



# A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF HEDGES IN KHALED HOSSEINI' A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

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## **Abstract**

The paper aims to investigate the language used by the major characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and it aims to reveal how through the use of hedges in their everyday speech, they express their uncertainty through their lexical choices. Prince et al.'s (1982) classification of hedges has been used for the analysis which is supported by Salager-Meyer (1995). The classification is divided into approximators (change the propositional content carried in the utterance) and shields (amend the truth value of the utterance) to analyse hedging behaviour in the discourse genres of the major characters. The paper will explore how they interact with other major characters while using hedging. These expressions with equals or superiors in held dominated society in Afghanistan need to be analysed separately. The aim of the paper is to focus on the study of social groups without going into the gender differences with both expressions. The paper tries to find out the most common types of hedges used in the discourse. It also aims to reveal their essential types and reasonable characteristics. The study is steered within the framework of contemporary linguistics for example functional grammar, pragmatics and comparative analysis. The paper is an attempt to bring out the nature of hedging, important features of hedges and their discourse-marked specifics.

**KEYWORDS:** Hedging, social groups, approximators, shields.

## **Introduction**

Hedging is used quite frequently in interpersonal communication. The research demonstrates Lakoff's viewpoint that hedges are 'words whose meaning implicitly implies fuzziness-words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy' (Lak off [1973] p.471). Hedging suggests degree of more or less without exhibiting the full commitment so that the accuracy or precision of what is said can be achieved. The paper analyses the meaning and purposes of hedges in interactive discourse among the major characters in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. The main functions of hedging in interactive discourse are to elude clashes, lessening face-threatening acts and controlling the

annoyance. Hedging plays an important role in the language study. The right use of hedging devices reproduces a high level of knowledge of the ideologies of speechmaking while interacting socially. With the appropriate use of hedging communication becomes more polite and operative which is the main function of hedging. The characters in a text may be alleged as impolite, rude and haughty if they don't use hedging in their interaction with others.

The paper deals with hedging and it tries to explore how epistemic modality/hedges used by the major characters in interactive sentences help them to struggle and stand against the discriminatory society in Afghanistan. By choosing words of fuzziness they hesitantly stand against the system. This study looks at the language used by the major characters to interact in informal interaction with other characters. The study also depicts how the tentative devices help them to save their face in the society. The research also provides insight into the use of hedges in different discourse genres. These can be seen as different in their main purposes and as far as the degree of spontaneity is concerned. This article aims to study the how many times hedging is used in the discourse and what are their reasonable functions

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Hedging and its functions**

Hedges or epistemic modality are the linguistic practises that describe the speaker's surety about the truth of the proposition. According to Coates (2004) epistemic modality covers the qualifiers like sort of, a little and the modals such as may and might and expressions like I know, I mean and I think and tag questions. These lexical choices are considered epistemic modal items because they demonstrate the degree in which the speaker is certain and about the alertness that has been expressed. These are also called hedges because hedging depicts the assertive tone of sentences used by the speaker.

The term hedging has existed in linguistics since long, but there is not any appropriate definition that may be covering all aspects of how to use it more appropriately or exactly. The concept of hedging in linguistics was first introduced by Lakoff (1973). According to Lakoff (1973), hedges are "words whose meaning implicitly implies fuzziness – words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (p. 471). Lakoff presented the following as examples of hedges in English: sort of, more or less, kind of, roughly, loosely speaking, pretty (much), mostly, relatively, somewhat, rather, technically, strictly speaking, essentially, in essence, basically, principally, particularly, par excellence, for the most part, very, largely, especially, exceptionally, quintessentially, often, literally, than anything else, almost, typically/typical, as it were, in a sense, in a real sense, in a way, in a manner of speaking, details aside, so to say, practically, a true, a real, a regular, virtually, all but technically, practically, actually, really, all but a, anything but a, (he as much as...), -like, -ish, can be looked upon as, can be observed as, pseudo-,crypto-,in name only etc.(Lakoff,1973,p.472).

