

Chapter 2: Overview of Hedging in Literature: Patterns, Trends, and Knowledge Gaps

2.1. Introduction

This chapter offers a thorough review of the literature on the concept of hedging, beginning with its origins in Linguistics and tracing how it has been extended and developed by various scholars over time. It further provides an overview of major classification frameworks used to categorise hedges across different languages and genres. Further, the chapter provides an extensive review of the existing literature on hedging in newspaper editorials, focusing on a range of studies that have examined hedging across different languages and cultures. The studies highlighted in this chapter span various linguistic frameworks and methodological approaches, providing insight into the patterns and trends in hedging usage, and the role of hedging in media discourse. This review also identifies significant gaps in the existing body of knowledge, particularly concerning hedging in Indian languages and Indian English, and the need for further exploration in this area. Finally, the chapter situates the present study in the void apparent after the literature review.

2.2. Hedges: An Introduction

I would like to begin this section by introducing the concept of hedge/hedging through a thoughtful reflection by Skeleton:

“It is through the hedging system of a language that a speaker distinguishes between what they assert. Without hedging, the world is purely propositional, a rigid (and somewhat dull) place where things are either true or false. With hedging,

however, language becomes more flexible, and the world more nuanced.”

(Skeleton, 1998)

The basic idea of fuzzy set theory is that all things belong to a fuzzy set with a certain degree of membership. Thus, often, a proposition is not either true or false, but may be partly true (or partly false) to certain extent (Zadeh, 1965). Similarly, in human language, hedges are used to express the degree of membership of a particular semantic category or to soften the strength and certainty of a statement. These linguistic devices align with the principles of fuzzy set theory, reflecting the gradation of truth or certainty in communication.

Lakoff (1972) is often credited with introducing “hedge” in Linguistics through his seminal article "Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts," defining hedges as words that serve to make statements more or less fuzzy. Lakoff's initial concept of hedges was primarily semantic, focusing on specific linguistic expressions such as sort of, kind of, slightly, and very that inherently serve to make statements less definitive. However, it is important to recognize that Zadeh (1965) and Weinreich (1966) were key predecessors in the study of hedging. Their pioneering works “Fuzzy Set Theory,” and “Metalinguistic Operator” respectively laid the foundation for the development of Lakoff's conception of hedges.

Furthermore, fundamental contributions were also made by Rosch (1973) from the point of view of cognitive psychology. Rosch (1978, 39) explored the idea of semantic prototypes from a cognitive perspective and suggested that natural languages have built-in ways to express and handle the varying degrees to which something can belong to a category. In her opinion, hedges belong to those mechanisms. Her idea can be demonstrated well through the pictorial representation of an example sentence, “Penguin is a sort of bird.” (See figure 2.1).

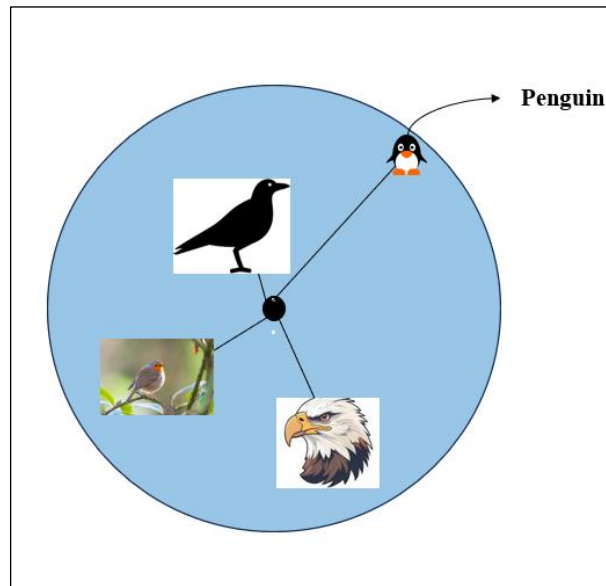


Figure 2.1: Pictorial representation of an example using the prototype theory

In the figure 2.1, the circle represents the class of birds. The centre of the circle contains the most prototypical examples of birds those species that most closely align with our mental image of what a bird is, such as robins or sparrows. As we move outward from the centre towards the periphery of the circle, the "birdness" of the species declines. In other words, the further a bird is from the centre, the less it fits the typical characteristics we associate with birds. Penguins, for example, lie closer to the periphery of the circle because, while they are indeed birds, they differ from the prototypical image of a bird in significant ways (e.g., they cannot fly). Thus, penguins are considered a less prototypical bird compared to those species at the centre. This demonstrates how the prototype theory allows for a graded, flexible understanding of categories.

