

Hedging in Newspaper Editorials: A Cross-Linguistic Analysis of Indian and British English

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ABSTRACT

This study compares linguistic hedging in newspaper editorials between Indian English (IE) and British English (BrE). The aim is to identify types of hedges, their frequency, and their pragmatic functions. Two datasets comprising 20 editorials from 'Times of India (IE) and 20 from 'The Guardian' (BrE), covering a similar time frame, were contextually analysed. The findings reveal that BrE editorials exhibit more hedging, utilising a wider range of linguistic hedges, as evident by a higher type to token ratio (TTR). Furthermore, the study also presents a list of frequent pragmatic functions served by hedges in newspaper editorials. The study provides insights into cross-linguistic variations in editorial language choices between Indian and British English, specifically in the use of hedges. Moreover, it can have fruitful implications in teaching-learning linguistic hedging (which is a crucial part of an individual's pragmatic competence) to the IE as a Second Language (ESL) learners.

Keywords: Cross-linguistic study; Hedging; Newspaper Editorials; British English (BrE); Indian English (IE); Pragmatic Functions

1. Introduction

Hedging, in general, involves the application of speculative language by speakers or writers in order to communicate a degree of ambiguity, caution, and doubt regarding the credibility of their claims. Hedges are employed by authors to tone down the force of their claims and present them as opinions rather than facts to evade their anticipated opposition by their interlocutors. Besides, hedging is often employed as one of the negative-politeness strategies (Leech, 2014: 11), and can function as one of the face-saving strategies (Vlasyan, 2018).

The term "hedging" was first used by Lakoff (1972) to refer "words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy" (Lakoff, 1972: 195). The study of hedging has garnered significant interest among linguists subsequent to Lakoff's work. This interest has led to the analysis of hedging in various contexts, including textbooks (Crismore, 1984; Hyland, 2000), political speech and interviews (Gribanova and Gaidukova, 2019), students' writing (Crismore et al., 1993), academic research articles (Mauranen, 1993; Hyland, 1998), and journalistic discourse (Dafouz, 2008). In scholarly literature, hedges have been identified by various terms such as compromisers, downtoners, downgraders, weakeners, softeners, and backgrounding items (Trajkova, 2011). Lately, it has been observed that the term 'hedging' which was initially used to refer to fuzziness (Lakoff, 1972) has been widened to cover a number of interrelated concepts, namely indetermination, vagueness, indirectness and approximation (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Hyland, 1998; Varttala, 2001; Vazques and Giner, 2008). Hedging, which was initially considered as a semantic concept shifted to a pragmatic one, and today most researchers have come to the consensus that there are no restrictions on the forms that can be used as hedges (Clemen, 1997: 242). In this study, we adhere to the definition proposed by Kaltenböck, Mihatsch, and Schneider (2010) regarding hedging.

They characterize hedging as "a discourse strategy aimed at diminishing the force or certainty of an utterance" (Kaltenböck, Mihatsch, and Schneider, 2010: 1). Here, discourse strategy is interpreted as a linguistic method used to achieve a specific outcome (Sanders, 2015: 1). Hedging strategies can manifest in various forms and indicate non-prototypicality, uncertainty from the speaker, or mitigation to soften the impact of the statement.

Newspapers serve as significant repositories of societal discourse, reflecting the linguistic and ideological nuances of the communities they represent. Extensive research has explored various aspects of newspaper discourse, shedding light on language use, power dynamics, and social representations within these textual artifacts (Bednarek, 2006; Hakam, 2009; Knox, 2009; Lihua, 2009; Malherbe, 2021). Editorials are regarded as the voice of a newspaper. They serve as public discourse that communicates with a broad audience and play a significant role in shaping and influencing public opinion (Van Dijk, 1996). Editorials occupy a unique position in newspapers, conveying its official stance, shaping public opinion, and influencing policy decisions on various socially crucial and contemporary topics. Consequently, they are expected to possess significant persuasive value. Therefore, investigating the linguistic strategies deployed in editorials can offer valuable insights into the discourse practices of media institutions and the construction of public discourse. Here comes the importance of hedges. Hedging is crucial in newspaper editorials because it allows for the presentation of facts or information that may not be conclusively proven (Omo and Destiny, 2020:27). This practice helps the newspaper avoid making hasty generalizations and protects it from potential legal implications.

However, amidst this vast body of research, a notable gap emerges concerning the examination of metadiscourse markers in newspaper editorials, particularly within the context of IE and BrE publications. Argumentative texts like editorials using interactional metadiscourse markers strengthen the writer's and the reader's relationship. Among the interactional metadiscourse markers (i.e., hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers), hedging is an essential feature for writers to clarify their epistemic stance and position in the writer–reader interaction (Williams, 1981). Hedging is crucial for the writer to present their stance in editorials properly and with caution in order to persuade readers politely of their points of view. Editorials cover subjects that are significant to the society. However, the opinions of editorialists might not always correspond to the official stance of the newspaper or its intended audience. In order to capture the attention of readers and persuade them to embrace their points of view, writers find it helpful to tone down and cautiously present their assertions.

