

Using Hedges in Misani Speeches throughout COVID-19 vs. Pre-COVID-19 Span

Instructor: Mohammad Jabbar Lazim

University of Misan/ College of Education/ Dept. of English Language

mohammed.jabbar@uomisan.edu.iq

Abstract:

Hedging devices are linguistic characteristics that have numerous functions. In this study of sociolinguistics, these devices demonstrate a comparison between the types and frequency of hedging devices used by the Misani social groups prior to the COVID-19 time and the types and frequency of hedges employed by the same groups within the COVID-19 duration through their communication in areas in Misan city. The procedure adopted in the study was a questionnaire which was sent to the sample. The sample of the study consisted of 70 participants who were selected from physicians working in hospitals, university instructors and other social groups in the city of Misan. The data was analyzed as a body for the number and types of hedging devices used in this study. The talks spoken by Misani social groups were divided into two periods: the speeches before the appearance of COVID-19 and within the COVID-19 time. The results of the study demonstrated that the speakers during the Coronavirus tend to use more hedging devices in their speeches than in those of the same speakers before the appearance of the COVID-19. The recommendations of this study are to give hedges an enormous prominence due to their interest in a communication process in community and their help in solving many issues attached to that community particularly when speakers use such items in vague, cautious, accurate and solid situations.

Key words: Sociolinguistics, Hedging devices, Fuzziness , COVID-19.

Introduction

Whether there are spoken language or written language, the meanings of linguistic forms must be determined by contexts, physical or linguistic context. In every setting, there are particular factors whose task to contribute to conveying these meanings between speakers to interpret their behaviors through a pattern of using these linguistic forms. Therefore, this seems to account for the fact that there exists mutual intelligibility among speakers of a particular language. It is fully reasonable to define language as the most appropriate means of communication, cooperation and participation. In order for speakers become successfully collaborated to each other, they use this tool that serves as `` the primary physical component of the human message system `` (Bretton,1976, p.431).

What is Sociolinguistics and what is its interest?

Sociolinguistics is usually defined ``as the descriptive study of the effect of any or all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on language and the ways it is used.`` It has the capacity of overlapping with patterns of social relationships, the social behavior of human , social interaction, and aspects of culture associated with our daily life (Wikipedia, 2024,para. 1) . Moreover, Fields of linguistics vary according to their users. Among those fields of linguistics which is affected by sociolinguistics is morphology.

To investigate and consult, the people ask questions and reply to the other people`s speeches and demands. Doing such social tasks appropriately, people need to modify their interactional patterns using various linguistic devices. Since the term social class is usually utilized to recognize groups of people sharing something, as well as it very often is concerned with the speakers in towns and cities, the employment of hedges has been used in speaking of the social context of certain groups, particularly those who have been present throughout Coronavirus, to identify their speech with each other. They have been using these hedging expressions or words to go beyond the expressions or words of politeness, gender and so on to include and accomplish other healthy, political, scientific and social issues. According to Jinyu (2014), the linguistic differences or similarities between people regardless gender differences or any other groups are related to the ways in which they are treated in society. Yule (2010) agrees with Jinyu`s perspective and states that ``the unique circumstances of every life result in each of us having an individual way of speaking`` (p. 255).

Misanis Social Groups` Talk during COVID-19 Span

Communicating in the language-using setting, Misanis social groups, like other speakers in Iraq, are also involved in social, political, healthy issues. In the conversation, the speakers usually ask questions or investigate something and respond to others` speeches and their demands using their mother tongue, as well as English as a foreign language. To accomplish this in ways that keep other speakers` sensibilities away from risks they inevitably encounter resulting under certain circumstances and effective talk with others in their area, they should choose words and expressions to express caution, vagueness, claims and even solidarity occurring due to Coronavirus. And because the hedges are means used for the avoidance of the “unnecessary risks, responsibilities and functions such as good rapport, giving options, respect, showing uncertainty, caution, or consideration” (Caffi,2007, p.7), hedging devices have come to play a basic role during the COVID-19 period. The speakers, particularly in the city of Misan, have been picking these hedging means up within Covid19 a lot compared to previous periods. Therefore, there are three reasons why those speakers tend to use hedges.

