

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

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### 6.1. Introduction

This cross-linguistic study set out to investigate the hedging strategies employed in editorial discourse across three languages: Hindi, IE, and BrE. The primary objective was to identify, analyse, and categorise these strategies while examining the pragmatic functions they serve in shaping editorial communication. Drawing on a corpus of 300 editorials, the research utilised a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative contextual examination. This methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of how hedges operate structurally and functionally across linguistic and cultural contexts, shedding light on their role in moderating statements, managing politeness, and fostering reader engagement. By bridging structural and pragmatic analyses, this study contributes to the broader discourse on cross-linguistic and genre-specific linguistic practices.

### 6.2. Summary of Findings

To achieve the research objectives, the study analysed a corpus of 300 editorials, with 100 editorials from each language, collected within the same time period. The editorials were contextually analysed, and systematically coded for hedges. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative analysis.

#### **Types and Frequency of Hedges**

The analysis of hedging strategies revealed several important findings:

- Plausibility Shields were the most frequent type of hedging strategy across all three corpora. These hedges are used to soften statements, expressing uncertainty or

tentativeness, and to maintain politeness. This aligns with the view that hedging plays a crucial role in mitigating the impact of face-threatening acts and maintaining the writer's neutrality or detachment from contentious issues in editorials.

- Adaptors emerged as the second most prominent hedging strategy in Hindi and IE, while in BrE, they ranked third, following rounders. These hedges are typically employed to adjust or moderate a statement, reducing its absoluteness and signalling flexibility in the writer's position.
- Rounders, which involve approximation (e.g., "about," "around," "almost"), ranked second in frequency, next to plausibility shields, in BrE. However, their usage was comparatively lower in IE and Hindi (ranking third, following adaptors). Rounders contribute to hedging by reducing the precision of a statement, allowing the writer to make less direct or categorical claims.
- Attribution Shields were the least used hedging strategy across the three corpora. They typically involve attributing a statement to a source ("according to experts," "according to a report," "some said"), and their lower usage suggests that writers prefer to maintain more direct authority in their claims rather than deferring to external sources.

Additionally, the statistical test (LLR) validated our hypotheses that BrE editorials employ more hedging than IE and Hindi editorials, and that IE uses more hedging than Hindi. This suggests that hedging is more ingrained in editorial practices in English culture, especially in the context of British English, which may have more developed norms of politeness and indirectness in public discourse. The Type-to-Token Ratio (TTR) analysis further revealed that Hindi editorials exhibit identical lexical diversity with its British counterpart in their

use of hedging strategies, implying a wider range of hedging forms, while IE showed lower diversity compared to both Hindi and British English.

### **Pragmatic Functions of Hedging**

A central focus of this study was the exploration of the pragmatic functions of hedging in editorial discourse. Through an in-depth contextual analysis of 300 editorials, eight primary pragmatic functions of hedging were reached upon: maintaining politeness, expressing varying degrees of commitment to a proposition, acknowledging limitations or the irrelevance of precision, mitigating the certainty or strength of a claim, expressing uncertainty or doubt, making conditional assertions, fostering inclusivity to enhance persuasion, and evading responsibility. These functions offer valuable insights into the nuanced ways hedging is employed to navigate the complex rhetorical demands of editorial writing.

Far from being merely a tool for evasion or ambiguity, hedging emerges as a versatile rhetorical strategy. It allows editorial writers to manage the delicate balance between authority and humility, precision and flexibility, as well as directness and decorum. By softening assertions, hedging helps maintain a tone of politeness and respect, fostering an inclusive and persuasive dialogue that accommodates diverse perspectives. These functions emphasise the integral role of hedging in crafting nuanced and credible editorial discourse, shaping not only how arguments are presented but also how relationships between writers and readers are managed. This nuanced use of hedging ultimately contributes to the creation of thoughtful, deferential, and engaging communication.