The present study attempts to make some significant contributions to the field of contrastive pragmatics by providing a cross-linguistic analysis of hedging in Indian and British English newspaper editorials. Pragmatic phenomena, such as hedging, are particularly interesting to study from a contrastive perspective because their realizations often differ significantly across languages (Romero-Trillo, 2018). The study contributes to the understanding of the types and the pragmatic functions of hedges, and offers practical implications for ESL teaching. The comparison of hedging in IE and BrE newspaper editorials not only would shed light on linguistic differences but also on editorial norms and conventions in cross-linguistic contexts. This can have implications for media studies and journalism, providing insights into how language is used to engage and persuade readers in different English-speaking cultures. The comparison of hedging in IE and BrE editorials can also provide educators with concrete examples and data that can be used to illustrate the concept of hedging in the classroom. This makes the abstract concept of hedging more tangible and understandable for learners. The methodological approach of comparing hedges in newspaper editorials sets a framework for future research in contrastive pragmatics. Other researchers may adopt similar methods to study hedging in different languages, further expanding the scope of contrastive pragmatics.

English in India or IE is the oldest non-native variety of the English language. As an overseas variety, it is next only to Irish and American English in historical depth (Sridhar, 2020). Article 343 of the Indian Constitution grants English the status of an associate official language, alongside Hindi, which holds the status of an official language. IE holds significant prominence across various domains including governance, education, media, and the publishing industry. For example, in India, the number of English-language newspapers registered and their circulation figures rank second only to those in Hindi (*Introduction to Indian English*, 2020). IE, as a variety of English spoken in India, exhibits unique linguistic features influenced by the country's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. Pragmatic conventions, such as politeness strategies and speech acts, may differ between IE and BrE due to cultural differences and social norms. For example, IE makes less overt use of 'please', 'thank you' and other polite expressions in informal conversation. However, as Kachru Y. (1997) has shown, a variety

of alternative strategies, such as blessing (*jite raho* ‘May you live long!’) and appreciating are employed to convey the same sentiment (Sridhar, 2020).

The study is particularly compelling due to the lack of scholarly research on hedging phenomena in Indian languages, including Indian English (IE). This research would provide some valuable insights into the types and forms of hedging in IE, and offer a comparative analysis with BrE.

The present study compares and contrasts hedging and its nuances across Indian and BrE as employed in IE and BrE newspaper editorials. For the purpose of classification of hedges, several existing taxonomies were visited, and finally, a taxonomy for hedging comprising of the framework by Prince et al. (1982), and a label from Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997) have been chosen. The objectives of the study are twofold:

1. Identifying hedges in IE and BrE editorials
2. Categorising the hedges and enlisting pragmatic functions of hedges in the two varieties of English.
3. To situate the work in cross-linguistic, socio-pragmatic variations of hedging in the two varieties of English.

The major research questions probed in this study are as follows:

1. What are the various hedges employed by editorial writers and their respective frequencies in Indian and BrE newspaper editorials?
2. What pragmatic functions do hedges serve in the context of editorial discourse in the selected newspaper editorials?

The rest of the paper is organized into five sections. The second section briefly presents us with an overview of various scholarly works on hedging across genres. The third section discusses the theoretical framework providing the details of the classification schema selected for the present study. The fourth section gives the description of how the editorials were collected and the method employed to analyse the editorials for hedges. The fifth section presents the findings, including an analysis of the linguistic markers used as hedges in the two newspaper editorials and an examination of the various pragmatic functions of hedges. Finally, the sixth section concludes the study with implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Previous Studies on Hedging across various genres

There are ample studies across languages and genres as well in the pursuit of understanding the nuances of hedging. McKinlay (1983), Kibui (1988), Hyland (1994), and Mauranen (1993) have examined hedging in academic writing; Crismore et al. (1993), and Rounds (1981, 1982) have analysed hedging in student’s writing. Crismore (1984), and Hyland (2000) have looked for hedging in textbooks. Chen and Le (2023) studied hedging in news commentaries, and across languages and cultures (e.g. Tchizmarova, 2005; Kranich, 2011). Prince et al. (1982) based their study of hedges on the data elicited from physicians’ interaction. Salager-Meyer (1994) has also probed hedges in medical journals. There are plenty of scholarly works on hedges in informal spoken genre (Holmes, 1987; Dixon and Foster, 1997; Lauwereyns, 2002; Sanchez and Vogel, 2015; Johansen, 2020) Several studies focus on the use of hedges in newspaper discourse (Dafouz, 2008; Trajkova, 2011; Khanbutayeva, 2019; Omo and Idegbekwe, 2020; Shahid et al., 2020; Hassan and Said, 2020; Zarza and Tan, 2020).

Trajkova (2011) investigated the use of hedges in Macedonian and American editorials. The paper aimed to inquire the linguistic form and function of hedges in Macedonian and English newspaper editorials, and moreover the role of hedges in constitution and realization persuasion. Besides, the study also identified the cultural disparity apparent in the style of the American and Macedonian editorial writers. Nine editorials from each of the language’s quality newspapers constituted the corpus of this study. The Arizona Republic and the New York Times were selected from the American newspapers, and The Dnevnik, Večer and Nova Makedonija were chosen from the Macedonian newspapers. The findings revealed the use of more hedges in the American editorials than the Macedonian ones. Moreover, the study showed that modal auxiliaries are not the predominant linguistic items in the corpus. Would and will (in English) and their Macedonian equivalents were the most frequently used among them. As per the study, Macedonian authors hardly employ lexical judgmental and evidential verbs as hedges, instead solely using verbs to address readers directly. According to the findings, American writers utilised epistemic lexical verbs nearly six times more often than Macedonian writers.