In his article "Hedged Performatives", Fraser (1975) analysed modal verbs from the point of view of pragmatics, and demonstrated how certain performative verbs like apologise or promise when followed by modal auxiliaries such as must or should, results in the mitigation of the force of the speech act. For example, in sentences like I must ask you to take your seat or You should promise her your arrival, the modal verbs soften the performative commitment. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), dealing with politeness in verbal interaction viewed hedge as linguistic device to avoid

disagreement, and as a strategy of negative politeness. With these developments, a pragmatic shift occurred in the conceptualisation of hedging. It became clear that hedge was not just a static category of words but a dynamic process—hedging—where almost any syntactic form could function as a hedge, depending on the context. This shift broadened the scope of hedging to include a variety of linguistic structures, not limited to specific words or phrases.

2.2.1. Hedging and Gricean Maxims

Hedging is a way for speakers to navigate the tension between being cooperative (following Grice's maxims) and managing uncertainty, ambiguity, or politeness in conversation. By hedging, speakers can reduce the strength of their assertions, acknowledging possible limitations or doubts, and in doing so, maintain the conversational implicature of the message while also remaining politically sensitive or pragmatically cautious. Here is how hedging can be related to Gricean maxims (1975):

1. Maxim of Quantity (Providing the right amount of information)

Hedging can be a way to avoid over-committing to a statement when the speaker is unsure of the facts or doesn't want to over-inform. This is particularly important when providing uncertain or imprecise information.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** The market opens at 9 AM.
- **With hedging:** I think the market opens around 3 PM.

In this case, the speaker uses "I think" and "around" to hedge the statement, signalling uncertainty and reducing the risk of violating the maxim of quantity by potentially giving inaccurate or overly definite information. By hedging, the speaker does not fully commit to the statement, aligning with the idea of providing just enough information without over-asserting.

2. Maxim of Quality (Do not provide false information)

Hedging helps speakers avoid violating the maxim of quality, especially when they are unsure of the truth of a statement. Hedging allows speakers to express uncertainty, thereby preventing the unintended implication that they are knowingly providing false or unsupported information.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** Meera is definitely going to the party.
- **With hedging:** Meera might be going to the party.

In the hedged version, the speaker avoids overcommitting by using "might," signalling that they are not entirely sure about John's plans. This use of hedging maintains the maxim of quality, ensuring that the speaker doesn't state something that could later be proven false, or which they can't fully support with evidence.

3. Maxim of Relation (Be relevant)

Hedging can also serve to make a statement more relevant by accommodating context-specific concerns or uncertainties. For instance, when a speaker is unsure whether a piece of information is directly relevant or might be seen as too forward, hedging can allow them to introduce it in a less direct or more cautious way.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** You should definitely meet him.
- **With hedging:** You might want to meet him, I guess.

In the hedged example, the speaker softens their suggestion, perhaps because they are unsure about the listener's preference or the appropriateness of the recommendation in the current context. The use of "might want to" keeps the statement relevant but leaves room for the listener to interpret it more flexibly.

4. Maxim of Manner (Avoid ambiguity, be clear)

Hedging can also be a way to introduce clarity in situations where a statement might be vague or open to multiple interpretations. By hedging, speakers can acknowledge potential ambiguity in a situation, ensuring that they are not misunderstood.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** He will definitely be at the event.
- **With hedging:** I believe he will probably be at the event.

The use of "I believe" and "probably" helps clarify that the speaker is not asserting the statement with full certainty, thus avoiding possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The hedging here addresses any potential ambiguity and helps the speaker remain within the bounds of the maxim of manner.

It should also be mentioned owing to the unruly nature of hedges that they do not necessarily always adhere to the Gricean maxims, however, at times, it flouts them as well. For instance, when asked, "Do you know if there is any food in the fridge?" the responder replies, "Yes, I do know." In this case, the responder seems to flout the maxim of quantity by providing a response that, although precise, is intentionally non-committal.

2.2.2. Hedging and Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence, defined by Bachman (1990) as the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in different contexts, is a core aspect of communicative competence. It involves understanding and navigating the subtle interplay between linguistic choices and social norms, ensuring that messages are both contextually relevant and socially acceptable. A deficiency in pragmatic ability may significantly impede a second-language speaker in the area of hedging. Within this framework, the use of hedging—linguistic devices employed to express uncertainty, politeness,

or nuance—stands out as a critical indicator of pragmatic competence. Hedges such as "perhaps," "I think," or "sort of" allow speakers to adjust the force of their statements, soften potential impositions, or signal openness to alternative views, thereby facilitating cooperative and effective communication. When non-native speakers inappropriately hedge, they may be regarded as unfriendly, offensive, arrogant, or merely unsuitable. Failure to identify a hedged statement may result in a misunderstanding of a native speaker's intent (Fraser, 2010).

