategy. This, however, has led to the violation of the 'Conditionally Relevant principle, which forms the heart of the adjacency pairs. As a result of this, A's utterance may be followed by an unexpected reaction from B as seen in the above examples.

Example 2 indicates another strategy where a non-seeking information question is employed to avoid answering a direct question and to attract the receiver's attention to situation whereby he/she can understand the intended message. This represents another strategy to flout the maxims.

Another crucial point which is of no less importance than the previous ones deals with the degree of obscurity. Obscurity, which is affected directly by the Recipient Design, does violate the maxim of Manner, which states clearly 'avoid obscurity'. Hutch and Woffitt (1998:138) argues that: 'all turns at talk in some way designed to be understood in terms of what the speaker knows or assumes about the existing mutual knowledge between him/her and the recipient.'

A careful examination of the above adjacency pairs presents a Question-to-Question Strategy whereby the sender answers a question by raising another question to remind the receiver with a situation or an idea that is closely related to the current issue. The sender, of course, is not awaiting/seeking an answer since the

receiver's response is taken for granted.

It would be an overhasty to end this section up without illustrating a noteworthy idea dealing with the importance of hedging devices to *save the face of politicians*. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), imprecision made by hedging is motivated by the fear of being wrong later on. This conveys that the importance of hedging for politicians is of no less importance than of weapons for soldiers. Hedges, as a matter of fact, reduce the risk of negation.

Examples 4 & 5 illustrate the heart of the avoidance strategy. In the two examples, we see a complete ignorance of the questions which in turn reflects a complete violation of all maxims:

- (i) Maxim of Quantity: the answer is more informative than is required;
- (ii) Maxim of Relation: there is no relationship between the adjacency pairs;
- (iii) Maxim of Manner: clarity is completely destroyed, and
- (iv) Maxim of Quality: the answers reflect the lack of truth.

II. Visible Hedging Markers

In conformity with the aims posited above, the data have undergone quantitative and qualitative analyses. By means of quantitative measures mentioned above, the obtained results are given in the following Tables (2), (3) & (4). For comparative & contrastive illustrations, and attempt has been made to examine lexical hedges in the Interlanguage Corpus of Arab Students of English (ICASE) and a similar size from Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS)

Table (2) Lexical Hedges

No	Hedging Devices	Freq. in Arabic	Freq. in English	S. No	Hedging Devices	Freq. in Arabic	Freq. in English
1.	rubbama/may be	15	6	9	yushiku/about to	1	2
2.	qad+present verb/may	5	2	10	hawali/about/near/	5	4
3.	ya?taqidu/believe/ think	9	8	11	imma/either or	4	2
4.	muhtamal/possible	2	4	12	muxxaran/lately	9	3
5.	yabdu/seem	7	5	13	qaliilan/few	2	2
6.	bishakil ?am/in general	2	0	14	?ala al-aqal/at least	4	3
7.	ba?d/some	6	3	15	bishakil munasib/in a suitable way	3	2
8.	a?hyanan/sometimes	16	7	16	mumken/ can be	1	1
	la?alla/perhaps	1	4	---	-----	----	----
TOTAL		63	39	TOTAL		29	19

Table (3) Syntactic Markers

No.	Syntactic Hedges	Freq. in Arabic	Freq. in English	
1.	Hypothetical Conditional	4	3	
2.	Rhetorical Questions	11	8	
3.	Text Voice	Passive Voice	6	5
		Sender-Receiver (We)	25	16
		Impersonal Attribution	20	19
TOTAL		66	51	

Table (4) Rank Order by Percentage of Hedging Means

No.	Language	Freq. of Lexical Hedges	Freq. of Syntactic Hedges	%
1.	English	58	51	40.82
2.	Arabic	92	66	59.18
Total		150	117	100

Table 2 presents what Hyland (1996) calls lexical hedges. These include, besides the modal verbs, epistemic lexical verbs and certain other devices used mainly to express tentativeness and uncertainty. A quick glance at Table 3, on the other hand, shows another important kind of hedging devices called syntactic hedges, recognized means or strategies of hedges expressed mainly by hypothetical conditionals, questions, passive voice and impersonal attribution. Table (4) shows that hedging use is subject to recipient design. As such, politicians use fewer hedges when addressing the English speaking communities and the privileged people of their societies who use English as the medium of communication.

