

Between Doubt and Certainty: A Study of Hedges in English Political Discourse

Hafiza Sundas Khan¹ and Liaqat Iqbal²

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Abstract

Hedges are linguistic devices that are labeled as expressions of uncertainty, probability and doubt. These linguistic devices are inserted by the speakers and writers in their discourse or writings to make their statements and utterances less direct and uncertain. This research aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of hedges in English political discourse, focusing on their form and functions. By adopting a mixed method approach, which involves collecting and analyzing political discourses and interviews available on YouTube, this research seeks to utilize Salager-Meyer's (1997) framework to comprehensively analyze the use of hedges. It was found that approximators (used 42 times) are common in English political speech. These findings are particularly pertinent as approximators are useful in expressing uncertainty and in facilitating general statements. Introductory phrases, modal auxiliaries, as well as other language forms also came out as significant sources of hedging since they indicated the speakers' desire to restrain the audience expectations and the stature of the claims made. Through this research, it is anticipated to provide a deeper understanding of the linguistic nuances and persuasive strategies used in political communication.

Keywords: Political Discourse, Hedging, Form and Functions of Hedging.

Introduction

Discourse, defined as "language in its contexts of use" (Flowerdew, 2013), differs depending on the specific demands and qualities of various communication settings. Informal situations frequently allow for spontaneous discourse, whereas formal settings, particularly those involving public figures such as politicians, necessitate careful planning. As Teodorescu (2018) points out, language is methodically created in formal contexts, particularly those with big audiences. Van Dijk (2009) adds that political speech is especially deliberate since speakers are aware of the influence of their words and the public setting. Politicians, for example, avoid word overuse because their remarks are usually recorded and examined by the media. Chilton (2004) describes two political perspectives: Two models from which government and politics arise: one based on power and authority and the other on social cooperation. Of all the discourses, political discourse is special vis à vis the need to properly assess its linguistic and paralinguistic components. Guerra (2013) asserts that political speech is typically aimed at large audiences and achieved some desired outcomes, from influencing to convincing. Politicians often utilize their meta discourse methods, hedging, to tone down the directness and soften the signal in order to attain their goals. As an important meta discourse strategy, this research is on hedging in political debate.

¹MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan.

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan.



Hedging expresses doubt or lack of commitment to some proposition. It allows speakers to speak with humility and accuracy. Hedges can express ideas in terms of likelihood, not certainty. Hedges in speech and writing help promote cooperation in that they show the speaker understands the dangers he commits himself to with his words. On the one hand, they act as mitigators, for instance by preventing face threatening situations and being politer. Language is used to practice power in politics. Language and persuasion have long been cherished as intertwining ideas: should language be used to persuade someone to have everything to do with whether that persuasion is moral or is an effort in manipulation.

In this regard, extensive studies have been done on hedging in different forms of political discourse but there is a noticeable gap in hedging use related to Pakistani politics. In Pakistan, political language frequently lies at the tipping point in terms of asserting authority whilst limiting risk, and hedges are a vital rhetorical resource. Yet, the work of hedges has been left out in Pakistani political discourse. This study specifically seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of hedging in political discourse. Forms of hedges, their frequencies and pragmatic functions are pinpointed. This study contributes to the issue of understanding how political figures in Pakistan utilize hedging in their communication, with respect to the linguistic role of language for steering political message across distinct linguistic contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is a place where political rhetoric holds tremendous sway over the opinion of the polls and their political consequences. Nevertheless, the language of the debate has been underexplored for its strategic uses and, in particular, the importance of hedging is undervalued. Previous studies on political rhetoric have, for the most part, concentrated on Western contexts, leaving the sociopolitical dynamics of the packed Pakistani discourse as yet under researched. Such hedging has been further under examined with regards to the forms, frequency, and functions of hedging. This study investigates the rhetorical function of hedging to define how language choices filter public perception and political participation in Pakistan. The study of this focus further enhances the understanding of political language techniques in non-Western cultures and provides insights for developing communication practices in Pakistani politicians.