Lakoff (1973) firstly considered hedging from the point of view of formal semantics that functions inside the ideational function of language. He emphasized that normal language sentences are not always utterly true, false or nonsensical, but they are rather somewhat true and somewhat false. The membership in conceptual categories is not a simple yes-no question but a matter of degree. In real situations, it is very difficult to find objects that exactly match a particular class or category. Some categories do not have clear boundaries. Belongingness to these vague boundaries is expressed not absolutely, but slowly and gradually. The sentence *John is tall* is true only provided John is really tall, because tallness is a relative concept. Lakoff's concept of hedging is also connected with the prototype theory suggested by Rosch (1978). According to this theory every object is connected to a category but represents it to different degrees. For example, a robin is a more typical representative of the category *bird* (prototype) than a penguin. Hedges are appropriate to use in relation to non-prototypical concepts. Therefore, a sentence *A penguin is sort of a bird* is true, but *A robin is sort of a bird* is false (Lakoff, 1973, p. 471). Fuzziness represents the degree of deviation from the prototype.

Different perspectives have been taken by different researchers. Lakoff Fraser (1975) concentrated hedging mainly as verb hedging and then Brown & Levinson (2014) focused on hedging from the speech act point of view of henceforth unfolding hedges in terms of politeness strategies.

### **Classification of Hedges**

Then Prince et al (1982) implemented a multidimensional approach. According to him, hedges should be divided into two major parts; approximators and shields. The first part (approximators) hedge is the propositional content and may be further subdivided into adaptors and rounders. Adaptors, like somewhat, *kind of sort of, some, a little bit, that are* related to class membership add to the real meaning of the utterance. Rounders such as *about, approximately, something, around,* direct a range, within which a notion is approximated. The other major class (shields) pertains to the degree of uncertainty. The shields tell us about the propositional content that the speaker expresses. Henceforth these may reflect how far the characters are involved and to which extent. These hedges fall into two groups: plausibility shields and attribution shields. Plausibility shields, such as *I think, probably, I take it, as far as I can tell, I have to believe right now, I don't see that* convey the speaker's uncertainty, doubt about what is being said. The other subclass, attribution shields, covers expressions contributing to the truth value of the proposition, as in *according to, presumably, at least, to somebody's knowledge,* etc.

Salager- Meyer (1994: 150) in her study of hedges in medical discourse, describes that hedges are projected to make the information conveyed more clearly in positive sense. And the negative politeness is left to the reader providing a space for the opinions so that these should not be imposed upon their thoughts and the negative face of the reader should be protected. So the hedges can be seen as a strategy of 'self-protection' to save the face. The author while making his characters being uncertain and avoiding to be assertive, through the use of hedging devices, tends to be non-committal concerning the information conveyed. This may be called a strategy to evade from the criticism of his/her readers. Salager-Meyer

(1995) adds three more categories in Prince et al.'s classification of hedges. She includes the following classes of words in the taxonomy of hedging devices.

- Shields: *can, could, may, might, would, to appear, to seem, probably, to suggest*
- Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time: *approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, etc.*
- Hedges expressing personal doubt and direct involvement: *I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, etc.*
- Emotionally charged intensifiers: *extremely difficult/interesting, of particular importance, unexpectedly, surprisingly, etc.*
- Compound hedges: *could be suggested, would seem likely, would seem somewhat etc.*

Chan and Tan (2009) further intricate on Salager-Meyer's (1995) theory. According to their linguistic investigation, all hedges can be divided into: adverbials (e.g. *approximately*); epistemic verbs (e.g. *suggest, seem, and appear*); modal verbs (e.g. *may, can, would*); cognition verbs (e.g. *believe, suppose, think, and surmise*); hypothetical constructions (*if*-clauses + adjectives, adverbs, nouns expressing modality); anticipatory *it*-clauses and *there is/are*.