Tahririan and Shahzamani (2009) conducted a study comparing Persian with English newspaper editorials, for hedging, a significant linguistic aspect involved in expressing uncertainty and possibility, within the context of journalistic English. The findings indicated that English newspaper editorials exhibited a higher

frequency of hedging compared to their Persian counterparts. Furthermore, concerning the variation in topics, it was observed that English political editorials tended to contain slightly more hedging than those discussing economic and social issues, while Persian economic editorials showed a slightly higher prevalence of hedging compared to political and social editorials.

Khanbutayeva (2019) inspected the hedges in English and Azerbaijan economic and political newspaper editorials to find the frequent occurring hedges. The analysis and categorisation of hedges with relevant examples from both the languages have been demonstrated in the study which show how these devices are employed to express uncertainty, commitment, and confidence in the assertion. The findings reveal that in general, shields are more frequent than approximators in both the languages. Moreover, the findings indicate that the Azerbaijani editorials are less hedged than its British counterpart.

Sahid et al. (2020) attempted to examine the similarities and differences between the use and distribution of metadiscourse markers in English and Urdu newspaper editorials using the model of metadiscourse markers given by Hyland (2005). The dataset comprised of 50 newspaper editorials each from the two languages (culled from 5 newspapers from each of the languages). Both the languages showed disparities in terms of the use of various interactive and interactional metadiscourse subcategories. The results showed that in terms of the usage of interactional metadiscourse markers, Hedges were found to be more frequent in English newspapers (24%) than its Urdu counterpart (16%).

Zarza and Tan (2020) carried out content analysis of 240 randomized newspaper editorials (120 from New York Times (NYT) and 120 from its Malaysian counterpart - New Straits Times (NST)) for hedges and boosters. The findings reveal that hedges in the NYT editorials were less frequent than their Malaysian counterpart, while boosters in the NYT were more frequently employed than in the NST. This reveals that it is a convention in editorials of both the NYT and NST to be tentative in articulating their stance, however, in comparison, NYT appears to be more bold and certain in expressing its stance than NST that is more cautious. Additionally, in the NYT, hedges and boosters were predominantly found in the third move (justifying or refuting events), while in the NST, they were found in the last move (articulating position). This distribution could be due to the communicative purpose of each move.

Overall, looking at the present studies on hedging, we find plenty of works analysing hedges, their nature, types, function, and frequencies across languages like English, Chinese, Persian, Azerbaijani, and Macedonian. However, as per our literature survey, there is a dearth of scholarly works investigating hedges in Indian languages or even in IE except for a work by Sahid et al. (2020) examining the similarities and differences in the use and distribution of metadiscourse markers in English and Urdu newspaper editorials using Hyland's (2005) model. However, their study focuses on the broader category of metadiscourse and does not specifically highlight hedges or account for the various types and nuances of hedging. Therefore, this work, which attempts to undertake a comparative study of Hedging in British and IE newspaper editorials, would be an interesting and novel endeavour. This study would give us some insights into the hedging strategies in IE newspaper editorials in contrast to those in BrE newspaper editorials.

3. Theoretical Framework

The term "hedge" was first coined by Lakoff (1972), and since then, there has been a thorough investigation of the nature, varieties, and nuances of hedging. These efforts resulted in various classification frameworks by scholars across genres. Prince et al. (1982) made a distinction between two kinds of 'fuzziness': 'fuzziness within the propositional content' (Approximators) and 'fuzziness in the relationship between the propositional content and the speaker' (Shields), that is, in the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition transmitted'. Hübner (1983), building on Hare (1970), established a similar difference between understatement and hedges. According to him, hedges, such as in English *It's a bit hot in here*, modify the phrastic, which is the propositional content, but understatement, as in *I think that* the neustic phrase *"Situations are unstable in the country"* refers to the speaker's attitude towards the statement. Caffi (1999, 2001, 2007) in her study of mitigation made a tripartite division between bushes, hedges, and shields. Bushes operate on the propositional content by mitigating the precision of referring terms (or by minimising them), and they are equivalent to Prince et al.'s (1982) approximators. Hedges, according to her terminology, comprise both indications of illocutionary power and speaker commitment. In 1994, Salager-Meyer recognised five major kinds of hedges: Shields (modal verbs and semi auxiliaries expressing possibility) similar to 'Plausibility Shields' by Prince et al., (1982), Approximators (stereotypical "adaptors" and "rounders" of quantity, degree, frequency, and duration e.g., "approximately,"

"roughly," "somewhat," etc.), Phrases conveying authors' direct involvement (e.g., "it is our view that", "I believe," and "to our knowledge,"), Emotionally charged intensifiers (e.g., extremely difficult/interesting," "dishearteningly weak," etc.), Compound hedges, which included "strings of hedges" ("It may somewhat," "at least a few might," etc.).