Literature Review

Over the last twenty years, significant strides have been achieved pertaining to the study of hedges with their distribute in academic prose and political-rhetorical discourse and even in common speech, although postponing academics' opinions concerning the significance of the features in question as far as the studies is concerned. Some, such as Hyland (1998) and Crompton (1997), argue that hedges are intended to demonstrate modesty, minimize personal engagement, and safeguard the listener's good image, whereas Geyer (2008) emphasizes their role as politeness techniques. According to Riekkinen (2009), hedges are a negative politeness tactic that makes comments less straightforward or certain. For discourse analysis, different analytical approaches exist, but this study focuses specifically on a pragmatic approach to hedges, analyzing how they function to manage politeness and convey speaker intent.

Hedging has been analyzed in numerous contexts, including many within English speaking political environments. During press conferences hedging will be highlighted in Alrashady's (2010) exploration of the 2008 discussions between John McCain and Barack Obama and Fraser's (2010) examination of George W. Bush's mastered hedges as well as Abdul Majeed's (2011) examination of the hedging used in the first presidential debate between Obama and John McCain.

Like Laurinaityte, she analyzed the hedging patterns in speeches of Obama and George W. Bush, in specific scenarios: pre and post-election and Truong's research is comprehensive, analyzing hedging in 56 inaugural addresses by 44 U.S. presidents over more than two centuries. Hedging has also been investigated by researchers outside the U.S.; such studies have helped to understand the crosscultural linguistic strategies of hedging. In a study, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's use of hedging in 2015 inaugural address was examined by Idowu and Owuye (2019), while Rabab'ah and Abu Rumman (2015) considered hedging practices in Arabic political discourse through 25 speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan. Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) examine hedging in British political speeches as well as British celebrity interviews to consider some contextual specificities of hedging across genres in Europe. Mížková's research investigated similar elements of political speeches of Tony Blair (in English context) and Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovakian context); Mansour and Alghazo (2021) did similar analysis for Donald Trump's hedging in two speeches to U.N. General Assembly.

In the same way, Aziz et al. (2022), for instance, conducted a corpus-based study on hedging and boosting strategies in the speeches of Benazir Bhutto covering the period from 1989 to 1997 in the South Asian context, while Taweel et al. (2011) provided a broader picture of regional linguistic practices in hedging during conflict related discourse, they did that for Arabic and English broadcast interviews during the Third Gulf War. To extend the exploration of hedging, Jalilifar and Alavi (2012) interviewed the renowned political figures, George W. Bush and Jimmy Carter, on CNN and BBC, while studying hedging in the local U.S. political discourse at Tampa City Council in Florida, confirming the flexibility of hedging across various political states. It means that study of hedging is a significant area, exploring which in the context Pakistan will further add to the worth of the field.

Research Methodology

The present research uses both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to achieve the objectives and answer research questions. Three programs with a focus on political themes were selected. The quantitative feature of this research involved analyzing the data by counting the occurrences of hedges in each hedging category. On the other hand, the qualitative feature of this study encompasses an analysis of the categorized data that focused on the forms and functions of hedges. This includes investigating how hedging is used to express uncertainty, mitigate the statement and soften criticism. Hence, the mixed method approach enabled the researcher to analyze both the forms and function of hedges used in political discourse. Data for this research was gathered using convenience sampling from three political programs. Three prominent Pakistani politicians, Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, and Bilawal Bhutto, were chosen for analysis. Each politician's representation includes one video. The programs selected are Aljazeera, China Global Television Network and The Daily Show. This approach enabled a targeted examination of hedging forms and functions within accessible, relevant political content.

Table 1: Details of the Selected Programmes

No.	Name Of the Program	Telecast Date	Duration
1	Aljazeera	05-08-2023	20 minutes
2	China Global Television Network	13-11-2022	28 minutes
3	The Daily Show	15-03-2023	27 minutes

Each program featured one host and one guest politician, and the research was largely centered on hedges: their forms as well as their functions in political discourse.

The framework of Salager-Meyer (1997) has been selected for data analysis as it provides a wide variety of hedges. This framework is appropriate as with the application of this framework, the authors of the study are able to classify the types of various hedging devices thus enabling advancement of knowledge on their application in different contexts.

