

Chapter 4: Hedging in Editorials: Qualitative and Quantitative Insights

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative and quantitative findings of the study, aligning with its primary objectives. The first section provides a detailed frequency analysis of hedges identified across the three corpora, highlighting their distribution and normalized frequencies per 1,000 words. Following this, the structural classification of hedges is outlined using the proposed classification schema, offering insights into the linguistic patterns of hedging across BrE, IE, and Hindi. The third section delves into the functional classification of hedges, employing the framework by Prince et al. (1982). A modified version of this schema, tailored to the specific requirements of editorial discourse, is also introduced to enhance the analytical precision of the classification. The subsequent section reports the result of the log-likelihood test to examine our research hypotheses. Finally, the chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion of the findings. The discussion integrates the interpretations of the results, contextualises them within the broader landscape of cross-linguistic studies on hedging, and compares them with recent and relevant research in the field.

4.2. Findings

After the identification and codification of the hedges in editorial discourse, the three corpora were contextually analysed to classify the various types of hedging strategies. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 exhibit the tokens and types of hedges identified across the corpora, along with their normalized frequencies (F) per 1,000 words. Reporting both raw and

normalised frequencies is a good practice while quantitatively analysing the corpus (McEnery & Hardie, 2011: p. 51)

In terms of linguistic tokens, BrE exhibits the highest frequency, followed by IE and Hindi. A similar pattern is observed for linguistic types. Thus, based on the frequency distribution of hedges across the languages, the following order emerges:

Frequency of Hedges: BrE > IE > Hindi

Table 4.1: Frequency distribution of hedge tokens across corpora

Corpus	Corpus Size (in words)	Hedge Tokens	Normalised F (Per 1000 Words) of Hedges
The Guardian (BrE)	59,262	752	12.6
Times of India (IE)	40,924	443	10.8
Dainik Jagran (Hindi)	48,828	365	7.5

Table 4.2: Frequency distribution of hedge types across corpora

Corpus	Hedge Types	Normalised F (Per 1000 words) of Linguistic Type
British English	140	2.4
Indian English	73	1.8
Hindi	70	1.4
	TOTAL: 283	

Furthermore, the TTR was also calculated for the three corpora to infer the lexical diversity of hedging across the corpora. Lexical diversity or lexical richness (Daller, van Hout & Treffers-Daller, 2003) of a text accounts for how many different words are used in a text.

This measure has been widely applied in computational analysis of corpus data to statistical measures that gauge the lexical richness of texts (Gregori-Signes & Clavel-Arroitia, 2015).

A higher TTR for a corpus indicates that the text contains a greater variety of words and exhibits a richer vocabulary, meaning the author used a wider range of different words within the text, rather than repeating the same words frequently. It can tell us how large a range of vocabulary is used in the text. Table 4.3 shows the TTR value of the three corpora. TTR can be calculated using the simple formula (by multiplying it with 100 we can get the percentage value):

$$TTR = (types \div tokens) \times 100$$

Table 4.3: TTR values of the three corpora

CORPUS	TTR	TTR in Percentage (%)
BrE	0.186	19
Hindi	0.191	19
IE	0.164	16

Looking at the TTR values, it can be inferred that BrE and Hindi shows almost identical lexical density. However, the Indian variety of English shows a relatively diminished score relative to its British counterpart and Hindi.

Most existing studies in the literature have adopted either a formal or a functional approach to classify hedges. However, our study employed a hybrid approach, integrating both formal and functional parameters to achieve a wholesome understanding of the various syntactic forms hedging strategies or hedging devices assume and the functional/pragmatic

aspects of the hedging strategies. By categorising hedges both structurally and functionally, we attempted to provide a two-dimensional analysis of hedging practices.

4.2.1. Structural Classification

For structural categorisation, we reviewed several existing classification schemas to examine the tags used to categorise hedges. These schemas predominantly rely on grammatical categories such as modal auxiliaries, epistemic verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives, and other syntactic forms. Drawing insights from these established schemas and accounting for the diversity of hedges identified in our corpora, we developed our own structural classification schemas tailored for English and Hindi editorial discourse. This proposed framework attempts to accommodate the myriad features of hedging strategies observed in the data while ensuring alignment with broader linguistic principles. It can be mentioned that we did not feel the need of proposing two different structural frameworks for the two varieties of English because largely the forms assumed by hedges in the two varieties overlap.

Table 4.4 demonstrates the proposed structural schema for English (BrE and IE) and table Y for Hindi hedges.

Table 4.4: Structural schema for English Hedges

Syntactic Categories	BrE	IE
Vague Quantifier	<i>some, many, few, several, a few</i>	<i>few, a few, some, many, little, a bit</i>
Epistemic Verbs	<i>seem, think, indicate, suggest, consider</i>	<i>seem, appear, suggest</i>
Modal Auxiliaries	<i>may, maybe, might, can, could, would</i>	<i>may, could, would, might, maybe</i>
Prepositions	<i>about, around, over</i>	<i>about, around, over, almost</i>

Adverb	<i>perhaps, apparently, presumably, partly, allegedly, partially, barely,</i>	<i>often, perhaps, largely, unlikely, seemingly, mostly, nearly, barely, reportedly, likely, probably, possibly, recently</i>
Adjective	<i>alleged, roughly, barely</i>	<i>alleged, largely, mostly, nearly, barely,</i>
Modal Noun	<i>possibility, assumption, speculation, estimate,</i>	<i>possibility, probability</i>
Comparative Phrase	<i>More than, less than, more often, far more likely, more like</i>	<i>More than, less than, more often than not</i>
Compound Hedge	<i>could perhaps, may seem, seem likely, some may consider (treble hedge), etc.</i>	<i>seems almost, would be likely, may seem, might be attempted, one might, etc.</i>

Table 4.5: Structural schema for Hindi Hedges

Structural Categories	Instances of Hindi Hedge-forms with English translation
Vague Quantifier	<i>kaī</i> “many”, <i>kucha</i> “some”, <i>lambe samaya se</i> “for a long time”, <i>muṭṭhī bhara</i> “a handful”, <i>būte dinom</i> “in the past”, <i>hāla ke samaya meṃ</i> “recently”, <i>camḍa</i> “a few”, etc.
Epistemic Verbs	<i>mānā</i> “It is believed”, <i>batāte haiṃ</i> “it is said”, <i>kahā jā rahā hai</i> “it is being said”, <i>kiyā gayā hai</i> “it has been done”, <i>lagā</i> “it seemed”, <i>dikha rahī hai</i> “it is visible”, <i>dikhāī diyā</i> “it has appeared”, etc.
Modal Auxiliaries	Polysemous linguistic form ‘ <i>saka</i> ’ for various modalities <i>sakatā</i> , <i>sakate sakem</i> , etc “may, might, could, etc.”
Adverb	<i>karība-karība</i> “almost”, <i>kathita taura para</i> “reportedly”, <i>aksara</i> “often”, etc.
Adjective	<i>adhikāmsā</i> “most”, <i>jyādātara</i> “mostly”, <i>thoḍe-bahuta</i> “somewhat”, <i>lagabhaga</i> “almost”, <i>acchī-khāsī</i> “quite”, <i>karība</i> “approximately”, <i>se jyādā</i> “more than”, <i>se kama</i> “less than”, <i>ke āsapāsa</i> “around” etc.
Approximative Quantifier	NUMBER1-NUMBER2 (e.g., 2-3, 15-20, etc.), <i>saikaRoM</i> “hundreds”, <i>hajārom</i> “thousands”, etc.