### 6.3. Research Contributions

This study makes significant contributions to the fields of linguistics, and particularly in pragmatics, and media discourse analysis, particularly in the study of hedging in editorial discourse across three distinct languages: Hindi, IE, and BrE. The contributions are categorised into theoretical, methodological, and practical dimensions, each offering valuable insights and avenues for future research and application. Below is a detailed description of these contributions:

#### Theoretical Contributions

- **Development of a Structural and Formal Classification of Hedging:** A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of separate structural classification schemas for hedging in Hindi and English (Indian and British varieties). This classification highlights the distinct hedging strategies that are commonly employed across these languages. By categorising hedges into various structural forms, such as adverbs, vague quantifiers, modal auxiliaries, and others, the study has deepened our understanding of the linguistic features used to express uncertainty and mitigation in editorial discourse.
- **Refinement of the Functional Classification of Hedging:** The study also offers a refinement of the functional schema originally proposed by Prince et al. (1982) for classifying hedges. The revised schema takes into account the nuances of hedging in editorial discourse, a genre that requires a delicate balance between persuasion, objectivity, and reader engagement. The new schema categorises hedging into more granular functional types, which can be used to analyse how hedging serves specific purposes such as politeness, mitigation of uncertainty, maintaining neutrality, and dissociating the writer from controversial opinions. This theoretical extension

provides a more comprehensive model for analysing hedging in editorial contexts and, more broadly, in media discourse.

- **Insights into the Pragmatic Functions of Hedging:** The study offers significant insights into the pragmatic functions of hedging in editorial discourse. Through the analysis of over 300 editorials from three linguistic contexts (Hindi, IE, and BrE), we have extracted eight broad pragmatic functions of hedging in editorial discourse including politeness, evasion, vagueness, epistemic modality among others. These findings significantly develop our understanding of hedging in editorial discourse, specifically in the context of how language is used to manage relationships with readers, maintain objectivity, and avoid overcommitting to controversial statements.

### **Methodological Contributions**

- **Development of a Corpus for Hedging Analysis:** One of the most practical methodological contributions of this study is the development of a specialised corpus consisting of 300 editorials (100 from each language: Hindi, BrE, and IE). This corpus, specifically coded for instances of hedging, serves as a valuable resource for future research on hedging and related pragmatic phenomena. The process of coding hedges within these corpora has created a structured and consistent database that allows for detailed analysis of hedging patterns and their functions in different editorial contexts.
- **Cross-Linguistic Comparison:** The study employs a comparative approach, analysing hedging strategies across three linguistic contexts (Hindi, Indian English, and British English). This method provides valuable insights into the cross-linguistic variability of hedging strategies. By identifying both common and distinct features of hedging across these corpora, the study contributes to

the literature on contrastive pragmatics and cross-linguistic analysis of hedging. This approach lays the foundation for future studies that might investigate hedging in other linguistic varieties, or compare hedging strategies across different media genres (news articles, opinion pieces, etc.).

- **Enhanced Functional and Structural Classification for Editorial Discourse:** By refining the functional classification schema, and proposing structural framework for hedging in editorial discourse, this research offers a fine-grained model for analysing editorial discourse. This model is especially useful for examining how hedging serves specific rhetorical functions in editorials, such as mitigating strong statements or distancing the writer from controversial opinions. The use of this enhanced classification will help future studies better capture the complexities of hedging and its role in shaping editorial tone, reader engagement, and the persuasive impact of media discourse.

### **Practical Contributions**

- **Application to ESL and Hindi Language Teaching:** A major practical contribution of this research lies in its potential application to language teaching, particularly in ESL and Hindi language instruction. Hedging is an important component of pragmatic competence, and understanding its use is crucial for learners to communicate effectively in both formal and informal settings. The coded corpora developed in this study can serve as valuable resources for teaching hedging strategies, helping students grasp the subtleties of language use in different contexts. By incorporating these findings into language curricula, instructors can teach learners not only about hedging forms but also about their functional roles in discourse—such as expressing politeness,

uncertainty, and neutrality. This is particularly useful for learners aiming to master the subtleties of editorial writing or critical analysis of media texts.

