

An investigation of Hedges' discourse analysis using male and female languages

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Summary:

This study explores the uses of hedging phrases in English for both males and females, using discourse analysis to understand how gender influences communication patterns. The phrases "maybe," "somewhat," and "I think" are examples of hedging phrases or words that soften a sentence. These phrases are often associated with politeness, ambiguity, or confusion.

To analyze differences in communication language between men and women in educational contexts, a questionnaire was used to analyze academic discourse. The sample ranged in age from 35 to 57 years and was divided into faculty members and department heads, as well as gender (male and female). The sample was selected from Al-Mustansiriya University.

They were then asked to complete a questionnaire containing six general questions. The study was conducted because these topics require a balance between understanding and flexibility on the one hand, and consistency and clarity on the other.

Chapter one

1.1. Introduction

Hedging is a linguistic strategy used to soften speech to avoid upsetting the listener, to demonstrate the speaker's uncertainty or lack of commitment to what is being said, or to demonstrate reluctance to give up their role in the conversation. Darwin (2017) confirms significant disparities between men's and women's speech patterns

in recent decades. Regarding linguistic reports, women were more likely to use hedging strategies.

Fall-rise intonation patterns, modal verbs like "may," "might," "would," and "could," tag questions like "isn't it" and "didn't he," phrases like "I assume," and adverbs like "maybe," "probably," and "generally" are examples of hedging tactics. These distinctions frequently mirrored the kinds of discussions that took place between men and women. While males used language mainly to transfer information, women often used it to express their emotions and develop ties; therefore, it was more crucial to employ tools that reduced the likelihood of hurting one another's feelings.

Implying that their recipient's sentiments were less important. As a result, men were socially permitted to use profanity and non-standard English more freely, but women's languages are typically seen as being more formal and courteous. As a result, it is not unusual to hear women chastised with phrases like "that utterance is un lady-like," even if a guy may have used the identical phrase. However, it is starting to be seen that males are utilizing hedges more frequently in their interactions.

Since the 1960s, when it was first examined in linguistics (Lakoff, 1973; Prince et al., 1982; Crismore & Vande Kopple, 1997, 1999; Crompton, 1997; Cabanes, 2007; Caffi, 2007; Fraser, 2010; Brown & Levinson, 2014), little is known about the nature of hedging, hedge classes, and discourse characteristics. Insight into the usage of hedges in two distinct discourse genres—political speeches (planned, formal) and interviews (spontaneous, informal)—that differ in their principal goals and level of spontaneity is the research's practical usefulness.

Appropriate hedging behavior requires awareness of the functions of hedges and structural patterns they are used in. When non-native speakers fail to hedge correctly, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, or arrogant. If they

misinterpret a hedged utterance, they may misunderstand the interlocutor's .In discourse analysis, hedges are linguistic devices used to soften or weaken the force of an utterance, allowing speakers or writers to express opinions, claims, or criticisms in a less direct or assertive way. They play a crucial role in conveying uncertainty, politeness, and academic caution.

1.2. The Problem of the research

Speakers employ hedging as a tactic to avoid making straightforward assertions or responses. By employing a certain phrase or structure, speakers might show that they are not adhering to the anticipated substance of their argument (content dilution) or the intended rhetorical power of their statement (force dilution).

Hedging has garnered more attention since it is less common in spoken language than in written language, indicating how often it is in emotional speech.

1.3. Aims of the research

1- Identifying the most common hedge phrases used by professors, students, and teachers in educational institutions.

2- Analyzing discourse and how gender (male and female) as a social variable influences the use of hedges in answering students' inquiries and among professors themselves.

Chapter Two

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1 - Discussion of previous studies on male and female languages in discourse
Analyzing gendered communication is important because it highlights the disparities and imbalances that exist in the actual world (Lakoff, 1973: 73). Sociolinguistics offered methods for examining language based on several variables, including gender and socioeconomic background, in the 1960s and 1970s.

Lakoff's book "Language and Woman's Place" was released in 1975. She implies

that by using strategies like hedges, American women are compelled to moderate and soften their ideas.

According to Eckert and Males. They contend that Lakoff thinks women should "speak like a lady" from a young age, meaning they should be more refined, indirect, courteous, and conservative than males (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 158).

As stated by Joseph (2004:61), Thorne and Henley (1975) and Spender (1980) quickly followed up on Lakoff's work from 1975. This led to Tannen's (1994) discourse analyses of women's language as well as Cameron's (1992-1995) more politically focused work.