Modal Noun	<i>āśaṃkā</i> “apprehension”, <i>saṃdeha</i> “suspicion”, <i>saṃbhāvanā</i> “possibility”
Introductory Phrases	<i>saca jo bhī ho</i> “Whatever the truth is”, <i>eka taraha se</i> “in a way”, <i>āśaṃkā hai ki</i> “It is apprehended that”, <i>saṃdeha hai ki</i> “It is doubtful that”, <i>yaha samajhanā kathina hai ki</i> “It is difficult to understand that”, <i>isakī anadekhī nahīm karanī cāhie ki</i> “It should not be ignored that”, <i>aisā lagā ki</i> “It seemed that”, <i>koī bhī samajha sakatā hai ki</i> “Anyone can understand that”, etc.
Interrogative construction	<i>yaha samajhanā kathina hai ki kāmgesa netā priyaṃkā gāmdhī ko ukta prastāva se bhārata ke dūrī banāne para hairānī kyom ho rahī hai? kyā vaha isase anajāna haiṃ ki bhārata kisa taraha hamāsa sarīkhe ātaṃkī samūhom ke hamalom kā śikāra hotā rahā hai?</i> “It is difficult to understand why Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi is surprised by India's distance from the said proposal. Is he unaware of how India has been a victim of attacks by terrorist groups like Hamas?”
Negative construction	<i>kahīm aisā to nahīm ki katara ko yaha rāsa na āyā ho ki bhārata ne hamāsa kī barbara kārravāī ko ātaṃkī hamalā karāra dene meṃ dera nahīm kī?</i> “Could it be that Qatar did not like that India did not delay in declaring the barbaric action of Hamas as a terrorist attack?”

The figures (Figure 4.1, Figure 4.2, and Figure 4.3) depict the frequency distribution of various types of hedges across the three corpora based on structural/syntactic classification as discussed above.

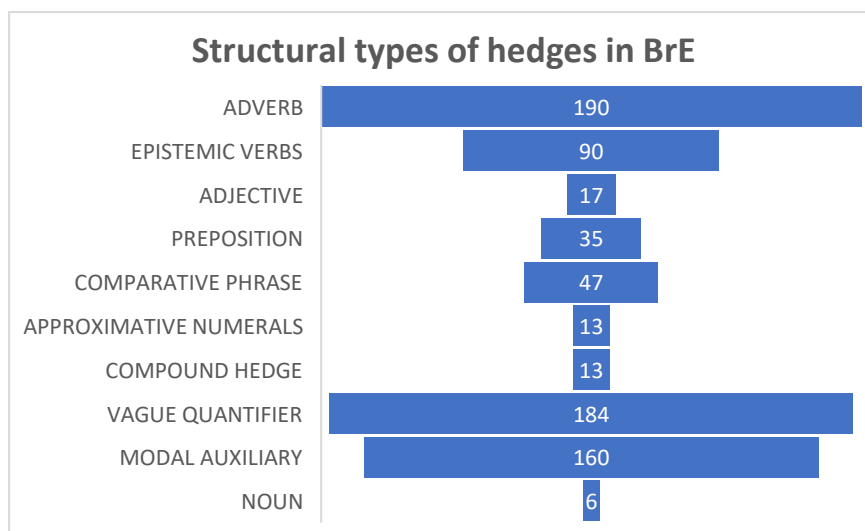


Figure 4.1: Frequency Distribution of various structural types of Hedges in BrE

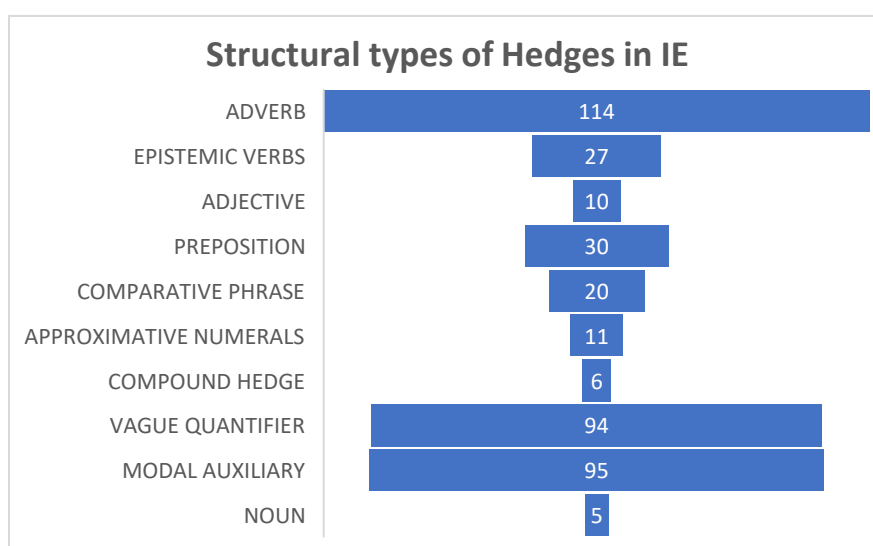


Figure 4.2: Frequency Distribution of various structural types of Hedges in IE

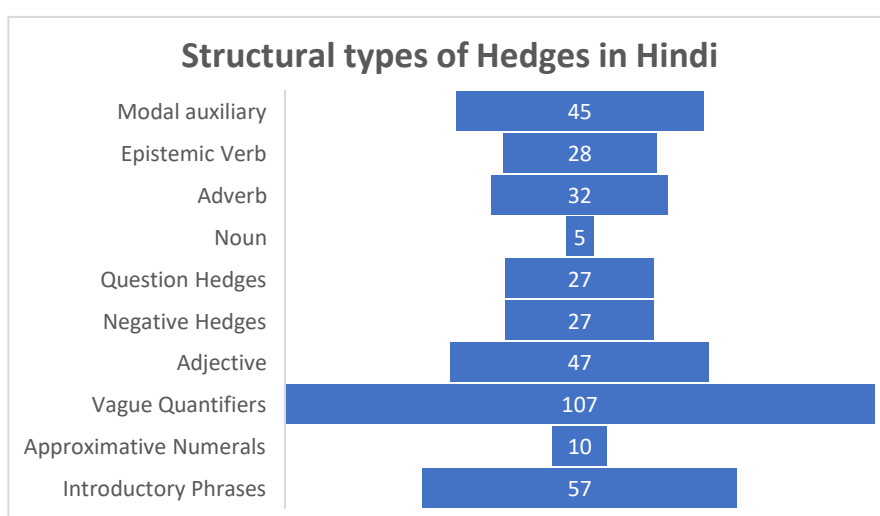


Figure 4.3: Frequency Distribution of various structural types of Hedges in Hindi

Looking at the above tables, we can observe that in English (BrE and IE), ‘adverbials’ followed by ‘Vague quantifiers’ come out to be the most frequent forms of hedging whereas, in Hindi ‘Vague quantifiers’ followed by ‘Introductory phrases,’ and ‘Adjectives’ are recurrent.

4.2.2. Functional Classification

After contextually analysing the editorial texts for hedging, we found that across the three corpora, there are basically two types of hedging: Propositional hedging and Speech act hedging, the former meant to attenuate the category membership of a semantic category, for example, ‘He is a *sort of* caretaker of the old castle.’ Whereas, the latter type is used to show the uncertain or uncommitted attitude of an interlocutor towards their claim or opinion. For example, ‘The police *might* arrest the offenders.’