- **Training LLMs:** Another practical contribution of this research is the potential for training LLMs to detect and analyse hedging in both Hindi and English editorial discourse. The corpus of 300 editorials, carefully coded for hedging instances, provides a rich data set that could be used to train AI models capable of identifying hedges in text. This could be particularly useful for developing automated tools to analyse media discourse, detect hedging strategies, and assess their role in shaping the tone and persuasiveness of editorial content. Given the increasing importance of machine learning in language processing, this corpus could help develop more sophisticated tools for linguistic analysis, making this study valuable for computational linguistics and media analysis applications.
- **Contribution to Media Linguistics and Discourse Analysis:** The research fills a significant gap in the field of Media Linguistics by offering a comprehensive account of hedging in editorial discourse, a genre that has not received sufficient attention in the context of hedging studies. It contributes to a growing body of work in discourse analysis, helping scholars understand how hedging strategies function within specific genres, particularly in the context of media communication. The findings from this research can be used to further explore how hedging shapes the way readers perceive editorial content, engage with the text, and interpret the author's intent.

## 6.4. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several implications across language teaching, media literacy, communication studies, and other fields concerned with language use, pragmatics, and media discourse. These implications underscore the significance of understanding hedging strategies in various contexts and the practical applications that arise from this understanding. Below are the key implications:

### 1. Implications for Language Teaching

The study provides valuable insights into the role of hedging in both pragmatic competence and metadiscourse strategies. Understanding how hedging functions in editorial discourse can be crucial for language learners, especially those studying ESL or Hindi. The findings from the study may have the following implications for language teaching:

- **Development of Pragmatic Competence:** Language learners often focus on grammar and vocabulary but may overlook the subtleties of pragmatic markers such as hedges. Hedging is an essential tool for learners to express politeness, uncertainty, and tentativeness—skills that are crucial in both formal and informal communication. This study can help educators incorporate hedging into their curricula, encouraging learners to use hedging strategies effectively in real-world communication by demonstrating the usage of hedges in media discourse.
- **Metadiscourse Awareness:** By understanding hedging as a form of metadiscourse, students can improve their ability to participate in nuanced conversations and write persuasive texts. Teaching hedging strategies can help learners grasp the importance of managing tone, politeness, and uncertainty in discourse. This is particularly relevant for students who aim to engage in academic writing, media communication, or other formal discourse.

- **Contextual Variability:** The study's cross-linguistic comparison of Hindi, Indian English, and BrE highlights how hedging strategies vary cross-linguistically. Language educators can use these findings to teach students about linguistic differences in communication and how to adapt their language use when engaging with speakers or writers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This understanding will help learners avoid misunderstandings and communicate more effectively across diverse settings.

## 2. Implications for Media Literacy

In an era of pervasive media consumption, developing media literacy is critical for helping readers critically engage with editorial content. This study contributes to media literacy in the following ways:

- **Critical Reading Skills:** Understanding hedging strategies equips readers with tools to critically analyse editorial content. When readers recognise hedges such as modal verbs, vague quantifiers, and attribution shields, they can better assess the degree of certainty, intent, and bias behind the statements made by editorial writers. Being aware of hedging strategies, readers can effectively identify when a writer is expressing uncertainty, softening a claim, or distancing themselves from a controversial position.
- **Identifying Bias and Intentions:** Editorial content often contains subtle persuasive elements, and hedging is one such rhetorical strategy that writers use to manage their relationship with the audience. By recognizing hedging, readers can gain insights into the writer's intentions, persuasion techniques, and possible biases. For instance, excessive hedging in a political editorial might signal a reluctance to take a firm stance, while strategic hedging can indicate a deliberate attempt to soften the

impact of a controversial claim. This awareness empowers readers to engage with content in a more critical and informed manner.