Table 2: Salager-Meyer's Taxonomy of Hedging Words

No	Category	Hedging Words
1	Modal Auxiliary Verbs	may, might, can, could, would, should
2	Modal Lexical Verbs	seem, appear, believe, suggest, assume, indicate
3	Adjectival, Adverbial, and Nominal Modal Phrases	
	a) Adjectival Modal Phrases	possible, probable, unlikely, likely
	b) Nominal Modal Phrases	assumption, claim, possibility, estimate
	c) Adverbial Phrases	perhaps, possibly, probably, likely, presumably
4	Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency, and Time	approximately, roughly, about, often, generally, usually
5	Introductory Phrases	I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that
6	If Clauses	if true, if anything
7	Compound Hedges	
	a) Double Hedges	(it may suggest)
	b) Tripple Hedges	(it seems reasonable to assume that)
	c) Quadruple Hedges	(It would seem somewhat unlikely that)

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first category deals with forms of hedges in English political discourse. The second category deals with the pragmatic functions of hedges in English political discourse. In the first category, the collected data is presented in tabular form, where each table details the frequency count of various political forms of hedges in English political discourse. In the second category, the pragmatic functions of hedges in English political discourse were examined.

Forms of Hedges in English Political Discourse

Hedges are language devices that express doubt, ambiguity, or nuance in communication. A framework analysis identified seven major types of hedges, with Introductory Phrases being the most common, occurring 34 times to establish a hesitant tone for utterances. Approximators appeared 42 times, indicating imprecision in degree, quantity, frequency, and time. Modal auxiliaries, with 25 instances, denoted possibility or potential outcomes, whereas modal verbs, adjective/adverbial phrases, and nominal phrases, each with two occurrences, communicated obligation, capacity, permission, and ambiguity. Additionally, compound hedges, which appeared twice, demonstrate intricate complexities in political discourse. Together, these hedges provided vital insights into how speakers manage sensitive themes, allowing them to communicate caution, preserve diplomacy, and approach contentious issues in a discreet manner.

Table 3: Frequency of hedging categories in English Political Discourse

Hedging device category	Frequency
Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time	42
Introductory Phrases	35
Modal auxiliaries	25
If – Clause	17
Modal lexical verbs	2
Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases	2
Compound hedges	2
Total 126	

Approximators of Degree, Quantity, Frequency and Time

Salager-Meyer (1997) notes that approximators aren't always used to create vagueness; they are sometimes necessary when exact details are unavailable, irrelevant, or when knowledge limitations prevent precision. Terms like "quite" and "somewhat" are categorized by Varttala (2001) as "adverbs of indefinite degree," reflecting a range or uncertainty in degree without implying exactness. This category represents the largest category of hedging devices and how politicians used approximators to avoid presenting exact figures, to soften the claims and give information that accommodates ambiguity. Table 2 shows the frequency of approximators concerning degree, quantity, frequency and time that were revealed as hedges in the discourse of Pakistani Politicians.

Table 4: Frequency of approximators concerning degree, quantity, frequency and time

Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time	Frequency
About	1
Almost	2
A lot	2
Few	3
Less	1
Little	1
Many	3
More	3
Most	6
Nearly	1
Often	1
Quite	3
Roughly	1
Some	5
Sort of	7
Usually	2
Total	42

Table 4 shows that the approximator "sort of" appeared the most frequently, seven times, followed by "most," which appeared six times. In comparison, the approximators "about," "often," "roughly," and "nearly" were used significantly less frequently, with each being reported only

once. According to Varttala (2001), utilizing such adverbs makes assertions "less than absolute," which adds a degree of caution to the statement. Furthermore, Martin-Martin claims that these approximators demonstrate "an unwillingness to make precise and complete commitment to the proposition expressed" (pp. 138-139). The example provided below demonstrate this.

1. There is something floating on the social media about some statement his or allegations he has made against me which are *quite* worrisome

Varttala (2001) says that approximators such as "almost," "about," and "nearly" are typically used with numerical expressions to introduce a degree of ambiguity or flexibility in precision (132). The use of approximators indicates that the speaker or writer is not committing to a precise amount, either owing to doubt or because precision is unimportant, rendering the statement less final. This can be manifested in the following excerpts (2-5) from the discourse of Pakistani politicians.