4.2.3. Hedging strategies across the corpora

In the BrE corpus, plausibility shields emerged as the most frequent type of hedging strategy, followed by rounders, adaptors, and attribution shields. Figure 4.4 illustrates the frequency distribution of hedges across these four categories, as categorised by the framework of Prince et al. (1982).



Figure 4.4: Percentage Distribution of various functional types of Hedges in BrE

Similarly, in the IE (IE) corpus, plausibility shields were the most commonly occurring hedging strategy, followed by adaptors, rounders, and attribution shields. Figure 4.5 provides a detailed depiction of the frequency distribution of these categories.

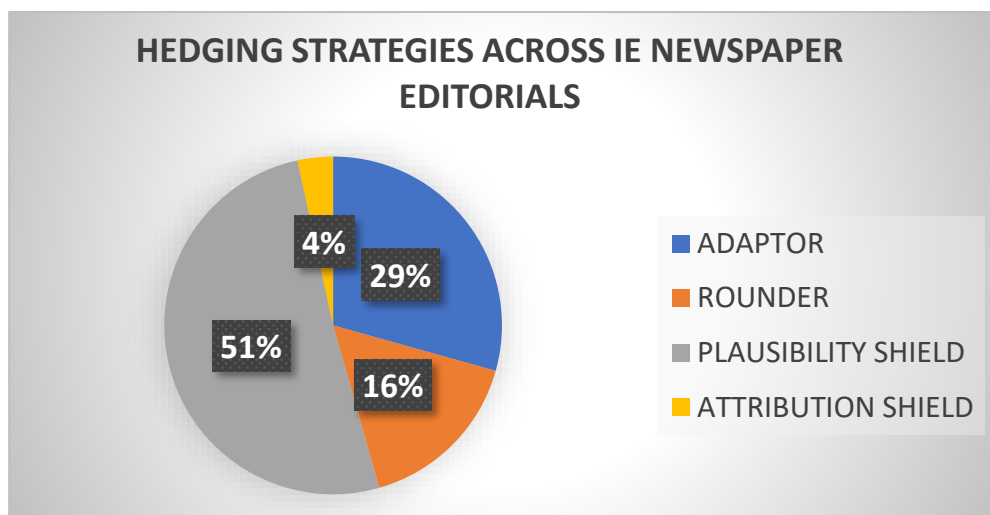


Figure 4.5: Percentage Distribution of various functional types of Hedges in IE

In the Hindi corpus, plausibility shields were again the most recurrent hedging strategy, followed by adaptors, rounders, and attribution shields. The frequency distribution of hedges in these four categories is represented in Figure 4.6, based on the framework of Prince et al. (1982).

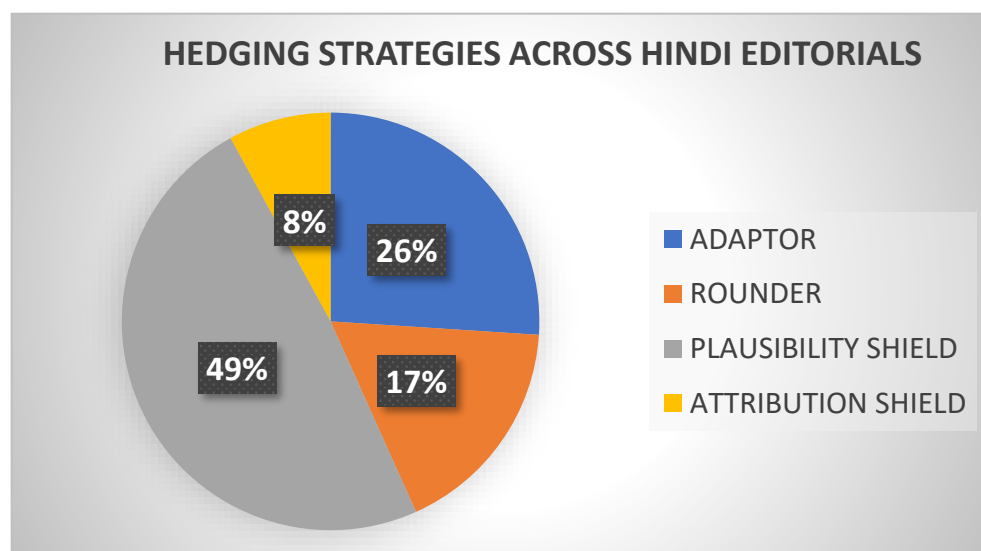


Figure 4.6: Percentage Distribution of various functional types of Hedges in Hindi

Figure 4.6 provides a consolidated representation of the frequency of different types of hedging strategies across the three corpora: Hindi, IE (IE), and BrE. The data reveals some interesting patterns in the distribution of hedging strategies, with Plausibility Shields emerging as the most frequently used type of hedge across all three corpora. This suggests that in editorial discourse, there is a strong tendency to use hedges that mitigate the perceived truthfulness or certainty of claims, particularly when addressing complex or contentious issues.

When we look at the frequency distribution of the four major hedging strategies—Plausibility Shields, Adaptors, Rounders, and Attribution Shields—across Hindi and Indian English, a notable similarity in pattern emerges. In both Hindi and IE corpora, the strategies are ranked in the following order of frequency:

1. Plausibility Shields
2. Adaptors
3. Rounders
4. Attribution Shields

This pattern indicates that both Hindi and IE editors tend to rely heavily on Plausibility Shields and Adaptors, with Adaptors, which include hedging strategies that soften or moderate statements, being used more frequently than Rounders, which primarily involve numerical or temporal approximations.

In contrast, the frequency order in the BrE corpus is slightly different, with the top four strategies appearing in the following sequence:

1. Plausibility Shields
2. Rounders
3. Adaptors
4. Attribution Shields

Here, Rounders are used more frequently than Adaptors, reflecting a greater preference in BrE for approximating numbers or concepts, possibly indicating a different approach to expressing uncertainty or tentativeness compared to Hindi and IE editorial discourse.

One of the key observations is that IE and Hindi show a higher tendency to use Adaptors (strategies that introduce hedges to soften or mitigate statements) relative to Rounders, which are less frequently employed in these corpora. This suggests that editorial discourse in these languages might prioritize strategies that signal hesitation, caution, or humility, rather than those that focus on numerical or quantitative approximation. On the other hand, BrE tends to make greater use of Rounders, which could reflect a different editorial style that emphasizes approximation and flexibility in presenting factual information.

Interestingly, across all three corpora, Attribution Shields are the least frequently employed hedging strategy. This indicates that while editors are generally cautious in their assertions and often use hedging to soften claims, they do not rely as much on distancing themselves from the sources of their information. This could be due to the greater emphasis on direct authority or personal stance in the editorial voices of these corpora, where attributing statements to unspecified or ambiguous sources is less common than employing other hedging strategies.

In conclusion, while there are some shared patterns in hedging use across Hindi, Indian English, and BrE editorial discourse, there are also notable differences, particularly in the

relative frequency of Adaptors and Rounders. Figure 4.7 depicts the consolidated distribution of hedging strategies across the three corpora for a lucid comprehension. These variations reflect differing cultural, rhetorical, and editorial preferences in how uncertainty, tentativeness, and authority are communicated in the media across these linguistic contexts.