- **Promoting Media Awareness:** The study encourages the development of media literacy programs that help the general public, particularly students, recognise linguistic features like hedging that shape how information is presented in the media. Media literacy education can promote better understanding and analysis of editorial content, fostering a more discerning and informed audience.

### 3. Implications for Communication Studies

This exploration of hedging in editorial discourse also has significant implications for communication studies, especially in understanding how hedging functions in communication across diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

- **Cross-Cultural Communication:** By comparing hedging strategies in Hindi, Indian English, and British English, the study highlights important cross-cultural differences in communication styles. Hedging plays a role in managing face threats, mitigating disagreements, and maintaining politeness, but the specific ways in which these strategies are employed can vary widely across cultures. The study contributes to the field of intercultural communication by demonstrating how language use—particularly hedging—differs in managing uncertainty and politeness in editorial discourse across these linguistic contexts.
- **Impact on Editorial Communication:** The study contributes to understanding how hedging shapes editorial communication and affects the tone, persuasiveness, and authority of editorial writing. Editors and journalists can benefit from a deeper understanding of how hedging operates to balance objectivity and persuasion in their work. By recognizing the types of hedging strategies that are most effective in

different cultural contexts, communicators can improve their writing and tailor their editorial content to their target audience more effectively.

- **Language and Persuasion:** The findings from the study possess wider significance for how hedging operates within the realm of persuasion. Comprehending how hedging alleviates assertions and reduces certainty can yield insights into the mechanics of argumentation and persuasive discourse. This is especially significant in domains like as political discourse, advertising, and public relations, where hedging can affect the perception of a message's credibility, authority, or bias.

#### **4. Implications for Computational Linguistics and AI**

The corpus of 300 editorials, carefully tagged for instances of hedging, is a significant resource for applications in natural language processing (NLP) and AI. The ramifications in this domain encompass:

- **Training AI Models for Hedging Detection:** The coded corpora can be used to train LLMs and AI systems to detect hedging in editorial content across languages. Given the growing interest in developing AI-driven tools for linguistic analysis, this study's detailed corpus provides a foundation for creating more sophisticated systems capable of identifying hedges in texts. These AI tools could be used in media analysis, content moderation, or the automated detection of bias in news reporting.
- **Automated Discourse Analysis:** The development of AI-based tools to identify hedging and other metadiscursive features could enhance automated discourse analysis. Researchers and media analysts could use such tools to conduct large-scale analyses of editorial content, enabling them to track trends, assess the tone of

discourse, and understand the strategies used by writers to shape public opinion over time.

## **6.5. Limitations of the Study**

While the present study provides valuable insights into the use of hedging in editorial discourse across Hindi, IE, and BrE, several limitations must be acknowledged, which could affect the generalisability and complexity of the findings. These limitations open up avenues for future research to further explore and expand upon the current study's conclusions.

### **1. Gender of the Editorial Writers**

One significant limitation of this study is the exclusion of gender as a variable in the analysis. The gender of editorial writers may influence their use of hedging strategies, as previous studies have shown that men and women often employ different linguistic strategies in their writing. Gendered differences in language use may affect how hedging is employed, particularly in editorial contexts where persuasion, authority, and politeness are crucial. Future research could benefit from examining the role of gender in shaping hedging behaviour in editorial discourse, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how different writers may deploy hedging strategies differently.

### **2. Genres of the Editorials**

Another limitation is the lack of consideration of editorial genres. Editorials can vary significantly in terms of their tone, purpose, and audience. For example, editorials that critique government policies may employ different hedging strategies compared to

those that address social issues or international affairs. While this study focused on a broad selection of editorial texts, the variations within editorial genres—such as opinion pieces, news commentaries, or political endorsements—were not accounted for. Future research could explore whether different genres of editorial writing have distinct hedging patterns, thereby offering a more detailed understanding of how hedging functions across the spectrum of editorial discourse.