Numerous studies conducted in the 1980s verified that women are more likely than men to speak in a way that comes out as courteous. For instance, courtesy in the Mayan culture is examined by Brown (1980: 126). She demonstrates that women employ more courteous tactics than men. Although hedges are used by both sexes, only women utilize them to convey their innermost thoughts and feelings. Hedgehogs are a way for men to show their uncertainty. According to Brown, men's communication style lacks facial attentiveness.

One may thus contend that this approach is less polite. To her, "it seems reasonable to predict that women in general speak more formally and politely, since a higher level of politeness is expected from inferior to superior and because women are culturally relegated to a secondary status relative to men." Similarly, Coates (1988:123) asserts that women are more polite than men. Coates uses the term "women's styles" to describe politeness (ibid.: 102).

2.2. Hedges and Gender

Hedges may be used differently depending on gender, some linguists conclude. Hedges are used more often by women than by men. It is generally the case that hedges are used in female speech (Lakoff 1975:79). Using "sounding feminine" techniques, hedges reflect their social status. In the study of "sex roles," Preisler

(1986:288) found that "linguistic tentativeness signals are correlated with both sex and interactional role, which is either task-oriented or socio-emotional." Preisler found that although women's language is characterized by the use of more verbal assertiveness techniques, it frequently employs hedges (ibid).

The previous viewpoints, however, are not widely agreed upon. Other linguists, such as Holmes (1990: 202), disagree with Lakoff and Preisler's assertions. This study highlights that "women often use hedges as positive politeness devices signaling solidarity with the addressee," as opposed to being instruments for expressing uncertainty. At the same time, she says, successful panelists calm their audience. Female panelists are great because of their typically helpful approach (ibid.:205).

It is noted by Holmes (1995: 74) that women typically speak in ways that appear courteous. Hedgehogs are a politeness device, she notes. Holmes and Coates appear to agree on this point. She clarifies that hedges lessen the impact or power of a statement. In this sense, they express a desire to avoid imposing (Coates, 1996: 264).

According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 183), women are frequently accused of presenting themselves as less fully devoted to the statements they have made. Women who speak English are likely to hedge their bets using qualifiers like "sort of" or "probably," as well as discourse particles like "you know," "of course," and "like," according to Lakoff (1975; quoted in Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, ibid.).

2.3. - Importance of studying discourse analysis in relation to gender

Discourse analysis and gender are two closely related concepts that have been extensively studied in academic work. Discourse is used to create and maintain gender categories, which influence power relations. The study of the language used is known as discourse analysis. It is the study of how we interpret language and what we do when we use it in certain situations. The study of language at a higher level

than the sentence, and how sentences are connected to produce meaning, coherence, and purpose, is another definition of discourse analysis.

But even a single sentence or speech can be considered a "communication" or an "action," not just a sentence structures who's "literal meaning" is derived from grammar. Grammar may tell us the precise meaning of "I pronounce you husband and wife," but it does not tell us when and where marriage is truly established.

The term "discourse analysis" is used to study how sentences in an oral or written text fit together to create meaning and coherence, and to identify different literary genres (such as dialogues, narratives, reports, descriptions, explanations, etc.). The term "pragmatics" is sometimes used to study language in use.

(Levinson, 1983). The term "discourse analysis" used in this book includes both pragmatics (the study of the meanings of language used in specific contexts) and corpus (the study of how sentences and phrases are combined to produce meaning across multiple sentences or phrases).

We use language not only to signify things but also to act. We accomplish goals, objectives, and activities. A pastor marries two people when he declares, "I pronounce you husband and wife," rather than simply telling them something. A speaker who refers to a relationship between two gay men as "marriage" contributes to the creation or reconstitution of the institution of marriage in a specific way, as an institutionally sanctioned union between two faithful people, not necessarily a man and a woman.

Chapter three

3.1. Methodology and Findings

3.1.1 Description of the research design

Qualitative data for this study were collected using a descriptive methodology. Six general questions about their interactions and responses to university students were distributed to 86 professors from various departments at Al-Mustansiriya University.

The survey included fourth-year undergraduate students, ranging in age from 20 to 22 years. The target group for the survey was professors aged 35 to 57 years. with at least five years of experience, experience and culture were key factors in the communication style and ease of conveying information to them.

Filler is not a sign of weakness; it's a common strategy women use to maintain friendly and open communication.