First, the COVID-19 object has recently and surprisingly come. This can indicate the fact that the nature of this virus requires human recognition.``In real situations, it is rare to find objects that exactly match a particular class or category``(Vlasyan, 2019, p.618). That is, when investigating the symptoms of this virus, there have been different possible responses from Misanis social groups` point of view, particularly ordinary people, because such viruses symptoms almost depend on someone`s immunity. In Misanis talk, for example, if someone can say to another person who may have virus You may have flu, not Coronavirus, that person seems to assume if he really has COVID-17, COVID-19 or any other new variant since the virus is a relative conceptual thing. This agrees with the view of Zadeh(1965) regarding hedging in terms of human recognition. According to his view, that most classes in the real world are fuzzy. Therefore, the expressions are used to represent such devices as modal verbs(may, might, could,etc..) cognition verb(think, believe, seem,etc..), classifies expressions(sort of, kind of) and so on.

Second, the nature of hedging or fuzziness usually tends to fit weakness or hesitance. In language domain, O`Barr and Atkins (2011) explained that linguistic characteristics showing tentativeness and uncertainty of an assertion are attached to

powerless individuals whether they are men or women. In this respect, even when the difference between the men and women was described in terms of the use of hedges, Lakoff(1975) and some other scholars referred to the weak features women have. Mohajera and Jan (2015) added that hedges are usually used by individuals disregarding the gender to express one`s self- relief when he/she feels his failure in a particular situation, that is, they are employed to decrease the topics sensitivity(Coates, 2004). This certainly indicates that hedging devices seem to have come to impact people's sensibilities. Consequently, because all the people, especially in Misan, more or less can be weak during the COVID-19 period and individuals using these hedging means are positively affected, Misani's social groups recourse to use these hedging expressions in their talk a lot to express their sensibilities during the COVID-19 time. They have been doing so since they have thought that such mitigated expressions probably have been decreasing their fears and suffering from Coronavirus because talking about this virus has become one of the more sensitive topics people have had in their life, particularly patient individuals. In Misan, for instance, the speakers have been using these devices to avoid telling others, especially patients, with the full reality of COVID-19. They have been doing that in order to motivate the patients to resist the risks of disease, maintain their health from deteriorating and eventually overcome the virus. In turn, most people who have been present during the Corona period have said that most individuals have liked to hear expressions like hedging devices, as one person to another person who may have had COVID-19 in Don't worry the corona virus may be like flu, but a bit stronger, I think it isn't so dangerous disease, or It is said that this virus could be curable. According to Hardcastle et al.(2015), that `` most social psychological theories applied to health behavior change tend to assume a degree of motivation for change and have focused on attempts to promote action by converting motivation into action``(p.1). During the COVID-19, the words or expressions such as may, probably, likely, it is said as hedging devices have been more frequently used.

What are hedging devices and what are their function?

Due to the needs of its users in society, the hedging has motivated the scholars (Skelton, 1988 ,Salager-Meyer, 2000, Hyland, 1998) and others to adopt it in the area of their work. As linguistic strategies qualifying categorical commitments, this concept comes to express tentativeness rather than certainty .In social setting, hedging is treated as a regular process found among participants: the listener tends to accept the fuzzier speech by a speaker in a certain situation under particular circumstances.

The concept of hedging can be seen as the mitigating device to reduce the unwelcome effects of a speech act between participants in a conversation (Fraser, 1980). Although the concept of mitigation is dissimilar with that of hedging, the need for developing such concepts has led them to work together (Ibid). In addition, Sahragard and Javanmardi (2011), in their study on the communicative context of some Iranian participants, discovered that language has the offensive side and the hedges can help in decreasing this side. That is, sometimes information conveyed by the language does not seem to be appropriate (Salager-Meyer, 1994). As a form of euphemism, hedges can be adverbs such as slightly, comparatively, somewhat etc. as in The virus is somewhat curable, adjectives such as insignificant, unimportant ,unnecessary etc. as in The problem I would like to talk about may be unimportant, and even clauses such All I know, that Corona is curable, what I know and so on as in They are not sure if the virus may disappear soon, but this is what they know. The words somewhat and unimportant in the first two sentences and the subordinate clause what I know in the last sentence represent mitigating forms, hedges, to lessen the effect of the utterances.

