

Chapter 5: Unveiling Pragmatic Functions of Hedges in Editorial Texts

5.1. Introduction

This chapter posits and discusses the pragmatic functions of hedges and hedging in editorial discourse, drawing insights from a contextual analysis of 300 newspaper editorials, evenly distributed across three languages: Hindi, IE, and BrE. By examining the use of hedging within these texts, the chapter aims to identify and categorise the primary pragmatic roles that hedges play in editorial writing. Through a systematic thematic analysis of various functions, the study groups similar patterns into broader themes to provide a comprehensive understanding of how hedging operates within editorial discourse. This exploration not only highlights the nuanced ways in which hedges contribute to meaning, persuasion, and stance in editorials but also highlights their role in managing uncertainty, politeness, and audience engagement across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

The chapter begins by establishing a foundational understanding of what constitutes a pragmatic function. It then provides an overview of studies that have explored the pragmatic functions of hedges more broadly, setting the stage for a focused examination of research specifically aimed at understanding hedging in editorial discourse. Following this, the chapter presents and describes the primary pragmatic functions of hedges as observed in the analysed data. These functions are further elaborated upon through detailed discussion, culminating in a conclusion that synthesises the findings and their implications.

5.2. Pragmatic function: Definition

Pragmatics focuses on the use of language in context and how context influences meaning. It studies speakers' choices to express their intended meaning and the kinds of inferences that listeners draw from an utterance in its use (Allan and Jaszczolt, 2012). Pragmatic function, therefore, refers to the use of language to attain specific goals or effects. It

comprises understanding how language is used to perform actions, such as making requests, giving commands, making promises, and expressing politeness, and other discourse effects. Pragmatic functions are essential for effective communication, as they help convey the intended meaning and achieve the desired response from the listener. If it is not understood or misunderstood, it can result in miscommunication and may have a detrimental impact on the interpersonal relationships.

Hedging is considered a pragmatic strategy as it comprises the use of language to accomplish interpersonal relations, convey politeness, and lessen face-threatening acts. It allows interlocutors to express uncertainty, soften claims, and negotiate meaning in a way that upholds social accord and diminishes the risk of conflict (Clemen, 1997; Markkanen & Schröder, 1997).

5.3. Pragmatic Functions of Hedging: A Synthesis of Scholarly Views

Hedging, as a linguistic strategy, has been widely analysed across various scholarly perspectives, with significant emphasis on its role in managing interpersonal relationships, mitigating the force of statements, and shaping the speaker's or writer's commitment to the truthfulness of their utterances. Linguists lack consensus over the role of hedges in language use (Wellner, 2023). There exists a dichotomy in the explanation of hedging, either through semantics or pragmatics; nonetheless, it is important to note that these two domains cannot be separated from one another. Although Lakoff took a semantic approach to hedging, he had previously said in his paper that pragmatics and semantics are interwoven rather than independent (Lakoff, 1972: 492). The following section will briefly overview the various perspectives linguists hold regarding the functions of hedging devices.

Lakoff (1972) mentions two reasons why hedges are used in the first place: to express uncertainty or to soften the speech to be polite. Prince et al. (1982) and Skelton (1988) believe that the primary function of hedges is to convey information in an unobtrusive and unostentatious way.

Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holmes (1995) introduce hedging as a tool for achieving negative politeness, especially in social hierarchies. By minimising the threat to a listener's face, hedges allow speakers to navigate sensitive topics, thus avoiding the imposition of a high rank or power difference in a conversation. In this way, hedging is viewed as a way of respecting the recipient's autonomy and social face. Cabanes (2007) and Fraser (2010) further elaborate on this idea, categorising hedges as part of a broader politeness strategy that helps speakers maintain social harmony. These strategies, as seen in the concept of negative politeness, reduce the directness of an utterance, making it less imposing and more deferential.

Crystal (1988) offers a complementary, though somewhat more pessimistic, perspective, framing hedging as a device speakers use to avoid commitment and reduce the risk of giving precise or verifiable information. This perspective situates hedging within a framework of reluctance or strategic vagueness. In this sense, speakers may hedge to avoid being questioned further or to distance themselves from potential accountability, particularly when discussing potentially contentious or uncertain matters. Salager-Meyer (1994) builds on this idea by emphasising the use of hedging in academic or professional contexts, where researchers and writers often hedge to present their claims with caution and modesty. This approach suggests that hedging allows the speaker to communicate without fully committing to the veracity of a proposition, especially when dealing with complex or unconfirmed information.

