

# Hedges

In the linguistic sub-fields of applied linguistics and pragmatics, a hedge is a word or phrase used in a sentence to express ambiguity, probability, caution, or indecisiveness about the remainder of the sentence, rather than full accuracy, certainty, confidence, or decisiveness.

## Types of hedges

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Hedges may take the form of many different parts of speech, for example:

- There might just be a few *insignificant* problems we need to address. (adjective)
- The party was *somewhat* spoiled by the return of the parents. (adverb)
- *I'm not an expert but* you might want to try restarting your computer. (clause)
- That's false, *isn't it?* (tag question clause)

❖ Consider the following sentences and describe the function of the italic words and clauses in relation to the whole utterance:

- a. I'm not sure if this is right, but I heard they separated.
- b. She couldn't live with him, I guess.
- c. He is a slightly stupid person.
- d. I am not an expert, but you might want to try restarting your computer.
- e. The party was somewhat spoiled by the return of the parents.

Did you work it out? The italic words and clauses above lessen the impact of the respective utterance, this mitigating device is called hedge. The number of hedges, i.e. indications that what we say may not be totally accurate, reflects the importance of the maxim of quality for cooperative interaction in English.

Consider the following speaker's account of her recent vacation: Do you think the speaker might even be conscious of another maxim? If so, which maxim?

- a. As you probably know, I am terrified of bugs.
- b. So, to cut a long story short, we grabbed our stuff and ran.
- c. I won't bore you with all details, but it was an exciting trip.

The initial phrases in the sentences above show that the speaker is conscious of the quantity maxim, thus, she reduces her account to a length appropriate for the current purpose of exchange. Hedges may intentionally or unintentionally be employed in both spoken and written language since they are crucially important in communication. Hedges help speakers and writers communicate the degree of accuracy and

truth in assessments more precisely. It seems that when people are involved in conversations, they do not only want to convey information, but are also eager to show that they are aware of and observing the maxims

## INTRODUCTION

In our writing, we often indicate how confident we are about the claims we make. If we are doubtful that something is true, we may use words like *perhaps* or *possibly*. If we're confident, we may say that something is *clearly* or *obviously* true. These words are called hedges and boosters. They affect the tone of our writing, and good writers use them effectively.

## HEDGING

To hedge means to waffle on an issue, to avoid committing oneself. Originally, the term referred to literally hiding in a bush or hedge. These days, hedging simply means expressing some feeling of doubt or hesitancy.

Here is a list of words that are considered hedges:

Examples: Perhaps, maybe, admittedly, might, possibly, likely, probably, predominantly, presumably, so to speak, seems, appears, may, think, to some extent, suggests, sometimes, often, around, roughly, fairly, usually, etc.

Observe the difference in tone when we use hedging:

No hedging: We vandalized school property.

With hedging: It's possible that we may have vandalized school property.

In this example, hedging is merely a strategy for evasion. Indeed, if you're not careful, hedging can hurt your writing. It's easy to come across as timid and lacking in confidence. Hedging can also clutter up your sentences.

Yet, hedging has its benefits. Hedges suggest that the writer is careful, nuanced, and keen to avoid generalizations. A text that contains hedging is an open text, a text that invites debate and further research.

## **BOOSTING**

If hedges express doubt, boosters demonstrate confidence.

Here are some examples of common boosting words:

Examples: certainly, indeed, always, undoubtedly, in fact, clearly, actually, obviously, know, prove, conclusively, definitely, evidently.

The danger with boosters is that they can make you seem cocky and pompous. However, if you use them sparingly they can convey the right amount of self-assurance. The selective use of boosters will convince your reader that you know your stuff and are an expert in your field.