For instance, a speaker saying, "It might be better to consider another approach," demonstrates an understanding of how hedging softens the suggestion, making it less confrontational and more palatable. In contrast, the absence or misuse of hedges can lead to miscommunication or social friction. For example, a direct statement like "This is wrong" may come across as blunt or offensive, potentially damaging interpersonal relationships, whereas a hedged version like "This might not be entirely accurate" mitigates the harshness and invites further discussion. Similarly, overusing hedges can undermine clarity and authority, as seen when a speaker excessively qualifies their ideas, leaving the listener confused about their stance. Thus, the ability to employ hedging effectively is not merely a linguistic skill but a marker of one's broader pragmatic competence, as it reflects the speaker's sensitivity to context, intent, and social dynamics.

2.2.3. Defining Hedges/Hedging

Lakoff drawing upon the notions of fuzzy set theory (Zadeh, 1965), and metalinguistic operators (Weinrich, 1966), introduced hedges as words whose task is making semantic categories more or less fuzzy. Brown and Levinson define a hedge as a "word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership in a set"; it says that the membership is "partial, or true only in certain respects" (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 145). This definition aligns with the prototype theory by Rosch (1973) which maintains that some members of a category are more central than others, and that the characteristics used to determine membership are graded. Hyland describes hedging as absence of commitment to

the truth value of a proposition or a tendency to avoid expressing that commitment categorically (Hyland, 1998). Later, hedge has also been seen as an interactional metadiscourse marker by Hyland (2005). Figure 2.2 exhibits the framework for the classification of metadiscourse markers by Hyland (2005).

Category	Function	Example
Interactive resources	Help to guide the reader through the text	
Transitions	Express relations between main clauses	In addition, but, thus, and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally, to conclude, my purpose is
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above, see Fig, in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	According to X, Z states
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meanings	Namely, e.g., such as, in other words
Interactional resources	Involve the reader in the text	
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might, perhaps, possible, about
Boosters	Emphasize certainty and close dialogue	in fact, definitely, it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately, I agree, surprisingly
Engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider, note, you can see that
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author (s)	I, we, my, me, our

Figure 2.2: Hyland's (2005) framework for metadiscourse markers

According to Fraser (2010, 22), hedging is a rhetorical strategy, by which a speaker, using a linguistic device, can signal a lack of commitment to either the full semantic membership of an expression (Propositional hedging) or the full commitment to the force of the speech act being conveyed (Speech act hedging). Yang (2013) says that hedges are those expressions that make the meaning of speeches uncertain and doubtful. In our present study we have taken into consideration the latest conception of hedging by Kaltenböck et al. (2010, p. 1) who defined hedging as 'a discourse strategy that reduces the force or truth of an utterance and thus reduces the risk a speaker runs when uttering a strong or firm assertion or other speech act'.

2.2.4. Hedging and other discourse effects

Hedging plays a crucial role in managing other discourse effects, such as vagueness, politeness, evasion, and mitigation. Figure 2.3 below depicts the other discourse effects related to hedging.

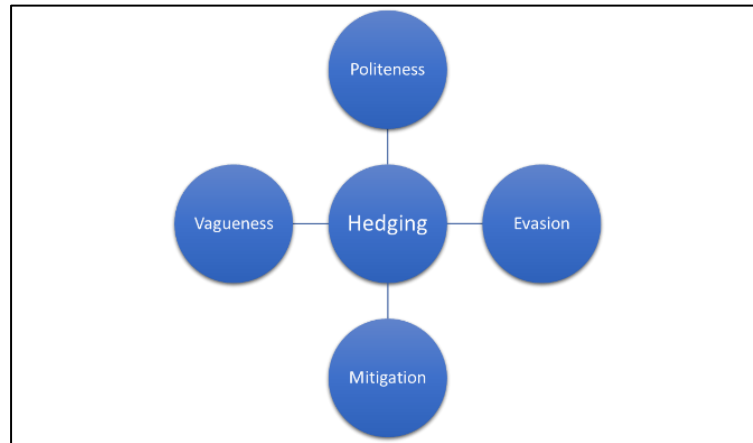


Figure 2.3: Hedging and other related discourse effects

One of the most common ways hedging introduces vagueness is by approximating numbers, times, quantities, or even statements about events. Words like "around," "about," "roughly," or "somewhat" make the information less specific and leave room for interpretation, thus creating vagueness.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** The project will take 3 weeks to complete.
- **With hedging:** The project will take *around* 3 weeks to complete.

In the hedged version, "around" introduces vagueness because it suggests that the completion time is not fixed—it could be a little more or a little less than 3 weeks. The speaker does not commit to an exact timeline, thus introducing uncertainty and vagueness.

Hedging often operates in parallel with politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where speakers mitigate their statements to avoid face-threatening acts. In these cases, hedging can also relate to how speakers soften the impact of their statements to protect social relationships.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** You are wrong.
- **With hedging:** I am not sure, but I think there is a mistake here.

In this case, the speaker hedges their statement to soften the potential face threat (accusing someone of being wrong) and to maintain politeness. Hedging can also be used to avoid giving a direct answer to a question, particularly when the speaker wants to avoid a sensitive or uncomfortable topic.

