

A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY ON HEDGING DEVICES IN KURDISH CONVERSATION

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Abstract

Hedges are words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. Truth and falsity are a matter of degree, and hedges make natural language sentences more/less true or more/less false. The purpose of the study is to investigate hedging devices in Kurdish spoken language. The aim is to know how hedging devices are used in Kurdish spoken discourse. Also the researchers are willing to know whether Kurdish speakers use hedging devices to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically, or to lessen the impact of an utterance. The data needed for the study was collected through observation, tape recording, and interviews. The dialogues of 35 people were recorded by the researcher as well as the researcher has interviewed with 21 people from different social classes. 15 classes and meetings which Kurdish language was the means of communication were observed. The research showed that hedging as a mitigating device is extensively employed in different conversations. The study shows that hedging devices have the same roles in Kurdish as they have in English. They are used to reduce the certainty and sureness of the utterances. It indicates that some pragmatic devices modify the epistemic strength of the statement in Kurdish language just as they do in English and Arabic.

Keywords

hedging devices; Kurdish; spoken discourse

Izveček

Omejevalci so besede, katerih naloga je narediti bolj ali manj nerazločno. O resnici oziroma nepravilnosti lahko govorimo le stopenjsko, in omejevalci naredijo naravni jezik bolj ali manj resničen ter bolj ali manj nepravilen. Namen tega članka je raziskati mehanizme omejevalcev v pogovorni kurdiščini in ugotoviti, kako so uporabljeni v kurdiškem pogovornem diskurzu. Poleg tega avtorja ugotavljata, ali uporaba omejevalcev nakazuje na pomanjkanje popolne

predanosti resnici izrečenega in željo po nekategoričnem izražanju obveze ali na zavestno zmanjšanje vtisa izrečenega. Podatki za raziskavo so bili pridobljeni z opazovanjem (15 predavanj v kurdijščini), snemanjem (35 ljudi) in intervjuji (21 ljudi iz različnih socialnih razredov). Splošni rezultati kažejo, da je uporaba omejevalcev kot blažilcev izrečenega v veliki meri uporabljena v vseh vrstah pogovorov in da ni opaznih razlik med uporabo omejevalcev v kurdijščini in angleščini. V obeh jezikih se uporabljajo kot mehanizmi, ki zmanjšujejo gotovost izrečenega, kar nakazuje, da v kurdijščini pragmatični mehanizmi modificirajo epistemično moč stavka, tako kot v angleščini in arabščini.

Ključne besede

mehanizmi omejevalcev; kurdijščina; pogovorni diskurz

1. Introduction

A hedge is a mitigating device used to lessen the impact of an utterance. Typically, they are adjectives or adverbs, but can also consist of clauses. It could be regarded as a form of euphemism. Hyland (1996) illustrates that hedging devices are used to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically. 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 more precisely the degree of accuracy and truth in assessments. Linguists almost unanimously define hedges as a means to tone down utterances and statements, to reduce the riskiness of what one says, to mitigate what might otherwise seem too forceful, to be polite or show deference to strangers or superiors etc. Lakoff, the pioneer in this field, defined the items like *largely*, *rather* etc as the words which “make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (Lakoff, 1972, p. 195). Non native English writers are expected to manifest in their research articles not only grammatical competence in the English language but also sociolinguistic competence in the form of expressing “politeness”, showing openness to criticisms, and confidently stating uncertainty regarding findings or claims. Markkanen and Schröder (2006) distinguish two types of hedges, or two reasons for hedging: one type of hedges deals with certain linguistic items that affect the truth-conditions of propositions; the other type reflects the degree of the speaker’s commitment to the truth-value of the whole proposition. Vold (2006) also writes about *real hedges*, which serve to give an accurate picture of the level of certainty, and *strategic hedges*, which may fulfill a variety of functions.

In short, hedges are used to express the writer’s attitude to both proposition and readers. This study aims at investigating hedging devices in Kurdish language. A large number of conversations of Kurdish speakers have been recorded and transcribed in order to be analyzed what hedging devices Kurdish speakers use in their speech to convey their message.

