

Exploring Hedges And Their Functions In Tariq Rahman's *Friend*



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Abstract: *This paper tries to investigate different types of hedges and the functions of hedges used in short story, Friend (1986), written by Tariq Rahman. The present research is qualitative in nature and is based on an interpretivist paradigm. The short story, Friend (1986), by Tariq Rahman is taken as the source of data. The theories of hedges and its functions, proposed by Coates (1996), and the types of hedges proposed by Salager-Meyer (1997) are used as a theoretical framework in the present study. The researchers have selected five types of hedges from Salager-Meyer (1997) classification. This paper concludes that the hedges which occur most frequently in the short story is modal auxiliary verb which occurred with the frequency of 9(36%), then the 'if' clauses which occurred with the frequency 6(24%), other types such as modal lexical verbs and introductory phrases occurred with same frequency 4(16%), then compound hedges with frequency 2(8%). There are three functions of hedges out of four found out by the researchers, these functions are; expression of doubt and confidence, searching for the right word, and sensitivity to others' feelings.*

Keywords: Hedges, interpretivist, types of hedges, functions of hedges, Coates theory, Salager-Meyers' theory

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

According to Lyons (1981), languages are the primary means of communication used by the particular group of people within the particular society they belong to. "Languages allow several methods of stating the same concept-addressing and welcoming people, describing objects, and paying praises (Holmes, 2001, p.2)." Halliday (1978) states that language serves to represent our participation in the discourse as speakers; the roles we take on and impose upon other; our feelings, wishes, judgments and attitudes.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. It is divided into various subfields: Phonology, Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics are some of

the subfields of linguistics. The ability to communicate intended message with all of its complexities in any cultural or social setting and to accurately comprehend the intended meaning of the other person's message are known as pragmatics. Fraser (2010) argues that pragmatics proficiency is essential for effective communication and a core component of general communicative proficiency

Language can be used as a tool for interaction and communication. However, people sometimes hesitates using spoken language to conduct and share their views and show unwillingness and doubt when producing utterances. To overcome this problem the speaker employs different language devices known as hedges. Hedges can be defined as any speech or utterance where the speaker explicitly conveys doubt, hesitation, or unwillingness.

About it, Lakoff (1973) writes: “The study of phrases where meaning indirectly incorporates fuzziness; words whose purpose it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy (p.458).”

Varttala (1999) notes that there are numerous ways to hedge and the kinds of hedging may actually be limitless. We utilize hedges to soften and reduce the impact of our statements. It has an important function in developing improved conversation. It makes our utterances less direct. Aijmer (1986) argues that hedges allow the speaker to feel more liberated from the accountability of the precise words they use. This study will try to explore the types and functions of hedges in Tariq Rahman’s *Friend* (1986).

1.2 Research Objectives

- To investigate the employment of several types of hedges and its functions in the short story *Friend* (1986).

1.3 Research Questions

1. What types of hedges are used in the short story *Friend* and what functions it perform the story, *Friend* (1986)?

Literature Review

Hedging is a linguistic phenomenon and an extensive number of studies have been done on hedges in various linguistics fields. Sari (2008) examined the introduction of theses written by students of linguistics at Airlangga University. Sari examined the types of hedges that are most frequently used in theses' introductions for her study. Sari used Hyland’s theory, Recski’s theory 2005, and Hinkel’s theory 1997 in her study. According to her research, modal auxiliary verbs are the most common hedging device employed in the sample, followed by modal lexical verbs, adverbs and adjectives, and modal nouns. According to the findings of her study, students commonly employed modal auxiliary verbs, with the word *may* appearing most frequently, followed by *could*, *might*, and *would*.

Fawaaid (2011) examined hedges in his study, which was based on undergraduate students' theses' sections on reviews of related literature. The information was gathered by documenting

ten theses of undergraduate students from the Muria Kudus University's English Education Department between 2007 and 2011. Findings from data analysis indicate that theses' writers prefer to use modal auxiliary while asserting their positions and making claims, because the writers seek to demonstrate their confidence in the accuracy of what they claim in the review of related literature sections by using hedging techniques of modal auxiliary verbs.