Example:

- **Without hedging:** Are you planning to attend the meeting tomorrow?
- **With hedging (evasion):** Well, I think I might go. It depends on how things go tomorrow.

The hedging in the second response ("I think," "might," "depends") avoids giving a straightforward "yes" or "no" answer. The speaker is evading the question, leaving the listener uncertain about their plans. This could be done for various reasons, such as not wanting to commit to attending or avoiding a confrontation if they decide not to go.

Additionally, Hedging is a form of mitigation because it weakens or softens the intensity of a statement. This is particularly useful in social interactions where speakers need to be tactful, avoid offending others, or maintain positive relationships. It can mitigate the force of an opinion or assertion by suggesting that the speaker's statement is just one possibility among others, rather than an absolute truth. This is particularly important when expressing opinions in sensitive or uncertain situations.

Example:

- **Without hedging (strong opinion):** This policy is a mistake.
- **With hedging (mitigation):** I think this policy might be a mistake.

In the hedged version, "I think" and "might" reduce the strength of the opinion. The speaker is not presenting the policy as an undeniable error but merely offering a suggestion or personal viewpoint. This makes the statement less forceful and less likely to be perceived as rude or confrontational.

Thus, through its subtle modulation of meaning, hedging shapes the overall tone and dynamics of discourse, fostering nuance, diplomacy, and flexibility in communication.

The next section deals with the several attempts towards the classification of hedges on various parameters. The section reviews the widely employed classification schemas across the studies to understand their nature and motivation.

2.3. Classification schemas for hedges: A review

Classification of linguistic hedges is fundamental to the analysis of hedging strategies across languages and contexts. It can help identify the various types of hedging strategies and further frequency distribution can inform us of the dominant type of strategies being employed in a discourse. These findings can facilitate comparative and contrastive enquiry cross-linguistically and across various genres which can develop a deeper understanding of how hedging functions in various contexts. By categorising hedges, scholars can better explore their role in communication, such as managing uncertainty, politeness, and mitigating face-threatening acts.

This section presents and examines some of the most widely employed taxonomies in hedging research, highlighting their theoretical foundations, and the nature/genre of empirical data on which they are built. By exploring these categorisation schemes, we gain insight into the diverse ways linguistic hedges are interpreted and analysed, providing a solid foundation for selecting or adapting an appropriate framework for our study.

In the 1980s, there was a significant effort to sub-categorise the class of hedges, based on certain class membership criteria. The following list reflects the range of proposals.

adaptors, agent avoiders, approximators, attenuators, attribution shields, bushes, committers, compromisers, consultative devices, deintensifiers, diffusers, diminishers, down-toners, forewarners, indicator of degrees of reliability, minimizers, mitigators, plausibility

shields, play-downs, politeness markers, scope-staters, understaters, validity markers, vocal hesitators, weakeners, etc (Fraser, 2010).

After the notion of hedge was introduced, linguists and scholars working on hedge/hedging have been proposing classification schemas for hedges to understand its nuances. There are various taxonomies for the classification of hedges in the literature developed using datasets/corpus from different domains: Medical Discourse, Political Discourse, Academic Discourse, etc. Some of the frequently employed taxonomies are briefly stated below in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: An overview of various classification schemas for hedges

Author(s)	OVERVIEW OF THE SCHEMA
Prince et al. (1982)	- Based on English oral medical discourse (Physicians' interaction). - functional binary classification of Hedge: Approximators and Shields - Approximators: Adaptors and Rounders - Shields: Plausibility Shields and Attribution Shields
Hübler (1983)	Hedges: Understatements (Modify the propositional content) and Hedges (Speaker's attitude towards his/her utterance)
Salager-Meyer (1994)	- Based on written medical English discourse - Formal-functional classification of hedges into five categories: Shields, Approximators, Expressions of author's personal doubt and direct involvement, emotionally charged intensifiers, and Compound hedges.
Ken Hyland (1996, 1998)	- Based on academic writing discourse. - Functional categorisation of Hedge: Content oriented and Reader oriented - Content oriented: Accuracy oriented and Writer oriented - Accuracy oriented: Attribute and Reliability
Crompton (1997)	- Data: Academic Discourse - Based on the form/structure of the hedges

