

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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**LINGUISTIC FEATURES
OF HEDGES IN INAUGURAL ADDRESSES
BY THE US PRESIDENTS**

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(RESEARCH SUMMARY)**

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

In real-life communication, people often face situations in which they cannot go straight to the problem or even find it hard to express their ideas clearly. That requires the speakers to have tactful communicative strategies. And producing hedges is regarded as one of the most appreciated language use for strengthening the reliability as well as the persuasion of an utterance.

Hedges are popularly used in everyday conversations and much of these has been recorded in political speeches. In the real life, by using hedges as a language tact, the speakers aim at achieving agreement from the hearers. This contributes to intensifying the success in a conversation. In terms of political speeches, the majority of politicians make use of hedges as an effective means to implicitly signal their messages to the audience, and accordingly, this can help to multiply the cohesion as well as the coherence of the speeches. In this sense, the Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents can be considered as the typical documents in which hedges are performed to convey the Presidents' messages to their citizens. Interpreting hedges in such political speeches is expected to be a very serious task. We are firstly advised to master what a hedge is. Later on, the interpreting must be thoroughly carried out basing on linguistic and non-linguistic factors that are available for the learners of language.

So far, in most classrooms of English in Vietnam, students have been encouraged to approach to most of cultural

as well as literary documents in English. However, they hardly ever care for any political speeches written in the language. And when studying pragmatics, the issues related to hedges have just been reached at the surface, students have not dug deeply to the comprehension and the practice. Such reality motivates me to do a study on linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents with the purpose of helping Vietnamese learners to grasp speeches in English. Therefore, the research is hoped to be of theoretical and practical value.

1.2. Justification for the Study

To some extent, an investigation into linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents will be a contribution to the knowledge of hedges in general and of hedges in Inaugural Addresses in particular. Accordingly, hedges play the roles of strategies that can enable both readers and listeners to receive the messages easily by boosting or attenuating the illocutionary force of speech acts such as Declarations, Representatives, Expressives, Directives, Commissives. The findings of the research are hoped to provide Vietnamese learners with precious comprehension of messages that the US Presidents wish to transfer through the hedges in their Inaugural Addresses.

1.3. Aims and Objectives

1.3.1. Aims

This study aims at investigating linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States and providing Vietnamese learners with English

linguistic knowledge to master the use of hedges in such Inaugural Addresses.

1.3.2. Objectives

The study tries to achieve the following objectives:

- Examining the linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents.
- Discovering the most common distinctive linguistic characteristics of hedges in such political speeches.
- Putting some implications towards the language teaching and learning of hedges for Vietnamese learners of English.

1.4. Research Questions

- 1) What are the linguistic realizations of hedges that can be found in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents?
- 2) What the distinctive linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents in terms of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics?
- 3) How are the typical realizations of hedges distributed in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents?

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study is confined to the linguistic features of hedges in 56 Inaugural Addresses by 44 US Presidents (from 1789 to 2009). In the scope of this study, I only deal with the lexical realizations of hedges. The grammatical devices such as tenses and mood and the prosodic ones like stress and intonation will not be discussed here.

1.6. Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3 Method and Procedure

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussions

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Implications

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW and THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Review of Prior Studies

In recent years, there have been a lot of researches conducted on the nature of communicative language and its related topic. One of the most concerned aspects of pragmatics is the issue of hedges which are defined by Lakoff (1973) as “*words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy.*”

Many linguists have treated Grice’s theory of Cooperative Principle as the foundation of their researches. Yule (1996) indicated that producing hedges not only shows the speakers’ awareness of the maxims but also means they are trying to observe them. If Lakoff approached hedges in the field of semantics, Brown and Levinson (1987) expended their research of hedges on pragmatics. According to them, hedges are useful for avoiding viewpoint conflicts. They pointed out that employing hedges is a negative politeness strategy which contributes to the face saving acts for both speakers and hearers before the dissimilarity of ideas. More than that, such strategy also helps the speakers refrain from violating the maxims in the Cooperative Principle as suggested by Grice. As for Markkanen and Schröder in their book (1997) on “Hedging and Discourse”, hedges are determined by “context (type of discourse), the colloquial situation and the speaker’s/ writer’s intention, plus the background knowledge of the interlocutors.” Furthermore, the authors emphasized that “the pragmatic function of hedging

is implicit at the level of utterance and not explicit in any lexical units.”