Biok Behnam (2012) examines the function, form, and frequency of hedges in the 100 quantitative and qualitative research articles' discussion section with high level of scientific assertions. To compare the overall number of hedging devices, the independent sample test was used. The outcome showed a statistically significant variation in the form and frequency of hedging words between quantitative qualitative research publications. Biok Behnam used comparative genre analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature and is based on an interpretivist paradigm. While conducting this study the researcher applies the descriptive qualitative method to the study because the researchers aim to analyze the types and functions of hedges in the text of the short story *Friend* (1986) by Tariq Rahman. The data for this research is taken from the short story *Friend* (1986) written by Tariq Rahman in 1975 and was published on 21 November 1986 in *The Frontier Post*. The text of the short story *Friend* (1986) by Tariq Rahman is used as the primary data source while different books, websites content, journals, and scholarly articles are used as secondary data sources to complete the data analysis.

The collected data is analyzed by using descriptive qualitative method. The data analysis of this study consists of the following steps:

1. Reading

The researchers thoroughly read the whole short story “*Friend*” to find the hedging expressions used by the writer.

1. Coding the Hedge

The research gave coding to each hedging expression found in the short story “Friend”. Based on the types of hedges, the researchers highlighted each type of hedge with different colors. The researchers highlighted modal auxiliary verbs with bright green highlighter, modal lexical verbs with yellow highlighter, Adjectival, Adverbial, and Nominal Modal Phrases with blue highlighter, introductory phrases with pink highlighter, “if” clauses with green, and compound hedges with red highlighter.

2. Putting the data in the table

The researchers created the table that listed number, types of hedges, frequency of each type of hedge that occur in the story, and percentages of the occurrences of each type of hedge. Then whole findings of the types of hedges was summarized in one table. Here is the form of table used by the researchers to put the data;

No	Types of Hedges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Modal Auxiliary Verbs	9	36%
2	Modal Lexical Verbs	4	16%
3	Introductory Phrases	4	16%
4	“If” Clauses	6	24%
5	Compound Hedges	2	8%
	Total Hedges	25	100%

5. Drawing the Conclusion

The selected data was analyzed and interpreted which leads to the conclusion of the study. In conclusion, after interpretation and comprehensive analysis the whole data was put into table to show the frequency and percentage of each type of hedges used in short story.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter attempted to highlight the total number of hedges and to investigate the functions of hedges. The data analysis and results are discussed below;

TABLE 1.1

The whole findings of the types of hedges is summarized in one table given below;

No	Types of Hedges	Frequency	Percentage
1	Modal Auxiliary Verbs	9	36%
2	Modal Lexical Verbs	4	16%
3	Introductory Phrases	4	16%
4	“If” Clauses	6	24%
5	Compound Hedges	2	8%
	Total Hedges	25	100%

Table 1.1 explores that the total number of the types of hedges found in the whole short story “Friend” is 25. After analysis of the data, it was found that this short story contains several hedges. The study reveals that the modal auxiliary verbs are the most frequently used hedges in the short story. This shows that the writer of the short story is more inclined towards the use of modal auxiliary verbs. Modal auxiliary verbs as hedges appear in the short story with the frequency of **9(38%)**. Second most frequently used hedge in the short story is “If” Clause that occurred with the frequency of **6(24%)**. The other types of hedges explored in this short story are Modal Lexical Verbs which occurred with the frequency of **4(16%)**. Another type of hedge the writer has used in the short story is that of Introductory Phrases that also occurred with the frequency of **4(16%)**. Additionally, the writer has also used Compound Hedges that appear with the frequency of **2(8%)**.

4.2 Discussion of the Findings

In this part of the study, the researchers discuss about the description of the types and functions of hedges explored in the short story.

