



HEDGES IN THE OPINION COLUMN OF THE JAKARTA POST

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Abstrak

Hedges dapat diartikan sebagai ungkapan keraguan dan ketidakyakinan seperti *might, can, could, seem, generally, act*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis hedges dan menjelaskan bagaimana fungsi hedges pada kolom opini surat kabar Jakarta Post. Penelitian ini bersifat deskriptif dan kualitatif. Data diambil dari kolom opini surat kabar Jakarta Post tanggal 13-18 Februari 2012. Data yang mengandung hedges dianalisa dengan memberi kode, diidentifikasi, dikelompokkan, dianalisa, dijelaskan dan disimpulkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa jenis hedges yang banyak digunakan adalah approximators yang sama jumlahnya dengan modal auxiliary verb. Hal tersebut menunjukkan bahwa penulis bisa menghindari pernyataan yang absolut atau klaim. Fungsi hedges yang paling banyak digunakan adalah reliability hedges. Hal tersebut mengindikasikan bahwa kepercayaan penulis pada kebenaran masalah. Alasan mengapa penulis menggunakan hedges untuk memenuhi gaya penulisan dan menunjukkan strategi kesopanan pendapat mereka

Abstract

Hedges can be defined as the expressions of doubt and uncertainty such as may, might, can, could, seem, generally, act. This study is aimed at identifying the types of hedges and explaining how hedges function in the "opinion Column" of Jakarta Post. This study is descriptive qualitative. The data were taken from "Opinion Column" of The Jakarta Post issued February, 13th -18th 2012. Data which contained hedges were analyzed by coding, identifying, classifying, analyzing, describing, and concluding. The results show that the types of hedges mostly used approximators are as many as modal auxiliary verbs. It is assumed that the authors could avoid the absolute statement or claim. The authors mostly used reliability hedges. It indicated that the authors' confidence in the truth of a proposition. The reasons why the authors used those hedges are to meet the style of writing and to show politeness strategies in their opinion

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INTRODUCTION

Language as a means of communication is essential in human interaction. We use language to communicate with others. By communication, people provide information, ideas, requests, commands, express feeling, etc. In expressing idea, people may use hedges, but people often do not realize that their statement contains hedges. The term hedging is not as popular as greeting, thanking, or leave-taking. This does not mean they hedge less often than they greet, thank or apologies. In fact, people hedge very frequently in their ordinary, everyday talk. Hedging can also be found in newspapers, magazine, books, even science textbooks and research reports, which many people think, hedge should give exact and accurate information (Nugroho, 2002: 17)

Meanwhile, Hyland (1996) reveals that most of EFL writer lacked their capabilities in using hedges to make claims. They got obstacles in conveying commitments and detachment from their propositions in academic writings. Furthermore, he states that incapability to hedge claim effectively is a hindrance for the EFL writers get in into academic atmosphere using English as the main language. Hidayati (2006) also shows that the inability of using hedges often lead the production of poorly written academic works. This might result in a potential declining trend in academic works published internationally.

According to Hyland (1998), hedging is the means 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.

Bonano was quoted by Nugroho (2002: 17), in simple words, hedging means the way people express their uncertainty about something or state something uncertain, and "hedges" are words or phrase which carries the speaker's uncertainty.

The researcher uses the theory based on Salager-Meyer classification (1997: 109-110) called Taxonomy of Hedges. He points out that hedges are mostly found in the following linguistics items; modal auxiliaries, modal lexical verbs, adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases (probability adjectives, nouns, adverbs), approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, introductory phrases, certain "if" clauses, compound hedges. Each type of the hedges will be

explained below as follow.

Modal auxiliary verbs are the most straightforward and widely used means of expressing modality in English academic writing, the most tentative ones being: may, might, can, could, would, should.

Modal lexical verbs are used to perform act such as doubting and evaluating rather than they merely describing of varying degree of illocutionary force : to seem, to appear (epistemic verbs), to believe, to assume, to suggest, to estimate, to tend, to think, to argue, to indicate, to propose, to speculate.

Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases include probability adjectives: e.g. possible, probable, un/likely, nouns: e.g. assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion, and adverbs (which could be considered as non-verbal nouns): e.g. perhaps, possibly, probably, practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently.

Approximates of degree, quantity, frequency and time can be realized through for example: approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of, and always. While introductory phrases can be realized through phrases such as: I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that, which express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement.

If clauses this is usually realized through the use of the following phrases: if true, if anything and Compound hedges are phrases made up of several hedges, the commonest forms being: A modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (e.g.: it seems reasonable/probable). Such compound hedges can be double hedges (it may suggest that: it seems likely that; it would indicate that: this probably indicates); treble hedges (it seem reasonable to assume that); quadruple hedges (it would seem somewhat unlikely that, it may appear somewhat speculative that), and so on.