2. Review of related Literature

Hedging is the expression of tentativeness and possibility. It is therefore central to academic/scientific writing, where statements are rarely made without subjective assessment of their reliability and where claims need to be presented with caution and precision. Science indeed is skepticism doubt, refutation, speculation, formulation of hypothesis, criticism. As a consequence, the expression of doubt and possibility is central to the negotiation of claims, and what counts as effective persuasion is influenced by the fact that evidence, observations, data, and flashes of insight must be shaped with due regard for the nature of reality and their acceptability to an audience.

In medical writing, hedges play a critical role in gaining ratification for claims for a powerful peer group by allowing writers to present statements with appropriate accuracy caution, and humility, expressing possibility rather than certainty and prudence rather than overconfidence. In a context where the accreditation of knowledge depends on the consensus of the research community and the need to evaluate evidence, comment on its reliability, and avoid potentially hostile responses (the “boomerang effect”), expressions such as “may”, “might”, “could”, “possible”, and “likely” can contribute to gaining the acceptance of research claims.

While research on hedging and hedges has progressed and expanded enormously over the past four decades, it is still apparent that the semantic category of hedges has not been precisely defined yet. Perhaps the lack of such a category is attributed to the complexity of the meanings of the hedging devices, a fact that has presented a serious challenge for researchers.

Apart from the semantic category of hedges, it seems that researchers have a broad consensus on what hedging is. Lakoff (1972) associates hedges with unclarity or fuzziness: “for me some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy.” (p. 195). It has been observed that the term hedging which was first used to refer to fuzziness has been widened to cover a number of interrelated concepts, namely indetermination, vagueness, indirectness and approximation (Zuck & Zuck, 1986; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hyland, 1998; Btoosh, 1999; Btoosh, 2004; Varttala, 2001; Vass, 2004; Chavez, 2004; Ayodobo, 2007; Vazques & Giner, 2008, Donesch-Jezo, 2010).

In a more comprehensive account of the term, Bruce (2010) associates hedging with all means leading lack of full commitment (p. 201).

Hedging is a rhetorical strategy. By including a particular term, choosing a particular structure, or imposing a specific prosodic form on the utterance, the speaker signals a lack of a full commitment either to the full category membership of a term or expression in the utterance (content mitigation), or to the intended illocutionary force of the utterance (force mitigation).

The impact of hedging devices in the discourse is measured by their overall effect on meaning or the message of the text oral/written. Hyland (1996) illustrates that

hedging devices are used to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically. The same function is found in economics discourse. Pindi & Bloor (1987) argue that “economics forecasters are shown to have three ways of modifying their commitments to a prediction: by hedging, using such as modal verbs as ‘*may*’ or other lexical items such as possibility and by specifying conditions.” (p. 55).

Hedging may also stem from the inner conflict between intention and desire: “being indirect is a mechanism for dealing with conflicting intentions and desires. The general form of the conflict is that the speaker wants to convey *X* for some reason and he does not want to convey *X* for other reasons. By being indirect he can convey *X* in one sense but not in another.” (Pyle, 1975).

Like English, Arabic does employ lexical, syntactic (conditionals or passive) as well as strategic hedges. However, one of the most common structural hedging devices employed in Arabic discourse is the *conditional sentences*. Safi (1988) argues that: “probability is one of the most difficult issues associated with conditionality. In English the use of the different tenses of verbs and modals usually stand for probability whereas in Arabic it is possible for the conditional particles and different tenses of verb to stand for probability”.

A text, of course, is said to have hedging by its having any of the different means that express hedging directly or indirectly. Channel (1994) argues that “one of the most useful and enduring insights to come out of the recent study of language use is that speakers and writers tailor their language to make it suitable to the situation (when, where and why?) and the linguistic context (is it gossip chat, an interview, a story in a popular newspaper?)”. Hedging use, as the literature shows, is affected by gender. Lakoff (1972) asserts that in order to show their femininity, women tend to adopt an unassertive style of communication.