	• Hedges: Epistemic Copulas, Epistemic Modals, Adjectives expressing probability, Adverbs expressing probability, Non-factive verb phrase (VP) structure (I/We + Non-factive VP & Impersonal subject + Non-factive VP), and Impersonal subject + non-factive verb + NP
Namsaraev (1997)	• 9 types of lexical hedges: • Modal verbs (will, must, might, can, should, could, would, may), lexical verbs (believe, assume, suggest, estimate, think, argue, seem, propose, suppose), • Probability nouns (assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion), • Probability adjectives (possible, likely, unlikely, clear, definite, certain, probable), • Probability adverbs (practically, presumably, clearly, probably, possibly, perhaps, definitely, certainly, apparently, completely), Adverbs of frequency (often, occasionally, generally, usually, sometimes, normally, frequently, always, rarely, never, seldom), • If clause (if true, if anything) • Compound hedges (seems reasonable, looks probable, may be suggested) • Fillers (you know, you see, by the way, sort of, well, hmm, uhm, uhh, uh..huh, all I know, I mean, yeah, like).
Caffi (1999)	• Hedges: Bushes, Hedges, and Shields • Bushes (operate on the propositional content by making referring terms or predicates less precise), • Hedges (speaker commitment and indication of illocutionary force.) & • Shields (comparable to Prince et al.'s (1982) attribution shields).
Varttala (2001)	• Hedges were divided into five main categories: modal auxiliaries, full verbs, adverbs, adjectives, nouns and an additional category classified under "other hedges" which includes such devices and strategies as "if clauses" and references to "limitations".
Heng and Tan (2002)	• Builds upon the Salager-Meyer's (1995) Theory • Hedges: Adverbials, Epistemic Verbs, Cognition Verbs, Modal Verbs, Hypothetical Construction (if-clauses + adjectives, adverbs, nouns expressing modality) & Anticipatory It-clause construction

Diewald (2006)	• Hedge: ‘charakterisierend’ & ‘perspektivierend’ • ‘charakterisierend’ (‘characterizing’): relates to the referential accuracy of an expression and is thus reminiscent of Prince et al.’s (1982) approximators & • ‘perspektivierend’ (‘perspectivizing’): assesses the validity, factuality or appropriateness of an utterance, thus reflecting Prince et al.’s (1982) shields.
----------------	--

We reviewed the primary classification schemas used in hedging studies by various scholars. These schemas can be broadly categorised into three types: Formal/Structural, Functional, and Formal-Functional. Formal categorisation focuses on the syntactic or grammatical roles of hedges, while Functional categorisation examines the semantic or pragmatic functions of hedges in context. The Formal-Functional category combines both approaches, incorporating elements of both functional and formal classification. For example, the schemas by Prince et al. (1982) and Hyland (1994, 1996) are functional, while Salager-Meyer's (1994) schema is formal-functional. In contrast, the categorisation by Heng and Tan (2002) is primarily formal.

Most of the widely employed functional schemas assume that there are basically two types of hedging – one which attenuates the propositional content, and the another which diminishes the force of speech act or the commitment towards the proposition. In case of functional classifications, the scholars have categorised the hedges according to the syntactic classes they lie in. Moreover, most of the schemas have been developed using the English corpus, and therefore we need to test how far the schemas are suitable for Indian languages.

2.4. Hedging across Genres and Languages

Hedging became a significant area of interest in linguistics following its formalization by Lakoff (1972). Recognized for their role in softening assertiveness, hedges are used across various types of discourse, including everyday conversations, medical discussions, and legal language. Over the past few decades, researchers have focused on hedges for their ability to lessen commitment and facilitate the negotiation of meanings between the reader and the writer (Yang, 2013). Several studies have explored the use of English hedges by various L1 groups in academic writing—spanning student papers, dissertations, and journal articles (Almakrob, 2020; Gomaa, 2019; Thuy, 2018; Smirnova & Strinyuk, 2020; Takimoto, 2015)—while also examining how authors strategically deploy hedging to present claims cautiously and politely, with foundational contributions from scholars such as Salager-Meyer (1994), Crompton (1997), and Hyland (1998). The use of hedging in political discourse has also been a focus, where scholars such as Fraser (2010) and Taweel et al. (2011) analysed how political figures soften or mitigate their statements to manage audience perception and retain flexibility. Additionally, research on hedging in media discourse, including studies by Khanbutayeva (2019) and Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019), has highlighted how media language can be crafted to subtly influence or persuade readers. Hedging in courtroom settings has also been scrutinised to understand how legal professionals manage ambiguity and avoid commitment, as seen in the works of Ponterotto (2014) and Vass (2017). Finally, studies on informal conversations, like those by Islam et al. (2020) and Johansen (2020), reveal how everyday speakers use hedging to maintain politeness, reduce confrontation, and express uncertainty in casual interactions. Hedging has been examined as a pragmatic function of specific expressions, including pragmatic markers (Jucker and Ziv, 1998; Andersen, 2001; Hasund, 2003), and as a component of related phenomena such as vague language (Channell, 1994; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge,

2003; Overstreet, 2011), modality (Holmes, 1982; Coates, 1987; Farr and O’Keeffe, 2002), and mitigation (Fraser, 1980; Caffi, 1999).

Collectively, these studies illustrate the multifaceted nature of hedging and its significance across a wide range of linguistic contexts. Hedging is recognized as a critical strategy in communication, serving not only to soften statements and express uncertainty but also to navigate the complexities of social interaction and persuasion. However, after reviewing a broad array of scholarly works on hedging across different genres, we identify a notable gap in the research specifically focused on media discourse.