People often use phrases like "eh...," "uh...," "oh," "um...," or "well, you know, I mean" when speaking. We refer to these types of phrases as fillers. They are words, sounds, or phrases that can be omitted from speech without changing its meaning.

These words may also appear in any part of the speech. Since the data used is professional experimental interview data, students should not use redundant phrases such as "as you know," "sort of," or "as you can see" in their answers.

Especially in formal settings, men may choose a direct approach to save time and communicate information effectively.

To deepen their understanding of the institutional barriers, future research on the integration of this important sector should be encouraged. Because they will graduate as primary school teachers, they should be encouraged to share their ideas and initiatives and employ them in the field of education. Because they are the foundation of the future, dealing with them requires wisdom, experience, and guidance, which is a significant challenge.

Discourse Markers: According to Quirk et al. (1985), direct messages are "apparently useless and meaningless elements" (pp. 178-179), and although they do not contribute to the spread of information, they are very important because the motivation to speak seems to be based on the need to feel as though the listener is sharing something with you.

He refers to them as “intimate signals” and “participatory tools.” According to Brinton (2008, p. 1), direct messages are “short vocal elements used for practical or procedural purposes, but with little referential meaning.”

The main purpose of direct messages, according to Rediker (1991), is to draw the listener's attention to a specific linguistic term that indicates how the utterance relates to its immediate environment—the types of connections between the intended sentence and the current discourse frame (ibid., pp. 367–381). According to him, direct messages are linguistic counterparts or complements to intonation cues or ambiguous gestures that help understand the participant.

Discourse is “much less lively and personal without direct messages,” according to Stenstrom (1994, p. 17). They indicate receiving information, agreeing with the interlocutor or interlocutors, and participating in the conversation (ibid.).

3.2. Data Analysis

This descriptive study was based on research on hedging in social discourse, specifically among male and female teachers in the educational environment, and how professors (male and female) interact with fourth-year students and their supervisors within the educational institution. Data for the study were collected using a questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to eighty-six male and female professors of different ages, levels of experience, and length of service, in order to obtain accurate and understandable answers that would help students clarify the information.

To contain uncertainty and anxiety as students prepare for a new experience: practical application, or the application of skills they have acquired over four years, the survey questions cover most of the questions discussed by teachers and students in the educational institution, being accurate and objective.

3.4. Analytical Framework

To gather information and examine the discourse of ambiguity between men and women, the researcher created a questionnaire. Through discourse analysis, this study examines the use of hedges in masculine and feminine language, with the goal of determining how gender influences communication patterns. Hedges (e.g., maybe, sort of, I think) are words or phrases that soften the impact of a statement. They are often associated with ambiguity, obscurity, and politeness.

Two tables were prepared. The first shows an analysis of the dialogue between academics and department heads, along with the highlighted sentences. The second shows an analysis of the dialogue between professors and students.

The following is a thorough examination of the information gathered using a questionnaire that was broken down into seven primary questions:

Questionnaire table (1)

(Between department heads or higher-ranking officials and the academics themselves)

N	Item	Answers	Analysis
1	First Question: Concerning the preparation of an academic workshop	Female: "Maybe next Thursday would be a good time for us to have the workshop? Most staff members could find it simpler. Males: "That could work, but I think Friday would be more convenient for the science department." female: "Oh, I see. I guess you're probably correct. Just since Thursday had a lighter schedule, it seemed like a decent idea. Males: "Yeah, maybe we can check with the rest of the team first, just to be sure."	Fillers: Maybe, perhaps, I imagine, just as I can, I was thinking, perhaps, just. The tone is gentle and accommodating, directly acknowledging the other point of view

2	Question 2: Discussing student evaluation	Female: "It seems like the pupils are under a lot of stress right now. Perhaps we ought to lighten the workload a bit." Male: "You make a valid argument. We can't drastically reduce expectations, but I suppose we could move one of the deadlines." Female: "I wasn't proposing we reduce the standards, of course. I just figured that could be somewhat helpful to them." Male: "All ok. Let's speak with the other faculty members to find out their opinions"	with some flexibility. Fillers help make subtle suggestions, dilute the focus, avoid sudden rejections, and gradually express a point of view without imposing it.
3	Question 3: Discussing curriculum development	Female: "I believe we may need to make some minor revisions to the assessment procedures. Some pupils are having some difficulty using the present system." Male: "It's feasible. However, don't you believe that their study habits are more to blame? For the most part, the system is effective." Female: "That's accurate. I just reasoned that a few adjustments may help bring everything into harmony." Male: "Perhaps. At the following committee meeting, we may go over it in further depth."	