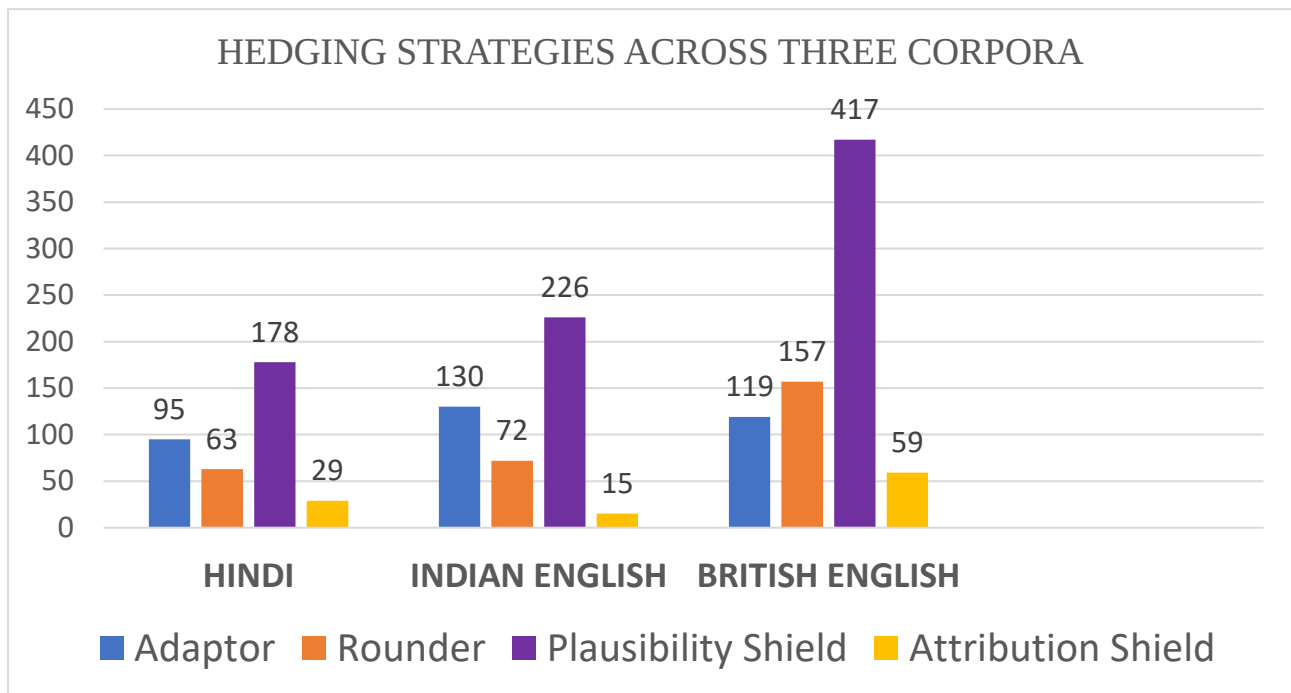


Figure 4.7: Frequency distribution of hedging strategies across Hindi and English

4.2.4. Statistical test

This section states the three hypotheses that were formulated based on prior researches and our pilot study (Satsangi and Ghosh, 2024). These hypotheses were tested using LLR test. We formulated the following hypotheses regarding the usage of hedges in editorial discourse across the three languages: Hindi, British English, and Indian English:

1. British English (BrE) editorial discourse employs more hedges than IE editorial discourse.
2. British English (BrE) editorial discourse employs more hedges than Hindi editorial discourse.

3. Indian English (IE) editorial discourse employs more hedges than Hindi editorial discourse.

We carried out log-likelihood test to ascertain the above-mentioned hypotheses. Log likelihood ratio test is used to look for the significant variation between two corpora in terms a feature (Rayson and Garside, 2000).

Log likelihood Calculation

Log likelihood is calculated by constructing a contingency table 4.6 as follows:

Table 4.6: Contingency table for the calculation of log-likelihood

	Corpus 1	Corpus 2	Total
Frequency of word	a	b	a+b
Frequency of other words	c-a	d-b	c+d-a-b
Total	c	d	c+d

The value 'c' corresponds to the number of words in corpus one, and 'd' corresponds to the number of words in corpus two (N values).

The values 'a' and 'b' are called the observed values (O), whereas we need to calculate the expected values (E) according to the following formula:

$$E_i = \frac{N_i \sum_i O_i}{\sum_i N_i}$$

In our case N1 = c, and N2 = d. So, for this word,

E1 = c*(a+b) / (c+d) and E2 = d*(a+b) / (c+d).

The calculation for the expected values takes account of the size of the two corpora, so we do not need to normalize the figures before applying the formula. We can then calculate the log-likelihood value according $-2 \ln \lambda = 2 \sum_i O_i \ln \left(\frac{O_i}{E_i} \right)$

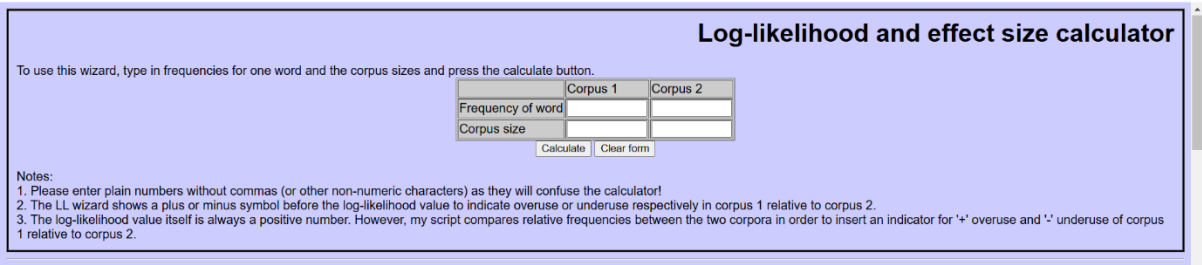
This equates to calculating log-likelihood G2 as follows: $G2 = 2 * ((a * \ln(a/E1)) + (b * \ln(b/E2)))$

Interpretation of Log likelihood Ratio

- If the log likelihood for your result is greater than 6.63, the probability of the result - i.e. the difference between the two corpora - happening by chance is less than 1%. So we can be 99% certain that the result actually means something. This is usually expressed as $p < 0.01$.
- If the log likelihood is 3.84 or more, the probability of it happening by chance is less than 5%. So, we are 95% certain of the result. This is expressed as $p < 0.05$.

LLR Calculation using log-likelihood wizard

The mathematics behind log likelihood is quite complicated, therefore we calculated the log likelihood ratio using a freely available Web-based log-likelihood wizard provided by Paul Rayson (<https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>). Figure 4.8 gives the screenshot of the web-based calculator.



Log-likelihood and effect size calculator

To use this wizard, type in frequencies for one word and the corpus sizes and press the calculate button.

	Corpus 1	Corpus 2
Frequency of word		
Corpus size		

Notes:

1. Please enter plain numbers without commas (or other non-numeric characters) as they will confuse the calculator!
2. The LL wizard shows a plus or minus symbol before the log-likelihood value to indicate overuse or underuse respectively in corpus 1 relative to corpus 2.
3. The log-likelihood value itself is always a positive number. However, my script compares relative frequencies between the two corpora in order to insert an indicator for '+' overuse and '-' underuse of corpus 1 relative to corpus 2.

Figure 4.8: Screenshot of the web-based LLR calculator

Table 4.7 provides us with the values of frequency of hedges and corpus size in each of the three corpora. One by one, we put the value for corpus pairs to calculate the LLR for the three corpus pairs (IE and Hindi; BrE and IE; BrE and Hindi).