Hedge types were categorised into two categories by Ken Hyland (1996): content-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. Both accuracy-oriented (including attribute-oriented and reliability-oriented) and writer-oriented hedges fall within the category of content-oriented categories (Hyland, 1996: 438). While reader-oriented hedges "give deference and recognition to the reader and avoid unacceptable over-confidence," content-oriented hedges "help the writer present claims with precision relating to both the terms used to describe real-world phenomena and the degree of reliability the writer invests in the statement" (Hyland, 1996: 449). They also "signal reservations in the truth of a claim to limit the professional damage which might result from bald propositions."

Table 1 below shows a summarized overview of various classification taxonomies of hedges in literature.

TABLE 1 Brief depiction of various hedging taxonomies in Literature partly adapted from Johanson (2020: 89)

Authors	Propositional Content	Speaker Intention	Speaker Commitment	Evidential (source of the proposition)	Effect on the interlocutor
Hare (1970)	Understatement		Hedges		
Prince Frader and Bosk (1982)	Approximators – Rounders and Adaptors		Plausibility Shields	Attribution Shields	
Hübler (1983)	Understatements		Hedges		
Salager-Meyer (1994)	Approximators		Shields, Author's personal doubt		
Hyland (1996, 1998)	Content-oriented hedges – Attribute hedges		Content oriented hedges – Reliability hedges, Writer oriented hedges	Writer oriented hedges	Reader oriented hedges
Caffi (1999)	Bushes	Hedges	Hedges	Shields	
The present study	Rounders, Adaptors, Compound hedges (for content mitigation)		Plausibility Shields, Compound hedges (for force/attitude mitigation)	Attribution Shields	

Source: Johansen (2020: 89)

Primarily, we utilised Prince et al.'s (1982) framework, supplemented with the 'Compound hedges' label from Salager-Meyer (1994), to accommodate the various types of hedges identified in our study. Although Prince et al.'s framework was originally based on a corpus of physicians' interactions (spoken discourse), yet we could apply the same on our editorial (written discourse) dataset. This was feasible due to the conversational writing style of editorials, which closely resembles with spoken discourse, and because the underlying linguistic features and functions of hedging are relevant to both spoken and written discourse, including newspaper editorials.

Prince et al. (1982) divided hedges broadly into two main types:

1. Approximators
2. Shields

1. Approximators: It is employed to lessen the truth condition of the propositional content. Approximators are

again divided into two classes:

1.1. Adaptors: These are qualifiers like "*sort of*," "*somewhat*," "*a little bit*," etc. that lessen the proposition's representativeness and impact its truth value. For instance:

1. I kind of liked her as a friend.
2. Tom seemed a bit disturbed.

1.2. Rounders: a set of hedges that modify the propositional information contained in statistics, deictic time markers, and measurements. They are typically used when the speaker is not concerned about the exact or precise details, as in the expressions *about*, *around*, *approximately*, etc. For instance:

1. Around 50% of the candidates were unaware of the new regulations.
2. She was roughly 19 years old when she published her first novel.

2. Shields: It aims to convey a certain level of doubt towards the propositional content that the speaker expresses and is meant to assist the speaker in waiving responsibility for the overall truthfulness of the information that is presented in the utterance. It is divided into two subclasses:

2.1. Plausibility shields: It conveys the author's/writer's doubt, caution, uncertainty in the claims made by them. For example:

1. I guess he does not want to negotiate.
2. We may not see each other tomorrow.

2.2. Attribution shields: When the author refers to someone other than them. This may also help the author in evading the responsibility of the veracity of the truth of the proposition. For Example:

1. According to the latest report, our state has the lowest crime.
2. In common parlance, He was an honest leader.

3. Compound Hedges (Salager-Meyer, 1994, 1997): A string of two or more hedges in an utterance. Depending on the number of hedges it can be subdivided into: *double*, *treble*, and *quadruple* hedges. For example, "*It seems likely that some politicians from the ruling party can be involved in the alleged scam.*"

4. Material and Method

For the present study, we collected 20 newspaper editorials from 'Times of India', an IE daily (retrieved from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-editorials/>) and 20 from 'The Guardian', a BrE newspaper (retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/editorial>). The selection of the editorials followed a purposive sampling strategy. The selection of editorials aimed to cover a diverse range of themes—politics, sports, society, economy, and ecology—to capture a wide variety of hedging strategies. This approach was based on the assumption that editorials from different genres would exhibit variations in the types of hedging employed. For example, English political editorials tended to contain slightly more hedging than those discussing economic and social issues (Tahririan and Shahzamani, 2009). Both datasets cover the same time period, specifically June-July 2021. The selection of newspapers was primarily based on criteria such as wide circulation, impactful journalism, and online accessibility. Besides, both the newspapers have a strong online presence with comprehensive websites offering news, analysis, opinion pieces, and multimedia content covering national and international news, providing readers with a broad perspective on current events from around the world. The description of each dataset is presented below in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Information about datasets

S.N.	NEWSPAPER	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	WORD LENGTH	TOTAL HEDGES (TYPES and TOKENS)
1.	Times of India	20	6156	27 and 59
2.	The Guardian	20	6853	38 and 62

The first step towards the analysis was to read comprehensively the selected editorials from 'Times of India', and 'The Guardian' in order to identify the linguistic item behaving as hedges. Afterwards, the datasets underwent a contextual and comprehensive analysis for hedges using a classificatory framework (see section 3). The analysis of hedges in editorials was primarily conducted manually given the contextual nature of these linguistic markers. Additionally, *Antconc 4.0*, a freely available concordance software, was used in identifying

specific lexical hedges, such as modal auxiliaries, adverbials, adjectives among others. Thereafter, the hedges in context were categorised into various types as per the taxonomies by Prince et al. (1982) and Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997). Furthermore, we systematically identified and compared the pragmatic functions of the hedges employed in these editorials. The analyses in our study were more qualitative than quantitative, and hence fine statistical computations were not performed.