Language scholars have claimed that gender differences in communication mirror and reproduce broader political inequalities between the sexes (Fishman, 1978; Rakow, 1986; Thorne & Henley, 1975; Thorne, Kramer, & Henley, 1983; Uchida, 1992). The use of hedging devices is one area of inquiry in which this argument has found support. Research on gender and hedging has been strongly influenced by Robin Lakoff’s book, *Language and Woman’s Place*. Lakoff (1975), an American linguist, argued that women’s speech lacks authority because, in order to become “feminine”, women must learn to adopt an unassertive style of communication. That is, they must learn to denude their statements of declarative force. Lakoff coined the phrase “women’s language” to refer to a group of linguistic devices that serve this function, including hesitations, intensive adverbs, empty adjectives, tag questions, and compound requests. Hedges form part of this group.

The term *hedge* refers to a class of devices that supposedly soften utterances by signaling imprecision and noncommitment. Examples include the pragmatic particles *about*, *sort of*, and *you know* and the modal terms *possibly* and *perhaps*. Since Lakoff’s

pioneering work, hedges have featured prominently in research on gender and communication. Based upon data about their distribution in the speech of men and women, researchers have made bold theoretical claims—most commonly that women’s language is indecisive and deficient.

Fraser (1975) introduced the term HEDGED PERFORMATIVE, where certain performative verbs such as apologize, promise, and request when preceded by specific modals such as can, must, and should, as in

- a) I should apologize for running over your cat.
- b) I can promise that I will never again smoke grass.
- c) I must request that you sit down.

result in an attenuated illocutionary force of the speech act designated by the verb. In these examples, the modals were considered as hedges. Example (a) is still an apology, just one less strong than if should were not present. Prince et al. (1982) made a clear distinction between two types of hedging, one type that involves the propositional content and affects the truth condition of the proposition conveyed (propositional hedging), and a second type that involves the relationship between the propositional content and the speaker and serves as an index of the commitment of the speaker to the truth of the propositional content conveyed (speech act hedging).

These authors divided up the hedging world into two classes. The first, APPROXIMATORS, operate on the propositional content proper and contribute to the interpretation by indicating some markedness, that is, non-prototype, with respect to class membership of a particular item.

There are two subclasses: ADAPTORS (acknowledged to be what Lakoff called hedges), relate to class membership; for example, somewhat, sort of, almost describable as, some, a little bit, etc.,

- a) He also has a somewhat low interior larynx.
- b) She noticed that he was a little bit blue

and ROUNDERS, convey a range, where the term is typical, for example, about, approximately, something around, etc.

- a) His weight was approximately 3.2 kilograms.
- b) The baby’s blood pressure was something between forty and fifty.

Both sub-classes occur when the speaker is attempting to correlate an actual situation with some prototypical, goal-relevant situation, where the hedging indicates that actual situation is close to but not exactly the expression modified. SHIELDS, their second class, change the relationship between propositional content and the speaker by implicating a level of uncertainty with respect to speaker’s commitment.

Here, again, there are two subclasses. PLAUSIBILITY SHIELDS are expressions that relate doubt, such as I think, I take it, probably, as far as I can tell, right now, I have to believe, I don’t see that, etc., illustrated by the following.

- a) I think we can just slow him down to a little over maintenance.
- b) As far as I can tell, you don't have anything to lose by taking that path.

The second subclass, **ATTRIBUTION SHIELDS** are expressions such as according to her estimates, presumably, at least to X's knowledge, etc., which attribute the responsibility of the message to someone other than the speaker, often via plausible reasoning.

- a) He was not very ill, according to her estimates.
- b) There was no reason to worry, as far as anyone knew.

The authors also point out that one usually does not impose belief on another when the speaker believes that the proposition at issue is false. For example, in the following sentence,

- a) According to Dr. Jenkins, we should take out the shunt before we move him.

the speaker is typically committed to the truth of the statement.