Table 4.7: Frequency of hedges and corpus size in each of the three corpora

	IE Corpus	Hindi Corpus	BrE Corpus
Frequency of hedges	443	365	752
Corpus Size	40924	48828	59262

Figure 4.9 shows the LLR statistics after inserting the values of frequency of hedges and corpus size for the three corpus pairs. Table 4.8 demonstrates LLRs for these three pairs of corpora and their interpretation about what they signify regarding the variation in terms of hedging usage.

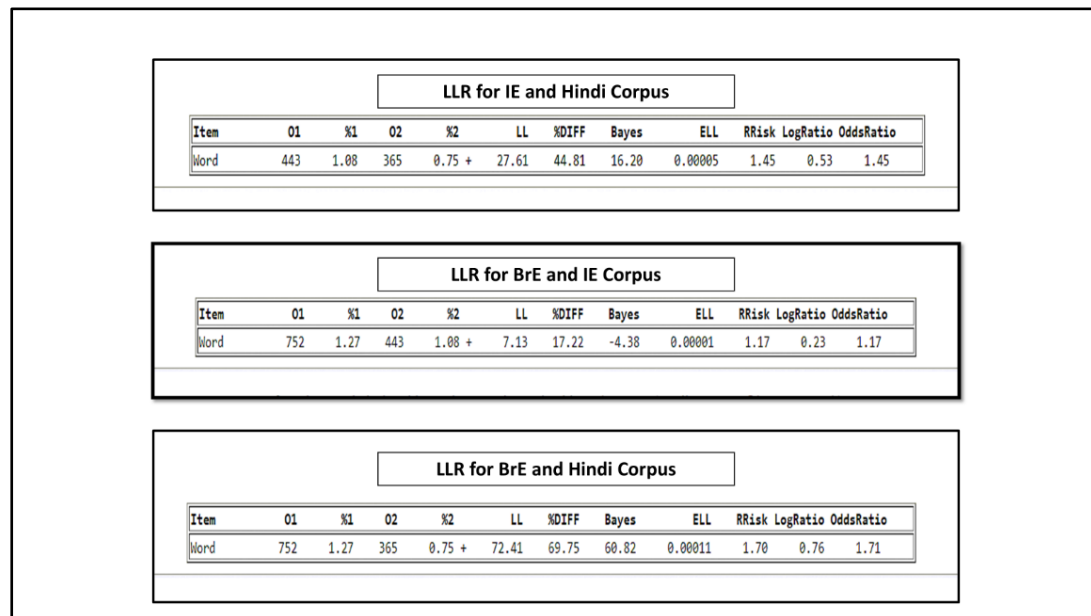


Figure 4.9: LLR results for the three corpus pairs

Table 4.8: LLR and interpretation for the three pairs of corpora

Corpus Pair	LLR	Interpretation
IE& Hindi	27.61	Significant at $p < 0.0001$ Overuse of hedges in IE
BrE and IE	7.13	Significant at $p < 0.01$ Overuse of hedges in BrE
BrE& Hindi	72.41	Significant at $p < 0.0001$ Overuse of hedges in BrE

The LLR results show that BrE editorials use more hedges than IE and Hindi editorials. Moreover, IE editorials showed more hedging than Hindi editorials. These results validate our all the three hypotheses to be true. The order of hedging in terms of frequency can be stated as:

$$\text{BrE} > \text{IE} > \text{Hindi}$$

In the following section, we will delve into a detailed examination of hedging instances from editorial discourse in Hindi and English (British English and Indian English). By analysing specific examples from these corpora, we aim to uncover the various hedging strategies employed in each linguistic and cultural context.

Through these examples, we will explore the different types of hedging strategies in action, such as Plausibility Shields, Adaptors, Rounders, and Attribution Shields, and examine how these strategies serve to mitigate the force of statements, express uncertainty, and manage interpersonal dynamics between the writer and the reader. By contextualizing these hedging strategies within the specific discourse of editorials, we will gain insight into how

editorialists navigate complex issues, present information with varying degrees of certainty, and engage readers in critical thinking.

4.2.5. Hedging in Hindi Editorials

1. Adaptors: Adaptors reduce the categorical strength of a proposition by indicating the degree or extent to which it belongs to a category. They introduce nuance and lessen the assertiveness of a claim. For example,

a. *vāstava meṃ supṛīma koṛṭa ne apāne phaisale se isa anuccheda kī bahālī kā rāstā bhī karība-karība baṃda kara diyā.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘In fact, the Supreme Court, with its decision, **almost** closed the way for the restoration of this article.’

Here, the hedge "*karība-karība*" diminishes the categorical membership of the proposition "*baṃda kara diyā*". Instead of stating definitively that the Supreme Court completely blocked the restoration of the article, the editorialist uses this adverbial to suggest that the action is complete to a certain extent (near completion) but not absolute.

This hedge tempers the claim, making it more cautious and less open to counterarguments. Editorials often aim to present balanced views. The adaptor reflects the writer’s awareness of complexities while still highlighting the central point. By softening the assertion, it invites readers to consider the nuanced reality rather than forcing a categorical judgment.

2. Rounders: Rounders approximate the information presented, particularly concerning figures, statistics, or measurements, to avoid committing to exact values.

b. *naśīle padārthoṃ ko naśṭa karane kā abhiyāna eka arśe se jāī hai aurā pichale varṣa lagabhaga 12 hajāra karoḍa rupaye kī ḍragsa naśṭa kī gayī thī.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘The campaign to destroy narcotics has been going on for a long time and last year drugs worth about Rs 12 thousand crores were destroyed.’

The hedge " *lagabhaga*" introduces approximation regarding the monetary value of destroyed drugs (12 thousand crores). Rather than providing a precise figure, the writer hedges the amount to signal that the number is close but not definitive. Editorials often deal with statistics that may lack complete accuracy. By using a rounder, the writer ensures factual flexibility. Readers are less likely to challenge approximated data as it allows for minor discrepancies. Editorials often deal with statistics that may lack complete accuracy.

3. Plausibility Shields: Plausibility shields reflect the writer's uncertainty or doubt about the truth or accuracy of a statement, often expressed through words like "*probably*," "*possibly*," "*perhaps*," etc.

c. *ho sakatā hai* *ki āne vāle dinom meṃ isā samasyā kā samādhāna ho jāe ki do hajāra ke noṭa badalane aur unheṃ jamā karane ke māmle meṃ kisa tarāha ke niyamom kā pālana honā hai, lekin itanā hī paryāpta nahī hogā.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘It is possible that in the coming days, the problem will be resolved as to what kind of rules have to be followed in the matter of exchanging and depositing Rs 2,000 notes, but this will not be enough.’

In the above example, "*ho sakatā hai*" signals uncertainty about whether a solution will emerge in the coming days for the issue of currency exchange. By expressing uncertainty, the editorial opens up room for debate and invites readers to form their own opinions. Editorials must balance opinions with journalistic integrity. Plausibility shields help avoid overly assertive claims while still discussing contentious issues.

4. Attribution Shields: Attribution shields shift responsibility for a claim to an external source, thereby distancing the writer from the information's accuracy or reliability. For example,

d. *eka anumāna ke anusāra āne vāle varṣom meṃ bhāratīya vāyu senā ko tīna sau tejasa laḍākū vimānoṃ kī āvaśyakatā hogī.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘According to an estimate, the Indian Air Force will require three hundred Tejas fighter aircraft in the coming years.’

In this sentence, the hedge "*eka anumāna ke anusāra*" is an attribution shield. It attributes the claim regarding the requirement of Indian Air Force for 300 Tejas fighter jets in coming years—to an external but vague source ("*anumāna*", meaning *an estimate*). By doing so, the writer avoids direct ownership of the information.