The view of hedging as a marker of precision and carefulness is particularly prevalent in academic discourse. Salager-Meyer (1994) suggests that hedging in research writing enables the author to present information tentatively, reflecting the inherent uncertainty of academic claims. This interpretation posits hedging as a reflection of intellectual humility by marking a careful balance between being assertive enough to present findings and cautious enough not to overstate conclusions. This function is particularly evident in the careful language used in scientific and academic contexts, where researchers are often required to hedge their claims to reflect the limits of their knowledge and avoid over-generalisation.

In a more conversational setting, hedges also function as conflict avoiders and mitigators of face-threatening acts. Vlasyan (2018) suggests that hedging makes communication more polite and effective by reducing the risk of confrontation or disagreement. This pragmatic function of hedging helps to smooth over potential conflicts, allowing speakers to introduce disagreeable or uncertain statements without directly threatening the interlocutor's face. Lee (2020) suggests that hedges are particularly useful in expressing doubt, uncertainty, or caution, which further mitigates the risk of overstatement or presumption in the face of complex or contested issues.

Hedging, therefore, appears as a politeness strategy that functions in face-to-face interaction and written forms of discourse, such as academic writing and media articles. The consensus in the literature points to three primary functions of hedging: precision, politeness, and attenuation of imposition (Gribanova and Gaidukova, 2019). While these functions may vary across cultural and linguistic contexts, they remain central to understanding how hedging operates in communication.

Some studies have explored the pragmatic functions of hedging in editorial discourse. Kuhia and Mojood (2014) argued that metadiscourse, including hedging, plays a persuasive role in editorial texts. Sedaghat and Biria (2015) suggested that hedging signals uncertainty about the truth value of referential information. Purwantini (2021) proposed that editorialists use hedging to encourage critical thinking among readers by presenting statements with room for doubt and reservation. Tahririan and Shahzamani (2009) highlighted that hedging allows editorialists to express tentativeness and possibility in their writing.

However, despite these contributions, there remains a significant gap in comprehensive and exhaustive explorations of the pragmatic functions of hedging in media discourse. Our study aims to fill this gap by offering a detailed account of the primary functions served by hedges in editorial discourse.

In our analysis, which draws upon data from three distinct languages of editorial discourse—Hindi, Indian English, and British English—we have identified several nuanced hedging functions that extend existing literature's insights. This study specifically aimed to explore the roles of hedges in editorial discourse. Through a contextual analysis across these three corpora, we pinpointed several key functions that hedges perform. Interestingly, these functions were broadly consistent across the languages, often overlapping rather than being distinct or mutually exclusive. The following section outlines the various functions of hedging in context, supported by examples from the three corpora.

5.4. Pragmatic Functions of Hedges in Editorial Discourse

Several important pragmatic roles of hedging in media speech were identified by the analysis and can be classified as follows:

1. Expressing varying degree/extent of commitment to the proposition

Hedges are used to express varying degrees of commitment to the truth or validity of a proposition. They help in reducing the absoluteness of a claim, indicating partial scope of an utterance. For example,

BrE

1.1. Ukrainian accession would tilt the balance of influence on the European Council away from the EU's 20th-century western core towards its 21st-century joiners in the east. **Some** founder members suspect that process has gone far enough already. (The Guardian, 2023)

In the example 1.1, the use of "some" implies that not all founder members share this suspicion, thereby limiting the scope of the utterance. Furthermore, it limits the scope of the claim by acknowledging that only a portion of the group holds this view, leaving room for exceptions. By hedging with "some," the statement avoids attributing the suspicion to all founder members, which would be a stronger and less cautious assertion. This reflects the writer's intent to provide a qualified statement, showing sensitivity to nuance and variability within the group being referenced.