It is also viewed as a way of informing the truth only to a particular extent because of the vagueness occurring in a certain context. When talking, the utterances certainly become somewhat false /true, not fully real or unreal. The vagueness typically originates from the sudden appearance of new objects to our world. As a result of these unexpected things, hedges must be " words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzier' (Lakoff,1973,p.471) . These fuzzy things certainly make our statements or speech more fuzzy or hedging. Consequently, Lakoff (1973) produced words and expressions to express such vague things as sort of, kind of, loosely speaking, more or less, roughly, relatively, somewhat, rather, mostly, technically, essentially, in essence, basically, principally, particularly, largely, for the most part, especially, exceptionally, quintessentially, literally, often, more of a ____ than anything else, almost,

typically/typical, as it were, in a sense, in a real sense, in a way, in a manner of speaking, details aside, so to say, practically, a regular, virtually, all but technically, practically, actually, really, all but a, anything but a, (he as much as...)

Furthermore, having been appropriately used for language too, hedging as communicative ability is thought to be a device for conveying vagueness deliberately under situational circumstances. It is described as a “rhetorical strategy, by which a speaker [...] can signal a lack of commitment to either the full semantic membership of an expression [...] or the full commitment to the force” (Fraser, 2010, p.22). During their study on medical discourse between physicians working in a paediatric ward as a type of spoken interaction, Prince(1982) et al. widely elaborated their framework of hedging based on the need for hedges in the case of fuzziness being the kind of a relationship between the participant and the content or within the propositional content itself. According to Prince(1982) et al., hedging means could be elaborated to : adaptors, rounders, plausibility shields and attribution shields. Adaptors show non-prototypicality and speakers could use such devices to adapt a term to fit a new condition, e.g. Her face was sort of pale. The second category of hedging means are called rounders. They are used by the speaker who try to avoid giving exact information, e.g. Her blood pressure was approximately normal. In order for the real situation is not identical, the speaker may use both rounders and adaptors. Therefore, the situations become prototypical (Ibid). Third category is Plausibility shields. It is that such devices normally indicate tentativeness that the speaker can adopt in respect of the proposition content. For example, I think, It is said, etc.. as in I think her urine is yellowish. The last category is called attribution shields. The speaker uses these attribution shields when he needs to attribute what is expressed in proposition to another person. For instance, at least, to someone` knowledge, presumably, according to etc. as in After injection the insulin, her blood sugar will presumably drop. Hence, speakers continue to look for vagueness in their speech since accuracy may result in problems in their commitments in work. To achieve these fuzzy environments, they continue to use hedges as part of a resource, not a problem (Skelton, 1988).

From the adaptation of hedging phenomenon with some linguistic fields, these hedging devices definitely play a basic role in fuzzing and mitigating the language in different language-using settings.

Related studies of literature

No doubt, each language has its own systematic pattern for using its linguistic features. Because the hedging devices are part of these features, they are often used to contribute to alleviating statements or utterances to express Caution, solidarity, vagueness and others in different context. Furthermore, nearly scholars such as

(Coates, 1987; Holmes, 1984; O'Barr & Atkins, 2011) assert that the cooperative nature the hedging devices have makes these items manipulated by one group, not the other.

Furthermore, Lakoff (1975) claims that the hedging devices are often identified as weak features by the recipients, therefore; their effect are obviously found in communication. He investigated from these devices through the distinction between the male and female speeches. During the investigation, she concluded that the hedging corresponds with the features of women being weak. Consequently, she considered this reason that leads the women to manipulate such devices in their speeches. O'Barr and Atkins(2011) almost agree with Lakoff(1975) as to the fuzzy features of human. They stated that linguistic hedging features are used by weak individuals regardless the gender. They viewed that the denser powerless people are, the more hedging the context is.

In the other study, Coates(1993) searched for the analysis of female and male speeches in terms of the use of hedging expressions as a way to express the politeness. She showed the difference between the ways the men and women use. During the study, she provided the information that males sometimes use some certain hedging devices more than female in some situations.