2. The economy grew at 6.5% which is *almost* a record in Pakistan
3. China opened its eyes in a very independent atmosphere in 1949 and now in *about* 70 72 years look at China

Varttala (2001) observes that adjectives and adverbs of indefinite frequency, such as "usually" and "often," are used when the speaker chooses not to indicate the precise scope of applicability. This option provides flexibility or ambiguity to the data, allowing for a broader interpretation. This is illustrated in the excerpts (4-6).

4. Because my mother was Prime Minister of Pakistan for a few years, but she spent *most* of her life in opposition
5. We *usually* use to drown we don't have boats how do we get out
6. She was the first Pakistani politician to have climate on her agenda and I *often* think that had we started dressing things then in 2007.

Varttala (2001) explains that using approximators "hedges the strength of the predicate," reducing the statement's force or certainty and allowing for a more flexible interpretation of the claim (p. 133). The following excerpts (7-8) which include a number of approximators, such as *some*, *many* and *several* are extracted from the discourse of English political discourse.

7. I just want to emphasize that of these people, 33 million people that were affected, *some* of those people, I mean, they're not living the most elitist lives or the most well-off lives,"
8. *Many* people are still affected

In excerpt (1) Imran used the approximator of degree "quite" to avoid committing to an extreme position regarding the severity of allegations. Using this approximator Imran softened the statement, making it less definitive and more flexible. In excerpt (2-3) the speaker softens the statement by using approximator of quantity "almost" and "about" by introducing a degree of uncertainty about the exact figure. In excerpt (4) by using approximator of quantity "most" as a hedge Bilawal avoids defining how much time his mother spent as Prime Minister as opposed to how much of it was in opposition. This softens the statement, making it less categorical and more adaptable, as is typical with hedging. In excerpt (6-7), approximator of frequency "often" and "often" is used by Bilawal in his statement. Here "often" serves as a hedge, signifying a consistent but not clearly defined frequency of thought or contemplation. This provides a level of uncertainty flexibility in how frequently Bilawal considers the impact of previous climate initiatives. In excerpt (8) Bilawal used approximator of quantity "some", in order to avoid generalizing about all of the affected people and to acknowledge the variety of circumstances among those affected, Bilawal employed the word "some" to emphasize that, of the 33 million people affected by the floods, there were some who were not the poorest or most destitute prior to the disaster striking.

Introductory Phrases

An introductory phrase introduces a moment of doubt or conjecture, successfully setting the tone for the subsequent declaration. Salager-Meyer (1997) claims that phrases like "I think," "I believe," and "to our knowledge" express the writer's personal doubt and direct involvement with the audience (p. 7). Furthermore, Martin-Martin describes the "Subjectivization" strategy, which uses first-person pronouns (I/we) in conjunction with cognitive or performance-enhancing verbs like "think," "suppose," or "suggest" (p.138). This strategy enables speakers to express their personal opinions while also establishing a relationship with the listener and displaying respect for their perspectives. Introductory phrases such as "I believe" and "I think" were found in the discourse of political figures such as Pakistan Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, and Bilawal Bhutto, underlining their usage of these language to encourage conversation and convey personal opinions.

Table 5: Frequency of Introductory Phrases

Introductory phrases	Frequency
I think	12
I believe	7
You know	16
Total	35

Table 5 reveals that the introductory phrase "You know" registered the highest frequency (16 instances). While "I believe" recorded the lowest frequency (7 instance). Such hedging devices are clearly manifested in the following excerpts (1-3) taken from the discourse/interview of Pakistani Politicians.