The function of hedges analysis in this study refers to Hyland's in (1998: 156). They are content oriented hedges and reader oriented hedges. The content oriented hedges are divided into accuracy oriented hedges and writer oriented hedges. Meanwhile, the accuracy oriented hedges are divided into attribute hedges and reliability hedges.

The use of attribute hedges allows deviations between idealized models of nature and instances of actual behavior to be less accurately expressed. They enable writers to restructure categories, to define entities, and to conceptuali-

ze processes less exactly in order to distinguish how far results approximate to an idealized state by specifying less precisely the attributes of the phenomena described.

Reliability hedges indicate the writer's confidence in the truth of a proposition. They acknowledge subjectivity and are motivated by the writer's desire to explicitly convey an assessment of the reliability of propositional validity.

Writer-oriented hedges according to Hyland (1998) are writer-focused and aimed to protect the writer from the possible consequences of negotiability by limiting personal commitment" (Hyland, 1998). Writer oriented hedges limit the writers' commitment to statements.

Reader-oriented hedges mostly deal with the interpersonal interaction between readers and writers. Hyland (1998) argued that it is not appropriate to ignore the readers; otherwise it will display the writer as unacceptable deviant persona. Hyland considered personal attribution and reference marked by pronouns such as I, we, my, our as the main indicator of reader-oriented hedges. Through using these markers, writers 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, p.182).

METHODS

This research is descriptive qualitative because it is intended to describe types of hedges found in "Opinion Column" of the Jakarta Post. The unit of analysis of this research is every sentence found in "Opinion Column" of Jakarta Post containing hedges. The method used in collecting data is documentation one. The data were taken from "Opinion Column" of the Jakarta Post dated February 13th – 18th, 2012 which consist of 20 texts.

After collecting all the sentences containing hedges from the "opinion column" of Jakarta Post, the researcher started analyzing the data by using some steps based on Manion, Morrison and Cohen, (2007 : 470-480). Those steps are coding, identifying, and classifying.

The steps to analyze the data were based on the framework given by Salager-Meyer (1994; 1997), those are finding the hedges, classifying the types of hedges, and describing the reasons why the writers of the letters used those hedges. The writer used Hyland's hedges function (1998: 156) to evaluate the functions of hedges produced in "Opinion Column" of The Jakarta Post.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Hedges

The types of hedges analysis in this study refer to the seven types of hedges composed by Salager-Meyer (1997). Those seven categories are called strategic stereotypes or hedges taxonomy. The terminology symbolizes the sequence of those categories based on how frequent they mostly used.

The results shows that the types of hedges found in "Opinion Column" of Jakarta Post are 693. The authors used modal auxiliary verbs and approximates of degree, quantity and time with the frequency 236 (34.05%). The next considerable type of hedges found in this column is the category of modal lexical verbs, which appear 64 (9. 24%) and others share quite similar number in the column, that is 60 (8. 66 %).

The fifth type is if clause 39 (5.63%) and the adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrase is 26 (3.75%). On the other hand, the authors of "Opinion Column" of Jakarta Post seem to reluctantly use compound hedges since it appears 21 (3.03%).

There are a number of examples on types of hedges written by the authors as follows.

1. If the poverty line was set at \$2 per day as suggested by the ADB, the statistic for the number of poor here *would* further increase to reach at least 117 million, or about 50.57 percent of the population.

The use of **would** in sentence (1) does not reduce the writer commitment but softens categorical assertions and thereby avoids forcing the reader to comply with a forthright insistence of a claim.

2. When the state *seems* to be powerless against vigilantes, people will move to protect their dignity.

The use **seems** in sentence (2) denotes the writer's claim about the state. The Writer thinks that the state does not really have power against vigilantes.

3. Observing poverty through income alone is *extremely* inadequate

The writer shows in sentence (3) to indicate an extreme condition that he was very sure that poverty has already inadequate through income.

4. In fact, eradicating poverty is *more* difficult for areas that have Limited access to government's

facilities and services

The writer indicates that he does not tend to give the precise degree of difficulty for areas to government's facilities and services

5. *According to* the UN, poverty is a condition resulting from severe deprivation of basic human needs such as food, shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation, health, education and information.

The writer uses the sentence (5) to express the writer's personal doubt and direct involvement.

6. *If this continues*, it will create unpredictable progress in terms of the country's prosperity in the future

The writer gives supposition in her statement in order to show her doubt

7. Nowadays, Malaysia and Singapore are *focusing on* the Quality of papers or on the citation of the papers

In sentence (7) indicate a standpoint where the writer judges the truth of the claim. He does not give an absolute claim or statement in the proposition. If there is another idea opposing the claim, the writer protects by the existence of hedges in the statement. He states the claim by focusing on the quality of papers.

8. The child of a poor mother **will generally be more** Vulnerable to diseases and other health problems due to poverty

The sentence (8) is treble hedges which are combined modal auxiliary (will, approximate of degree, quantity (generally, more). The writer thinks that the child of a poor mother has many problems of his health.