IE

1.2. Atiq's long career as a politician who flitted through different political parties speaks to the nexus between criminals and politicians in the state. This, therefore, leads to the suspicion that his killing may be **a bit** convenient. (Times of India, 2023)

In the given sentence, "**a bit**" functions as a hedge by introducing tentativeness and mitigating the strength of the claim. The hedge indicates that the suspicion about the convenience of the killing is not presented as an absolute fact but rather as a possibility or impression. By using "a bit," the writer reduces the strength of the claim that Atiq's killing is convenient, leaving room for alternative interpretations. Further, the expression makes the statement more open-ended, inviting readers to consider the idea without fully committing to its validity. Overall, the hedge tempers the claim, making it less definitive and more exploratory in tone. This nuanced phrasing tempers the writer's position, signalling that the proposition is only partially valid.

Hindi

1.3. *isameṃ saṁdeha nahīṃ ki apanā rājanītika prabhāva kho dene ke bāda bhī kāṁgresā eka rāṣṭrīya dala hai aurā karība-karība sāre deśa meṃ usakā prabhāva hai.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: 'There is no doubt that even after losing its political influence, Congress is a national party and has influence in almost the entire country.'

In the Hindi example 1.3, the hedge "*karība-karība*" (*almost*) introduces an element of approximation to the claim about Congress's national influence discounting the absolute scope of the proposition. The use of "*karība-karība*" signals that the extent of Congress's influence is not uniform across the country. This nuanced phrasing reflects a careful balance between affirming the proposition and acknowledging its limitations. Pragmatically, this hedging usage helps the writer present a realistic and measured view, avoiding overgeneralisation while maintaining the credibility of the assertion.

2. Acknowledging the inherent limitations or irrelevance in precision

Hedges can be used to provide an approximate value or estimate, often when precise details are unnecessary or unavailable. This can be intentional, aligning with Gricean (1975) maxims where precision is not required, or unintentional, reflecting limitations in precision.

BrE

2.1. Prosecutions for rape have fallen far short of what is needed; the international criminal court has just overhauled its policy on gender-based crimes. **Almost** a decade ago, Britain's then foreign secretary William Hague made ending sexual violence in conflict a priority. (The Guardian, 2023)

In the above-mentioned example, "*almost a decade ago*" conveys a near but not exact timeframe for the event described. The hedge "*almost*" softens the temporal reference, signalling that the specific number of years is less relevant than the approximate period. This hedging strategy aligns with Grice's maxim of relevance, where the intention is to provide a general context rather than exact chronological detail. Pragmatically, it reflects tentativeness while ensuring that the main focus—William Hague's priority-setting—is not overshadowed by a demand for precise timing.

IE

2.2. A sharp fall in vegetable prices brought down the growth in food price index to 4.7% in November from over 7% the previous month. Consequently, the headline inflation dropped. However, core inflation, which represents the rise in prices after removing food and fuel, remains sticky **around** 6%. (Times of India, 2023)

In 2.2, the hedge "*around*" indicates an approximate value of the core inflation rate. The use of "*around*" acknowledges that the exact figure may vary slightly but remains within a

close range. This hedging usage reflects both intentional imprecision—where exactness might be deemed unnecessary—and a recognition of the fluctuating nature of economic indicators. Pragmatically, it allows the writer to discuss inflation trends confidently while leaving room for slight deviations, maintaining credibility and aligning with the dynamic nature of economic discourse.

Hindi

2.3. *sībīāi ne hāla meṃ rābaḍī devī aura lālū yādava se pūchatācha bhī kī haiḥ sībīāi ne pichale varṣa akṭūbara meṃ isa māmāle meṃ jo āropa patra dāyara kiyā thā, usameṃ lālū yādava, unakī patnī rābaḍī devī aura madhya relave ke tatkālīna jīema sameta **karība** 16 logom ko nāmajada kiyā thā.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘In the charge sheet filed by the CBI in this case in October last year, it had named about 16 people including Lalu Yadav, his wife Rabri Devi and the then GM of Central Railway.’

In the Hindi example, the hedge "*karība*" (*approximately*) introduces an estimated figure of "16" individuals named in the charge sheet. This hedge softens the assertion by signalling that the exact number may not be 16 but is close to it. Pragmatically, this use of hedging allows the writer to provide relevant numerical information while accommodating the possibility of minor inaccuracies or ambiguities. It maintains the writer's credibility, as the focus remains on the significance of the charge sheet rather than precise quantification.

3. Mitigating the certainty or strength of a claim

Hedges may be employed to show a speaker's lack of confidence in the accuracy or certainty of the information being presented. They signal a subjective stance where the speaker does not fully commit to the truth of the proposition. This can have a mitigating effect on the utterance presented.