Hubler (1983) made a similar two-way distinction of hedging, between what he called **UNDERSTATEMENTS** and **HEDGES**, although he uses **UNDERSTATEMENT** as a cover term for both. Understatement means that "the emotional negatability (of sentences) is restricted through the indetermination of the phrastic," that is, they concern the propositional content of the sentence. It is a bit cold in here, contains an understatement. **HEDGING** "is restricted through the indetermination of the neustic," that is, it concerns the speaker's attitude to the hearer regarding the proposition, the claim to validity of the proposition the speaker makes. It is cold in Alaska, I suppose, contains a hedge. Hubler's division resembles that of Prince et al. (1982), whose **APPROXIMATORS** correspond to Hubler's **UNDERSTATEMENTS** and whose **SHIELDS** correspond to his **HEDGES**.

In the 1980s, there was considerable effort to sub-classify the class of hedges, based on certain class membership criteria. The following list reflects the array of proposals involving: attenuating hedges. adaptors, agent avoiders, approximators, attenuators, attribution shields, bushes, committers, compromisers, consultative devices, deintensifiers, diffusers, diminishers, down-toners forewarners, indicator of degrees of reliability, minimizers, mitigators, plausibility shields, play-downs, politeness markers, scope-staters, understaters, validity markers, vocal hesitators, weakeners, etc.

Since the 1980s, there has also been an emphasis on the properties of individual hedges, for example, see Kay (1984), and Aijmer (1984). In addition, there has been considerable interest in exploring the use of hedging within different genres of language use, for example, the research article, mathematics talk, politician talk, negotiation talk, and the speech of language learners, to name but a few of the areas. I do not explore these areas (cf. Schröder & Zimmer, 1997).

There is general agreement today that HEDGING is a rhetorical strategy, by which a speaker, using a linguistic device, can signal a lack of commitment to either the full semantic membership of an expression (PROPOSITIONAL HEDGING),

- a) He's really like a geek.
- b) The pool has sort of a L-shaped design.
- c) Peter's house is almost 100 feet wide.

or the full commitment to the force of the speech act being conveyed (SPEECH ACT HEDGING),

- a) Come over here, can you?
- b) I guess I should leave now.
- c) That type of comment isn't made around here. [Agent less passive]
- d) Perhaps you would sit down a minute.

The notion of REINFORCEMENT, initially considered a part of hedging, has pretty much been laid aside. Thus, sentences such as

- a) I certainly do insist that you sit down.
- b) He is extremely tall.

are not generally viewed today as instances of hedging but rather of reinforcement. Aijmer (1984) believes that the reason for this narrowing of the concept stems from the fact that the sense of hedging on the positive side of a concept (be it to involve a proposition or a speech act) seems counterintuitive:

Hedging is simply not a symmetrical notion, and it does not connote reinforcement. Linguistic hedges include linguistic devices, both morphological and syntactic forms used in the process of hedging. These include: adverbs, adjectives, impersonal pronouns, concessive conjunctions, indirect speech acts, introductory phrases, modal adverbs, modal adjectives, hedged performatives, modal nouns, modal verbs, epistemic verbs, negation, tag questions, agentless passives, parenthetical constructions, if clauses, progressive forms, tentative inference, hypothetical past, metalinguistic comments, etc.(p.128)

3. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to investigate hedging devices in Kurdish spoken language. The researcher would like to know how hedging devices are used in Kurdish spoken discourse. Also the researchers are willing to know whether Kurdish speakers use hedging devices to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically, or to lessen the impact of an utterance. As far as we know hedges help speakers and writers communicate more precisely the degree of accuracy and truth in assessments. Linguists almost unanimously define hedges as a means to tone down utterances and statements, to reduce the riskiness of what one says, to mitigate what might otherwise seem too forceful, to be polite or show deference to strangers or superiors etc. In this survey, the

researcher investigates if hedging devices play the same roles as they do in other languages such as English and Arabic in the following examples:

- (1) *rubbama* nahnu nantaçer mustaqbal 'aswa
“*Perhaps*, we are awaiting a worse future.”
- (2) *ana a'taqid* 'anna hadhihi çaraban leisat 'adalah
“*I believe* that this is not a fair war.”
- (3) *qad tastamer* alçarb limodat osbo'ayein
“The war *may* last for two weeks.”