In particular, media discourse, which plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing societal perspectives, has not been thoroughly explored in terms of hedging usage. As a key metadiscourse marker, hedging is frequently employed to manage the persuasiveness of messages, allowing writers or speakers to present information in a way that maintains credibility while subtly guiding the audience’s perception. Given its role in mitigating assertiveness, hedging holds a central position among other stance markers—such as boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions—in media discourse. These features are strategically used to craft persuasive narratives, manage reader reactions, and foster a sense of objectivity or balanced reporting. Thus, the importance of hedging in media discourse warrants further investigation to better understand its pragmatic functions and impact on communication strategies.

2.5. Hedging in Newspaper Editorials: A literature review

Newspaper editorials hold a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing readers’ perceptions of key socio-political issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Firmstone, 2019). Editorial writers are expected to present an objective stance that is free from personal biases

and to avoid overstating their views (Aldisert, 2009). They should express their perspectives in a way that minimizes any potential threat to the face of their audience, often employing metadiscourse markers such as hedges. Hedging serves as a crucial pragmatic strategy, allowing writers to convey their stance cautiously, reservedly, and with nuance.

However, there is a dearth of substantial studies on hedging in newspaper editorials, yet there are a few recent scholarly works which were found after carrying out keyword search on scholarly database like Google Scholar. The following Keywords were used to search for related papers:

- Hedges AND Newspaper Editorials
- Hedging Strategies in Newspaper Editorials
- Hedging AND Media Discourse
- Hedging in Newspaper Editorials
- Hedging AND Pragmatic Competence
- Pragmatic functions of Hedges in Editorials

Upon the keyword search we found precisely fourteen research articles closely relevant to our enquiry. The scholarly works were critically reviewed to look for common trends and the nature of their works. Table 2.2 below enlists the scholarly works found after the keyword search, and further reviewed to understand the current trends in the domain of “hedging in editorial discourse,” and to identify the research gaps. We have taken into account the scholarly works (journal articles) from 2008 to 2024.

Table 2.2: A list of relevant scholarly works for the literature survey

S.N.	Author and Year	Title	Journal
1.	Buitkienė (2008)	Hedging in Newspaper Discourse	Žmogus Ir Žodis
2.	Tahririan and Shahzamani (2009)	Hedging in English and Persian Editorials: A Contrastive Study	Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (Ijal)
3.	Trajkova (2011)	Toning down statements in newspaper editorials	Zbornik Za Jezike I Književnosti Filozofskog Fakulteta U Novom Sadu
4.	Kuhia and Mojood (2014)	Metadiscourse in Newspaper Genre: A Cross-linguistic Study of English and Persian Editorials	Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences
5.	Nugroho (2014)	Hedging in News Stories and Editorials in The Jakarta Post and The Washington Times	Journal of English Language And Culture
6.	Sedaghat and Amirabadi (2015)	Cross cultural analysis of hedges in Persian and English editorial columns.	International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World
7.	Omo and Idegbekwe (2017)	Pragmatic Hedges in Editorials: A Focus on Vanguard, Guardian and Sun Newspaper Editorials in 2017	Journal Of Translation and Language Studies
8.	Siddiqui et al. (2018)	Hedges As Metadiscourse In Pakistani English Newspaper Editorials: A Corpus-based Study	International Journal of Development Research

9.	Khanbutayeva (2019)	Hedging in Newspaper Editorials in the English and Azerbaijan Languages	International Journal of English Linguistics
10.	Hassan (2020)	A Pragmatic Study of Hedges in American Political Editorials	International Journal of Research in Social Sciences And Humanities
11.	Purwantini (2021)	The Use of Hedges in Editorials in the Jakarta Post	The Journal of Educational Development
12.	Rozario (2022)	Types of Hedging Devices Used in the Editorials of English Dailies of Bangladesh	Critical Insights
13.	Iqbal and Sabiri (2024)	A Corpus-Based Study of Adverbial Hedges in Pakistani English Newspaper Editorials	VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences
14.	Alghazo et al., (2024)	The construction of stance in English and Arabic newspaper editorials: a case study	Humanities And Social Sciences Communications

2.5.1. Inclusion Criteria

The need for inclusion or exclusion criteria in selecting literature for a literature review is crucial for several reasons as they help ensure that only the most relevant and significant studies are included, maintaining the review's focus on addressing the research questions and objectives effectively (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). By setting clear boundaries on what is included, the review process becomes consistent, reducing bias and making it easier to justify the choices made when curating sources. Inclusion criteria ensure that high-quality, empirical, or well-substantiated research is used, enhancing

the credibility of the review. With the vast amount of research available, inclusion and exclusion criteria help manage the scope of the review, making it feasible to conduct a thorough analysis within the given time and resource constraints. For studies that analyse data (like hedging in different discourse contexts), criteria ensure that the selected studies can be meaningfully compared or synthesized, which is particularly important for cross-linguistic research. These criteria establish a transparent and structured approach, which readers can understand and replicate if necessary.