BrE

3.1. Israel reportedly plans a “very long war” stretching into 2024, and still has no plan for what comes next. Yet while Gaza’s suffering **appears** to have no end, we must also look to the broader picture. (The Guardian, 2023)

The hedge “*appears*” reflects the writer's subjective interpretation of Gaza's suffering, signalling a lack of full confidence in the absolute truth of the statement. The use of this hedge softens the claim, allowing room for alternative perspectives. Pragmatically, it reflects the complexity and emotional weight of the issue, emphasising the writer’s attempt to present a balanced view while acknowledging uncertainty about future developments.

IE

3.2. In Telangana, BJP’s earlier momentum **seems** to have fizzled out. In Andhra and Kerala, it remains a minor player. (Times of India, 2023)

In this instance, the hedge “*seems*” indicates the writer's tentative stance regarding BJP's political status in Telangana. The lack of certainty is further emphasised by the proposition being framed as an interpretation rather than a fact. Similarly, the statement about BJP remaining a minor player in Andhra and Kerala uses neutral, factual language without definitive commitment to why this is the case, reinforcing the subjective tone.

Pragmatically, this hedging reflects an editorial norm of cautious commentary on political dynamics, where conclusions are often nuanced and open to debate.

Hindi

3.3. *aisā lagatā hai* ki vipakṣī dala keṁdra sarakāra kī hara pahala kā bahiṣkāra karane para tula gae haiṁ aur isā krama meṁ yaha dekhane se bhī inkāra kara rahe haiṁ ki ākhira isase unheṁ hāsila kyā ho rahā hai? (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘It seems that the opposition parties are bent on boycotting every initiative of the Central Government and are refusing to even see what they are gaining from it.’

The hedge "***aisā lagatā hai***" (*it seems*) explicitly signals the writer's subjective interpretation of the opposition's stance. The phrase conveys a lack of complete assurance in the assertion, framing it as an observation or inference rather than a definitive fact. Pragmatically, this hedge allows the writer to critique the opposition's actions without overcommitting to a potentially controversial or disputable claim, preserving the tone of editorial neutrality.

4. Expressing Uncertainty or doubt

Hedges are used to convey uncertainty or probability, suggesting that a statement may be true but is not asserted as a fact. Modal verbs and certain adverbs are commonly used to reflect such functions.

BrE

4.1. One prospect is that Sudan could effectively become divided into two zones, as Libya has been. Another is **perhaps** even more disturbing – that rather than splitting, it **may** splinter, leaving those on the ground in ever more danger. (The Guardian, 2023)

This example employs two hedges: "*perhaps*" and "*may*". The adverb "*perhaps*" signals a speculative stance, suggesting that the described scenario is a possibility rather than a definitive outcome. It leaves room for alternative stances and interpretations, and thereby not imposing a certain stance on readers. The modal verb "*may*" further emphasise this uncertainty, indicating that the situation of splintering is a probable but unconfirmed development. Pragmatically, these hedges enable the writer to engage with a hypothetical scenario while maintaining caution and leaving room for alternative interpretations. This hedging strategy aligns with the editorial goal of raising awareness about a concerning issue without overstating its certainty.

IE

4.2. The third quarter GDP contained early signals that the economic momentum **may be** slowing down faster than expected. (Times of India, 2023)

In this example, the hedge "may be" serves the pragmatic role of indicating tentativeness or possibility, allowing the writer to express caution about the claim. By using "may," the writer avoids making a definitive assertion about the economic momentum slowing down, thereby acknowledging uncertainty and leaving room for alternative interpretations or future developments. This softening of the claim also contributes to maintaining the writer's credibility by avoiding overgeneralisation, especially in a context like economic forecasting, where outcomes are inherently uncertain.

Hindi

4.3. *sarakārī naukariyom ko lekara yaha dhāraṇā bhī vyāpta hai ki ve javābadehī kī māṅga nahīm karatīm* **śāyada** *isakā hī yaha pariṇāma hai ki ausata sarakārī karmacāriyom meṃ janatā kī sevā ko lekara apekṣita pratibaddhatā kā abhāva dikhatā hai.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘There is also a widespread perception about government jobs that they do not demand accountability. Perhaps the result of this is that the average government employee lacks the requisite commitment to serve the public.’