The data needed for the study was collected through observation, tape recording, and interviews. The dialogues of 35 people were recorded by the researcher as well as the researcher has interviewed with 21 people from different social classes. 15 classes and meetings which Kurdish language was the means of communication were observed.

4. Data analysis and discussion

The following dialogue is between mother and her seven-year-old daughter:

- (4) Daughter crying and wanting to go to bazaar with her mother, but her mother doesn't want to.
 Mother: “shaa, shaa, **daley** shetoo shta”
 “look, look, (addressing her husband) **as if** she is mad.”
 Father: “**agar qawlt** pe nadabaaya, away nadakrd.”
 “**If** you didn't **promise** her, she couldn't behave like that.”
 Her aunt: “**hamisha** aawaaya?”
 “Does she **always** do so?”
 Her father: “naawallaa **jaar jaar** waadakaaw awish **pemvaabe** dayki rqi hastaandbet.”
 “No, **sometimes** she does so, **perhaps** her mother made her angry.”
 Her mother: “nawalla **hamisha** waya. **Nazanm** bowa daka wala hichm pe nakotwa.”
 “No, she **always** gives excuses. **I don't know** why she does. I swear God I have not told her anything.”
 Daughter to her father: “nawalla lemi daa baba jian. Awal **qawli** pemda,
 alan dale naatbam.”
 “No, she hit me, dear papa dear papa. At first, she **promised** me to take me, now she doesn't want to.”
 Her mother: “kotm **agar** Nasrin khaanm Baran benet amnish ato dabam.”
 “I told **if** Nasrin Khanm drove Baran with her, I would take you with me.”

According to Lakoff (1972), hedges are “words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy”. He states that truth and falsity are a matter of degree, and hedges make natural language sentences more/less true or more/less false. Therefore, the

examples mentioned above include hedging devices in Kurdish language. By investigating the conversation, it is understood that Kurdish speakers use *agar* (if: pseudo-conditionals), *qawl* (promise: a performative verb), *pemwaabe* (I think: a plausibility shield), and *naazaanm* (I don't know: a tentativizer) in order to make utterances be neither absolutely true, nor absolutely false, but rather true/false to a certain extent, or true in certain respects and false in other respects.

Considering the following example:

- (5) ...**hamisha** aawaaya...
 "Does she *always* do so?"

As far as we know the term "*hamisha*" (always) is not a hedging device; it plays as boosters in order to intensify what is being said, whereas the term "*jaar jaar*" which means "sometimes" in sentence (6) has been used to reduce the degree of certainty. See the following example :

- (6) ...naawallaa **jaar jaar** waadaka...
 "No, *sometimes* she does so."

We can say that in Kurdish language, approximators are used to operate on the propositional content proper and contribute to the interpretation by indicating some markedness.

The following conversation occurred among a history teacher (T) and his students (S). They were talking about the future of Iran's economy:

- (7) S1: "aga zer **awaa** chowata sare va dolaar **wahshatnak** gran bowa, **bley** khalk raeii bdan?"
 "Professor!! The price of gold has raised **a lot** and dollars has become **terribly** expensive. Do you **think** people take part in election?"
- T: "mn **mo?taqidm** ka khalk waqean narazin wa ba ehtimali qawi kam raei dadan."
 "I **believe** that people are really unsatisfied and **most likely a few** will vote."
- S2: "amma agaa amn **ehsas dakam** amjaar khalk **zortr** raeii dadan."
 "But My Professor, I **feel more** people will vote this time."
- S3: "wali mn **bawar nakam**. Agarish raei bdam, tedadyan kama."
 "But I **don't think** so. **If** they vote, **a small number** will do."
- S1: "aga **bley** Amrikaa hamla bka ba Eran?"
 "Professor, **do you think** US attack Iran?"
- T: "**bochuuni** mn awaya ka **zorbay** awaanay ka raeii dadan ya faqirn ya sonnati fkr dakanawa."
 "I **guess most** of the people who will vote either are poor or think traditionally."
- S2: "ay **agar** khalk **kam** raei bdan **ehtemali haya** Amrika hamla bka?"
 "**If a small number** of people vote, **may** US attack Iran?"
- T: "naazaanm awa maluum nia ba zor sht bastagii haya."
 "I **don't know**. It is **not clear**. It ups to various factors."