### Methodology

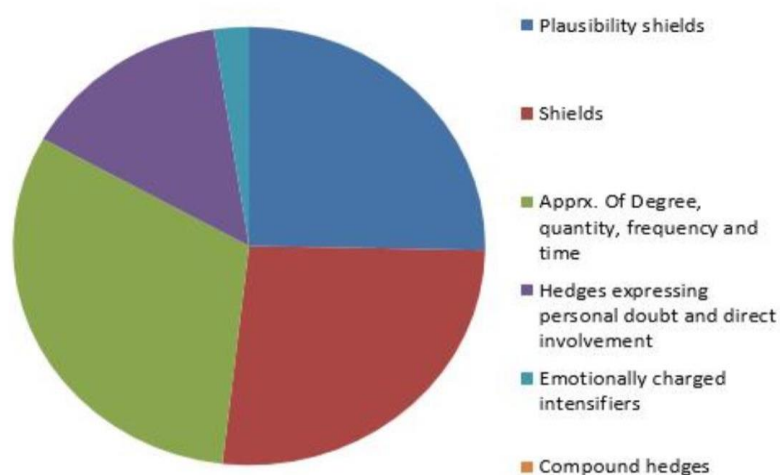
Hedges and its classification is very vast exhibiting great diversity, the most frequently occurring lexical choices for the analysis of Khaled Hossaini's *A thousand Splendid Suns* have been chosen. The analysis focuses on the two categories of hedges; approximators and shields (Prince et al., 1982) further added by Salager-Meyer's division of hedges into three more categories for the selected text. The hedging words of five categories in the text were identified. The choice of the sources of material was determined by the different speeches made by major characters in the text. The procedures used for linguistic assessment of the corpus data are quantitative and comparative analyses.

### Results and Discussion

We clearly observe from the analysis of the text that the different types of hedges has been primarily linked with politeness fuzziness, hesitation, uncertainty and indirectness (Kranich,2015; Takimoto,2015; Dontcheva- Navratilova,2017;Malyuga and McCarthy,2018;Qin and Uccelli,2019) According to Lakoff (1972) the hedges can be used to represent two reasons firstly these can be used to express uncertainty, secondly these can be added to soften the speech to be polite although prince et al(1982) and Skelton (1988) are of the view that the main and important objective of the hedges is to convey information in an inconspicuous and modest way still the fact can't be ignored that they support interlocutor's willingness to soften the speech so that readers' sympathy can be evoked. This willingness to make the speech soft that can be viewed in terms of positive and negative politeness. As Cabanes (2007) stated 'Hedging may present the strongest claim a careful researcher can make' (Salager-Meyer, 1994, p. 151). Brown and Levinson (2014), Cabanes (2007) and Fraser (2010) ruminates hedges in terms of positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies lessen the threat to the hearer's positive face, make them feel

more satisfied, valued and relaxed, whereas negative politeness strategies tend to moderate the effect the lexical choice of the speaker may produce on the recipient. Particularly if the rank of imposition of the utterance conveyed is high, then this can be used to make it more tentative and less impinging. But this is commonly agreed that hedges are discourse features and their functions may be described as contributing to precision, politeness and attenuating and lessening the negative imposition.

The analysis shows that there are various types used in interaction in the text. Khaled has always depicted his characters exposed to wrongness and mistreatment as his novels are a true picture of society of Afghanistan. The characters portrayed by him are suffering from a low self-esteem, rejection and pain.



Henceforth it is quite natural that these characters try to avoid conflicts and minimizing face threatening acts, the main purpose of hedges. The writer prefers to use hedging to avoid his characters to be perceived as impolite arrogant and rude characters.

As it is clear from pie chart that the major characters in the text prefer approximates, shields, plausibility shields more than the hedges expressing personal doubts and direct involvement, emotionally charged intensifiers and compound hedges as included by Salager-Meyer (1995). It occurs that Mariam (the protagonist) hedges a little more in situations while interacting with other characters.

The research shows that the most frequently used hedges in the conversational discourse of the text are approximators, plausibility shields and shields using modal verbs. The most numerous shields are I think, I guess, I suppose and in modal verbs are may be, could, might.

### Approximators

The analysis depicts the maximum use of Approximators (31%) used by Mariam, Laila and Rasheed, the major characters in the text that too of degree quantity frequency and time as put by Salager-Meyer (1995).

Mariam closed her eyes. ‘Please, brother. There are children involved. **Small children.**’

A **long sigh** ‘s Maybe someone-there’

You have to understand that I was **full** of drugs myself, always slipping in and out, to the point where it was hard to tell what was real and what you’d dreamed up.

So I came by here a **few days** ago.

I prefer ‘Office.’ And you’ll be with her **shortly**.

Laila hoped to have a thousand Afghanis or more stowed away. **Half of** which would go to the bus fare from Kabul to Peshawar.