In summary

1. Hedges are used to clarify ambiguity, soften the tone of comments, or promote agreement. For example, typical hedges are, I think, perhaps, somewhat, you know.
2. Transcripts of a variety of dialogues are available, such as meetings, interviews, and class discussions. Participants: The number of speakers is equal between men and women. The frequency, purpose, and location of hedges in speech are key topics for discourse analysis.
- 3-Managing the conversation: When making a request or offering feedback, be polite (Do you mind?).
Saying something like, "I think we could try..." may encourage participation. Asking, "Would it be okay if...?" is not a good way to push the issue.

For women: Strive for consensus and inclusiveness. Managing the conversation helps build unity, encourage politeness, and reduce conflict.

Men use strategic hedging to lessen uncertainty without compromising authority (e.g., "This might be the right approach"). Although less common, these hedging strategies are employed to provide alternatives or to keep control.

Perhaps there's some filler, or perhaps a little of it, I think, is enough.

Function: Empathy, alleviating suffering, noteworthy recommendations, a lack of vulnerability in helping the ambitious, and Japan's understanding of the balance between flexibility and expectations.

Filler: I think, maybe, perhaps, somewhat, perhaps, this is possible, don't you think?

Motivation: Offering suggestions for improvement without direct confrontation

Conservative speech while maintaining the position

Tone: Cautious, allowing for dialogue .Somewhat defensive, but

Women are 72% more likely than men to use fillers to soften their tone and deliver information calmly. Sometimes (14%), though less commonly, men use fillers to soften their claims without appearing condescending. Gender alone is not as important as the social role of the situation (e.g., who is the leader, who speaks first).

Questionnaire table (2)

(Between professors and students)

N	Item	Answers	Analysis
1	Question 4: What is the application process? How are grades distributed?	Female: "In terms of execution, we often begin with observations before moving on to hands-on student involvement. In general, grades are given as follows: 30 for participation and attendance, 40 for implementation, and 30 for the final report. Of course, we take the issue into account if any special circumstances occur. This implies that we can reconsider if it is warranted, correct? Male: The implementation process is simple: The student observes the program for a week before beginning to apply it in	Element: Clarification Almost no hedges. straightforward manner. Tone: Clear, succinct, and decisive. Objective: Stress rules and convey knowledge rapidly. Function: Emphasis on discipline and order. Overarching distinction between men's and women's approaches

		real-life situations. They issue 30 reports, 40 applications, and 30 contributions as part of the assessment. Grades may only be modified with a formal, documented justification. Does this make sense?	to this kind of inquiry. Feature: Men and Women Details: Give detailed explanations, focusing exclusively on the most important details.
2	Question 5: A student asks about the deadline for submitting the final research.	Female: Okay, I think the deadline is next Thursday, but please review the syllabus carefully. Do you mind if I remind you? Male : "The deadline is next Thursday. Review the syllabus. Let me know if you have any problems."	Filler: Greater (possible, typically) Reduced or nonexistent flexibility: Shows a readiness to comprehend or work with others. highlights dedication to the system. Style: Declarative, formal, directive, engaging, supporting, and participatory
3	Question 6: The student would like some input and explanation regarding his project.	Female: "Overall, your performance was good. In short, I think you could have improved the conclusion. Can you clarify that last point?" Male: "The ending is bad, but the project is solid overall. To reinforce your last point, you should clarify it."	

Conclusion:

This research explores how men and women communicate differently in educational settings, particularly when responding to inquiries related to the application and evaluation process, which requires a balance between understanding and flexibility on the one hand, and firmness and clarity on the other. And also includes a comprehensive study of language and style, as well as real-life examples of how men and women respond to these types of inquiries.

Hedging: Typically, Unquestionably, Perhaps, Alright

The tone is adaptable, thoughtful, and specific.

Giving the pupil a thorough explanation and letting them know they are being considered are the objectives.

Building the student's confidence and encouraging them to ask questions without fear are the roles.

Women are more likely to explain regulations in a non-confrontational way using soft language (65%), frequently taking the student's situation into consideration.

Male respondents are more likely to be direct and firm (21%), and they frequently emphasize the regulations' uniformity and clarity. Depending on the situation and the learner, both strategies can be beneficial.