Similarly, Mohajer and Jan`s (2015) study endeavors to add to the existing body of literature on social setting by looking at examples hedging devices in men`s communication to figure out that these means are characteristics used by men. The study was conducted with analyzing recorded conversations of Iranian male to examine how these elements are applied in their informal interactions. The researchers concluded that Iranian males use these devices hedges in their communication to save their faces as the speakers and attempt to preserve the face of addressees.

Behnam and Khaliliaqdam (2012) conducted the study in Kurdish spoken language to examine the hedges. In their study, they attempted to find out if these hedging devices are manipulated in the language of the Kurdish speakers as being a degree of commitment to their speeches. They , after collecting the data through interviews and dialogues, reached conclusions that the Kurdish speakers can mainly use the hedges as mitigated ways in many conversations and also reported the role these devices played in English and Kurdish talk was almost the same. This study corresponded with the conclusions of the Vlasyan`s (2019) study which showed that the hedging devices are very common in casual conversation and give a key interpersonal communicative resource of the participants in conversations.

It has been observed from the above presentation of the aforementioned studies that these studies are interested in the manipulation of hedging expressions in different contexts. Yet, no study has mainly been concerned with the study of hedging devices

used as sociolinguistics in Misanis social speeches during the COVID-19 period versus previous periods, a point which this study takes into consideration, i.e., filling in this gap..

Statement of the problem

The distinction made between the speech of social groups under certain circumstances and the speech of the same groups who live in ordinary conditions and justifications behind many linguistic selections like hedging devices they use when communicating have motivated many scholars particularly sociolinguists. Following the same work, there are some researchers have investigated and reached conclusions in this area.

Significance of the study:

The hedging devices as a way of softening language, mitigating claims, and expressing vagueness must be a clue to social issues under particular conditions. Such linguistic items have been attached to lots of works and articles of researchers. They have been used to cope with most studies whether these studies have been cross-linguistic, or not. Although all the studies have been carried out by western researchers concentrating on their cultures, what this study has investigated and reached can be considered as a device to make other issues can be deeply investigated through sociolinguistics. It has also added the information that the differences between the speeches is not only in terms of one group versus the other group, but the differences can also be in terms of the different times of the same groups in one area under certain conditions.

Research questions

The objectives of this research paper and what has been already considered are taken into consideration in the answer to the research questions.

1. Do Misanis social groups really use the hedging expressions in their talk a lot during the COVID-19 compared to the pre-COVID-19 span?
2. Are the talks of social groups who have been living the COVID-19 period more fuzzy than those of the same groups who lived the pre- COVID-19 due to healthy affects and human nature?

Hypothesis

Based on the first question of the research paper, the hypothesis of the research can be:

There is valued distinction between the number and the types of hedging items Misanis social groups manipulate in their conversations within the Coronavirus period and the number and types of hedging items the same groups manipulate in their speeches before the Coronavirus span.

Method

The researcher used a descriptive quantitative approach in his research to study, compare and analyze a discourse hedging feature. This method could discover to what extent that speakers of the Misanis social groups who have been living the Covid-19 period have resorted to manipulate the hedging in their speeches more than in those of the same groups who lived before the Corona period and to emphasize sociolinguistic effects as well.

The questionnaire

In order to collect the required data, a questionnaire was selected as a tool. The questionnaire was constructed containing eight items which each area of the Misanis speakers must have. These areas include physicians working in Misan hospitals, English department staff in University of Misan, and other social groups randomly chosen in the city of Misan. The questionnaire built for gathering the required data is dependent on three scales: each item given agree takes (3), Neutral takes (2) or Disagree takes (1). The data was statistically treated after it was taken by the questionnaire from Misanis social groups about their conversations with their friends, relatives or colleagues from their memories before coming Coronavirus and its variants and during the COVID-19 time via cellular phones or at work etc.. The participants in the study belong to the 20 physicians working in Misan hospitals and 50 others randomly chosen as the speakers of Misanis social groups, particularly patients hospitalized with COVID-19, and the English department staff in University of Misan. Their background relatively belongs to the various cultures, and their ages are different from one person to another. The

researcher chose them to be participants in his study because most of them speak English as well as their native language when they want to talk to their friends/colleagues who share them the same work. Certainly, all of them have been present prior to and during COVID-19. The researcher told them about the conditions and the reason behind this study. The participants, in turn, they emphasized that they would implement what was required. In the end, the questionnaire form of collecting data is as following.