Taken together, Tables 2 and 3 show that hedging is most widely expressed lexically. What ought to be mentioned, at this stage, is that it is the context that determines whether the used device is a hedge or not. This observation is based on the contextual analysis of certain devices illustrated below.

The initial generalization concerning the difference in density indicates that discourse factivity is directly and widely affected by the nature of the recipient design. Two supporting and justifying points are attributed to such generalization:

(i) English discourse, which has special and different audience, is much more factive in comparison with Arabic discourse. The high degree of factivity of English

discourse is attributed to the audience who are more knowledgeable about the subject being discussed due to their constant contact with foreign and non-governmental media. This, in turn, encourages politicians to be clear and avoid vagueness and approximation and sometimes to show no hesitation in their support to the international efforts in this regard.

(ii) Arabic discourse is addressed to the public and thus, it tends to be much more hedged. Politicians, as mentioned before, resort to hedging to protect themselves against any possible criticism. Of course, Hedging devices offer them a suitable floor to reinterpret their claims in accordance with the current case. To sum up, the degree of factivity and recipient design do, in fact, go together.

To gain a better insight on the use of hedges in previous literature and due to the lack of a political corpus, Table (5) presents the frequency count of the lexical hedges in the Interlanguage Corpus of Arab Students of English (ICASE) and a similar size from Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS) as shown in Btoosh & Taweel, in press). Each of these two corpora consists of 100, 000 tokens.

Table 5. Frequency count of categories of inflation devices and hedges in E2A1 and E1 corpora.

Devices	E2A1 Corpus		E1 Corpus	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Inflation Devices	2130	78.68	1876	73.33
Hedges	577	21.32	682	26.67
Total	2707	100%	2558	100%

In comparison with Btoosh & Taweel's (in press) findings concerning the use of lexical hedges in E2A1 (learner) and E1 (native) corpora, it is interesting to note that

the use of the lexical hedges by politicians, as shown above, largely outnumbers the use of similar items in any of the native and learner corpora examined in Btoosh & Taweel's study. Perhaps, such findings aren't surprising since hedging is primary a feature of political discourse rather than academic writing.

III. Hedging Types, Strategies & Pragmatic Functions

Having presented and discussed avoidance strategy and the results of the quantitative analysis, it would be more appropriate, at this juncture, to desert strategies and density and to thoroughly concentrate on hedging types, strategies & categories. By so doing, a corpus of fifteen examples is provided here to illustrate this. The first seven sentences are original Arabic utterances while the last eight examples are original English ones.

1. ana a taqid anna hadhihi ḥaraban leisat adelah
'I believe that this is not a fair war.'
2. qad tastamer alḥarb limodat osbo ayein
'The war may last for two weeks.'
3. la yojad hunalik shak bi n al iraq mas oul an hadhihi alḥarb
'There is no doubt that Iraq is responsible for these attacks.'
4. hadha biwoḍoḥ siyaasat ma yeir muzdawaja
'It is clearly a double-measure policy.'
5. rubbama naḥnu nantaḍer mustaqbal aswa
'Perhaps, we are awaiting a worse future.'
6. ana da iman as al nafsi mata tafham hadhihi alomah madha yajri
'I usually ask myself when will this nation understand what is going on?'