4.2.1 Types of Hedges

There are seven types of hedges presented by Salager-Meyer (1997) and among those seven types the researchers attempted to examine five types of hedges in the short story. The description and analysis of the types of hedges is discussed below:

4.2.2 Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs are those types of verbs that functions as hedges. Modal auxiliary verbs are most frequently used to express modality in the text or discourse. The scale from strongest to weakest is followed as; can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would. The most often used modal auxiliary verbs as hedging expressions are may, might, could, would and should.

The most frequently used hedges in the short story are modal auxiliary verbs. Not all of the

modal auxiliary verbs act as hedges but only those that express uncertainty, probability, doubt and vagueness act as hedges. It usually shows the “mood”, or “attitude” of the speaker. An extract from the short story is given below which shows the use of modal auxiliary verbs as a hedge:

Extract 1

*“In any case, I thought she **would** not accept money.”*

In the above extract the bold word *would* is a modal auxiliary verb. One of the modal auxiliary verbs used in the short story is *would*. With the use of modal auxiliary *would*, the narrator Tamim is indirectly making his claim. His thoughts were the amalgamation of doubt and confusion at that moment. He was not sure whether his act of giving money to Soniya as a gift would make her happy or angry. He just predicted about the upcoming situation that Soniya would might get angry and would not accept money. It shows that the speaker is not completely certain if the girl would accept money or not. By hedging their assertion, the speaker is admitting that they are no completely aware or have control over the situation.

4.2.3 Modal Lexical Verbs

Modal lexical verbs are also called speech act verbs; it means that it is not only used to describe something but also perform certain acts. It can be used as epistemic verbs such as to assume, to seem, to suggest, to appear, and also to indicate, to estimate, to think, to argue, to speculate, to propose, although in this way various kinds of verbs can be used (Banks, 1994), there tends to be high reliance on the above mentioned examples mainly in academic writing. The example of the lexical verb as a hedge can be seen in the extract from the short story given below:

Extract 2

*“She **seemed** to have put on the burden of years of anguish and desperation and guilt.”* In the above extract the bold word *seemed* is a modal lexical verb. *Seemed* can be considered a

hedging expression as it implies tentativeness or uncertainty about the speaker's judgement or perception. It confirms the doubt of the speaker in making claim.

Tamim assumes about Soniya's condition that how she appears to him at that moment. The word *seemed* express his doubt. In order to lessen the force of proposition, Tamim use modal lexical verb *seemed* in making his claim vague. He used it because he was not sure of Soniya's expressions, the use of *seemed* suggests that the speaker is not completely sure if Soniya's expressions are true or if it just appears that way to the speaker. The hedging expression *seemed* helps to soften the statement and make it less assertive or absolute.

4.2.4 Introductory Phrases

Introductory phrases are those phrases that express the direct involvement and the speaker's own doubt. These phrases are considered as thought phrases like: we feel that, I believe that, it is our view that, to our knowledge and so on.

The example from the short story which consists of Introductory Phrase that functions as a hedge can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 3

*"She was merely nineteen then, and I **considered** myself grown-up because I happened to be six months older."*

In extract 3, an introductory phrase can be seen in bold. Introductory phrases show direct involvement of the speaker such as here in above example the speaker gives his opinion by using an introductory phrase "*I considered myself grown-up*". The speaker injects a hedge in his claim to express his opinion. Tamim was six months older than Soniya due to which he considered himself grown-up, but due to his childish behavior, Soniya behaves like a grown-up lady with Tamim because the harsh experiences of her life forced her to become a mature girl at such a young age of nineteen. So, here is the direct involvement of the speaker, in his opinion, as he is six months older than Soniya, so he considers himself a grown up man and Soniya should not consider him a kid, but due to his immature acts Soniya often scolds him

to grow up and don't act like immature boys.

