



Speaking Strategy For Urban Indonesian Learners In Academic Situation

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Abstract

This mini research is aimed to see the use of politeness called hedges in the spoken language of students of Politeknik Negeri Jakarta at any proficiency levels of English. Most students have 400-450 for their TOEFL score. In Indonesia, English acts as a foreign language (EFL), therefore it is treated as a minor subject in non-English Department. They get only 2-3 hours per week, so they have only limited time to learn English. During English classes, students like to use hedges when answering questions. Politeness tools or hedges are used to mitigate their statements which might cause an insult to other persons. Furthermore, they are used to moderate the level of an utterance or the uncertainty of its content. Therefore they have important role in interpersonal communication. Data was taken by observing 100 students of Electrical Engineering Department. This study ignored the genders of the students. The observations were conducted by observing their habits of using English when English subject was being taught in the class. The results of this study showed that students generally used hedges 'I think' (27%) and 'maybe' (15%). These implied their doubts and sometimes to show their appreciation to listeners or others. We can conclude that most Indonesian students prefer to use mitigation tool in order to avoid or minimize insulting other people.

Key words: hedges, spoken language, mitigate

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I. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

For most non-English speaking countries, learning English is a tough job, including for most Indonesian students. The most difficult about English is when Indonesian students have to make communication in English. They sometimes have doubts to answer questions in English. They are not sure whether they make correct answers or not. This happens everywhere, including students from higher institution.

Although Indonesian people's character is friendly and easy to mingle with new persons they just meet, they are still shy if they have to communicate in English. There are some people who do not have open character and find difficulty to state what they want to say or think. These are people who think that they English is not good enough or they have lack of vocabularies. This typical of students I found in State Polytechnic of Jakarta's campus. Actually, most students know well some vocabularies for daily conversation, however, unfortunately they do not practice it in their everyday lives. Perhaps, this happens because the environment and surrounding are not comfortable enough to practice English. Sometimes it may happen if someone speaks English with his or her friends, others will make fun of him or her. So they need some words that can 'save' them. These might be used to prevent them from making mistakes (Banks, 1996).

In academic situation, such as like in the classroom, students of Polytechnic sometimes show their doubts in speaking English. English teacher should motivate them all the time when teaching-learning process goes. Teachers must continuously convince them to speak up. Some already show their confidence. Students who are not confident enough mostly use some words that can "save" them from getting embarrassed. These are called hedges. They use these words as strategy to prevent them from making mistakes. Not only that, this strategi will help them to make the communication go smoothly.

Based on the description above-mentioned, I conducted mini research to find out students' habit in using hedges when speaking in academic situation. I would like to investigate what kind of hedges are used by students and how many percentages are found. Academic situation here in this research means that English is

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being taught in the class. It is interesting to note that students are very pleased when teacher ask them to make individual presentation in front the class.

The purpose of study is to explore kinds of hedging devices and frequencies use of hedging devices as politeness strategy among Indonesian students. Another important thing is that the study will see whether or not they make the same politeness strategy both in their Indonesian and English language.

Since the participants of the research were non-native English speakers, the result of the research would be beneficial for the development of pragmatic study which explores many languages around the world. In addition to that, it would enrich the world of social science, especially in sociolinguistics study.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Actually, there are many researches that have been conducted regarding the mitigation in spoken language. The most prominent one comes from Hyland (1996). He is a professor at Hong Kong University who persistently focuses in mitigation tools called hedges. He says that hedges are the right tools to stress what they believe to be correct and deliver their messages appropriately to listeners. The hedging device, like passive constructions, was mostly used by Native English speakers. His opinions was based on Myers' concept (1989) that hedges can be used to mitigate statements or claims. Hyland's concept was also influenced by other linguists, Brown and Levinson (1987) who said that hedges are particles used to make strong words become weak.

The similar research was made by Wang, Yuling (2010) from China. She investigated hedges in verbal communication. She found when speakers made communication with others, they should adapt their contextual situation with mental world, social world and physical world in order to achieve the expectant responses. The hedges like *I think, I guess, maybe, only, a few, exactly* were commonly used by Chinese people when they spoke English in academic environment.

Other researches come from Iran and Lithuania. From Iran, Samaie and his colleagues (2014) investigated the types of hedges used by Persian people. They focused the use of hedges used in scientific article. Furthermore they compared English scientific article made by Persians and native English writers. Their result of the research found that Persians liked to use hedges to mitigate their claims. Meanwhile, contrary to Samaie's findings, Seskauskien (2008) from Lithuania found that Lithuanian undergraduate students were not using more hedges in their English article.