For gauging the lexical diversity of the hedges in the two datasets, Type to Token ratio (TTR) served as a parameter. TTR is the ratio obtained by dividing the types (the number of unique word forms) occurring in a text or utterance by its tokens (the number of individual words in the text). Sometimes, researchers have expressed this TTR as a percentage, multiplying the ratio by 100 (Thomas, 2005). A high TTR indicates a high degree of lexical variation, while a low TTR indicates the opposite. The range falls between a theoretical 0 (infinite repetition of a single type) and 1 (the complete non-repetition found in a concordance). In the case of multi-word hedges (for example, "may probably" and "at least a few might"), each unique combination of words has been counted as a separate type. Table 3 below depicts the examples of various types of hedges from the two newspaper editorials.

TABLE 3 Examples of various types of hedges from the two newspaper editorials

Types of Hedges	Times of India (Examples)	The Guardian (Examples)
Adaptors	<i>Therefore, it makes <u>little</u> sense to keep young adults out of the vaccination drive.</i>	<i>Therefore, <u>I believe that</u> the best investment advice that any individual kind of receive is to start early and save regularly.</i>
Rounders	<i><u>Many</u> readers will be astonished that the contribution of glacial melt can be just under 1% even in the higher Himalayas.</i>	<i>Last month, a committee of MPs heard that <u>around</u> a quarter of community sports clubs may never reopen.</i>
Plausibility Shields	<i>The Rs 150 price point <u>may be</u> choking vaccine production and will likely drive away other vaccine makers.</i>	<i><u>Perhaps</u> the atheist Philip Larkin got to the nub of it 70 years ago, when communal Christian worship still flourished.</i>
Attribution Shields	<i><u>The new study suggests</u> the other researchers have failed to distinguish between snowmelt and glacial melt because the technology and data to make the distinction was not easily available earlier, but makes a huge difference. <u>In common parlance</u>, glaciers are often but misleadingly called the source of Himalayan rivers.</i>	<i>Severe light pollution in Britain <u>appears</u> to have fallen, according to the CPRE. <u>Experiments suggest that</u> the subatomic world may be much more complex than we thought.</i>

Source: Authors

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the dataset of IE newspaper editorials revealed the utilisation of 27 distinct linguistic expressions as hedges, with 59 tokens of hedging found within a dataset of 6156 words. In contrast, the BrE newspaper editorials exhibited the use of 38 different types of linguistic expressions as hedges, amounting to a total of 62 tokens of hedging in a similar-sized dataset of 6853 words. To assess lexical diversity, we examined the Type-Token Ratio (TTR), which measures lexical richness. The TTR for IE editorials was determined to be 0.4, while for BrE editorials, it was calculated as 0.6. The TTR results seem to suggest that BrE newspaper editorials are more likely to exhibit a higher degree of lexical variation in the context of using hedges compared to their IE counterparts. Sahid et al. (2020) also found in their contrastive study between English and Urdu newspaper editorials that English editorials tend to use more hedging compared to Urdu editorials.

In the same vein, Khanbutayeva (2019), in their investigation of hedging devices in English and Azerbaijani economic and political newspaper editorials, has also found English newspaper editorials to be more hedged than their Azerbaijani counterpart. Approximators (Prince et al., 1982), which consist of adaptors and rounders, are scarce in the IE editorials (only one instance of adaptor and one rounder in the selected dataset). Table 4 below illustrates the comparative frequency distribution hedges in both newspaper editorials.

TABLE 4 Frequency (N) and percentage (%) distribution of hedges in the Indian and the BrE newspaper editorials

Types of Hedges	Times of India		The Guardian	
	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Adaptors	1	2%	3	5%
Rounders	8	14%	10	17%
Plausibility Shields	48	81%	43	74%
Attribution Shields	2	3%	6	4%
Total	59	100%	62	100%

Source: Authors

In the frequency and percentage distribution of hedges as shown in Table 4 above, 81 % of hedges found in the IE newspaper editorials are Plausibility shields. Second most occurring hedges are Rounders (14%). Attribution Shields are relatively lesser (3%) followed by Adaptors (2%). Whereas, In the BrE newspaper editorials, 74% of the total hedges found are Plausibility Shields. Second most occurring hedges, unlike the IE newspaper editorials, are Rounders (17%), and next comes Adaptors (5%), and the least frequent being Attribution Shields (4%). Hence, we see that Plausibility Shields are the most dominant types of hedges in both datasets of two language varieties. In both datasets, ‘Shields’ account for the majority of hedges i.e., 84% in the case of IE newspaper editorials, and 78% in case of BrE newspaper editorials. Remarkably, one study by Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) (in the genre of political discourse) also shows that Plausibility shields are the most frequent types of hedges.