4.2.5 "If" Clauses

The second most frequent hedge is "if" clauses. There is no particular word which can be referred as "if" clauses but it is in a phrase form which is used as hedging expressions in the discourse. "If" clauses aim to demonstrate the probability for something or a particular circumstance. "If" clause by itself imply that a condition must be met before an action is taken.

The example from the short story which consists of "If" Clause that functions as a hedge can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 4

*"I felt I would grow up **if I kept meeting her.**"*

"If" clause in the above extract expresses that the speaker indicates the hypothetical situation and its consequences. For example, in the above extract, Tamim thinks that he would grow up if he kept meeting Soniya. So, there is a possibility that he would get mature in case he continues to meet her. The above example also shows the ambiguity and vagueness of the speaker's thoughts. Here the speaker proposed a situation that if he continues meeting Soniya then it is possible that he might get mature and learn many things from her.

Compound Hedges

Compound hedge is that type of hedge in which two or more than two hedge phrases or expressions are combined in a sentence. For instance, lexical verbs incorporate modal auxiliary verbs, such as, 'would probably'.

The examples from the short story which consists of Compound Hedges that functions as a hedge can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 5

*"She **would probably** throw it back at my face and give me a slap too."*

The use of compound hedge in the above extract shows the ambiguity of the speaker's thoughts and statement. In the above extract the combination of modal auxiliary (would) and adverb (probably) is a compound hedge. Would probably modifies "*throw it back at my face and*

give me a slap too". Tamim is assuming about the situation and what would be Soniya's reaction if he gives her money. He is not sure of her reaction but thinks she might slap him because of this act. He is uncertain of the situation.

Extract 6

*"She **almost seemed** to shrink and wither away palpably as she stood there."*

In the extract "She *almost seemed* to shrink and wither away palpably as she stood there," *almost* and *seemed* both functions as hedges. "Almost" shows some degree of uncertainty, indicating that Tamim is not entirely certain that Soniya actually shrunk and withered away, while "seemed" also shows uncertainty by implying that the Soniya's shrinking and withering away may have only appeared to the speaker to be happening. Therefore, "almost seemed" is a compound hedge in this sentence.

4.2.6 Function of Hedges

Coates proposed different functions of hedges and using Coates' theory (1996), it is explored that there are three functions of hedges found in the short story. These three functions are expression of doubt and confidence, sensitivity to other's feelings, and searching for the right word. The description and analysis of the functions of hedges found in the short story are discussed below:

4.2.7 Expression of doubt and confidence

One of the most basic functions of hedges proposed by Coates is the expression of doubt and confidence. This function plays the role of indicating that the writer or the speaker is not fully committed to his or her claim. It shows confidence and doubt of the speaker in making their claim. Simply they use hedge expressions to show that they are not completely sure of their statements and that there is still room for other interpretations and possibilities. In other words, by hedging, a person is expressing their lack of confidence in the authenticity of the statement being made.

The example from the short story which shows the expression of doubt that perform the function

of hedge can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 7

*"In any case, **I thought** she would not accept money."*

The main role of hedges is to express that the speaker is not fully committed to what they are saying. In the extract 7, the use of hedge *I thought* signals that the speaker is not confident about his claim. The hedging expression *I thought* shows that Tamim is not completely confident regarding the truth of proposition "*she would not accept money*". This is what he thought, he is not certain which shows that there is possibility that she might accept money or reject it. The speaker is not making a definite statement, but rather expressing their uncertainty about whether or not Soniya would accept money.

4.2.8 Expression of Confidence

The example from the short story which shows the expression of confidence that perform the function of hedge can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 8

"The deepest communication human beings can have with one another was ours." In Extract 8, Tamim is talking about depth of communication between himself and Soniya. His statement is closer to confidence that they have profound and meaningful communication. He felt confident about his statement. He was sure that they have deepest communication among all human beings.

4.2.9 Searching for the Right Word

The role of hedging expressions is not confined to a single function. Hedging expressions can also be used to search for an appropriate word. In order for a speaker or writer to express their ideas in an appropriate way, hedges allow a person to use accurate words. It also allows a person to show that he or she is struggling to search for the right word. So, hedges can be used to Find the appropriate word to accurately describe something.