In the same vein, Nguyen Duong Nguyen Trinh (2001) did the investigation into lexical devices functioning as hedging in spoken English and spoken Vietnamese. According to the researcher, English has “a rich repertoire” of hedging devices to express the mitigation with epistemic auxiliaries: *can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should*; epistemic lexical verbs: *think, believe, suppose, guess, suggest, seem...*; epistemic adjectives: *probable, possible, likely, presumable...*; epistemic adverbs: *perhaps, maybe, conceivably, allegedly, reportedly*; and epistemic nouns: *chance, probability, possibility, likelihood*. However, with the same classification, Vietnamese “may be an impoverish language” for the lexical units to indicate epistemic meaning with epistemic auxiliaries: *có thể, sẽ*; epistemic lexical verbs: *nghe, thấy, ...*; epistemic adjectives: *chắc, có thể, ...*; epistemic adverbs: *có lẽ, hình như, thì phải, ...*, and epistemic nouns: *khả năng, tin đồn, cảm giác, ...*

In studies of Vietnamese in terms of pragmatics, Dao Nguyen Phuc (2003) examined hedges in the act of asking for permission based on Grice’s theory of Cooperative Principle. This author argued that in some situations of asking for permission, the speakers normally tend to flout the maxim. In such cases, hedges do really work. They are considered as helpful factors increasing the reliability as well as the persuasion of the utterances. Specifically, hedges are employed in repeating the old information, in emphasizing the reliability of the information, etc. In talking about hedges and politeness in Vietnamese conversations, Vu Thi Nga (2008) stated that

hedges in politeness are the ones whose effect is explicit at the level of utterances, and it is mainly towards the hearers. Being aware that what is being uttered may influence on the positive or the negative face of the hearers, the speakers are likely to hedge.

Yet hardly any researches on political speeches have been conducted. Therefore, we propose that a study on linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents should bring about some contribution to the theory and the use of hedges as well.

2.2. Theoretical Background

2.2.1. Definitions

2.2.1.1. What is discourse analysis?

As expressed by Yule, the investigation of “the form and function of what is said and written is called discourse analysis” [15, p.83]. The analysis of discourse spreads from the focused investigation of very simple words like “oh”, “well” in daily conversation to the study of the core ideology in a culture.

2.2.1.2. What is a hedge?

In 1973, Lakoff defined hedges as follows: “*For me, some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness – words whose jobs is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. I will refer to such words as hedges.*”

Brown/Levinson (1987) defined the term “hedge” as “*a particular word or phrase that modifies the degree of the membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set it says of that membership that it is partial or true only in a certain*

respect, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected”.

Crompton (1997) suggested a definition for hedges in academic writing: “A hedge is “an item of language which a speaker uses to explicitly qualify his/her lack of commitment to the truth of a proposition he/she utters”.

2.2.2. Speech act classification

Table 2.1: The five general functions of speech acts (following Searle 1979)

Speech act type	Direction of fit	S = speaker X = situation
Declarations	words change the world	S causes X
Representatives	make words fit the world	S believes X
Expressives	make words fit the world	S feels X
Directives	make the world fit words	S wants X
Commissives	make the world fit words	S intends X

2.2.3. The modification of the illocutionary force

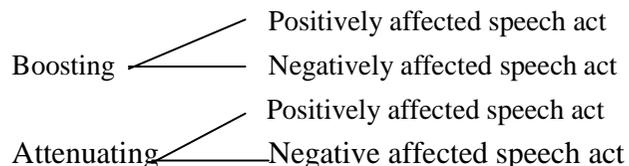


Figure 2.1: Strategies for modifying illocutionary force (adapted from Holmes (1984))

2.2.4. The Cooperative Principle

The maxim of Quality try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

- do not say what you believe to be false.
- do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The maxim of Quantity

- make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
- do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The maxim of Relevance make your contribution relevant.

The maxim of Manner be perspicuous, and specifically: avoid obscurity; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly

2.2.5. Context

With the arrival of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and more recently, cognitive linguistics on the linguistic scene, the context of an utterance is defined as “a small subpart of the universe of discourse shared by speaker and hearer, and includes facts about the topic of the conversation in which the utterance occurs, and also the facts about the situation in which the conversation itself take places.” [9, p.68, 69]

2.2.6. Politeness

Yule defined politeness as “the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face.” [15, p.60]

G. Yule set up his politeness theory on the basis of “face”. In his framework, “face” consists of two related aspects:

One is negative face. That is the need “to be independent, to have freedom of action and not to be imposed on by others”. [15, p.61]

One is positive face. That is the need “to be accepted, even liked, by others, to be treated as a member of the same group, and to know that his or her wants are shared by others”. [15, p.62]

2.3. Summary

In this chapter, some definitions of hedges by Lakoff, Brown/Levinson, and Crompton as well as their related concepts have been presented. During the study, I treat the Speech act classification by Yule, the definition of hedges by Brown/Levinson and the Cooperative Principle by Grice as framework for my investigation. The method of our analysis will be made clear in the next chapter where the linguistic features of hedges in terms of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are brought into place for the examination.

