

The Reasons for EFL University Students Employ Hedges during Their Speaking Class

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ABSTRACT

Communication is important in language schools because it connects the meaning of a person's thoughts. As a result, as foreign language learners, students must grasp how to engage effectively with other students. In this regard, the researcher believed it was critical to explore English Foreign Language (EFL) university students' communication styles during their speaking class, which included hedges. The research aims were to discover the sorts of hedges used by EFL university students during their speaking class in an academic context, as well as the reasons why EFL university students used hedges during their speaking class. This study was conducted at Politeknik LP3I Makassar and it was focused on the students in the first semester in subject Basic Speaking with the total participants were 23 students of one class. The method used was descriptive qualitative method. There were 6 recordings in the interview sections the theory from Riekkinen and Svarova (2009) was used to analyze the data gained. After transcribing and analyzing the data, the results showed that the students employ hedges for some reasons. The first reason was to express a personal evaluation or a suggestion to put into practice for a current situation, the second reason was markers of vagueness that will enable students to express uncertainty, the third reason gained in interview section was to apply a need in a situational context such as request, seek permission, and giving advice, and the last reason was to apply politeness in requesting the attention of the hearer.

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KEYWORDS

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1. Introduction

Being able to communicate in English involves not only being able to respond to and ask questions in English, but also understanding what speech they should generate in every particular context in order to make the remarks appropriate for the circumstance and suitable for the interlocutor. Based on Wilamova (2005), When pragmatics was initially examined, the definition was "meaning in usage" or "meaning in context." It is also argued that pragmatic competence, as the investigation of meaning, is generated by interactive players rather than the language system.

Hedging is one linguistic competency that is connected to pragmatic competence. Based on Hua (2011), the concept of the hedge was first put forward by American linguist, George Lakoff (1972) in his paper "A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concept" in which hedges were defined as words whose job was to make fuzzier or less fuzzy. Another definition is from Wilamova (2005) in her study about pragmatics. She stated that hedges are pragmatic markers that annotate or weaken the strength of an utterance. Besides, Holmes (2001) believed that hedging is a way to express uncertainty and also to soften the utterances of the speaker. Language serves to demonstrate our involvement as speakers in the speech situation, including the roles we adopt for ourselves and impose on others as well as our desires, feelings, attitudes, and judgments. Because of this, individuals may express the same idea in various ways to various individuals. However, people occasionally hesitate to conduct and convey their thoughts orally. People sometimes hesitate for several reasons, like their age, a new experience, etc. People used to believe that communication was simply an exchange of ideas between people; however, spoken language performs a variety of other functions as well. These language tasks are divided into two categories, one covering information exchange and the other covering interpersonal aspects of communication. It means that when we speak, we not only convey meaning but also interpersonal messages. (Prihandoko et al., 2019). According to Holmes (2001), hedging is a method of communicating

interpersonal signals in spoken conversation that allows speakers to soften the impact of their remarks in order to make them more acceptable to the interlocutor.

Hedges are useful to speakers for two reasons. First, the presence of hedges can boost speakers' confidence when it comes to making public speeches or answering journalistic questions. People cannot always avoid speaking about unknown issues, and it is not advisable to employ absolute statements since listeners are constantly ready to analyze the authenticity of what is stated. Therefore, another advantage is protecting speakers' self-image from their unfriendly listeners (Teng, 2015). Other aims that may be reached by utilizing hedges include avoiding unneeded risks, obligations, and functions such as excellent relations, providing alternatives, respect, displaying uncertainty, caution, or thoughtfulness, and, most significantly, achieving academic acceptability and success (Ahmed & Maros, 2017). Hedges are significant in English Language Teaching (ELT) because, according to Teng (2015), employing hedges is an effective approach in communicative exchanges between teacher and students, thus both teachers and students should understand this device to help them become more successful in communications, especially in the ELT process. The understanding of using hedges, both theory and practice, leads to no more feel confused when using it. When teacher and students are confident with knowledge, they will probably have the ability to translate correctly about what they want to the hearer gets in appreciate situations.

According to the following explanation, hedges are connected to the way people reduce or soften their utterances, which includes ambiguity. Instead of stating, "your notion is incorrect," the speaker might hedge and add, "I believe your idea is pretty wrong." The inclusion of the words "I believe" and the transformation of "wrong" into "very incorrect" is an example of hedging. Hedges weaken and soften words so that they can be accepted by the audience without fear of being condemned. The willingness to collaborate with other speakers is shown by the use of hedges.