Hedges in this pattern: I believe, May, just, or perhaps. No single filler. Direct speaking.

Tone: Adaptable, encouraging, and indecisive.

Function: Boosting the student's confidence, relieving stress, and facilitating conversation. Direct and unambiguous instructions that minimize extraneous conversation.

Nice, fair, maybe, sort of, maybe, are filler words. Direct, critical communication without any filler.

Method: Use gentle language with criticism to soften its impact. Direct, clear criticism.

Impact on the student: Feels valued and supported. Feels stressed or needs improvement soon.

Chapter four

4.1. Conclusion

Through exploratory research, this study sought to understand how men and women working in educational institutions and interacting with students use discourse analysis. This research aims to examine ambiguity and how it interacts with this age group, as well as with teachers and administrators. Given that students acquire educational skills that they will apply throughout their educational careers, the fourth phase was chosen.

A six-question survey was administered to 86 male and female professors of varying ages, backgrounds, and professions. The results showed that women used 72% more words when chatting with other professors than when talking to students. When interacting with women of the same rank, men tended to be more empathetic

and use a different tone of voice (14%), while they tended to be more direct and assertive (21%) when interacting with students.

While the direct and strong reaction was seen as encouraging and motivating the student to complete his homework, the woman's touching during the chat was seen as a way to relieve his stress and anxiety.

General characteristics of response style Men and women:

Low use of fillers (for cushioning)

Tone: directive, collaborative, interactive, empathetic, and sometimes authoritarian

Criticism: direct, sometimes without introduction, qualified by "maybe, sort of"

Clear goals include helping the learner, maintaining communication, giving clear instructions, and obtaining results.

This isn't the style that every man or woman follows. Experience, culture, and job title are important factors

A woman's use of fillers in her speech is not a sign of weakness; rather, it's often a tactic to maintain a friendly and open conversation

In formal settings, a man may choose a direct style to save time and communicate information effectively.

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Questionnaire on Gender Differences in Language Use in Educational Settings

❖ instructions:

Please explain how you think men and women typically express themselves in each of the following situations. You can provide brief answers or complete sentences that adhere to the required language usage.

1. Discussing a Project Presentation

Situation: Two colleagues are collaborating on a project and discussing how to present it to their group.

How would the man express his opinion?

How would the woman express her ideas?

2. Discussion scenario in an educational setting: A man and a woman employee are having a general discussion about their work at an educational institution.

What would the man say in this situation?

What would the woman say in this situation?

3. Curriculum Development Meeting

Situation: A man and a female professor are discussing how to improve the curriculum.

How will the man express his recommendations?

How will the professor express her recommendations?

4. A student inquires about the deadline for submitting projects.

Situation: A student inquires about the deadline for submitting the final project.

What will the teacher say?

What will the teacher say?

5. A student asks for feedback on a project

Situation: A student asks for feedback on his project.

What would the male instructor say?

What would the female instructor say?

6. A student inquires about the distribution of grades and practicum.

Situation: A student inquires about the practicum process and the distribution of grades.

What explanation would the male instructor offer?

What explanation would the female instructor offer?

دراسة تحليل الخطاب للغموض باستخدام لغة الذكور والإناث

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الغموض . تحليل . دراسة وصفية

الملخص:

يكشف البحث عن استخدامات العبارات التحوطية في اللغة الإنجليزية للذكور والإناث على حد سواء، مستخدمةً تحليل الخطاب لفهم كيفية تأثير النوع الاجتماعي على أنماط التواصل. تُعد عبارات "ربما" و"إلى حد ما" و"أعتقد" أمثلة على العبارات التحوطية أو الكلمات التي تُخفف من حدة الجملة. غالبًا ما ترتبط هذه العبارات بالتهذيب أو الغموض أو الالتباس.

لتحليل الفروق في لغة التواصل بين الرجال والنساء في السياقات التعليمية، استُخدم استبيان لتحليل الخطاب الأكاديمي. تراوحت أعمار العينة بين 35 و57 عامًا، وقُسمت إلى أعضاء هيئة التدريس ورؤساء الأقسام، بالإضافة إلى الجنس (ذكور وإناث). اختيرت العينة من جامعة المستنصرية. ثم طُلب منهم إكمال استبيان يحتوي على ستة أسئلة عامة. أُجريت هذه الدراسة لأن هذه المواضيع تتطلب التوازن بين الفهم والمرونة من جهة، والاتساق والوضوح من جهة أخرى.