**THE FUCNCTION OF HEDGING DEVICES USED IN *"ROOM FOR DEBATE"*
POSTED IN NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE WEBSITE**

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Abstract
According to Hyland (1998), hedging is the mean by which writers can present a proposition as an opinion rather than a fact: items are only hedges in their epistemic sense, and only when they mark uncertainty. Hedges can be either lexical (e.g.: *assume, may, possible*) or structural (e.g. passive form) devices through which writers can show their uncertainty towards the proposition. This study attempts 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 used 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 avoiding 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

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

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

(Fuertes-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 (Cabanes, 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 an 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.

B. Limitation of the Study

This study attempts to investigate the types and frequencies of hedging devices used in "*Room for Debate*" posted in New York Times online website in the section of politic, economic, business, environment, health and technology. Further, this study is conducted to find out the possible functions of hedging devices in "*Room for Debate*" published on New York Times online website.

C. Problem Statement

The present study attempts to address the following research questions:
1. What are the forms and frequencies of hedging devices used in *"Room for Debate"* posted on New York Times online website?
2. What are the possible functions of hedging devices in *"Room for Debate"* posted on New York Times online website?

D. Objective of the Study

In accordance with the background and the research questions, the following are the objectives of the study:
1. To describe the forms and frequencies of hedging devices used in *"Room for Debate"* articles posted on New York Times online website.
2. To describe the possible functions of hedging devices in *"Room for Debate"* articles posted on New York Times online website.

3.

E. Benefit of the Study

The benefits of the study are as follows:

1. Theoretical Benefit

The result of the study is expected to provide additional information about the forms of hedging devices used in online newspaper.

2. Practical Benefit

a. The implications of this study will be useful for English for Specific Purpose (ESP) developers, English for Academic Purpose (EAP) developers to teach hedges in writing and reading comprehension activities about particular topics.

b. This study can help Indonesia writers and readers to acquire a better knowledge on the use of hedges in newspaper discourses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Historical Background of Hedging

In the field of hedging studies, there is still little clarity and agreement as to what counts as a hedge. In different studies hedges are defined differently, which reflects the difficulty of determining what exactly the hedge is.

In the brief history of linguistics, based on Hyland (1998: 1), the term "hedge" was introduced by Lakoff (1972) who defines a hedge as a word "whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fussy". The definition of hedges is expanded and enriched by many scholars later. Brown and Levinson (1987: 145) state that a hedge is "a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set", which is a supplement to Lakoff's definition.

Hyland (1996a: 437) argued that hedging devices " do not fit into a neat scheme of discrete categories which allows one meaning to be clearly distinguished from others", moreover assigning specific meaning exclusively to particular forms is not always possible. The reason for this difficulty is that "hedging devices may convey a range of meanings for particular users in particular contexts" (Hyland, 1998:156). Due to the poly-pragmatic nature of hedging devices, which can cover an array of purposes such as "weakens force of statement, contains modal expressions, and expresses deference, signal uncertainty, and so on" (Hyland, 1998:103). Hyland (1998) developed a fuzzy category model for hedging devices, which allows more than a single unequivocal pragmatic interpretation of hedges and overlap of usage.

B. Hedging Functions in Poly-Pragmatic Model

Due to the poly-semous and poly-pragmatic nature of hedging devices, Hyland confirms that assigning specific meanings exclusively to particular forms is not possible. According to this model, hedges can cover an array of purposes such as "weakens force of statements, contains modal expressions, as well as expresses deference, signals uncertainty, and so on" (Hyland: 160). Hyland by proposing this scheme tries to capture the multi-functional nature of the hedges which enables them to have a range of meanings at the same time.
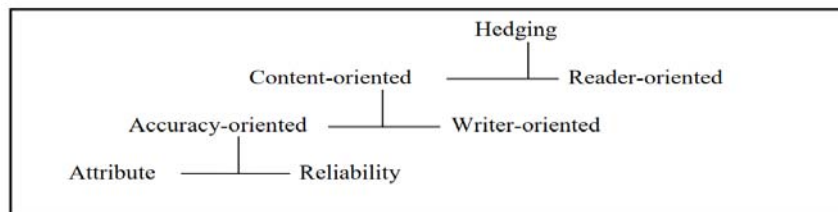

Figure 2.1: A model of scientific hedging (Hyland, 1998: 156)

As can be seen, Hyland (1998: 156) divided hedging devices in two main categories: *content-oriented hedges* and *reader-oriented devices.* According to Hyland (1998: 162) *content-oriented hedges* "serve to mitigate the relationship between propositional content and a non-linguistics mental representation of reality; they hedge the correspondence between what the writer says about the world and what the world is thought to be like". *Content-oriented hedges* further subdivided into *accuracy-oriented hedges* and *writer oriented hedges.*

The *accuracy-oriented* hedges refer to "writer's desire to express proposition with greater precision" which are further divided into attribute and reliability hedges. Based on Hyland (1998: 164) the first subtype of the *accuracy oriented hedges*, *attribute hedges*, help writers to specify more accurately" how far their results approximate to an idealized state and the second subtype, *reliability hedges*, indicate the amount of writer's certainty or uncertainty in a proposition.

Furthermore, Hyland (1998: 170) defined the second category of content-oriented hedges is *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 shield the writer from the possible consequences of negotiability 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" (Hyland, 1998: 171).

Along with accuracy-oriented and writer-oriented hedges, Hyland (1998) distinguished reader-oriented category of hedges. The main distinction between these categories is the reader-oriented hedges mostly deal with the interpersonal interaction between readers and writers. Hyland (1998: 182) considered personal attribution and reference marked by pronouns such as *I, we, my, our* as the main indicators of reader-oriented hedges. By using these markers, authors show that the propositions stated are their "personal opinion, allowing the readers to choose the more persuasive explanation" and have their own judgment (Hyland, 1998: 182).

RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Type

This research is conducted by using qualitative method. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), the qualitative research approach seeks to explore and understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviours, and interactions, the goal of which "is to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at meaning types, characteristics, and organizational aspects of documents as social products in their own right, as well as what they claim to represent" (Altheide, 1996: 42). This approach is particularly relevant in the present study because the researcher sought to investigate and understand the underlying motivations (i.e. discourse functions) of the use of the hedges in articles collected from *"Room for Debate"* in New York Times website.

B. Research Object

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.

Table 3.1

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

C. Technique of Collecting Data

To carry out the present study, the writer uses the documentation for collecting the data. The following are the steps for collecting the data:
   a. Logging in to the New York Times online website.
   b. Collecting 200 articles from the online archives of *"Room for Debate"* in the New York Times online website based on the chosen topics that will be analyzed. In this case, the writer chooses 6 topics that include business (abbreviated as Bsn), economy (Ec), politic (Polit), environment (Env), health (Hlt), and technology (Tech).
   c. Saving all the texts into the computer to form a database of corpora.
   d. Choosing 150 articles for the analysis after checking and controlling the topics and the length of articles.

D. Technique of Analyzing Data

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.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

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 4.1 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 Numerical Data	15	10	13	17	22	6	**83**	**8,5%**
Epistemic	30	27	28	17	20	18	**140**	**14,3%**

Lexical Verbs								
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%**
∑	**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.

(1) 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:

(2) 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).

(3) 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:

(4) 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 is *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".

(5) 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:

(6) Studies **_show_** that 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:

(7) 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:

(8) 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:

(9) 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).

(10) **_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)

C. 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 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%.

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.

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