Our findings indicate that specific linguistic devices found in several syntactic categories, such as Adverbials, Adjectives, Modal auxiliaries, and Lexical Verbs, are used more frequently as markers to employ hedging strategies in newspaper editorials. This is done to achieve the intended communication effects. Linguistic expressions typically employed for hedging encompass a range of grammatical elements, including modals, speculative verbs, adjectives, adverbials, quantifiers, conjunctions, and other similar components. Our findings support the general agreement that “no linguistic items are inherently hedgy” (Clemen, 1997: 241) and that “hedging devices are drawn from every syntactic category” (Fraser, 2010: 23). Table 5 below shows the mapping between the syntactic types, and the pragmatic functions/types of hedges.

TABLE 5 Types of hedges based on their syntactic/structural categories with their respective frequency (N) found in the two newspapers, the Times of India, and The Guardian

Syntactic Categories	The Times of India	The Guardian	Type of hedging
Modal auxiliary verbs	Can, could, may, might, would	Can, could, may, might, would	Plausibility Shields
Lexical verbs	Seem, believe, assume, suggest	Believe, think, seem, suppose, appear, told	Plausibility Shields
Adjectivals	Little, estimated, just under	Little, more, at least	Approximators
Adverbials	Often, overall, likely, hopefully, possibly	Usually, apparently, mostly, reportedly, supposedly, sometimes, Almost, perhaps, sort of	Approximators and Shields
Quantifiers	Some, many	Some, many, a few	Rounders
Introductory phrases	It would not be out of ordinary to assume The new study suggests ...	It appears that.... And one cannot deny...	Shields
Prepositions	around	around, about	Rounders
If clauses (Pseudo-conditionals/Counterfactual conditionals)	<u>If some reports are to be believed</u> , the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan could pave the way for a multi-nation UN team to oversee the nation does not fall into chaos.	Ben Rhodes, former national security adviser to Barack Obama, wrote on Twitter: “ <u>If</u> Trump was trying to abuse his power of the presidency to solicit foreign help for his campaign, it’s hard to imagine a more impeachable offense”	Shields
Compound hedges (made up of several hedges)	Many readers will be astonished that the contribution of glacial melt <u>can be just under</u> 1% even in the higher Himalayas.	<u>At least a few</u> cultural markers tantalisingly point in that direction	Shields and Rounders

Source: Authors

5.1. Comparison between Indian and BrE Editorials for hedges

Modal auxiliary verbs like “*can*,” “*could*,” “*may*,” “*might*,” *etc* are the most frequent in the IE editorials, whereas lexical verbs like *seem*, *think*, *assume*, *etc.* are the most frequent among other hedging devices in the BrE newspaper editorials. Hence, IE editorials largely employ modal auxiliaries (40% of the total occurrences of hedges) to downtone their assertions, whereas the British counterpart relies mostly on epistemic lexical verbs (21% of the total instances). Both the newspaper editorials use introductory phrases such as “*It appears that*” and “*It seems that*”, which tone down the strength of the following claim/proposition. Expressions such as “*Experiments suggest that*,” “*According to some reports*,” *etc* attribute the propositional part of the statements

to someone (organisation, authority, person, report, etc.) rather than the author/writer themselves, hence evading the responsibility of the truth condition of the proposition. However, such constructions are relatively higher in the IE newspaper editorials.

We also found some instances of compound hedges, which are used to augment the degree of hedging (Salager-Meyer, 1994) in both language varieties. For example, in BrE newspaper editorials, there are instances like “*something similar*,” “*little more than*,” “*At least a few*,” etc. Meanwhile, in Indian newspaper editorials, we found compound hedges like “*just under*,” “*If some*,” etc.

Four types of lexical verbs have been found to be used as hedges (Plausibility Shields) in the IE newspaper editorials like “*seem*,” “*believe*,” “*assume*,” and “*suggest*”. Whereas, the BrE editorials made use of six verbs: *believe*, *think*, *seem*, *suppose*, *appear*, and *told*. For example (1-2):

1. *EC's eight-phase Bengal election seems another unmitigated disaster.*

(Times of India)

2. *However, I no longer believe, leaving with a deal is a government's main objective. Or rather, as I believe, there is no good alternative to that.* *(The Guardian)*

In BrE newspaper editorials, Verbs of speculation and expression of one's opinion and belief such as “*seem*,” “*appear*,” “*believe*” adverbs expressing speculation and possibility such as “*reportedly*,” “*supposedly*,” “*possibly*” and adverbs expressing degree of certainty like “*usually*,” “*mostly*,” “*likely*” comprise around 48% of hedges. Whereas, in Indian newspapers, verbs and adverbs comprise only around 23% of all hedges.

BrE editorials have used more adverbs than the Indian counterpart. Adverbs like “*Often*,” “*likely*,” “*hopefully*,” “*possibly*,” “*partially*” were found in the IE editorials whereas, In the BrE editorials, adverbs like “*usually*,” “*apparently*,” “*mostly*,” “*likely*,” “*reportedly*,” “*supposedly*,” “*sometimes*,” “*perhaps*,” “*sort of*” have been used to hedge the statements. For example (3-5):

3. *We are usually debated for about six days.* *(The Guardian)*

4. *British consumers are apparently on a new round of belt-tightening as soaring food and petrol prices and below-inflation wage rises eat into household budgets.*

(The Guardian)

5. *The gap between students, which often arises on account of economic inequality, may partially be bridged through the use of technology.* *(Times of India)*