We considered the following inclusion criteria:

- Studies published in the last 15-20 years to capture current trends and methods.
- Research focusing on hedging in media discourse, specifically newspaper editorials.
- Empirical or corpus-based studies to align with our study's nature.
- Cross-linguistic studies relevant to understanding hedging in British English, Indian English, and Hindi.

This section reviews those studies on hedging in newspaper editorials, highlighting their contributions to our understanding of how language can subtly influence and shape public discourse. Hedging, defined as the use of language to express uncertainty or mitigate the force of a statement, has been studied in the context of newspaper editorials. A recurring theme across the studies is that editorials, as a genre of media discourse, tend to employ more hedging than news reports. This trend was probably first highlighted by Buitkienė (2008), who found that newspaper editorials exhibit a higher frequency of hedging than news stories. This observation has been corroborated by several subsequent studies, including Nugroho (2014), who found hedging to be more prevalent in editorials than in news stories in both Indonesian English and American English newspapers.

The use of hedging in editorials is often linked to the genre's persuasive nature. Editorial writers, aiming to persuade and influence public opinion, use hedging to soften claims,

introduce nuance, and engage the reader's critical thinking. As Purwantini (2021) suggests, the frequent use of modal auxiliaries, a common type of hedge, serves as a strategy to encourage readers to reflect critically on the arguments presented. Similarly, Hasan (2020) found that content-oriented hedges are the most frequent type of hedging in political editorials, supporting the view that hedging is crucial in shaping the persuasive nature of editorials.

A significant body of research has examined hedging across different languages, revealing both similarities and differences in its use. Many studies have found that English newspaper editorials tend to use more hedging than their counterparts in other languages. For instance, Tahririan and Shahzamani (2009) conducted a contrastive study between English and Persian editorials, finding that English editorials use more hedging than Persian ones. This trend is also evident in the work of Trajkova (2011), who compared Macedonian and American English newspaper editorials and found a higher frequency of hedging in American English.

Cultural and linguistic differences have been found to play a significant role in shaping hedging practices. In their study of English and Persian editorials, Kuhia and Mojood (2014) emphasised that genre conventions, cultural factors, and linguistic backgrounds influence the use of metadiscourse markers, including hedges. Similarly, Sedaghat et al. (2015) found that English political editorials used more hedging than Persian political editorials, with Persian economic editorials showing the highest frequency of hedging.

In contrast, some studies have pointed to cases where non-English languages employ hedging more frequently than English. Nugroho (2014) found that Indonesian writers use hedges more frequently than their American counterparts in news stories,

although this pattern was not replicated in editorials. Omo and Idegbekwe (2017) found that Nigerian editorials, when compared with English ones, exhibited a greater use of shields (a type of hedge), suggesting that hedging practices in Nigerian English may differ from those in native English.

Across the various studies, modal auxiliaries have emerged as the most common hedging devices in newspaper editorials. Modal verbs such as *may*, *might*, *could*, *should*, and *would* are frequently used to express uncertainty or possibility. Trajkova (2011) highlighted the dominance of modal auxiliaries in American English editorials, a finding also validated by Khanbutayeva (2019) in their contrastive study between BrE and Azerbaijani. Modal auxiliaries were also identified as the most frequent hedging device in Purwantini's (2021) study of political editorials in *The Jakarta Post*.

In addition to modal verbs, other forms of hedging have been explored, such as approximators, epistemic verbs, and hedging through reported speech. Siddique et al. (2021), in their study of Pakistani English Newspaper Editorials (PENE), found that hedges were expressed through a wide range of markers, including modal adjectives, adverbs, and epistemic verbs. Their study also categorised hedges into uncertainty expressions, conditional clauses, and impersonal expressions. This wide array of hedging devices emphasises the complexity and nuance involved in hedging practices in editorial discourse. Despite the growing body of research on hedging in various languages, there is a significant gap when it comes to studies on hedging in Indian languages and Indian English. Satsangi and Ghosh (2024) conducted a pilot study comparing BrE and IE editorials and found that BrE editorials employed more hedging than their Indian counterparts. However, this study also noted that both British and IE editorials primarily relied on shields, similar to findings in studies of other languages (Omo and Idegbekwe, 2017).

In the review of languages where hedging research have been carried out – we found that most of the existing publications are on English (British English and American English) followed by other languages like French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, and some Asian languages like Chinese, Japanese, Persian, among others.

While this study represents a small step in the exploration of hedging in Indian language, the overall literature on hedging in Indian languages remains sparse. There is little research focusing specifically on how hedging functions in Indian language editorials or in Indian English, and no comprehensive studies addressing the cultural and linguistic factors that may shape hedging practices in Indian media discourse.