1. *I think* that at that whatever happened during the sort of war on terror and the entire period that followed there there's like a fog of war that colors everyone's decision making everyone's perception
2. *I believe* that Pakistan is facing a whole host of problems
3. Whatever happens Imran khan cannot come into power but I have no problem with him so in other words I was told that you know he's worried that of income to power

In excerpt (1) "I think" at the start of Bilawal's response functions as an introductory phrase that introduces his personal perspective on the matter being discussed. It signals to the audience that the following statement reflects his own thoughts or beliefs. By using this phrase, Bilawal frames his response as subjective and acknowledges that his viewpoint may differ from other. In excerpt (2) The phrase "I believe" serves as an introduction phrase hedge. It expresses a personal opinion rather than declaring it as an objective truth, softening the statement and giving room for different viewpoints. By adding "I believe," Bhutto indirectly concedes that his assertion that democracy is the solution to Pakistan's problems reflects his subjective position rather than an absolute reality. This hedge indicates that he is constructive but cautious since he is able to express optimism yet still entertains the possibility of others. In excerpt (3), the phrase 'You know' serves as a speaker an explanatory phrase that dampens the emphatic utterance and 'You know' chores in performance of indirect low involvement. For example, instead of engaging in the context as an unquestionable fact, he uses the phrase 'you know' requesting for the context to be understood. This hedge helps the speaker to introduce his ideas gently so that they are not overbearing, which would increase the chances of the opponents winning the discussion that involved sensitive issues such as power relations and his opinion regarding the military.

Modal Auxiliaries

In the perspective of Salager-Meyer (1997), modal auxiliary verbs such as ‘can’, ‘would’, ‘may’ and ‘should’ are straightforward vehicles of modalities and are rather frequently used in English to convey tentativeness and hedge the claims. This, in turn, enables the authors or presenters to modulate the degree of confidence they express in their assertions and leave room for other interpretations or outcomes. Hyland (1998) backs this argument by pointing out that these models are crucial for conveying a degree of ambiguity, especially in conditional assertions where the words "would," "may," or "can" imply possibility rather than certain actions and results. These models are used in speech to avoid making absolute claims and to show an understanding of the range of possibilities, particularly when discussing absolute claims.

Table 6: Frequency of Modal Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries	Frequency
could	4
would	8
should	6
might	2
can	5
Total	25

Table 6 shows the frequency of modal auxiliaries which totals 25 instances. "Would" has the highest frequency with 8 occurrences, while "might" has the lowest frequency with only 2 occurrences. Examples below demonstrate these models.

1. But I *might* be wrong, and it *could* go the other way
2. I think an it's incredibly important to engage with them but at the same time my request to them and through TV show to them *would* be let girls learn guys.
3. There *can* be many studies and analysis about what went wrong where but it's also time for us to get working together

If Clause

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), "if clauses" express ambiguity or skepticism about a statement. Accordingly, when a speaker employs a "if clause," they frequently express that the assertion is dependent on the fulfillment of specific requirements. This indicates a degree of hesitation or caution regarding the claim being made. Quirk et al. provide a broader perspective, suggesting that "if clauses" can sometimes be associated with tentativeness, but this is not universally applicable. In some contexts, "if clauses" might simply state a condition without implying any doubt. For instance, in hypothetical or conditional situations, they can present scenarios without necessarily hedging the certainty of the outcome.

Table 7: Frequency of If Clause

If Clause	Frequency
If	17
Total	17

Table 7 reveals that the “If clause” registered 17 instances as a hedge. The example provided below demonstrate it.

1. *If* I get a chance again I will only take government if I have a clear majority
2. *If* God gives me the opportunity the most important thing is to establish rule of law

In excerpt (1) Imran khan used if clause to suggest a hypothetical future scenario in which he may return to power. This conditional phrase creates ambiguity about whether he will have another opportunity to govern. Furthermore, the second “if” sentence “if I have a clear majority” indicates the conditions under which he would accept the administration, underlining the need for a strong mandate. In excerpt (2) Imran khan introduced the conditional sentence that is contingent on obtaining another chance through a higher power's decision. This expression expresses humility and acceptance that his power to act is not totally under his control. It hedges his assertion by adding an element of doubt and attributing his probable future actions to other influences.

Modal Lexical Verbs

Salager-Meyer (1997) claims that modal lexical verbs serve as speech act verbs, allowing speakers to communicate acts like doubting and evaluating rather than simply relaying information. Additionally, these verbs are frequently used to quote or report other people's words, stressing the speaker's role in mediating the information rather than presenting it as an objective truth. Table 7 below presents the frequencies of modal lexical verbs used by politicians.