Attribution shields strengthen the claim's legitimacy by citing external data or sources. If the claim is challenged, the writer can point to the attributed source rather than bearing full responsibility. Citing sources may give the perception that the editorial is well-researched and data-driven.

4.2.6. Hedging in English editorials

1. Adaptors

e. BrE: The horror unfolding in Libya is a reminder of the kinds of devastation many are fleeing. But Sir Keir's pledge to "smash" the gangs seems **little more than an** attempt to sound as tough as the government. (The Guardian, 2023)

In the example from BrE, the hedge "*many*" acts as an adaptor. It diminishes the categorical strength of the statement regarding the "devastation" that people are fleeing. Rather than asserting that *all* people are fleeing due to the same devastation, the hedge "*many*" weakens

the generalisation and conveys that a significant—but undefined—portion of individuals are affected. Adaptors like "*many*" are often used to acknowledge exceptions and provide nuance. This makes the editorial's tone more cautious and prevents overgeneralisation while maintaining a critical stance. Here, the hedge allows the editorial to critique Sir Keir's political rhetoric without overstating the impact of the Libya crisis.

f. IE: India's prisons and then link it to the existing legal framework. India's jails are horribly overcrowded. They are packed with **largely** young inmates (18-30 years), **most of** whom are yet to be convicted. (Times of India, 2023)

In the second example from IE, the hedge "*largely*" functions as an adaptor that reduces the categorical strength of the proposition about inmates being young. Instead of stating *all* inmates are young, the hedge limits the generality and accounts for variability. This strategy allows the editorial to criticize prison conditions (overcrowding of young inmates) without making an absolute claim. It strengthens the editorial's credibility while maintaining balance. By using "*largely*," the writer avoids overstating the situation but still highlights the systemic failure of the prison system.

2. Rounders

g. BrE: When Myanmar's military launched a coup **almost** three years ago, snatching back the limited portion of control they had ceded to elected civilian leaders, it looked like the same old story. (The Guardian, 2023)

The hedge "*almost*" approximates the time reference (three years ago). It introduces slight uncertainty about the exact duration, reflecting that the coup occurred close to three years ago but not precisely. Rounders like "*almost*" help maintain accuracy when discussing approximate data or timelines. This hedge softens claims to account for imprecise

information. Here, it allows the writer to refer to a significant event (Myanmar coup) with an appropriate level of caution, ensuring factual integrity while advancing their argument.

h. IE: For example, only five or six out of 66 SC communities in Uttar Pradesh, and three or four among 20 SC communities in Bihar have garnered the benefit of protective discrimination policies. (Times of India, 2023)

The hedges "*five or six*" and "*three or four*" are classic examples of rounders. They approximate the figures rather than providing exact numbers. This is common when dealing with statistics that may not be precise or updated. Rounders allow editors to highlight disparities or trends while avoiding overly rigid claims about figures. By approximating numbers, the editorial underscores the inadequacy of protective policies without being misleading. It signals general trends without risking factual errors.

3. Plausibility Shields

i. BrE: **Perhaps** the prime minister is simply not interested, or **maybe** he limits continental contact for fear of upsetting hardline Brexiters. (The Guardian, 2023)

The expressions "*perhaps*" and "*maybe*" indicate uncertainty about the prime minister's motivations. The editorial refrains from asserting definitive reasons but presents plausible interpretations. Plausibility shields help editorial writers introduce speculation without committing to its truth value. This allows for a nuanced argument and reflects the complexity of political decisions. Here, the writer critiques the prime minister's behaviour cautiously while acknowledging the lack of direct evidence.

j. IE: For example, by 2027 the pension deficit will be almost \$12 billion. While this **may not seem** high compared to the total pension outgo of \$381 billion, it needs to be juxtaposed with the fact that French public debt reached record high levels of 115% of GDP last year. (Times of India, 2023)

The phrase "*may not seem high*" functions as a plausibility shield. It introduces doubt about whether the pension deficit is significant, depending on its context. This hedge reflects uncertainty and invites readers to critically evaluate the claim. It avoids imposing a singular interpretation. By using "*may not seem high*," the editorial juxtaposes two contrasting data points, encouraging readers to consider the broader economic implications.

4. Attribution Shields

k. BrE: The West Point-educated leader **reportedly** has a more diplomatic manner than his father, but there is no sign that he plans to diverge from him politically. (The Guardian, 2023)

The hedge "*reportedly*" shifts responsibility for the claim about the leader's diplomatic style to an external (but unspecified) source. Attribution shields like "*reportedly*" allow the editorial writer to present information while distancing themselves from the truth validity of the claim. This can protect the writer from accountability while keeping the discussion open to scrutiny.

l. IE: It is said that 'artificial intelligence leverages computers and machines to mimic the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the human mind.' (Times of India, 2023)

Through the use of the hedge "*It is said that*" introduces vague attribution. The source of the claim remains unknown, making the statement appear generic or widely accepted without specific validation. Vague attribution shields are often used to discuss concepts or opinions perceived as general truths. However, they can weaken the editorial's authority when overused.

4.3. Discussion

During the analysis of three corpora, each comprising 100 randomly selected editorials in British English, Indian English, and Hindi, we identified two primary functional categories of hedges: those that mitigate the propositional content of an utterance and those that attenuate the force speech act or strength of the utterance. This bifurcation corresponds closely to existing classification frameworks cited in prior research. Specifically, the notions of propositional hedging and speech act hedging, as proposed by Fraser (2010), were evident in our data. Adopting and adapting the classification schema by Prince et al. (1982), we have propositional hedges as approximators and speech act hedges as shields. Additionally, approximators are further divided into adaptors and rounders, while shields are categorised into plausibility Shields and attribution Shields.

However, our analysis prompted further refinement: Rounders have been sub-divided into approximative modifiers and approximative quantifiers, and attribution shields into specified attributors and unspecified attributors. These refinements not only align with established typologies but also offer a more nuanced perspective on the role of hedging in editorial discourse across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Scholars contend that hedges do not form a distinct grammatical category due to their inherently context-dependent nature (Clemen, 1997; Fraser, 2010), a perspective corroborated by our findings. Our analysis demonstrated that virtually any syntactic category can function as a hedge depending on the context in which it occurs. For example, in the sentence *She is a kind of friend to me*, the phrase "kind of" operates as a hedge, softening the assertion and suggesting that the person is not a typical or ideal friend. Conversely, in the sentence *There are five kinds of sentences in English*, the phrase "kinds

of" denotes classification and does not serve a hedging function. Through this example, we can understand the contextual fluidity of hedging expressions.

To gain deeper insights into the syntactic patterns underlying hedges, we examined the predominant syntactic categories used as hedges in each language, with a particular emphasis on identifying cross-linguistic similarities and differences. This involved proposing structural classification schemas customised to both English and Hindi. Our analysis revealed notable patterns: in BrE and IE, hedges are predominantly realised through modal auxiliaries (e.g., might, could), epistemic verbs (e.g., seem, suggest), adverbs (e.g., probably, possibly), vague quantifiers (e.g., some, several), adjectives (e.g., likely), and prepositions (e.g., about, around).