One remarkable difference between the two varieties of English was that we found no instances of “*sort of*” and “*kind of*” which are considered one of the most prototypical Adaptors (Prince et al., 1982). Whereas, in the BrE editorials we did find the instances of “*sort of*” and “*kind of*” however, the instance of “*sort of*” in 7 is clearly not an instance of mitigation/hedging. For example (6-7):

6. *Therefore, I believe that the best investment advice that any individual kind of receive is to start early and save regularly.* *(The Guardian)*

7. *These polls will be therefore mostly about tactical advances, which give no answer to the question of what sort of modern-day state the UK should be.* *(The Guardian)*

5.2. Politeness and Hedging

It is widely acknowledged that politeness is one of the chief motivations behind hedging (Markkanen and Schröder, 2010: 192). In their well-known theory of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) make a division between negative and positive politeness on the grounds of whether speakers take into account others' want to remain unimpeded or their wish to be accepted and approved by others. That is, negative politeness is associated with respect and social distance and positive politeness with solidarity.

Positive and negative politeness functions of hedges are thus closely intertwined. Politeness is frequently equated with protecting the face of others, and saving hearer's face is also often regarded as the main purpose of hedging. However, speakers quite often use hedges in order to protect their own face wants as well. Following examples (8-11) our datasets depict the overlap between hedging and politeness:

8. Ben Rhodes, former national security adviser to Barack Obama, wrote on Twitter: “*If Trump was trying to abuse his power of the presidency to solicit foreign help for his campaign, it's hard to imagine a more impeachable offense*” *(The Guardian)*

9. He **could be** direct, rude and offensive, and he did not greatly care if he caused upset. *(The Guardian)*

10. *If some reports are to be believed*, the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan could pave

the way for a multi-nation UN team to oversee the nation does not fall into chaos. (Times of India)

11. So the multiple phases seem to have escalated physical confrontations instead of dampening them. (Times of India)

In example 8, the expression by using the 'if-clause construction' has diminished the face threatening of Trump, simultaneously saving the addressor from anticipated conflict and criticism. In example 9, the expression 'could be' has been used to show the addresser less direct, and considerate towards the negative face of the referent denoted by 'He.' In example 10, the clause 'if some reports are to be believed' has been used to save the positive face of the editorial team by shielding them from anticipated criticism. In example 11, the lexical hedge 'seem' makes the statement less forceful by presenting its as writer's opinion, and diminishes the degree of criticism it does, hence saving the face of the interlocutor/referent.

5.3. Pragmatic function of hedges in the context in the selected newspaper editorials

The pragmatic functions were arrived at based on the contextual interpretation of the hedges in the discourse. Following is a list of such functions:

1. Introducing imprecision due to either lack of precise information or lack of need/intention to convey, emphasizing that the numbers should be interpreted with a degree of flexibility.
 - a) *With Covid cases rising rapidly across the country — **more than** 1.26 lakh cases were registered in the last 24 hours.* (Times of India)
 - b) *Last month, a committee of MPs heard that **around** a quarter of community sports clubs may never reopen.* (The Guardian)
 - c) *When the Higgs boson was found at the Large Hadron Collider **almost** a decade ago, it was supposed to be the final piece in the jigsaw at the smallest, subatomic scale.* (The Guardian)
2. Mitigating the force of an utterance by introducing an element of uncertainty or tentativeness to the statement, and allowing for alternative interpretations and potential subjectivity.
 - a) *Dissidence **may be** on the rise, but BJP is miles away from the organisational car wreck infighting has put Congress in.* (Times of India)
 - b) *Last month, a committee of MPs heard that around a quarter of community sports clubs **may** never reopen.* (The Guardian)
3. Represents writer's/speaker's perception/shielded stance (using perception verbs like "seem," "appear" and mental state verbs like "think," "believe," etc.) rather than a definite claim/fact.
 - a) *So, the multiple phases **seem** to have escalated physical confrontations instead of dampening them.* (Times of India)
 - b) *However, I no longer **believe**, leaving with a deal is a government's main objective. Or rather, as I **believe**, there is no good alternative to that.* (The Guardian)
4. Showing that a certain entity holds partial membership to a class or to show the degree of non-prototypicality/class-membership; Showing the partial class-membership or the extent to which a proposition is prototypical.
 - a) *Therefore, I believe that the best investment advice that any individual **kind of** receive is to start early and save regularly.* (The Guardian)
 - b) *From a global perspective, the Jammu attack has **little** novelty.* (Times of India)
5. Attributing the proposition to an unauthentic or unclear evidential or to hearsay
 - a) ***In common parlance**, glaciers are often but misleadingly called the source of Himalayan rivers.* (Times of India)
 - b) *David Cameron is, **we are told**, very embarrassed.* (The Guardian)
6. Giving a vague picture using indefinite quantifiers like *many, some, few, a few, recent, less, more, etc.*
 - a) *Congress also borrowed **many** of left's ideas, especially in 1970s.* (Times of India)
 - b) ***Many** bowl-haired teenagers look like they have joined the 1970s sitcom *The Partridge Family*.* (The Guardian)