Table 8: Frequency of Modal Lexical Verbs

Modal Lexical Verbs	Frequency
Seem	2
Total	2

Table 8 reveals that the “modal lexical verbs” registered 3 instances as a hedge. The example provided below demonstrate it.

1. I have no problem with him but he seems to have a problem with me there is something floating on the on the social media

In excerpt (1) the Prime Minister employs “I guess” as a lexical verb hedge to introduce ambiguity into his assertion about the importance of the meetings. This term softens his assertion, showing that he values the meetings but does not make an absolute claim. It demonstrates a diplomatic approach by leaving room for interpretation, allowing him to convey his opinions without being overly assertive.

Adjectival, Adverbial and Nominal Modal Phrases

Varttala (2001) emphasized that modal adverbs, which convey ambiguity in statements, are closely related to adjectives that express possibility or likelihood. Adverbial and adjectival modal terms, such “possible” or “likely,” are used to soften claims by giving the impression that they are not final. By using this hedging technique, speakers might express hesitancy or skepticism, weakening their claims and recognizing the possibility of other results. Table 6 presents the frequencies of adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases that were registered in the discourse of English political discourse.

Table 9: Frequency of Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases

Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases	Frequency
Perhaps	1
Probably	1
Total	2

The following excerpts (1-2) taken from the discourse manifest the use of adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrase

1. China the second largest economic world a very prosperous country has trillions of dollars of trade annually *probably* six trillion dollars
2. I felt, sort of, throughout my political career, just as a result of my age, *perhaps* the same ideas, same suggestions

In excerpt (1) Shahbaz used the adverb “probably”, which implies a sense of uncertainty about the precise figure. This hedging device helped him convey a broad sense of size without claiming absolute accuracy. In excerpt (2) adverbial phrase “perhaps” is used by Bilawal to introduce an element of uncertainty. It implies that, while he believes age influences how ideas are absorbed, he recognizes that this is not a fixed or absolute reality.

Compound Hedges

The employment of two or more hedges in a single statement is known as compound hedging, and it enables speakers to express a subtle sense of hesitancy or hesitation. Double hedging is the use of two hedges; triple hedging is the use of three hedges; and quadruple hedging is the use of four or more hedges. This language technique helps the speaker show caution in their statements by lessening the force of their claims. Table 8 presents the frequencies of compound hedges used in political discourse.

Table 10: Frequency of Compound Hedges

Compound hedges	Frequency
Quite a lot	1
A lot more	1
Total	2

The following excerpts (1-2) taken from the discourse manifest the use of compound hedges.

1. But at the same time, I think I'd like to say I've proven over the course of time, weather I was in opposition or as foreign minister, that age is just a number, and we can still get *quite a lot* done.
2. I imagine you feel this issue *a lot more than* others might

In excerpt (1) the word "quite a lot" functions as a compound hedge, combining an approximator of quantity "quite" and "a lot". This phrase is an approximator of quantity, implying an undefined enormous number without being precise. It softens the message by eliminating an exact figure, which allows for interpretation. In excerpt (2) the usage of "a lot" and "more" serves as a compound hedge, combining two approximators to soften the claim while conveying a feeling of comparison and emphasis.

Pragmatic Functions of Hedging Devices

Hedging devices serve multiple pragmatic functions, which vary depending on the speech context, audience, and purpose. Understanding the functions of hedges in political discourse requires insight into the speaker's background, goals, intentions, and political direction. Hyland (1998) describes hedging as a "poly-pragmatic" strategy, meaning a single hedging device can serve multiple purposes, often making its exact function or meaning hard to pinpoint. This flexibility allows speakers to adapt their language to achieve different objectives simultaneously, such as expressing uncertainty or seeking audience alignment. The data of the present research revealed that hedging devices used in English discourse of Pakistani politicians served five pragmatic functions: (1) mitigating claims by showing some kind of uncertainty, (2) expressing a lack of full commitment, (3) searching for acceptance from the audience and expressing politeness, (4) avoiding direct criticism especially when predicting future events or consequences, and (5) requesting the listeners' involvement. These functions are explained and illustrated in the following sub-sections.