In Hindi example 4.3, the editorialist uses the hedge "*śāyada*" (perhaps) to express doubt or uncertainty about the connection between a cause and an effect. The cause is the widespread perception that government jobs do not demand accountability, while the effect is the claim that the average government employee lacks the commitment required to serve the public. By employing "*śāyada*," the writer softens the assertion, reducing its strength and presenting it as one possible stance rather than a definitive statement. This choice not only allows for alternative interpretations but also invites readers to engage in discussion and consider other perspectives on the issue.

5. Making conditioned assertion

These hedges limit the truth of a proposition to specific conditions, making the statement contingent upon certain factors. Conditional constructions are commonly used for this purpose.

BrE

5.1. If Mr Sunak thinks that is his strongest card or, worse, has engineered a row with the express purpose of playing it, he is delusional. (The Guardian, 2023)

The conditional "*if*" limits the validity of the claim to Mr. Sunak's potential actions and intentions. It frames the proposition as hypothetical rather than factual. This construction creates room for the writer to critique Mr. Sunak's strategies without definitively asserting that he has acted in a specific manner. By presenting the scenario conditionally, the writer engages readers in evaluating the likelihood of the proposition, softening the impact of the criticism, mitigating the face threat while maintaining its rhetorical strength.

IE

5.2. If Kyiv is to counter Moscow's influence in the developing world and make its case, it can't be seen to be the cause of more economic misery for them through a dramatic expansion of the conflict. (Times of India, 2023)

The conditional "if" introduces a specific requirement for Kyiv's success: avoiding actions that exacerbate economic misery. This makes the statement contingent upon Kyiv's behaviour and choices. The hedge highlights a key consideration while avoiding a definitive prediction about Kyiv's future actions or outcomes. This allows the writer to emphasise the potential consequences of specific decisions, encouraging strategic reflection rather than asserting inevitability.

Hindi

5.3. *yadi isa asthāyī anuccheda ko samaya rahate niṣprabhāvī kara diyā gayā hotā to saṁbhavataḥ jammū-kaśmīra meṁ alagāvavāda evaṁ ātaṁkavāda ne sira nahīṁ uṭhāyā hotā aura vahāṁ itanī tabāhī nahīṁ huī hotī.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: 'If this temporary article had been neutralised in time, perhaps separatism and terrorism would not have raised its head in Jammu and Kashmir and so much devastation would not have occurred there.'

The conditional "yadi" (if) introduces a hypothetical scenario tied to past actions or inactions. The use of "saṁbhavataḥ" (possibly) adds further tentativeness, signalling the writer's acknowledgment of uncertainty about the exact outcomes. The hedge serves to critique the historical handling of the article without making absolute claims about causality. It provides a speculative framework for analysing the issue, allowing the writer to express an opinion while mitigating potential counterarguments or backlash.

6. Politeness and Indirectness

Hedges soften statements to reduce directness and assertiveness, often serving as a face-saving strategy or to maintain politeness. This function is often realised through modal verbs, passivation, and rhetorical questions rather than direct commands.

BrE

6.1. The US **could perhaps** slow-roll its replenishment of shells. But Mr Netanyahu appears confident that the administration will not actually use its leverage. Israel reportedly plans a “very long war” stretching into 2024, and still has no plan for what comes next. (The Guardian, 2023)

In the example 6.1, the use of the modal "could" introduce a level of uncertainty, making the suggestion less forceful and thus more indirect or polite. "Perhaps" further weakens the assertion, acknowledging that the speaker is not entirely certain about the possibility, leaving room for other interpretations or outcomes. This phrasing functions as a softener, avoiding a strong or direct claim about the intentions of US, which could be seen as too assertive or presumptuous. The verb "appears" also signals a level of uncertainty or tentativeness, which is typical of hedging. It suggests that the speaker is interpreting the situation rather than making a categorical statement, which serves to avoid imposing an opinion as fact, allowing space for different interpretations.