Table 1. The Construction of Questionnaire Having the Areas of Work and Items.

Area	Items	Significance		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Misanis speakers before and within the appearance of COVID-19	1. The use of hedging expressions has increased during the corona period. 2. The use of hedging expressions was low before the corona period. 3. You have chosen such expressions to talk to the patient for the sake of solidarity. 4. Hedging expressions in one`s speech have probably decreased your fears due to corona virus. 5. The use of these hedging means is as a result of the sudden appearance of Corona virus. 6. Your tendency to use these expressions is because of a lack of full commitment to the situation. 7. This type of virus is known to you before,			

but you did not expect it to appear.

8. I did not know this virus before and it has suddenly appeared.

Data collection and analysis:

A questionnaire of eight items were assigned to the participants in the study. The participants were asked to choose any scale (Agree/ Neutral/ Disagree) of each item and submit it to the researcher before it was delivered in front of the audience. The researcher explained hedging devices and their interest in utterances to them. Enough time was also given to every participant to think and then choose.

Results

In order to accomplish the aims of this study, the data was statistically analyzed after the sample of this study was administrated by the questionnaire. Table(1) provides the total scales of the items selected by the Misanis social speakers about the use of hedging devices in their speeches throughout the COVID-19 period versus pre-covid19 periods.

Table 1. Misanis speakers before and within the appearance of COVID-19.

Item No	Item Content	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage Significance	Percentage Significance Rank	Test z	Value	Statistical Determination
1	The use of hedging expressions has increased during the corona period.	1.0000	.00000	% 79.07	1	6.86	1.96	Significant
2	The use of hedging expressions was low before the corona period.	2.6200	.49031	% 77.02	2	8.01	1.96	Significant
3	You have chosen such expressions to talk to the patient for	1.4000	.49487	% 68.12	7	7.98	1.96	Significant

	the sake of solidarity.							
4	Hedging expressions in one`s speech have probably decreased your fears due to corona virus.	1.1600	.37033	% 69.04	5	8.13	1.96	Significant
5	The use of these hedging means is as a result of the sudden appearance of Corona virus.	1.4600	.50346	% 64.32	8	9.92	1.96	Significant
6	Your tendency to use these expressions is because of a lack of full commitment to the situation.	1.0000	.00000	% 70.21	4	9.98	1.96	Significant
7	This type of virus is known to you before, but you did not expect it to appear.	2.7800	.50669	% 68.87	6	8.46	1.96	Significant
8	I did not know this virus before and it has suddenly appeared.	1.0000	.00000	% 70.23	3	9.03	1.96	Significant
		1.5525	.23295	% 68.76		7.86		Significant

The items (1) and (2) in the above table (1) demonstrate that the number of hedges used in the speeches of Misanis social groups within COVID-19 is larger than that in those of the same social groups before Coronavirus. Selecting them and recording the highest marks is clear evidence that hedging devices are the result of appearing something fuzzy which has suddenly occurred. To interpret the speech and classify membership, approximate the notion to some extent, express doubt about one`s speech ,and contribute to the truth value of proposition through comprising linguistic forms, the speakers certainly have been using various linguistic means of hedging. These hedging forms can be categorized: Adaptors (a little bit ,somewhat, sort of, kind of, etc..), rounders(approximately, about, something, etc..), plausibility shields(I think, probably, as far as I can tell, he has to believe right now, I don`t see, ashufah mo katir, etc..), and attribution shields (, presumably, to doctors` knowledge, according to, at least, it is said, etc..).

Discussions

Based on the publication of Prince et al., (1982) about linguistic forms considered as tools to manage the information and the publication of O'Barr and Atkins (2011) about linguistic hedging forms which are regarded as the feature of weak individuals' language regardless the gender, and as theorized earlier in this investigation , it has been accounted for that social groups use linguistic forms in their speeches to express the tone, information , vagueness and attitude when they become powerless or encounter unobvious and cautious attitudes more than when they are in normal circumstances. The scholars stated that in exceptional conditions, the powerless social groups or those who are to be more accurate tend to use the hedging devices to become more tentative, vague and solidary. In this study, to interpret the speech, approximate the notion to some extent, and express doubt about one's speech through comprising linguistic forms as a result of occurring something fuzzy and sudden like Coronavirus and its variants, Misanis social groups certainly have been using various linguistic means of hedging. They have been employing hedging devices a lot ,particularly at the beginning of the appearance of this virus, compared to the past periods. The hedging forms can be categorized: adaptors (a little bit ,somewhat, sort of, kind of, etc..), rounders(approximately, about, something..), plausibility shields(I think, probably, as far as I can tell, he has to believe right now, I don't see..), and attribution shields (, presumably, to doctors' knowledge, according to, at least, it is said..)