Another researcher comes from Indonesia. Maryanto (1998) wrote his thesis about hedging devices. His research focused both readers and writers. He found that Indonesian liked to utilize hedges to prevent conflict among them. He related hedges with Indonesian culture which contains politeness and respects others. The hedges of modalities (*could, may, can*) were mostly used in academic wrting.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used was the descriptive qualitative. This method is appropriate for a language reserach (Johnson, et al, 2008). I employed this method because my intention was to obtain insights as to the strategies utilized by students. According to Hyland (1996), hedging is most commonly expressed by lexical verbs (examples: *believe, appear, seem*), modality (examples: *may, should, could, can*), epistemic adverbs (examples: *perhaps, maybe, likely, possibly*), epistemic adjectives (examples: *possible, likely*), and some phrases (examples: *I think, in my opinion, according to...*).

3.1. The corpus

The corpora for this data were taken from students' final presentations and made by first semester students of Electrical Engineering Department at State Polytechnic of Jakarta. The students' presentations were conducted in front their classmates. Each student got 15-20 minutes to present their topics including Q-A session. The students' antusiasms were shown when they listened to their friends who presented the paper.

There were 100 students who were spread in 4 classes. So, in one class the amount of students varied from 24-26 persons. I gave them opportunity to present their paper according to the time-teaching table. This is in accordance with the main characteristics and spirit of the qualitative approach which says that what stands out in a qualitative study is the depth and breadth of the analysis, not the number of the subjects studied.

3.2. Procedure and Data Collection

For the purpose of the study, the types of hedging devices were listed and classified. They were put in a list. This would make me easy to put checklist and then separated them into another list for specific classification. This would be necessary for counting the frequency of hedging devices used by the students.

I was interested in investigating students' presentations and also while they were answering questions in front of the class. When making claims, students tried to persuade listeners and their friends as well. In

academic environment, hedges are effective and propositional functions work in rhetorical partnership to persuade listeners to accept knowledge claims (Myers, 1985).

When students made their individual presentation, I would listened and noted down what kinds of hedging devices they use. I also marked their expressions if they had doubts answering questions from their own classmates. This activity was conducted in one (1) month where the meeting session was only once in a week. After I noted all the hedging devices used by the students, I made the classification and began to count the frequency manually. This took me about a week to count all the data until it finished.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

When I finished collecting data, it was time to analyze it. I analyzed each classification and made important notes. I ignored their mistakes in grammar and structures. Although in fact, students made so many mistakes in grammar and structure. I promised to correct them in another time. I only focus on politeness strategy when they answered their friends' questions and how they responded to their friends' arguments.

The analysis became more interesting when I knew that Indonesian culture influenced the way they responded to questions or arguments raised by their friends. Furthermore, the way the students made claims were also influenced by their culture. Unfortunately, I disregarded culture analysis in this context. Actually there are other hedges used such as: passive and active constructions, modals, if, abstract rhetors, et cetera, but I focused only on two hedges: *I think* and *Maybe*. Based on my observation, it was found that *I think* showed higher percentages (27%) than *Maybe* (15%). It can be seen from the table below:

Hedges	Percentages (%)
<i>Can</i>	8
<i>I think</i>	27
<i>Must</i>	6
<i>Maybe</i>	15
<i>Passive constructions</i>	22
<i>Active constructions</i>	18
<i>Will/would</i>	4
Total	100

From the result on the table, it is seen that Indonesian students mostly used the expression "I think" when answering questions from their friends. This is because they were in doubt whether their answers were correct or not. By using this tool "I think", they could "hide" their doubts if somebody would come up with arguments. Another reason is that Indonesian like to use this expression when making statements in their mother tounge language.

V. CONCLUSION

Hedging devices are often utilized by Indonesian student because these help them conceptualise the claims that they are going to convey. Moreover, these mitigation tools will assist the students to communicate with the listeners. It can be said that hedges are communicative tools to negotiate with the potential readers. In conclusion, the use of *I think* and *Maybe* are more preferable because the students do not need to say much about it if there are arguments from listeners. Futhermore, it could also be the habit of Indonesian speakers to use these hedges in order to look more polite and prevent from making mistakes. By using *I think* implies that the opinion is really coming from speakers not others. So listeners can not argue his/her answers. Meanwhile the use of *Maybe* implies that speakers are not really having doubts but merely just habit to mitigate their statements.

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