7. tusheer annata ij bi annana naqtarib min marḥalah muḍlimah
'The results indicate that we are approaching a new dark phase.'
8. If we fight Iraq for its short illegal occupation of Kuwait, then why don't we fight others for their long illegal occupation of our lands?
9. I think there will be no end for this war.
10. According to the reports, the Iraqi president still endangers the neighboring countries.
11. Some of the leaders are not truth tellers.
12. To some extent this is not true.
13. It is probably the beginning of a comprehensive war that transfers us from bad to worse.
14. We know that Iraq has no mass destructive weapons.
15. When will this nation wake up?

It would never be hard to distinguish between the above underlined hedges and intensifiers. For instance, the difference between the first two articles 1 and 2, on the one hand, and 3 and 4, on the other hand, is merely a difference between probability (weakening) and factivity (strengthening). The lexical hedges '*may*' and '*believe*' used in 1 and 2 have added a new meaning to the original propositional content. Thus, the cautious precision and uncertainty expressed in 1 and 2 are not attributed to the propositional content but rather to the two metadiscoursals or lexical hedges. The probability expressed in 1 and 2, as a result of this, has kept distance between the sender and his propositional content. Receivers, due to the influence of such mitigation, are left in a double bind situation.

Precision of 3 and 4 has been enhanced by means of persuading words/intensifiers. Unlike '*believe*' and '*may*' mainly used to express imprecision and lack

of commitment to the propositional content, the intensifiers/persuader words ‘*clearly*’ and ‘*no doubt*’ are used to show certainty, precision and full commitment to the propositional content.

(i) Types

Detachment, a term used by Chafe (1982) to refer to the choice of certain devices that suppress the direct involvement of an agent in action, is manifested by two major types of hedging, namely shields & approximators (Markannen & Schröder, 1997). Shields refer to hedging devices that don’t affect the truth-conditions but reflect the degree of speaker’s commitment to the truth-value of the proposition.

1. I think there will be no near end for this war.
2. I believe that this is not a fair war.

This category includes “all modal verbs expressing possibility...epistemic verbs (that is, which relate to the probability of a proposition or a hypothetical being true) such as “to suggest”, “to speculate.”

Unlike shields, approximators refer to hedging devices that do affect the truth-conditions which in turn affect the propositional content itself.

1. Some of the leaders are not truth tellers.
2. To some extent, this is not true.

However, this category includes words that lack precision such as *somewhat*, *often* and *approximately*.

(ii) Strategies

It might be useful, in this context, to observe that politicians' choice of words is never spontaneous. A closer look at the data shows that politicians hardly produce a sentence that is free of all kinds of indirectness, indetermination, approximation or vagueness. For the purpose of this paper, we will distinguish seven strategies employed to serve hedging.

(i) Epistemic modality:

The war may last for two weeks.

(ii) Likelihood modalities:

It is probably the beginning of a comprehensive war that transfers us from bad to worse.

(iii) Sender-Receiver Solidarity (we):

We know that Iraq has no mass destructive weapons.

(iv) Hypothetical Devices:

If we fight Iraq for its short illegal occupation of Kuwait, then why don't we fight others for their long illegal occupation of our lands?

(v) Questions:

When this nation will wake up?

(vi) Impersonal attribution:

According to the reports, the Iraqi president still endangers the neighboring countries.

Further illustration of these strategies will be presented in the following section dealing with the pragmatic functions of hedging.

(iii) Pragmatic Functions

Having presented types and strategies, it is now the time to turn to the other important aspect of the study, viz the pragmatic functions of hedging. By so doing, a comparison will be carried out between a number of hedged sentences and their factive counterparts. Before attempting to engage in such discussion, it seems much more reasonable to pause a little to shed light on three aspects that play an important role in the interpretation of the pragmatics of hedged propositions:

- (i) *Inferences*: at this level, one should distinguish between explicit and implicit information. Of course, most of information is not stated explicitly in most kinds of discourses. This reveals that the receiver has a lot to do in the interpretation of the discourse depending on his own inferences.
- (ii) *Prior Knowledge*: nobody can argue against the importance of the previous knowledge in finding out the intended meaning. Prior knowledge, which may include the knowledge of the domain or even the sender himself, makes the role of the receiver much less complex and facilitates the interpretation process.
- (iii) *Context of Situation*: according to Halliday (1985), this consists of three aspects: (a) Field: this refer to what is embodied in the discourse and the purposes for its inclusion, (b) Tenor: this refer to the participants in the discourse, their roles and their interrelationships, and (c) Mode: this refer to the nature of the language in the discourse and how it is communicated.