There was a twirl dress with **little pink**. Fishes sawn around the bodice, a blue floral wool dress.

Thirteen days, it’s **not so long**.

So, you see, your sin is **even less** forgivable than mine.

It was Rasheed who salvaged a handful of hakim’s books. “**Most of them** were ash. The rest were looted, I’m afraid.”

### Shields

Shields don’t affect the truth value of the content conveyed in an utterance as approximators do. They refer to to the relationship between the content that has been uttered and the speaker. The second largest used class in hedging is shields i.e.26%. The most used shields are may be, might have, could.

“**May be** there’s someone there who **might** know him, someone”---

“There is no one”. Mariam close her eyes. “Please, brother. There are children involved. Small children”. A long sigh. “**Maybe** someone there”—

She tossed, another handful of seeds into the coop, paused and looked at Mariam, “Better for you too, **maybe**”.

She knows how his comment was intended “**maybe** this is necessary”.

“I’ve been- thinking, that **maybe** we should have a proper burial for the baby. I mean”.

He **might have** mentioned it.

**Maybe** put his hand where it didn't belong?

But she **could** hear footsteps, and voices, a distant car horn, and some mechanical humming punctuated by clicks.

### Plausibility Shields

The analysis shows that plausibility shields used in interactive sessions in the text are 25%. Among the plausibility shields found in the text are I think, I assume, I guess, I believe, I didn't think. These are frequently used by the major characters in the text that seems these characters feel it natural to express their thoughts and opinions that they wish to make fuzzy or less categorical or even straightforward.

A leaf-shaped pendent, tiny coins etched with moons and stars hanging from it. "Try it on, Mariam jo, What do you think? **I think** you look like a queen".

**I think** it was night anyway, it's hard to tell in those places.

"At first, you see, at first I **didn't –think** you even existed". He was saying now.

Abdul Sharif reached across the table and put a hand on her kneecap. "But I came back. Because, in the end, I think he would have wanted you to know. **I believe** – that I'm so sorry. I wish..."

You can be imprisoned for running away, **I assume** you understand that, nay?

**I think** Mullah Giti here has a crush on Tariq.

"**I guess** some people can't be dead enough." he said.

### Hedges expressing personal doubt and direct involvement

The next used class of hedges is tags or reversal tags as suggested by Fraser (2010). the analysis exhibits less use of these hedges that express personal doubt and direct involvement i.e. 14%.

You're not going to cry, **are you?**"

Was Mariam mistreating her?

That's it, **isn't** it?

When Mariam had seen her, Fariba said, she had asked in a high, supplicating voice, its normal, **isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it normal?**

"The riddle, the answer is stamp. We should go to the zoo after lunch "you knew that one. **Did You?**"

"I let you win." He laughed. They both knew that **wasn't true**

Was Mariam mistreating her?

“That’s it, isn’t it?”

### **Emotionally charged intensifiers;**

**These intensifiers used** in the text are very less i.e. this shows the author is least interested to use of emotionally charged hedges.

**Mercifully**, the pink pill again. Then a deep hush. A deep hush falls over everything.

“I **prefer** ‘Officer.’ And you’ll be with her shortly. Do you have a telephone number for this uncle?”

### **Conclusion:**

As we can see, Hedging helps to maintain and regulate relations in conversation. Hence forth it plays an important role in making communication more meaningful and effective. The correct use of appropriate types of hedges serves as a great tool in mapping language in different types of discourse. The findings obtained in the course of this research exhibits the most frequent type of hedges in the conversation of major characters in *Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini are approximators of degree, quantity and time thus depicting the writer’s style. He has preferred the approximators of degree while hedging. The research also revealed that shields and plausibility shields are most commonly used by the writer though on a little less scale. The analysis demonstrates that the contexts of hedges used in the text are decisive. The major characters want to attract more attention through linguistic environment for the readers and readers too focus to understand their conversational implications when these characters use hedging and its different types in conversation. The analysis clearly indicates that while using hedges in their interaction major characters intend to imply some information uncertain and implicit. In conclusion, the paper analyses how their use in the text is marked stylistically and functionally. These hedges reinforce the speaker’s involvement, which contributes to the positive perception of the speech by the readers. The appropriate use of hedges portray a better impact of communication between the writer and readers.

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