According to Varma and Tan (2015), certain speech actions, such as criticism, are frequently hedged to appear more threatening to the listener and hence less likely to be refused. Lakoff (1972) regarded the usage of such gadgets as an indication of social unease, indecision, and a lack of trust. For example, hedges are used to weaken a claim (e.g., sort of, kind of, I believe, and you know), whereas epistemic modal forms transmit the presenter's attitude towards their speech (e.g., may, might, should, and must) whether there is a degree of certainty or otherwise. Dousti and Rasekh (2016) argued that in some contexts, hedging is a crucial component of language, where the effective use of hedges indicates efficient social contact by demonstrating the capacity to articulate degrees of confidence and mastering rhetorical methods necessary in specific scenarios. Nozawa (2015) agreed, stating that the speaker might employ hedging to bargain their gifts to the listener. As a result, the usage of hedges becomes critical.

Advanced learners will sometimes purposely or unintentionally employ hedges in their speech to soften their words so that they are acceptable (Warsono, 2016). Because they already have English abilities and competencies, they are anticipated to be able to hedge their statements in writing and speaking. That skills and competences are not only important for advanced learners but also for language learners (Rahman, 2018). Therefore the basic learners are also needed to be taken as the subject of the research in their speaking activity to be observed by the way they survive to make the statements more accepted to the interlocutors (Said et al., 2021). Nonetheless, despite the significance placed on hedging, little is known about the allocation or usage of hedges in academic contexts across the two components: speaking class and basic pupils, and thus hedge research has focused mostly on advanced learners (Yagis & Demir, 2014; Nozawa, 2015; Varma & Tan, 2015; Teng, 2015; Warsono, 2016) therefore, this research will be conducted to bring the use of hedges in the learning process in speaking class used by EFL university students, especially in the basic level students. The subject of this research was the students of undergraduate program at Politeknik LP3I Makassar. The reason why the researcher chooses a speaking class of basic students because of the statement from Hua (2011) He remarked that whenever a speaker is discussing his shortcomings, he utilizes a lot of hedges to shield his face by dampening the self-relief he had created. In other words, in speaking class, both speakers and listeners should maintain the look no matter they are in pros or cons and hedges will be used as their function in softening the words. The transcription of the students' oral productions during the class was the data for this research and was concerned about identifying types and reasons for hedges used by the students.

2. Method

Qualitative method with descriptive analysis was used in this research. As Gayet al. (2006), the qualitative method is concerned with the collecting, analysis, and interpretation of extensive, narrative, and visual data in order to acquire insight into a specific phenomenon of interest. Furthermore, the goals of qualitative research are to promote a profound understanding of a certain feature, such as the environment, a procedure, or even a belief. As a result, it was used to

gather data, analyze data, and interpret data that was relevant to the study goal of determining why EFL university students hedge their utterances during their speaking class.

An interview session was employed after the classroom observation is done, in which the students who hedged their utterance was interviewed. A semi-structured interview was conducted in this research to answer the second research question, which entangles written list of questions, but the researcher was free to inquire and delve more information dealing with students' utterances that contain hedges. According to Richard (2009), the typical qualitative research interview has been described as a 'conversation with a purpose' or 'professional conversation.' and has been described as 'the gold standard of qualitative research.' Furthermore, this instrument was done as corroboration to build justice, so there was not only single judgment of the researcher to the participants but also involving the participants' view so it was become fair. To give more credible explanations for the frequent use of hedges in students' speaking classes and to address the second research question of the study, a session was arranged in which interviewees were invited to discuss the underlying factors for their use of hedges. To aid their explanations, they were provided examples of their created utterances as the trigger.

3. Result

The researcher had analyzed the result of the data collection of the research. For this part, the researcher analyzed the reasons for EFL university students employed hedges during their speaking class from the first until the third meeting. There were six students whose employed hedges therefore those students were interviewed.