Although all indications associated with the percentages of items in the table, especially those of the items 1 and 2, demonstrated that the hedging devices have been being used by the Misanis speakers in their speeches during COVID-19 rather than in those before coronavirus by the same groups, there have been some significant differences among social groups and how they have been utilizing such means and their functions in accord with the nature of their work . That is, in the study, the data was expanded to include different types of hedge and their use among Misanis speakers. For example, one social group, physicians, could have been using certain hedging expressions such as kind of , sort of, somewhat, something and so on (rounders) to approximate the notion of this thing (Corona) and its risks to the patients ,or through raising awareness among the speakers about seriousness of the viruses in a mitigated way on TV or other media as in: You may not get infected if you do not mix with others ,or It is a kind of virus that affects the respiratory system.. . Here, the physicians, with those expressions and others, have been trying to approximate the concept of Coronavirus by their own way to people, depending on medical backgrounds. In terms of solidarity, they have thought that people have been weak and have had fears because of this virus. And since the hedging devices can be used to treat with weak peoples' attitudes, the speakers have wanted to decrease listeners' fears due to COVID-19 ,that is, the people who have been afraid of the virus have been in need for hearing hedging devices in the speech of physicians like rounders . In the Misan context, there are a lot of

expressions used to do so. The physician, for instance, could have been saying The virus is exactly like influenza, but it is a little bit stronger. Therefore, the rounders, like a little bit in the sentence, are regarded to be strategies in their speech to treat others` sensibilities. Whereas some other groups in Misan city, ordinary people, have been usually employing words or expressions like attribution shields: it is said, it is believed, according to the doctor`s saying.. . For example, when asking someone who has never known this virus before, he has been saying `It is said that Coronavirus may not be long in the body`. This indicates that people who have not specific fields in medicine have to choose linguistic hedging forms in order to communicate with their counterpart while speaking about a vague and sudden thing like COVID-19.

Some other Misanis social groups working in official institutions and who are restricted to the commitments of their work tend to use a lot of hedging devices as plausible fields, such as I think, if clause and so on. When knowing about going to work, it has been necessary to make sure of the commitments with other colleagues in work because there have been no a static appointment during the Coronavirus period. In Misan , the local government has sometimes been taking preventive measures such as curfews and others, depending on the increase or decrease in the number of infections due to Corona. This by itself represents hedging which requires that Misanis social speakers have been using hedges like plausible shields. For example, during a call, one teacher may have been asking anyone of his colleagues if they may have been going work tomorrow or not I think we will not finish our work this week if the local government imposes a curfew. In this case, the expressions I think and if clause in the speech and a lot of expressions pragmatically common in Misan city like Inshallah(= God willing / if God accept) , ashufaha (in my opinion) and so on are all hedging devices used in the speeches of Misanis speakers a lot during the Corona virus time in contrast with pre-Corona span.

Conclusion:

The research study aiming at the use of hedging devices by the discourse of the Misanis social speakers during The COVID-19 time versus pre- Corona span provided a descriptive sociolinguistic topic analysis. The confidence and fact among the participants in the Misanis social groups during the COVID-19 period have been away,

the speakers have not been being described as social confident groups. From their tendency for selecting the items, it has been suggested that they have tended to fuzzy and mitigate their speeches. That is, They have been assumed to raise critical issues within the COVID-19 time and such issues could have been seen from different viewpoints, as well as they have been carried many possibilities. This indicates the fact that they have had weak features due to a fuzzy object has suddenly appeared and that there have been linguistic features, such as hedging devices, must have been used as a strategy to tackle this phenomenon and its risks in a flexible way. Therefore, the Misanis social speakers have been using these means to keep their communication in certain time and under a particular circumstance