### **3. Ideologies and Political Stance of Newspapers**

The study also did not consider the ideologies or political stance of the newspapers from which the editorials were drawn. Newspapers often have distinct editorial voices shaped by their political affiliations or ideological positions (Firmstone, 2019). These ideologies could influence the types of hedging strategies employed in their editorial discourse, particularly in how certain topics are presented with varying degrees of certainty, doubt, or tentativeness. For instance, a conservative newspaper might use hedging differently compared to a progressive one, especially when discussing contentious political issues. Future studies could investigate the role of political stance in the use of hedging, exploring how editorial writers from different political backgrounds employ hedging to shape their arguments and manage reader perceptions.

### **4. Synchronic Nature of the Study**

The present study is synchronic, meaning it focuses on a snapshot of editorial discourse at a particular point in time. While this approach provides a valuable understanding of hedging in contemporary editorial writing, it does not account for changes in language use over time. Language, including the use of hedging strategies, evolves in response to cultural, political, and social shifts. A diachronic study, which examines the historical development of hedging in editorials, could provide insights into how hedging practices

have changed over time, reflecting broader societal changes or shifts in editorial practices.

## **5. Limited Corpus Size**

While the corpus used in this study, consisting of editorials from Hindi, Indian English, and BrE newspapers, was sufficient for a preliminary investigation, its size was relatively modest. A larger and more diverse corpus, including editorials from a broader range of newspapers and publications, could potentially yield more robust findings and allow for a deeper analysis of the variation in hedging strategies. Additionally, incorporating editorials from newspapers in other varieties of English or from different linguistic backgrounds could help contextualise the findings and reveal cross-linguistic or cross-cultural differences in hedging strategies.

## **6. Focus on Linguistic Aspects, Excluding Socio-Cultural Factors**

Another limitation is the study's exclusive focus on linguistic aspects of hedging, without delving deeply into the socio-cultural factors that may influence hedging strategies. The use of hedging is not only shaped by linguistic rules but also by broader social, cultural, and political contexts. For instance, the socio-political climate, the level of press freedom, and cultural norms regarding politeness and authority can all affect how hedging is deployed in editorial discourse. The study did not explore how these external factors may intersect with hedging. Future research could examine the socio-cultural influences on hedging, particularly how cultural expectations around politeness, indirectness, or deference shape editorial language in different societies.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the use of hedging in editorial discourse across Hindi, Indian English, and British English. By acknowledging

these limitations, we can outline potential areas for future research that could extend the scope of this study, including a focus on gender, ideological influences, genre-specific hedging, and a deeper exploration of the socio-cultural contexts that shape hedging strategies in editorial discourse.

## **6.6. Recommendations for Future Research**

- Examining hedging in other genres such as political interviews, parliamentary discourse, courtroom discourse, informal conversations, and literary writings in Indian languages would provide a more comprehensive understanding of hedging strategies across different communicative contexts.
- Applying Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse hedging in a discourse can be promising in uncovering insights on power dynamics, identity and agency, social norms and expectations, and other sociopolitical implications of language use.
- With the rise of advanced LLMs such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Llama, Ernie, and Grok, it is increasingly important to explore how hedging differs between human communicators and AI systems. This comparison can offer valuable insights into the pragmatic competence of both humans and AI. Investigating whether AI exhibits hedging patterns similar to or different from human language users will help us understand how these models handle uncertainty and politeness. This research could also inform the development of more sophisticated AI systems that better mimic human conversational nuances.

- **Investigating Cross-Cultural Differences:** A comparative study of editorial hedging strategies in more languages, particularly from different cultural backgrounds, would enrich our understanding of how cultural norms influence hedging.
- **Exploring Socio-Political Influences:** Future studies could investigate how political events or social movements influence hedging in editorial discourse, particularly in politically charged contexts.

## **6.7. Summary**

To sum up, the study examines the use of hedging in editorial discourse across Hindi, Indian English, and British English, identifying patterns and variations in its deployment for constructing socio-political narratives and influencing public opinion. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of language use in media discourse and offer practical insights for media practitioners, educators, and researchers concerned with the role of linguistic strategies in contemporary communication.