7. Casting doubt on the accuracy or legitimacy of a categorization/information which you have heart to be true.
 - a) *And just as many **so-called** rightwing parties now stick to some of the basics of leftwing social policy ideas, left has evolved, too.* (Times of India)
 - b) *In an eerie coincidence, just days later, Punjab police recovered two crashed drones near the international border, **allegedly** used for ferrying weapons and ammunition to Khalistani groups.* (Times of India)
 - c) *The horror of her death is far from unique: more than 30 children have **reportedly** died in the brutal crackdown on protests against last month's coup, including a five-year-old boy and a seven-year-old girl who was shot dead in her home.* (The Guardian)
8. Indicating a degree of generality and a sense of partial or incomplete realization, suggesting that the statement applies to a significant proportion but not necessarily all, acknowledging potential exceptions within the category.
 - a) *These polls will be therefore **mostly** about tactical advances, which give no answer to the question of what sort of modern-day state the UK should be.* (The Guardian)
 - b) *Stan Swamy's death in judicial custody was an entirely avoidable tragedy. And **pretty much** every part of the criminal justice system is responsible.* (Times of India)
 - c) *Preoccupation with the polarised, long-winded Bengal elections that distracted national attention from a gathering second Covid wave should have been a wakeup call. But it hasn't quite worked out that way.* (Times of India)
9. Emphasizing the (indefinite/vague) proximity in time between two events
 - a) *In an eerie coincidence, **just days later**, Punjab police recovered two crashed drones near the international border, allegedly used for ferrying weapons and ammunition to Khalistani groups.* (Times of India)
 - b) *The most **recent** census may prove to be a tipping point of sorts in that national journey.* (The Guardian)
10. To soften the statement, making it less direct and absolute/ introduces a degree of politeness or caution.
 - a) *Nationally, too, BJP **would** prefer the Muslim vote to be diffused.* (Times of India)
 - b) *Also supported by the Wildlife Trusts, a ban **would** force retailers and their suppliers to source alternatives: with bark, wood fire, coir and green compost the main alternatives.* (The Guardian)
11. Drafting statement in conditional form so as to lessen the face threatening it may cause and also to deflect anticipated criticism on addressor (if-clause constructions/hypothetical)
 - a) ***If** some reports are to be believed, the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan could pave the way for a multi-nation UN team to oversee the nation does not fall into chaos.* (Times of India)
 - b) *Ben Rhodes, former national security adviser to Barack Obama, wrote on Twitter: "**If** Trump was trying to abuse his power of the presidency to solicit foreign help for his campaign, it's hard to imagine a more impeachable offense"* (The Guardian)
12. Involving readers in the discourse using impersonal pronouns like one/give room for the readers to involve in a dialogue (Hyland, 1996).
 - a) *And **one** cannot deny structural racism in a society where a black man is 19 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the Met than his white friend, or a young black mother is four times more likely to die in childbirth.* (The Guardian)

After a comprehensive analysis of hedges in context, we have found a wide range of pragmatic functions catered by hedges in the newspaper editorial discourse like mitigating the force of utterance, introducing uncertainty and tentativeness while presenting a claim, evading the responsibility of the truth validity of the proposition, marking a proposition less prototypical, presenting a piece of imprecise information in terms of numbers, purposive vagueness, etc. The pragmatic functions we recognised are not mutually exclusive in the two

newspapers. Moreover, many hedges served multiple pragmatic functions across the discourse, for example, diminishing the force of an utterance and downplaying the anticipated criticism simultaneously. We also found instances of linguistic expressions that acted as a hedge in a specific context, not a hedge in some other instance. For example, “can” acts as a hedge showing possibility somewhere; however, at other places, it only expresses the mood of “ability” or “capacity”. Similarly, “sort of” and “kind of” act as a hedge to show the degree of non-prototypicality in certain instances, whereas, in some of the instances, it only means “type of”. Likewise, “could” is used as the past form of “can,” whereas, in places, it is used for conveying a polite request or indirectness.

6. Conclusion

In the present study, we performed a cross-linguistic analysis of hedging strategies in British and Indian newspaper editorials. The findings reveal that in both contexts, hedges are used to mitigate and soften both the propositional content and the illocutionary force of the statements. As per the analysis conducted on our dataset, hedging is observed to be slightly higher in British editorials than in their Indian counterparts (evident by a higher TTR in the former variety). Shields are relatively more frequent in both the language varieties, with Plausibility Shields being the most frequent type of hedges in both datasets. Among Approximators, Adaptors are the least frequent hedges in both datasets. Whereas, Rounders are the second most occurring hedges (after Plausibility Shield) in both datasets. IE editorials employ modal auxiliaries and If-clause constructions with around twice the frequency compared to the British variety, aiming to mitigate the strength of their arguments. Moreover, we have identified as many as twelve pragmatic functions of hedges (mutually inclusive) in the two varieties of English newspapers. The implications of the findings from IE newspaper editorials can extend to the pedagogical instruction of metadiscourse markers (specifically hedges) among ESL learners in India to enhance their pragmatic competence. This study contributes to our comprehensive understanding of the use and choice of hedges in newspaper editorials in Indian and BrE from a cross-linguistic perspective. Future studies may aim for other sub-genres in the more extensive domain of IE journalistic discourse, like news commentaries and political interviews, to see if there are similar or different hedging patterns. The dataset used in the present study was relatively smaller. Therefore, in future studies, the validity of the findings from the present study can be tested by employing a relatively bigger dataset.

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