In contrast, Hindi displays a somewhat distinct repertoire of hedging strategies, favouring the use of introductory phrases (e.g., *aisā lagatā hai* "It seems like"), interrogative constructions (e.g., *kyā yaha sahī hai?* "Is this correct?"), negative constructions (e.g., *śāyada nahīṃ* "Perhaps not"), and comparative phrases (e.g., *jyādā yā kama* "More or less"). While BrE and IE demonstrated a high degree of overlap in syntactic types of hedges, the Hindi corpus revealed culturally and linguistically specific strategies that reflect the unique rhetorical and conversational norms of the language. Hindi retains richer use of subjunctive and presumptive moods, which allow propositions to be grammatically hedged without relying heavily on adverbials or modal auxiliaries. For example, the Hindi sentence "वह आ सकता है" (*vaha ā sakatā hai.*) — "He might come." naturally blends modal possibility (*sakatā hai*) with verb inflection, something English must construct with auxiliary verbs. In contrast, Standard British and Indian English, lacking robust subjunctive or presumptive moods (except in archaic or formal registers), typically resort to modal verbs, conditional structures, or epistemic adverbials to achieve hedging. For instance, "It is possible that he

will come." Or "He might come." Thus, English often builds hedging syntactically by layering auxiliaries and epistemic expressions rather than through mood-inflection.

This comparative structural analysis highlights both universal and language-specific dimensions of hedging, enriching our understanding of its syntactic and functional diversity. It suggests that various languages may have significantly distinct linguistic manifestations of hedging.

The log-likelihood test conducted across the three pairs of corpora (IE and BrE; BrE and Hindi; IE and Hindi) indicates that the BrE corpus exhibits a significantly higher frequency of hedging compared to both the IE and Hindi corpora, with the IE corpus showing more hedging than the Hindi corpus. The statistical significance of these results underlines a clear hierarchical distribution of hedging usage, following the pattern: BrE > IE > Hindi. These findings are consistent with patterns identified in previous research, which has demonstrated that English editorials tend to incorporate more hedging than editorial discourse in other languages, such as Persian, Azerbaijani, and Arabic (Tahririan and Shahzamani, 2009; Khanbutayeva, 2019; Alghazo et al., 2024).

The higher frequency of hedging in BrE editorial discourse might be explained by Hall's (1997) theory on language and identity which posits that language use is closely entwined to cultural identity. BrE editorials may use hedges to align with their cultural norms of humility and caution. Moreover, the prevalence of hedging in BrE editorials may be partly explained by journalistic norms that emphasize objectivity, neutrality, and factual restraint—values deeply embedded in Anglo-American reporting traditions (Tuchman, 1972). These norms often require writers to distance themselves from categorical claims, encouraging the use of hedging devices to convey tentativeness or avoid overstatement. Additionally, English as a language provides a rich grammatical resource for expressing

uncertainty and subjectivity, including modal verbs, conditional constructions, passive voice, and a wide range of epistemic markers (Clemen, 1997; Hyland, 1998). The availability of such linguistic resources most likely facilitate the frequent use of hedging in BrE editorial discourse.

In contrast, the relatively lower frequency of hedging in Hindi editorial discourse might reflect different cultural and rhetorical preferences for directness or assertiveness, as well as differences in syntactic structures and stylistic norms that influence how uncertainty or politeness is conveyed. The intermediate position of IE in the frequency of hedging suggests that it bridges elements of BrE and Hindi, reflecting its hybrid linguistic and cultural identity. However, future research could explore the relationship between hedging and cultural values of the language community such as politeness, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and collectivism to provide deeper insights into these patterns.

Furthermore, the Type-to-Token Ratio (TTR) measurements revealed that the lexical diversity of hedges is higher in BrE than in IE, while the Hindi corpus displayed a level of lexical diversity comparable to that of BrE. This suggests an intriguing dynamic that although the frequency of hedges is lower in Hindi editorials, it utilises a wide variety of lexical items for hedging, akin to English. The higher TTR in BrE reflects the language's rich lexical repertoire and its long-established tradition of nuanced discourse, particularly in formal genres like editorial writing. These linguistic strategies allow writers to convey subtle shades of meaning and adapt their tone to suit the rhetorical context, contributing to the observed lexical diversity.

The comparable lexical diversity in the Hindi corpus, despite its lower frequency of hedging, may point to the language's unique strategies for achieving variability in hedging expressions. Hindi editorial discourse, for instance, often employs rhetorical questions,

negative constructions, interrogative constructions, and comparative phrases to hedge statements. This mirrors the findings from studies on South Asian languages, which highlight their capacity for rich semantic variation within relatively constrained frequencies of use (Kachru, 1983). The ability to draw from a diverse pool of lexical and structural resources enables Hindi writers to achieve nuanced expression, even with fewer occurrences of hedging overall.

In contrast, the lower TTR in IE may be indicative of its hybrid nature as a variety of English influenced by both British norms and Indian linguistic practices. IE tends to favour a more standardised and formulaic set of hedging devices, which may limit lexical diversity in comparison to BrE or Hindi. This could reflect a preference for clarity and accessibility in editorial writing, particularly given the multilingual readership typical of Indian newspapers (Pingali, 2009).

Across the three corpora, plausibility shields emerged as the most frequent type of hedging strategy, a finding that aligns with recent studies on hedging in newspaper editorials (Hassan, 2020; Rozario, 2022). This predominance highlights the hypothesis that hedging strategies are highly genre-dependent (Prokofieva & Hirschberg, 2014; Gezegin & Bas, 2020), with editorial discourse favouring plausibility shields over other types of hedging. Editorials, as a genre, aim to persuade and inform while maintaining an impression of objectivity and fairness, making plausibility shields an optimal rhetorical tool. By using expressions such as “it seems,” “it is possible,” or “arguably,” writers can temper their assertions, reducing the risk of appearing overly dogmatic or biased.

The frequent use of plausibility shields serves several pragmatic functions. First, it enhances the writer's credibility by signalling intellectual humility and openness to alternative interpretations, which is particularly crucial in editorial writing where the

audience comprises a diverse readership. This aligns with Hyland's (1998) findings, which highlight how hedging contributes to a writer's ethos by projecting an image of a careful and considerate commentator. Second, plausibility shields fulfil a politeness function, as theorised by Brown and Levinson (1987), by softening potentially face-threatening acts. This allows writers to present their viewpoints without estranging readers who may hold contrasting perspectives, fostering a dialogic rather than adversarial tone.

Additionally, the prevalence of plausibility shields reflects a reserved and cautious attitude toward the writer's claims, consistent with the editorial genre's preference for balanced argumentation. Unlike other hedging strategies, plausibility shields directly address epistemic modality, allowing writers to acknowledge the complexity or uncertainty inherent in their claims. This is particularly significant in multilingual and multicultural contexts, as noted by Hyland (2005), where hedging strategies can mitigate cultural differences in communication styles, enhancing the accessibility and acceptability of the discourse.

Overall, the prominence of plausibility shields in the BrE, IE, and Hindi corpora highlights their critical role in shaping the persuasive and interactive dimensions of editorial discourse. This finding contributes to a deeper understanding of how hedging adapts to the demands of specific genres, offering valuable insights for future cross-linguistic and cross-genre analyses.

In both the IE and Hindi corpora, Adaptors emerged as the second most frequent hedging strategy, whereas in the BrE corpus, Rounders were identified as the second most prominent type of hedging after Plausibility Shields. This notable variation in the frequency of hedging strategies may be attributed to linguistic, cognitive, and cultural factors influencing editorial discourse in different contexts.