IE

6.2. That said, courts too add to the caseload burden with adjournments and by entertaining pleas from private colleges with deep pockets. Every such college rejected by NMC, or the earlier Medical Council of India, moves court; the matter invariably gets mired in adjournments or review or a stay. It may thus be an idea also for courts to review the basis to admit those cases that may not warrant its attention. (Times of India, 2023)

The use of "it may" in "it may thus be an idea" functions as a mitigative device, softening the suggestion to the courts. Instead of directly instructing or criticising, the phrasing presents the suggestion as a polite suggestion respecting the agency of courts rather than an imposition. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, particularly the strategy of hedging to protect the negative face of the addressee (courts, in this case). Similarly, "may" in "may not warrant its attention" serves to temper the claim about certain cases not deserving judicial attention. This hedging avoids overtly criticising the courts' decisions, maintaining respect and deference.

Both expressions contribute to indirectness, allowing the writer to frame their criticism and recommendation subtly. Rather than accusing the courts outright of inefficiency or mismanagement, the use of "may" introduces ambiguity, signalling that the statement is open to interpretation. This ensures the tone remains non-confrontational. The indirect phrasing invites the courts to reflect on their practices without making the assertion sound prescriptive or overbearing. This strategy is particularly effective in contexts where the subject (the courts) holds authority and sensitivity is paramount.

Hindi

6.3. *śarāba kī avaidha bīkrī ke dhamdhe ne eka udyoga kā rūpa le liyā hai aur vaha māṃga para vāṃchita sthāna para pahuṃcāī jā rahī hai isase na to śāsana anabhijñā ho sakatā hai aur na hī praśāsana.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: 'The business of illegal sale of liquor has taken the form of an industry and it is being delivered to the desired place on demand. Neither the government nor the administration can be unaware of this.'

The expression " *isase na to śāsana anabhijñā ho sakatā hai aur na hī praśāsana* (Neither the government nor the administration can be unaware of this) " serves as a subtle and polite

way to question the accountability of the government and administration. The statement does not directly accuse the government or administration of negligence. Instead, it implies their awareness through a negative assertion. This indirect approach softens the tone, making the criticism less confrontational. This hedge saves the face of the government and the administration by avoiding direct blame on them. It helps maintain the dignity of the entities being critiqued while still addressing the issue. Moreover, the use of the hedge introduces an element of ambiguity. Rather than definitively stating that the government and administration are aware and complicit, it leaves room for interpretation, allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions.

7. Evasion of Responsibility

Hedges are used to evade taking full responsibility for the accuracy or credibility of the information presented. This can be done through vague attribution or by distancing oneself from the assertion.

BrE

7.1. 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*" distances the writer from the assertion about the leader's diplomatic manner. By attributing the information to unspecified sources, the writer avoids direct responsibility for its accuracy. Pragmatically, this strategy allows the editorial to reference potentially significant but unverified information while emphasising its speculative nature. This approach safeguards the writer's credibility and signals to the reader that the claim should be interpreted with caution.

IE

7.2. 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)

Here, the phrase "*It is said*" introduces a generalised, unattributed claim about AI. The hedge evades accountability for the statement by attributing it to an unspecified source. Pragmatically, this vagueness allows the writer to discuss a widely held notion without endorsing it directly or addressing its validity. This form of hedging is particularly common in discourses where the writer wishes to avoid delving into contentious debates or lacks detailed evidence.

Hindi

7.3. *kahā jā rahā hai ki* *āienādīāie ke ghaṭaka dalom ke kucha aura netāom ne bhī isa baiṭhaka meṃ sāmila hone kī anicchā prakṛta kī.* (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘It is being said that some other leaders of constituent parties of INDIA also expressed their reluctance to attend this meeting.’

The hedge "*kahā jā rahā hai*" (*it is being said*) similarly attributes the claim to an unnamed source, creating distance between the writer and the information. This phrase signals that the information is circulating in public discourse but may not be verified. Pragmatically, this hedging allows the writer to report speculative or sensitive political developments while avoiding direct accountability for their accuracy. This is particularly useful in the political context, where unverified claims can be contentious.

8. Fostering Inclusivity to enhance persuasion

Hedges can involve the reader or audience, making a statement appear more inclusive and less refutable. This can be a persuasive strategy to gain agreement or reduce the possibility of opposition.

BrE

8.1. We cannot and must not look away from what is happening in Gaza. Half its population was forced from the north by merciless bombardment; now the Israel Defense Forces' attacks upon the south have intensified and dozens of tanks have entered. (The Guardian, 2023)

The use of "*we cannot and must not*" is a direct appeal to the readers' sense of moral responsibility and shared humanity. By employing the inclusive pronoun "*we*", the writer aligns the audience with the ethical stance being presented, creating a collective identity. This hedge softens the directive nature of the argument, making it harder for readers to refute without feeling excluded from a shared moral obligation. Pragmatically, this inclusive strategy strengthens the emotional resonance of the appeal, urging readers to empathise and act in solidarity.