In contrast, such hedging devices had been being used lesser within pre- COVID-19 span than the COVID-19 time by the same social groups. The participants were almost direct and tended to be somewhat assertive in their talks towards actual information most time, especially those who have commitments with their work. There were a lot of their expressions could have been labeled as boosters instead of hedging items. Yet sometimes the speakers were using the hedging devices but in an inconsistent level, depending on the nature of the speakers` work and their circumstances. However, this difference is regarded small compared to the COVID-19 period. Lastly, the results obtained in this study can probably be among researchers` interest to conduct more and more investigations about the significance of the difference in the number of linguistic features used in the discourse of social groups in a certain span ,not all times, under certain circumstances.

References

Behnam, B., & Khaliliaghdam, S. (2012). A cross-cultural study on hedging devices in Kurdish conversation. *Acta Linguistica Asiatica*, 2(1), 73-88.

Bretton, H.L. (1976) Political Science, Language, and Politics. In W. O`barr and Y.O`barr (eds.) Language and Politics. Mouton: The Hague.

Caffi, C. (2007). *Mitigation*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Coates, J. (1987). Epistemic modality and spoken discourse. *Transactions of the Philological society*, 85(1), 110-131.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-968X.1987.tb00714.x>

Coates, J. (2004). Women, men, and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language . London: Pearson Longman.

Fraser, B. (1980). Conversational mitigation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 4(4), 341-350.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(80\)90029-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(80)90029-6)

Fraser, B. (2010). Pragmatic competence: The case of hedging. In: Gunther Kaltenbock, Wiltrud Mihatsch, and Stefan Schneider (eds.), *New approaches to hedging*. UK: Bingley, 15-34.

Hardcastle S.J., Hancox J, Hattar A., Maxwell-Smith C., Thøgersen-Ntoumani C., & Hagger M.S. (2015) Motivating the unmotivated: how can health behavior be changed in those unwilling to change? *Front. Psychol.*, 6:835.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00835>

Holmes, J. (1984). Hedging your bets and sitting on the fence: Some evidence for hedges as support structures. *Te Reo*, 27(1), 47-62.

Hyland, K. (1998). Hedging in scientific research articles. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

<https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.54>

Jinyu, D. (2014). Study of gender differences in language under the sociolinguistics. *Canadian Social Science*, 10(3), 92-96.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/%25x>

Lakoff, G. (1973). Hedges: a study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 2(4), 458-508.

Lakoff, R. T. (1975). *Language and woman's place*. New York: Harper and Row.

Mohajer L., & Jan J. (2015). Preserving face and the use of hedges in masculine world of men. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 208, 13-20.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.176>

O'Barr, W., & Atkins, B. K. (2011). 'Women's language' or 'powerless language'? In J. Coates & P. Pichler (Eds.), *Language and gender: A reader* (2nd ed., pp. 451-460). United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell.

Prince, Ellen, Joel Frader, & Charles Bosk. (1982). On hedging in physician-physician discourse. In: Robert J. di Pietro (ed.), *Linguistics and the Professions*. Norwood-New Jersey: Ablex 1-29 (paginated pre-print).

Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*, 13 (2), 149-170

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0889-4906\(94\)90013-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0889-4906(94)90013-2)

Salager-Meyer, F. (2000). Hedging and positivism. *English for specific purposes*, 19(2), 175-187.

[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(99\)00022-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(99)00022-8)

Sahragard, R., & Javanmardi, F. (2011). English speech act realization of "refusals" among Iranian EFL learners. *Cross-cultural Communication*, 7(2), 181-198.

Skelton, J. (1988). The care and maintenance of hedges. *ELT Journal*, 42(1), 37-43.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/42.1.37>

Vlasyan , G. R. (2019). Linguistic hedging in interpersonal communication. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 66 (72), 617-623.

<https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs>

Wikipedia (2024) `` Sociolinguistics``

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociolinguistics>

Yule, G. (2010). *The study of language*. Cambridge University Press: New York

Zadeh, L. A. (1965). Fuzzy set. *Information and control*, 8(3), 338-353

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-9958\(65\)90241-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-9958(65)90241-X)