The example from the short story which shows that the speaker is searching for the right word

can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 9

*"Oh,' I said guiltily, feeling myself blushing, 'Oh it's ... Mats, **you know, well** it's **once in a blue moon.**"*

Here in this utterance Tamim is trying to search for the right word to justify his action of being drunk by saying I am not addicted, I drink very rarely, not always. As Soniya scolds him for his act, Tamim feels guilty, ashamed and blushing at the same time because he was caught by his friend Soniya in such an embarrassing situation. Tamim was drunk and when Soniya get angry and asked him who made you drunk, he get confused and unable to answer at once. He hesitantly answered that he is drunk due to his mats but at same time he gets embarrassed that he is caught by his best friend and he try to justify his act of drinking. He was unable to answer her directly so he searched for right words to answer appropriately.

Tamim in his utterance uses words like "you know, well", which shows that he is trying to find the right word to justify his action and also to overcome his embarrassment. The phrase "once in a blue moon" can also be used as a hedge as it is used to restrain the frequency of the speaker's actions and to lessen any possible negative criticism or judgment from the listener.

4.2.1 Sensitivity to others feelings

Hedges are not only used to make the statement uncertain and fuzzy but it can also be used by the speaker or writer to take in account the feelings of the listener or reader.

Through the use of hedge, speaker can reduce the harshness of his utterance that he is about to utter. This function of hedge is closely related to the theory of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978). The hedge here functions to avoid the negative attitudes of the addresser which may hurt the addressee's feeling; and end the conversation politely. So, Hedges can be employed by the speaker or writer to consider the listener's or reader's feelings as well as to make the sentence ambiguous and unclear.

The example from the short story containing

hedges which shows sensitivity towards others feelings can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 10

*"With the romantic scene in my mind and moisture in my eyes I said: **May** I say something?"*

Extract 10 shows that Tamim wanted to say something but not directly. He inserted a hedging expression to state his claim indirectly. He used the hedge *may* to soften the utterance he is going to utter and it also shows polite request for permission. He is softening his claim by using *may* because he somehow knows that what he is going to say might hurt her. So, in order to avoid it, he first enquired her permission before saying something that might hurt her feelings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find the types and functions of hedges in the short story, *Friend* (1986). written by Tariq Rahman. The study employed theories of the types of hedges by Salager-Meyer (1997) and functions of hedges by Coates (1995).

The study explored that the total number of the types of hedges found in the whole short story *Friend* (1986). is 25. After analysis of the data, it was found that this short story contains several hedges. The study reveals that the modal auxiliary verbs are the most frequently used hedges in the short story. This shows that the writer of the short story is more inclined towards the use of modal auxiliary verbs. Modal auxiliary verbs as hedges appear in the short story with the frequency of **9(36%)**. Second most frequently used hedge in the short story is 'If' Clause that occurred with the frequency of **6(24%)**. The other types of hedges explored in this short story are Modal Lexical Verbs which occurred with the frequency of **4(16%)**. Another type of hedge the writer has used in the short story is that of Introductory Phrases that also occurred with the frequency of **4(16%)**. Additionally, the writer has also used Compound Hedges that appear with the frequency of **2(8%)**.

Moreover, using theory of Coates, the researchers discovered that out of four functions

there are three functions of hedges used in the short story *Friend* (1986). written by Tariq Rahman. These three functions are expression of doubt and confidence, sensitivity to other's feelings, and searching for the right word. These functions are used in order to create a contented atmosphere for the communication.

To summarize, hedging is a linguistic phenomenon, used by the speakers or writers to show hesitation, doubt, vagueness. They use hedges when they are unsure about their statements. Through the use of hedging expressions, the speaker or writer can exhibit unwillingness to what they say or write. Hedges can also be used to reduce or soften the impact of statements and also to make the statements less direct.

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