Chapter 3 METHOD AND PROCEDURE

3.1. Research Design

This is a descriptive and qualitative study, using both qualitative and quantitative information.

3.2. Research Method and Procedure

The investigation of linguistic features is based on the Speech act classification by Yule, the definition of hedges by Brown/Levinson and the Cooperative Principle by Grice.

3.2.1. Sampling

The data for analysis are mainly samples taken from 56 Inaugural Addresses by 44 US Presidents (from 1789 to 2009). The major method to collect data is to survey with the

observation of linguistic features of hedges modifying Declarations, Representatives, Expressives, Directives, and Commissives and hedges observing the maxims in the Cooperative Principle in terms of Syntax and Semantics. After that, the illocutionary force of the hedges are also displayed.

3.2.2. Data analysis

All the data collected were descriptively and qualitatively processed. The procedure is as follows:

First, a list of instances containing hedges was collected. Then I classified them based on their function of modifying the five speech acts: Declarations, Representatives, Expressives, Directives, and Commissives. And the hedges observing the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner were also classified.

After I obtained such taxonomy of cooperative maxims, I carefully observed the linguistic categories (verbs, adverbs, adjectives, ...) which helped to build up hedges and analyze the hedges to find out their linguistic features syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically.

3.3. Reliability and Validity

My corpora are not big enough and this may not allow me to discover more linguistic features of hedges apart from Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents. Also, the data analysis based mostly on the theory framework that have traditionally been employed, which may reduce the validity of the analysis. However, this descriptive framework still proved effective in eliciting qualitative information with validity as far as the criteria for finding out the linguistic features in terms of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Chapter 4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Quantitative Results of Hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents

Table 4.1: Relative Frequency (per total instances) of Hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents

Cases of hedging	Raw numbers	Percentage (%)
	Total instances	
Hedges found based on Speech Act theory	435	62.1
Hedges found based on the Cooperative Principle	266	37.9
	701	
	701	

Table 4.2: Relative Frequency (%) of the Existence of Hedges found based on Speech Act classification

Hedges found via Speech Acts	Raw numbers	Percentage (%)
Hedges modifying Representatives	215	49.4
Hedges modifying Expressives	76	17.5
Hedges modifying Commissives	60	13.8
Hedges modifying Directives	53	12.2
Hedges modifying Declarations	31	7.1
Total	435	100.00

Table 4.3: Relative Frequency (%) of the Existence of Hedges found based on the Cooperative Principle

Hedges found via the Cooperative Principle	Raw numbers	Percentage (%)
Hedges observing Quality maxim	137	51.5
Hedges observing Manner maxim	58	21.8
Hedges observing Relation maxim	41	15.4
Hedges observing Quantity maxim	30	11.3
Total	266	100.00

4.2. Linguistic Features of Hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents

4.2.1. Linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents based on the Speech Act classification

4.2.1.1. Hedges modifying Declarations

Table 4.4: The Semantics of Hedges as Modifiers of Declarations by US Presidents

Syntactic realizations	Typical Members of the group	Semantic specification
Lexical Verb	<i>I desire, I think, I believe ...</i>	The speaker's desire, assumption, belief ...
Prepositional Phrase	<i>in obedience to, in obedience of the mandate of, without solicitation on</i>	The speaker's obedience to/of the power of American citizen or Constitution
Past Participle Phrase	<i>Prescribed by, called to, elected by</i>	The prescription of a power, establishment, the call of duty, trust, the status elected by people
Modal Verb	<i>may, must, should, can, will</i>	Knowledge or obligation
Noun	<i>Satisfaction, honor, pleasure</i>	The speaker's psychological state: satisfaction, honor, pleasure
Speech Filler	<i>Now, then</i>	A logical choice or consequence or speaker's self-determination

Causative Expression	<i>Let, Allow</i>	The lifting of barrier called from the outer force
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4.2.1.2. Hedges modifying Representatives