IE

8.2. Therefore, while **we** applaud digitisation initiatives, **we** must also remind all courts that they pay equal attention to threats. (Times of India, 2023)

The hedge "*we must also remind*" employs the inclusive pronoun "*we*" to create a sense of collective action and responsibility. This phrasing implies a shared concern about digitisation initiatives and the associated risks. The hedge reduces the assertiveness of the directive by framing it as a collective suggestion rather than a unilateral demand. Pragmatically, this inclusive strategy makes the argument more palatable and persuasive,

encouraging readers to feel involved in promoting a balanced approach to judicial digitisation.

Hindi

8.3. *jaba taka koī pramāṇa na mile, taba taka yaha nahīṁ kahā jā sakatā ki vaha paise ke bala para ucca sadana pahūṁce, lekina yaha kisī se chipā nahīṁ ki* kisa taraha kucha loga dhana bala ke jariye rājyasabhā kī sadasyatā hāsila kara lete haiṁ. (Dainik Jagran, 2023)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: ‘Unless any proof is found, it cannot be said that he reached the Upper House on the strength of money, but it is not hidden from anyone how some people acquire membership of Rajya Sabha through money power.’

Here, the hedge "*yaha kisī se chipā nahīṁ*" (*it is no secret*) subtly involves the reader by assuming shared knowledge or awareness of the issue. This rhetorical strategy appeals to the understanding of audience, making them feel involved in the writer's perspective. Pragmatically, this hedge strengthens the argument by framing it as a widely accepted observation, reducing the likelihood of opposition. The combination of tentative phrasing and collective knowledge fosters a collaborative tone, encouraging readers to agree with the implied criticism.

5.5. Discussion

In this study, we identified several pragmatic functions of hedges in media discourse. Some functions such as expressing uncertainty or doubt and creating room for alternative opinions resemble with the findings from prior studies (Tahririan and Shahzamani, 2009; Purwantini, 2021). The previous studies provided valuable insights but were limited as they were based on data with relatively smaller sample size, which constrained their ability to present a comprehensive and exhaustive catalogue of hedging functions. Studies have shown that editorials employ more hedges than news articles (Alghazo et al., 2024). Our study attempts to uncover the intent and reason behind the same.

Hedges serve an essential pragmatic function in editorial discourse by softening the absoluteness of propositions, thereby signalling tentative or partial commitment to a claim. This function is particularly significant in editorials, where the intention is often to persuade or inform while maintaining a level of nuanced argumentation. By expressing varying degrees of membership to a semantic category or proposition, hedges allow the writer to convey doubt, possibility, or limited certainty, thus aligning with journalistic norms of cautious and balanced reporting.

Editorial writers often use hedges to convey approximate values or estimates, aligning with the principle of relevance where exact precision might not be essential. This pragmatic function allows writers to present information flexibly, acknowledging the inherent limitations in precision or signalling that exactness is not critical to the argument. Such expressions are particularly useful in contexts where factual accuracy is respected but pragmatic considerations, such as maintaining reader interest or adhering to word constraints, necessitate some degree of vagueness.

Hedges are frequently employed in editorial discourse to signal a lack of confidence or express subjectivity regarding the information presented. These subjective markers allow writers to present propositions tentatively, indicating personal interpretation or doubt about their absolute truth. By hedging their claims, editorial writers maintain flexibility, acknowledge the complexity of issues, and invite readers to interpret the information critically. This pragmatic function helps in mitigating the strength of assertions, preserving objectivity, and managing the risk of potential counterarguments.

Hedges are a critical linguistic tool for expressing uncertainty or probability in editorial discourse. By suggesting that a statement may be true but refraining from asserting it as an absolute fact, hedges allow writers to address complex or speculative topics while maintaining credibility. Modal verbs and adverbs are commonly used for this function, enabling writers to convey caution, manage risks of overgeneralisation, and foster critical engagement from readers.