Function of Hedges

According to the polypragmatic model of hedges developed by Hyland (1998) hedging devices in terms of the functions they may perform can be divided into content-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. Content-oriented hedges "serve to mitigate the relationship between propositional content and a non-linguistic 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" (Hyland,1998:162). Content-oriented hedges are further subdivided into accuracy-oriented hedges and writer-oriented hedges. Accuracy-oriented hedges refer to "writer's desire to express proposition with greater precision" which are further divided into attribute and reliability hedges. Attribute hedges help writers to specify more accu-

rately "how far their results approximate to an idealized state" (Hyland, 1998:164). Reliability hedges indicate the amount of writer's certainty or uncertainty in a proposition.

Writer-oriented hedges are "writer focused and aim to protect the writer from possible consequences of error by limiting personal commitment" (Hyland, 1998:170). This type of hedges is typically expressed by modal auxiliary verbs, epistemic adverbs, adjectives and nouns, epistemic lexical verbs, a gentles passives, impersonal passive, attribution to the source, use of "abstract rectors". These are by no means a comprehensive taxonomy, but the most common examples. The last functional category of hedges is reader-oriented type, which makes the readers involved on a dialogue, thus monitoring the interaction process. This type of hedges may be realized by using different pragmatic markers, such as asking questions, taking personal responsibility, addressing readers directly.

The results show that reliability hedges are the most prominent category of hedges used in the "Opinion Column" of Jakarta Post, which the frequency is 44%. The second frequency distribution of hedging devices according to their function is attribute hedges which is 32%. The third mostly used hedges function is reader-oriented hedges 14% and the last is writer-oriented hedges 10%.

The "opinion Column" of Jakarta Post mostly used hedges which function as reliability hedges. The hedges used by the writers were employed to minimize mistake upon statement in the proposition. The writers might show less absolute statement. It can open the readers' interpretation because there is a room to negotiate about the proposition or there is a change of reality. In this function, most of the writers conveyed their arguments or statements speculatively.

There are some examples the function of hedges are used by the authors of the "Opinion Column" of the Jakarta Post.

9. Extra production *may* come online as several medium-scale mining firms and mining permit holders enter the production phase.

Reliability hedges specify the actual state of knowledge. It may because a certain stance of the writer which deals with the degree of strength of the relation between observed and assumed events as presented in sentence (9). Hedge (may) in sentence (9) is used to express the writer's assessment of the certainty of the truth of proposition. The writer decreases his confidence in delivering his view about the suggestion because it

deals the readers directly.

10. *Some* islands have different poverty percentages.

The attribute hedge in sentence (10) is *some*. The writer uses some as attribute hedge which function as rounder and reduces generalization.

11. I firmly *believe* that they *can* take the initiatives on themselves.

The writer acknowledges personal responsibility for the validity of propositional content or reader involvement. Moreover, personal attribution is also employed to soften claims. The writer is very sure that they can do it.

12. What needs to be *considered* given such a transformation is that the new Terrorists grew out of vigilantism, as exemplified in the case of Ahmad Syarip, the suicide bomber of a mosque in Cirebon (IV/154)

Sentence (12) reflects the author's attempt to diminish his own role in order to be protected from consequences of being wrong. The writer used (to be considered) impersonal constructions and passive voice are some means to do that.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data sources of this research which consists of 20 texts of opinion column of the Jakarta Post which consist of 693 hedges, the frequency of the types of hedges are Modal Auxiliary Verbs (34.05%); Modal Lexical Verbs (9.24%); Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Modal Phrase (3.75%); Approximators of Degree, Frequency, Quantity, and Time (34.05%); If Clauses (5.63%) Others (8.66%), Introductory Phrases (1.59%), and Compound Hedges (3.03%). From that analysis it could be seen that Modal Auxiliary Verbs and Approximates of Degree, Quantity, Frequency and Time are the most commonly used hedges type in the data, while the most rarely used of hedges is Introductory Phrases.

The authors used approximators to minimize a mistake in stating confirmation in the proposition. They might make the readers understand and interpret the statement, especially the approximators of time. The use of approximators can anticipate possibility of negative consequen-

ces if the authors find wrong in stating information in the sentence. It deals with avoidance of exact point by limiting the personal commitment to the things he claims as his knowledge. Modal Auxiliary Verbs are also most frequently used in the data. The authors used this type to indicate uncertainty and understatement, to reflect unforceful and polite statement. The researcher assumes that the authors could avoid the absolute statement or claim. The authors rarely used Introductory Phrases which express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement.

With regards to the second research question, the results of data analysis revealed that among four pragmatic functions of hedges, namely reliability, attribute, writer-oriented, and reader-oriented functions, the authors of "opinion column" of Jakarta Post mostly used hedges as reliability hedges, 44%. It indicates the authors' confidence in the truth of a proposition. However, they rarely used writer oriented hedges (10%). It might show the authors were employed to minimize mistake upon statement in the proposition and less absolute statement. It could open the readers' interpretation because there is a room to negotiate about the proposition or there is a change of reality.

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