Table 4.5: The Semantics of Hedges as Modifiers of Representatives by US Presidents

Syntactic realizations	Typical Members of the group	Semantic specification
- Noun showing validity/proof - Verb showing validity/proof	<i>history, experience, evidence</i> <i>- prove, bring, teach</i>	The speaker's citing of historical record, evidence
3 rd S + Modal lexical verb	<i>- 3rd Subject + believe</i> <i>- 3rd Subject+ taught</i>	The predecessor/founder's knowledge/experience
Pseudo S + BE + Modal lexical verb passive	<i>It is alleged that, It is believed, it has been proved, It is confidently believed</i>	A universal belief/common sense/a widely accepted knowledge
Pseudo S + BE + Modal Adjective	<i>It is unquestionably certain that, It is true that,</i>	The certainty from the outer source of information
Pseudo S + BE + Adjective + Speech act Verb	<i>It is safe to assert that</i>	The convenience or favor of the situation or nature

		of knowledge itself
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4.2.1.3. Hedges modifying Expressives

Table 4.6: The Semantics of Hedges as modifiers of Expressives by US Presidents

Syntactic realizations	Typical Members of the group	Semantic specification
1 st S + Adv + Expressive V	<i>I fervently hope, I sincerely hope that, I earnestly hope</i>	The speaker's hope with the signal of the manner showing sincerity/honesty ...
Inversion Adv + Aux + 1 st S + Expressive V	<i>Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray</i>	The speaker's hope, pray, with emphasis on the manner of hedging
1 st S + BE + Adv + Expressive V	<i>I am deeply impressed with gratitude for</i>	The speaker's impression, pray, with emphasis on the degree of hedging
Pseudo S + BE + Expressive Adj	<i>It is particularly gratifying to me, It seems to me very desirable</i>	The speaker's gratitude/desire with emphasis on the manner of hedging
1 st S + BE + Adv+ Expressive Adv	<i>I am equally well satisfied, I am sincerely anxious</i>	The speaker's satisfaction/anxiety with the signal showing the manner of hedging
Speech Filler	<i>All I dare hope is that</i>	The speaker's hope with the signal on the manner of introducing the content

Pseudo S + BE + Expressive V passive	<i>It is to be hoped that, It is, therefore,</i>	The speaker's hope/expectation with emphasis on the manner of hedging
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4.2.1.4. Hedges modifying Directives

Table 4.7: The Semantics of hedges as modifiers of directives
by US presidents

Syntactic realizations	Typical Members of the group	Semantic specification
Pseudo S + BE + Modal N + to Inf	<i>it is our duty to, it becomes the duty of all to</i>	The speaker's suggesting the hearer's duty to do something
Conditional Expression	<i>only if, unless, if ... but</i>	The speaker's suggesting a condition for the hearer to do something
1 st S + Vasking + conditional expression	<i>I wonder if we could</i>	The speaker's polite asking the hearer to do something
Modal V + 2 nd S + Vpermission 1 st S	<i>would you permit me the privilege of Ving</i>	The speaker's polite asking for the hearer permission to do something
1 st S + Vvolition + Speech act V + 1 st S + V	<i>I wish to say that I Verb</i>	The speaker's showing volition to do something

4.2.1.5. Hedges modifying Commissives

Table 4.8: The semantics of hedges as modifiers of commissives
by US presidents

Syntactic realizations	Typical Members of the group	Semantic specification
Pseudo S + Will BE+1 st possessive Pronoun+Neffort + to Inf	<i>It will be my endeavor to, It will be my constant endeavor to</i>	The speaker's showing the attempt/effort to do something
1 st S shall + Vcommissive + PP + to inf	<i>I shall swear to the best of my ability to</i>	The speaker's emphasis on the truth/commitment to do something
1 st possessive pronoun + shall BE+ commissive NP	<i>My efforts for such reformation shall be continued to the best of my judgment</i>	The speaker's commitment to the effort to do something
Pseudo S + shall BE + commissive NP + to inf	<i>It shall be displayed to the extent of my humble abilities in</i>	The speaker's commitment with his/her understatement of ability to do

	<i>continued efforts so to</i>	something
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4.2.2. Linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents based on the Cooperative Principle

The pragmatic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents based on the Cooperative Principle can be summarized in table 4.9

Table 4.9: The Pragmatics of Hedges as Signals of Conformity to Cooperative maxims by US presidents