Requesting the Listeners' Involvement

Some hedging devices like modal auxiliaries and approximators are used to involve the listener in what the speaker is talking about. Such devices include "would", "sort of", "most", etc. As shown in the excerpts below (1-3), the use of modal auxiliaries and approximators is directed to involve the listeners in what is being discussed.

1. "at the same time my request to them and through TV show to them *would* be let girls learn guys"
2. "We have to *sort of* think about the long picture, and now, climate change, and poverty, and all the income inequality and discrimination that people are facing across the country

In excerpt (1) The modal auxiliary verb "would" soften the request, turning it from a direct demand into a kind recommendation. It engages the audience by subtly asking them to modify how they view females' education. Directly addressing the Taliban's policies on the education of girls and implicitly requesting a change in their approach. In excerpt (2) Bilawal used "sort of" as an approximator of degree, softening the directive and making it less stressful. This hedge invites the audience to participate in a collaborative problem-solving process, making them feel included in tackling hard issues such as climate change and injustice. The major function here is to engage the listeners and build a collaborative environment.

Avoiding direct criticism especially when predicting future events or consequences

Pakistani politicians used hedging to protect himself against being criticized by others. If clause is used by Bilawal Bhutto in his stance to protect himself and softens the statement.

1. If he's innocent he'd be able to clear his name through the judicial system

Here the term "if he is innocent" serves as a hedge to avoid direct criticism. By phrasing the outcome conditionally, the speaker avoids openly accusing the individual, thereby keeping a neutral position. This hedging allows for discussion of a difficult issue without making final claims. The primary purpose is to avoid direct criticism, particularly when forecasting future events.

Mitigating claims by showing some kind of uncertainty

Politicians sue approximators to show uncertainty in their statements to avoid direct assertion. The given excerpt from PM Shahbaz used hedge to mitigate his statement.

1. China the second largest economic world a very prosperous country has trillions of dollars of trade annually *probably* six trillion dollars

Probably six trillion dollars" is an adverbial phrase used to convey uncertainty. It mitigates claims by suggesting that the exact figure is not confirmed but rather guessed. This suggests that the speaker is not completely committed to the particular number. The term "probably" indicates a level of uncertainty and admits the possibility of unpredictability. As a result, the remark is softened rather than presented as a clear fact.

Expressing lack of full commitment

When speakers use hedging language, they can indicate that they are not completely committed to a statement or concept. This is frequently done to insulate themselves from prospective criticism or to allow for adjustment. Modal auxiliaries used by politician to show lack of full commitment.

1. "But I *might* be wrong, and it *could* go the other way"

The phrase "I might be wrong, and it could go the other way" indicates lack of full commitment. The usage of "might" and "could" raises questions about the accuracy of the speaker's assertion and consequence. This suggests that the speaker is not completely certain in their position and is open to the potential of different outcomes. By putting things this way, the speaker softens their attitude and demonstrates an openness to alternative possibilities.

Expressing politeness and searching for being accepted

The objective of utilizing hedging devices could be to make their argument/discourse approved by the audience, especially when the speakers provide ideas that may clash with the listeners' interests. In other words, hedges are used to communicate politeness. The following excerpt clearly shows this function used in political discourse.

1. I believe that my struggle is for 27 years and the main gist of struggle is that what I saw when I went as a teenager to England

"I believe" is used to soften the assertiveness of the claim, making it about the speaker's viewpoint and inviting the audience to understand or agree with this perspective. It mitigates the forcefulness of the statement, making it more about personal opinion rather than definitive truth.

Conclusion

The examination of English political discourse by the use of hedging devices provides useful perspectives on strategies of communication among Pakistani politicians. The results in the use of approximators are consistent with findings by Mansour (2015) suggesting that such devices help to temper audience expectations and mask the brunt of divisive assertions. The collected data shows an interesting pattern where English approximators occurred with notable frequency, being observed 42 times. This trend raises the question of why particular political figures opt for certain types of hedging devices. This strategy is particularly relevant in the profession of politics where allowing ambiguity such as using approximators is helpful to avoid swearing in a polemical context due to multitude subjects in conflict. More specifically, the use of approximators facilitates speakers to retain flexibility which allows the individual to explore difficult and sensitive occasions.

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