The prominence of Rounders in the BrE corpus can be explained by cognitive theories suggesting that rounded numbers simplify complex numerical information, thereby reducing cognitive load (Sweller, 1988). Rounded numbers are easier for readers to process, remember, and interpret, making them an effective rhetorical tool in written communication. For example, expressions such as “about 10 years” or “nearly 50%” not only make numerical claims accessible but also convey a sense of approximation, which aligns with the writer's intent to present balanced and cautious assertions. Supporting this, research on heuristics and decision-making (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) indicates that people often favour round numbers as mental shortcuts during estimation and judgment. Additionally, Williams and Power (2013) found that round numbers are perceived as more credible and authoritative, potentially explaining their frequent use in BrE editorials aiming to persuade a broad readership.

Also, as per Crystal (2003), BrE tends to favour a more relaxed approach to numerical expressions, allowing speakers to convey information without requiring strict precision. This preference aligns with a broader cultural inclination towards indirectness and politeness, which can be especially beneficial in contexts where exact figures may not be essential. Such a tendency facilitates more fluid and relatable communication, where the focus shifts from absolute accuracy to conveying a general sense of meaning.

In contrast, the higher frequency of Adaptors in the IE and Hindi corpora may reflect an underlying cultural and linguistic preferences for alternative hedging strategies that emphasise modification or adjustment of meaning. Adaptors, which include phrases such as “to some extent” or “in a way,” allow writers to subtly qualify their statements, aligning with possible rhetorical norms in Indian and Hindi editorial discourse. This difference raises intriguing questions about why rounders are less dominant in these contexts. One possible explanation could lie in differing cultural attitudes toward precision and

approximation. Research has suggested that Indian and Hindi speakers may prioritise precision in communication, reflecting cultural values that emphasise clarity and directness (Kachru, 1983). This allows speakers to express varying degrees of certainty without making absolute or definitive claims, which is a culturally embedded approach to communication.

Another potential factor could be the stylistic norms of Hindi and Indian English, which may not lend themselves as readily to the use of Rounders. Instead, these languages might rely more heavily on Adaptors to achieve nuanced expression without relying on numerical approximation. However, this disparity between BrE and the other two languages under consideration invites further investigation. Future research could explore the psycholinguistic and sociocultural reasons behind these differences, examining whether cognitive processing of numerical information varies across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Such studies could also investigate whether the medium, audience, or genre conventions influence the preference for specific hedging strategies in multilingual editorial writing.

However, rounders do not rank as the second most prevalent type of hedging strategy in Hindi and IE; instead, they hold the third position in terms of frequency. In IE and Hindi, rounders are more commonly realized as approximative quantifiers (e.g., "2-3 years," "10-15 people") rather than approximative modifiers (e.g., "around 20 people"), as observed in the BrE dataset. Scholars such as Sridhar (2020) have noted that such constructions are typical in Indian languages and are often transferred into IE due to linguistic convergence. For example,

Hindi: *‘apane deśa meṃ aise udāharaṇoṃ kī kamī nahīṃ! hatyā, duṣkarma jaise*

gaṃbhīra māmalōṃ meṃ bhī phaisale āne meṃ 10-15 varṣa kī derī honā bahuta āma ho

gayā hai.' (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

(English Translation: In our country, such examples are not rare. Even in serious cases like murder and rape, delays of 10-15 years in decisions have become very common.)

In **IE**: 'Those named in the FIR registered in Rajasthan include Haryana police informers and Rajasthan police's first arrest in the case has led to damning claims about Haryana police's role in the vigilante killing. But '**30-40**' unnamed Rajasthan cops have themselves been charged by Haryana police with serious crimes in a February 17 raid, including causing miscarriage.' (Times of India, 2023)

Attribution Shields, in contrast, were the least frequently employed hedging strategy across all three corpora. These hedges function by transferring the responsibility for the truth of a statement from the writer to an external source, thereby diffusing accountability. However, this can also undermine the writer's credibility and the perceived strength of their stance. The relatively low usage of attribution shields in the corpora—8% in BrE, 4% in IE (IE), and 8% in Hindi—highlights a notable adherence to journalistic norms that prioritize accountability and direct responsibility in editorial writing.

This sparse use of attribution shields reflects the genre's underlying ethos of trustworthiness and authority. Editorials are expected to present well-supported and substantiated claims, ensuring that the arguments they advance resonate as credible and authoritative to their readership. As Reich (2011) observes, journalistic credibility hinges on the clarity and reliability of the information presented, which is often at odds with the deflective nature of attribution shields. By limiting their reliance on external attributions, editorial writers reinforce their accountability for the claims made, strengthening their rhetorical and ethical stance.

The marginally higher percentage of attribution shields in BrE and Hindi compared to IE could stem from differing cultural or linguistic conventions. In BrE, the slightly greater use may reflect a tradition of referencing authoritative sources as part of hedging. In Hindi, the occasional use of attribution shields might align with rhetorical strategies that rely on indirectness or community-based authority structures to frame arguments. However, these instances remain limited, indicating a broader journalistic commitment to direct accountability across all three languages.

The noticeably lower frequency of attribution shields in IE may be tied to its unique sociolinguistic landscape, where editorial writing serves a multilingual and multicultural readership that values clarity and unambiguous authorial responsibility. In such contexts, the overuse of attribution shields could be perceived as evasive or unreliable, diminishing the impact of the editorial's argument.

Our study identified several notable differences compared to recent research on hedging in editorial discourse. For instance, Omo and Idegbekwe (2017) reported no occurrences of compound hedges in their cross-linguistic analysis of Nigerian and English newspaper editorials. In contrast, our findings reveal instances of compound hedging in English editorials. This disparity could be attributed to their relatively smaller sample size, whereas our study analysed a larger dataset that encompassed a wider range of lexical items functioning as hedges. Additionally, earlier studies often relied on predefined lists of hedges, which might have excluded certain forms, limiting their scope.

Interestingly, while previous research (e.g., Trajkova, 2011; Khanbutayeva, 2019; Purwantini, 2021) has highlighted modal auxiliaries as the predominant hedging form in English editorials, our analysis identified adverbs as the most frequent syntactic category of hedging in both Indian and British English. This divergence may stem from our larger

and more diverse dataset, which facilitated the identification of a broader spectrum of hedging strategies. Supporting this finding, a recent corpus-based study on Pakistani English newspaper editorials by Iqbal and Sabiri (2024), which analysed randomly selected editorials from 2016 to 2021, also reported adverbial hedges as the most frequent hedging form in editorial discourse. These variations emphasise the importance of sample size and methodological inclusivity in capturing the nuanced usage of hedging expressions.

4.4. Summary

This chapter has examined the structural and functional aspects of hedging strategies in editorial discourse across Hindi, IE, and BrE corpora. The analysis revealed distinct patterns in the use of hedging, with Hindi relying more on vague quantifiers, introductory phrases, and adjectives, while English favoured adverbs, vague quantifiers, and modal auxiliaries. Functionally, Plausibility Shields emerged as the most frequently used strategy across all corpora, reflecting their centrality in moderating certainty and managing reader-writer dynamics. Differences in secondary strategies—Adaptors in Hindi and Rounders in BrE—highlight stylistic and cultural variations in editorial practices. Statistical analysis confirmed the hierarchy in hedging frequency: BrE > IE > Hindi, aligning with most prior studies, which show that hedging is more frequent in English.

The next chapter builds on these findings by delving into the pragmatic functions of hedging in editorial discourse. A meticulous contextual analysis of 300 editorials will explore how hedging serves broader communicative purposes, such as managing politeness, expressing uncertainty, and navigating the complexities of persuasion and reader engagement. This exploration will provide a deeper understanding of how hedging reflects cultural and rhetorical preferences in Hindi, IE, and BrE.