Of course, these aspects affect the interpretation of the hedged propositions,

which as we will see later on depends to some extent on the receiver.

16. It seems that we are approaching a new phase.
17. We expect more cooperation between Iraq and the United Nations in the near future.
18. The war may last for two weeks.
19. According to the reports, the Iraqi president still endangers the neighboring countries.
20. Some of the leaders are not truth tellers.
21. To some extent this is not true.

To understand the functions of the underlined words and to make the contrast sharper, let us rewrite the above mentioned articles 16 through 21 leaving out the hedges employed in each:

22. We are approaching a new phase.
23. There will be more cooperation between Iraq and the United Nations in the near future.
24. The war will last for two weeks.
25. Iraqi president still endangers the neighboring countries.
26. Leaders are not truth tellers.
27. This is not true.

As might be expected, the difference between the hedged articles 16 through 21 and the non-hedged ones 22 through 27 is clearly signaled by means of possibility and

factuality. By crossing out the hedging devices in the above examples the meaning has become quite different from the one that was originally intended.

The uncertainty and lack of commitment expressed by the lexical hedges '*may*', '*believe*', '*perhaps*', '*some*' and '*think*' have been lost in the reproduced articles. In these examples, senders are by no means trying to protect themselves against any possible criticism. Generally speaking, hedges are purposely used to produce a timeless acceptable discourse. This acceptability stems from the flexibility of the hedge itself, which, in turn, makes the proposition true regardless of the result in future. In 18, for instance, there are only two possibilities: (i) the war will last for two weeks or (ii) the war may last for more/less than two weeks. The mitigated proposition here puts the sender in a position where he is always a truth teller.

Notice, if the difference between the hedged articles 16 through 21 and the non-hedged ones 22 through 27 is that hedged articles express prediction and possibility and the non-hedged ones express factivity, then one should find out that the two groups are identical in propositions but differ in the metadiscoursals (discourse about discourse). There is no doubt now that the uncertainty and probability are brought about the intended use of hedges. Further illustration of hedging functions is illustrated in the following examples:

28. The current war which has a base name (Desert Fox) may become the seeds of a new comprehensive war that does not distinguish between friends and enemies.

29. What we have seen so far represents the leaders and their governments, but where are the parliaments that represent the majority?

Irrespective of the interrelated functions of hedging devices (lexical or syntactic), there is, however, a difference usually understood contextually. While 28 expresses prediction and is meant to save against future negative results, 29, on the other hand, expresses indirect criticism and incitement, that is to encourage the parliaments and the people of the Arab world to participate in the political scene.

The below listed syntactic hedges are assumed to exhibit further new functions not expressed by the above-mentioned lexical ones:

30. If war is a tool for peace as it is claimed, then why don't they use it to hasten the peace process in the Middle East?

31. Do we still trust their promises?

The crucial point here is not, however, the question or hypothetical conditional but rather the indetermination and the mitigated message expressed in each article. In contrast to lexical hedges, syntactic hedges aim at drawing the receiver's attention to an important point that is not stated directly for various politeness or political reasons. In 31, for example, the sender is not actually seeking an answer for his question but rather he is actually trying to remind people with the unachieved promises and to say directly don't trust them. The question that immediately arises here deals with the relationship between hedges and context. Are hedges context-dependent or context-independent devices? To identify this relation, let us examine the following questions:

32. When will the nation wake up?

33. What is the time now? (Ordinary question)

Apparently, the sender of 32 is not seeking information as the sender of 33 does. He is, in fact, trying to convey a message that cannot be conveyed directly. Instead of the direct incitement (that is to remind people with the current weaknesses), the sender has hedged his proposition in an appropriate and polite way by changing it into a question. This, however, shows that not all questions or hypothetical conditionals can express hedging in all contexts. Once again, this firmly proves that hedges are context-dependent devices.