Hedges that indicate conditional truth serve to qualify statements by limiting their validity to specific circumstances or conditions. By employing such hedges, writers avoid making absolute claims and instead present their arguments as contingent on certain factors. This strategy helps to manage the risk of criticism, ensuring that propositions are not easily refuted.

Hedges are strategically employed in editorial writing to evade full responsibility for the accuracy or credibility of the information presented. By using vague attribution or distancing mechanisms, writers can share contentious or speculative information without committing to its veracity. This hedging strategy allows editorialists to discuss sensitive topics, unverified reports, or widely circulated opinions while maintaining plausible

deniability. It also reflects an awareness of the potential consequences of explicitly endorsing questionable claims.

The use of vague quantifiers as hedges allows writers to generalise without committing to specific numbers, which may not be available or necessary. This hedging strategy offers flexibility and avoids the potential for dispute over precise figures. In editorial discourse, vague quantification often serves rhetorical or strategic purposes, such as emphasising trends or patterns without overly burdening the reader with precise data.

Hedging serves as a crucial politeness strategy in editorial discourse, particularly given the sensitive and often controversial issues it addresses. By employing hedges, editorial writers can present claims in a manner that protects the face of the individuals, groups, or entities being referred to in the discourse. By employing these strategies, the articulation strikes a balance between critique and courtesy, adhering to the norms of editorial language that aim to inform and persuade without sounding overtly accusatory. This approach helps to mitigate the risk of offending or alienating readers, maintaining a level of decorum that is essential in public communication.

Additionally, hedging allows newspapers to modulate the certainty of their claims, ensuring they remain within the bounds of verifiable truth. This careful phrasing is vital to avoid potential backlash or damage to the publication's credibility. When criticism or complaints are involved, hedging softens the tone, reducing the likelihood of harming the positive face of the subject, whether it be a person, country, or authority. Thus, hedging not only enhances politeness but also fosters a balanced and respectful editorial stance.

Hedges that involve the reader employ inclusive language to build a sense of shared responsibility, opinion, or action. This inclusive strategy can enhance the persuasiveness of an argument by making the audience feel part of the discussion or decision-making process.

By reducing the likelihood of opposition, these hedges subtly align the reader with the writer's stance while maintaining a tone of collaboration and collectivism.

Our research, while not claiming to offer an exhaustive list of pragmatic functions served by hedges, takes a broader and more inclusive approach. By analysing a wide range of examples drawn from editorial discourse in three distinct linguistic and cultural contexts—Hindi, BrE, and IE—we have aimed to identify and categorise the predominant functions of hedging. While there is always the possibility of discovering additional nuances or functions in future studies, our findings provide a robust foundation for understanding the strategic use of hedges in editorial discourse, particularly in terms of their role in navigating subjectivity, fostering inclusivity, and accommodating diverse perspectives in public communication.

5.6. Summary

The chapter has systematically explored the major pragmatic functions of hedges in editorial discourse. Each instance of hedging was closely examined and categorised according to the specific pragmatic function it served. Through this meticulous process, similar functions were grouped to identify overarching generic functions. This comprehensive approach has highlighted the nuanced ways in which hedges contribute to the subtleties of meaning and communication within editorial writing across these distinct linguistic contexts. The chapter enlists the major pragmatic functions of hedges elucidated with examples from the three languages. We found eight main functions: Expressing varying degree of commitment to the proposition, Acknowledging the inherent limitations or irrelevance in precision, Mitigating the certainty or strength of a claim, Expressing Uncertainty or doubt, limiting the truth of a proposition to specific conditions, Politeness and Indirectness, Evasion of Responsibility and Fostering Inclusivity to enhance persuasion

To sum up, hedging in editorial discourse is a versatile tool used to manage the complex interplay between precision, politeness, inclusivity, and uncertainty. The functions identified reveal that hedging is not just about avoiding directness but about crafting a balanced, nuanced, and respectful engagement with readers. It allows the writer to present their opinions, critique others, and navigate contentious issues while remaining aware of the social dynamics and epistemic limitations involved. In essence, hedging in editorial discourse is employed to navigate the balance between assertion and caution, certainty and doubt, and directness and politeness. This makes it a powerful tool for shaping discourse, ensuring that it remains inclusive, respectful, and thoughtful while addressing complex social, political, and cultural issues. The subsequent and final chapter concludes the study by briefly stating the findings, major contributions, implications, limitations, and future scopes.