Maxim observed	Hedging Expressions	Pragmatic possible effects
Quality	<i>it is said that</i>	Compensation for the lack of evidence or certainty
	<i>I'm told that</i>	Compensation for the lack of evidence or certainty
	<i>I think</i>	The message is just an assumption or subjective thinking of the speaker
Quantity	<i>as all men know</i>	The message is common knowledge
	<i>I should make some brief remarks</i>	A brief presentation of the message
	<i>Still one thing more</i>	A thoughtful continuation of the speaker's presentation
Relation	<i>Well</i>	The hedge signals the speaker's presentation of a relevant topic along with his/her confirmation on the continuation or starting of the given topic
	<i>then</i>	
Manner	<i>If I read the temper of our people correctly</i>	The speaker's attempt to clarify his comprehending of the hearer's mind in the communication

Chapter 5 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Issues Addressed In the Study

1) For the case of hedges modifying Speech Acts, the US Presidents were discovered to use *verbs*, *prepositional phrases*, *past participle phrases*, the speech filler “then”, the non-explicit speech act “Let ...” to create hedges modifying Declarations;

2) As for the cases of Representatives, the US Presidents were found to employ the structure *S + V+ (O) that*, the pattern *It + be + past participle*, the combination of the subject “It” with an adjective, to produce hedges modifying assertions of many types;

3) Regarding cases of Expressives, the US Presidents were seen to make use of some *adverbs*, *verbs*, the speech filler “then”, the phrase “no ... than ...”, the pattern “It + be + pp ...”, the phrase “a mark of” to set up hedges modifying utterances expressing feelings and emotions;

4) For cases of Directives, the US Presidents were recognized to use the structure “It + be + N ...”, the phrase “only if”, *verbs* to build up hedges modifying such speech acts as request, command and appeal;

5) As regard to cases of Commissives, the US Presidents were noted to employ the structure *It will be + N ...*”, the phrase “to the extent of ...” to achieve hedges modifying speech acts with commitment in different degree;

6) As for the hedges produced based on the Cooperative Principle, the US Presidents were found to use the *passive form*, the verb *think* to have hedges observing the Quality maxim;

employ the verb *know*, noun *summary* to create hedges observing the Quantity maxim; use the speech filler “well” to have hedges observing the Relation maxim; and make use of the *If clauses* to produce hedges observing the Manner maxim.

7) With a wide range of hedging devices, the US Presidents have employed different hedging strategies to modify the illocutionary forces of their speech acts in two pragmatic dimensions: boosting and attenuating the speaker’s commitment and certainty towards both the content of utterances and the American citizens as hearers.

5.2. Implications for the Teaching and Learning of Hedges

As to teachers, these following implications may be useful for their teaching of hedges:

- Since working on hedges is the process of referring and inferring, it requires learners of active participation during the lessons. That is to say teachers should warm up the lessons the more attractively, the better.

- For the purpose of the effective teaching, both methods of finding out and encoding hedges should be paid attention to. Accordingly, teachers are advised to give popular examples in real communicative situations, then provide learners with some hints or markers to discover hedges. Gradually, teachers should help learners to master the issue thoroughly by making more difficult requirements by asking them to find out hedges and their features in novels, stories, or in political speeches. At a high level, teachers should direct their learners to apply what they have learnt to create hedges. Additionally, it is better for teachers to select the materials or data which is popular and reliable.

As for Vietnamese learners of English, some differences in English's ways of expressing (in speaking and writing) may bring about the obstacles in their discovering as well as interpreting hedges. Hence, following suggestions are hoped to be of the feasible solution to their learning of hedges.

- In peculiar to exploring hedges in political speeches, learners are advised to obey the following order: Firstly, make sure that their knowledge of hedges is sufficient enough to deal with speeches. Next, seek for the background information as well as the content of the speeches. Finally, combine the comprehension on the speech into theoretical base of hedges together with the careful analysis to achieve the thorough message encoding.

5.3. Limitations

Although it has been given a lot of efforts, the study is inevitable to avoid short comings for the limitations in the ability of the researcher as well as the inadequacy of materials.

Besides, due to the lack of time, the examination of the linguistic features of hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents in terms of pragmatics have not proceeded as intended.

5.4. Suggestions for Further Research

A lot of problems relating to this study are left for further investigation. Therefore, the researcher suggests some further feasible studies on the following issues:

- The examination of the harmony of linguistic devices to signal hedges in Inaugural Addresses by the US Presidents.

- How the political images of the US Presidents may appear as a result of the employment of many kinds of typical hedges in their political speeches.