Another crucial point that emerges when talking about hedged messages deals with the role of the receivers. Drawing on the data, receivers are as active as senders themselves since they are required to:

- (i) Identify the unspoken message.
- (ii) Transform what is stated in words into deeds (indirect incitement).
- (iii) Give ratification / rejection for claims.

Before attempting to engage in stating the pragmatic functions, let's pause a little to examine the meaning of three further hedging devices:

34. Clearly, some of the Arab leaders still believe that Iraq endangers their countries.

The initial generalization that seems to emerge from the above example is that 'some' is never intended literally here. The explanation for such meaning is apparently pragmatic and must involve receivers. Although it hardly seems possible for the sender to mention the intended leaders directly, receivers, as a matter of fact, find no difficulty in finding out the intended meaning/message. If this is so, then there ought to be significant reasons for asserting that hedges are almost always context dependent devices.

35. We *hope* to hear the voices of the Arab public street that have disappeared for more than four decades.

It seems much more reasonable at this stage to distinguish between hope and criticism. In this example, the sender is not expressing hope, but rather s/he is criticizing the current situation of the nation. Drawing on the difference between the semantic or literal meaning and the pragmatic meaning of this article, it seems that we are rapidly approaching the importance of the extra-linguistic factors in understanding what is intended rather than what is stated.

As is evident from the above discussion, different receivers may sometimes interpret one and the same text differently. This conveys that the interpretation of a text is never totally objective. As a result of this, the receiver's interpretation affects the message positively or negatively depending on his own understanding of the issue. Apparently, part of the lack of the common ground between what is intended and what is understood is attributed not to the discourse itself, but rather to the metadiscoursal including hedges.

It may go without saying that senders sometimes resort to hedging to modify their ideas especially if such ideas contradict with their own states' policies. This, as matter of fact, varies from one country to another according to the level of freedom or democracy.

Now it appears useful to end our discussion by summarizing the principle pragmatic functions illustrated above. Of course, some of these functions do match the findings of the previous research:

- (i) Devoiding the senders' involvement;
- (ii) Requesting the receivers' involvement;
- (iii) Avoiding direct criticism;

- (iv) Avoiding direct incitement;
- (v) Mitigating claims;
- (vi) Avoiding hurting others (by means of euphemism);
- (vii) Protecting the sender against any possible criticism; &
- (viii) Expressing politeness.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections, an attempt has been made to identify, quantify and analyze different strategies and means of hedging employed in spoken political discourse in both Arabic and English. The study has sought to examine the means and strategies by which politicians show their detachment to their propositions and whether these strategies are affected by the language used and recipient design.

Regardless of the variations attributed to strategies, hedges, as the data show, serve several interrelated functions that do vary in their importance from one domain to another. The study has also shown that hedging density is affected directly by the recipient design. In the view of the above discussion, one may state that:

- (i) Hedges are devices used to express something indirectly;
- (ii) Discourse factivity is governed by extralinguistic factors, such as subject and the recipient design;
- (iii) Pragmatic interpretation of hedges is not any less important than the semantic one.
- (iv) Politeness is as much the conveyer of hedging, as the hedging is the conveyer of politeness. This concluding statement stems from the fact that all hedging devices, to a grater or lesser degree, do convey politeness.

Although the results are significant in comparison with the findings of the previous research, it is still premature to claim that such findings are conclusive. Rather, further research need to be conducted so as to check the validity of such insights and findings.

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