Reason 1 : Express Personal Evaluation

Kalau saya pakai kata "I think" sama "I choose" berarti kan itu menurutku toh Mam jadi tidak harus sama sama yang lain karena itu menurutku ji bisa saja beda sama yang lain persepsinya (If I uttered "I think" and "I choose" it means that it is totally my personal evaluation that could be different with the other's opinion because I experienced the different situation so the perception might be different too) [Interview section, Monday, January 17th 2022]

karena dari cara menjawabnya meragukan, tidak meyakinkan. Jadi, saya menggunakan opini saya dengan cara menggunakan kata "I thought" (the way she answered the question was confusing. Therefore, I demonstrate my opinion by using word "I thought") [Interview section, Monday, January 17th 2022]

karena yang diminta kan pendapatku toh Kak jadi menurut saya itu mikata "I think" yang cocok buat jawab pertanyaannya. I think itu artinya menurut saya toh Kak, cocokmi kah? (Because I was questioned by explaining my personal opinion so using word "I think" is the perfect word to be used in answering that question. I think means menurut saya in Indonesian language, isn't it?) [Interview section, Monday, January 10th 2022]

Reason 2 : Markers of Vagueness

Karena saya masih belajar Bahasa Inggris, Kak jadi masih artikan satu per satu itu kata-katanya. Pas saya mau bilang menurut saya atau dalam Bahasa Inggris in my opinion atau itu tadi, Kak yang kita bilang I mean. Sempatka juga ragu-ragu sih, Kak makanya saya ulangi buatperbaiki kata-kataku itu saya pakai I mean. (I am not an expert in English yet and it makes me translate the word by translating them by word per word from Indonesian language to English. In time I would like to say "menurut saya" in English. I also felt hesitate and repeated my sentence by using I mean to clearer my statement). [Interview section, Monday, January 10th 2022]

Reason 3 : Apply a Need in a Situational Context

Karena berharapka, nda enakka juga kalau langsung minta diulangi jadi mending bilang maybe, karena saya yang salah, saya yang terlambat (I was expecting but it was my mistake so I used "maybe" for asking the lecturer to repeat the explanation without any judgement) [Interview section, Monday, January 17th 2022]

Reason 4 : Apply Politeness

Lebih sopan dengan kata itu jadi tidak tersinggung itu orang nantidianggap menggurui (it is more polite with those words) [Interview section, Monday, January 10th 2022]

4. Discussion

The reasons are based on the theory from Riekkinen and Svarova (2009). In this part, the researcher found that there were some reasons of using hedges for the EFL students. The first motive was to convey a personal opinion or a proposal for a current issue. It can be seen from the statement of the student 1 who hedged his sentence twice by using personal evaluation. He stated that if he used hedges it means that it is totally his personal evaluation that could be different with the other's opinion because he experienced the different situation so the perception might be different too. Furthermore the used of hedges could help him express his own opinion that was differ from other's opinion without hesitation of being judged. Student 2 also uttered hedges twice using personal evaluation as the tool to express her own opinion in answering the question. She also stated that those hedges are the perfect word when she wanted to answer that kind of question. On the other sides, student 4 hedged her utterance in order to support the fact that everyone believes in. It is in line with the statement of the student 6 who said that he hedged his utterance because of his support to the fact that everyone agrees with. The last reason was from student 5 who stated that he hedged her utterance because the perfect way to express her opinion is by using that kind of hedges.

The second reason was markers of vagueness that will enable students to express uncertainty. It is stated by student 3 that she used hedges as a tool to express her uncertainty. She said that she is not an expert in English yet and it makes her translate the word by translating them word per word from Indonesian language to English. It leaded her hesitate and repeated her sentence by using hedges "I mean" to make her statement clearer. Lakoff (1972) in his study also argued that the reason why hedge is used in the first place was to express uncertainty.

The first motive was to convey a personal opinion or a proposal for a current issue. It can be seen in the statement of student 6 who said that he was expecting the lecturer could repeat or gave him a further explanation because he was late for the class so he could not understand about the material given by the lecturer.

The last reason was to apply politeness in requesting the attention of the hearer. It can be seen from the statement of student 3 by using hedges "suggest please". Her reason was to make her utterance more polite with that word. Similar finding was reported by Teng (2015) who also conducted research about function of hedging devices. In his study, he found that another function of hedging device is to achieve the result of politeness.

5. Conclusion

The students use hedges for a variety of reasons. The first reason was to convey a personal evaluation or a recommendation to put into action for a present scenario, the main reason was markers of ambiguity that would allow students to show doubt, the third reason obtained in the interview portion was to apply a need in a given situation including such request, seek permission, and offering advice, and the final reason was to apply courtesy in demanding the hearer's attention.

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