2.6. Research gaps and the present study

Upon the review of the existing literature on hedging we found that first of all there is a dearth of substantial scholarly work on hedging in media discourse. Secondly, most of the works on hedging have been carried out in western languages mostly English, and only a few studies on Asian languages like Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Urdu. Apparently, there is a lack of thorough studies on Indian languages and even Indian English. Given the multilingual nature of India, understanding how hedging functions in Indian languages and the interplay between IE and regional languages is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of media discourse in India. Subsequently, while much of the existing studies on hedging has focused on the quantitative aspects of hedging, there is inadequate attention given to the functional aspects of hedging in media discourse. Therefore, more studies are needed to explore how hedging in editorials contributes to persuasion, mitigation of contentious issues, and the construction of authority in media narratives, among other pragmatic functions.

A notable pattern emerges from existing research on hedges in newspaper editorials: most studies have approached the topic from a cross-linguistic perspective, often focusing on language pairs such as Nigerian and English, Macedonian and English, English and Persian, English and Chinese, and English and Azerbaijani, among others. These studies predominantly compare hedging strategies in one language with English, and in the case of monolingual inquiries, they primarily examine different varieties of English.

Our study aligns with this broader trend and further extends of scope to include both Indian English and Hindi, alongside British English, offering a distinctive contribution by introducing a non-Indo-European English (IE) variety and a typologically different language (Hindi) into direct comparative analysis.

but takes it a step further by extending the scope to three languages. Specifically, we are conducting a cross-linguistic investigation into hedging practices across BrE, IE, and Hindi, thereby broadening the understanding of hedging phenomena in multilingual contexts.

Furthermore, most existing research often lacks a multidimensional approach, which is essential for understanding the nuanced strategies that editorial writers use to modulate and safeguard their claims. Most existing literature tends to concentrate either on the formal classification of hedges or their functional aspects. Our study aims to bridge this gap by integrating both formal/structural and functional analyses, providing a more holistic understanding of hedging in editorial writing. Unlike most studies that use a predefined or limited set of hedges, our research aims to investigate as many varieties as possible, offering a more comprehensive view of hedging in newspaper editorials.

Furthermore, previous studies have frequently relied on insufficient sample sizes, limiting the validity of their conclusions. In contrast, our research utilizes a statistically significant sample size to enhance the reliability of our findings.

The present study seeks to address the significant gap apparent in the existing literature by investigating the use of hedges in Hindi and English newspaper editorials, specifically British English, Indian English, and Hindi. Employing a mixed-method approach, corroborating both qualitative and quantitative analyses, this study provides a comprehensive examination of the various types of hedging strategies used across these three languages. It does not only focus on the frequency of hedges in these editorials but also explore the structural and functional classification of hedging strategies, offering an in-depth cross-linguistic comparison. The study analyses a substantial corpus of 300 editorials, with 100 editorials from each language, ensuring a broad and representative data set. One of the major aims of this study is to identify the major pragmatic functions of hedges in the context of editorial discourse.

Given the lack of substantial research on hedging in Indian languages and Indian English, particularly within the context of media discourse, the study significantly contributes to the existing knowledge. It can provide crucial insights into the role of hedging in Indian media (particularly in the editorial discourse), a region where multilingualism and the interplay between English and regional languages like Hindi shape the discourse. By analysing hedging practices across Hindi, British English, and Indian English, this research helps fill the gap in cross-linguistic studies, and further our understanding of how hedging strategies are employed in the construction of authority, persuasion, and reader engagement in editorial writing. Thus, this study stands to contribute to both the field of pragmatics and media discourse analysis, offering fresh perspectives on how hedging operates within the linguistic and cultural contexts of Hindi and English editorial content.

2.7. Summary

In summary, this literature review has outlined the concept of hedging, its historical development, and its application across genres, languages, and cultural contexts, with a particular focus on newspaper editorials. Key trends include the prominence of hedging in editorials compared to news reports, the frequent use of modal auxiliaries as hedging devices, and the impact of cultural and linguistic factors on hedging practices. While English editorials often employ more hedging than those in other languages, significant gaps remain in research on IE and regional Indian languages like Hindi, particularly in media discourse. This study addresses these gaps by analysing hedging in Hindi, British English, and IE editorials through a mixed-method approach, examining their types, frequencies, and pragmatic functions. The findings will provide valuable insights into hedging practices in Indian media and contribute to cross-linguistic and pragmatic research.

The next chapter will detail the research methodology employed in this study, providing a clear understanding of how the investigation was conducted. It will describe the corpus used for analysis, including the criteria for selecting newspaper editorials in Hindi, British English, and Indian English. The chapter will outline the sampling methods employed to ensure a representative and balanced dataset. Additionally, it will explain the approach adopted to analyse the types, frequencies, and pragmatic functions of hedging.