The notion of REINFORCEMENT, initially considered a part of hedging, has pretty much been laid aside. Thus, Taking into account the sentences such as:

- (8) “*agha!! zer awaa chowata sare va dolaar wahshatnak gran bowa...*”
 “Professor!! The price of gold has raised **a lot** and dollars has become **terribly** expensive...”
- (9) “*.....khalk waqean narazin wa ba ehtimali qawi kam raei dadan...*”
 “... people are **really** unsatisfied and **most likely a few** will vote...”

These sentences are not generally viewed today as instances of hedging but rather of reinforcement. The words such as *awaa* (a lot), *wahshatnak* (terribly), *waqean* (really), and *ehtimali qawi* (most likely) are considered as reinforcement. The way Kurdish speakers reinforce something is quite similar to the way English speakers do. However, the sentence (10) includes an adaptor “*kama*” which means “*a small number*”. A Kurdish speaker tries to reduce the degree of the subject by using the adaptors just as an English speaker

- (10) **Agarish** raei bdam, tedadyan **kama**
 If they vote, **a small number** will do

The next dialogue happened among an English teacher (T) and her students (S). They argued on the word which the teacher doesn't know its meaning:

- (11) S1: “*agha aw kalimaya laweda yaani chi? Fela?*”
 “Professor, what does that word here mean? Is it a verb?”
- T: “*bale wa manaakay.... Hin...aw shtaa...korra to ble.....la sar zamanma ... dwaya pet dalem.*”
 “yes, and its meaning?..... **hin....that thing**.....boy? **you say....it's on tip of my tongue**.....I will tell you later.”
- S1: “**datwaanin** bleyn ba manaay waday ghazaeiya.”
 “we **can** say it is a meal.”
- T: “**dabe** tmashay farhangi logat bkam..... Teyda niya ajiba..... **fkr kam** englisi niya...”
 “I **should** look it up...it's not here.... **I think** it's not an English word...”
- S2: “*na englisi niya dabe.. italyayi bet...kamek italyayii dazanm.. ahha wabirm hatawa..la jegayekda ditoma.. awa pemwabe yani chorti dway nahar.*”
 “No, it's not an English word. It **must** be Italian... I know Italian **alittle**.....ahaa I remembered.....I have seen it **somewhere**..... **I guess** it means taking a short sleep after lunch.”
- S3: “**bley** dorost bet?”
 “**Do you think** it is right?”
- T: “**ba tawajoh ba** wshakani dawrobari **datwane** aw manaaya bdat.”
 “**According to** surrounding words. That meaning **can** be right.”

What is important to me is that vocalizations play an outstanding role in hedging a subject or an idea. Holmes (1999) attributes to hedges vocal hesitations (*um, er*) and

such linguistic forms as *you know*, *I think*, *sort of* which she labels as pragmatic particles. The terms such as “*Hin, aw shtaa*”, (*hin...that thing*) and “*korra to ble*” (boy? *you say*) are considered as hedged vocal hesitations. These vocal hesitations like plausibility and attributed shields impose the commitment on the proposition. Nevertheless, thinking of the following illustration,

- (12) “...na englisi niya ...**dabe**.. italyayi bet....**kamek** italyayii dazanm...”
 “No, it’s not an English word. It **must** be Italian... I know Italian **a little**.”

we can say that the word *kamek* (a little) is a sort of hedging device. Though it isn’t a hedging device in this utterance, it is considered as reinforcement. Since the student, by using such reinforcement as *kamek* (a little), wants to persuade the teacher that what he says is true. Therefore, the students try to foreground to the extent of Italian he knows by using the word *kamek* (a little). The other case which is worth maneuvering is the term *ba tawajoh ba* (according to) which is a sort of attributed shield. As far as we know attributed shield in Kurdish has the same function as that in English.

The following dialogue went on among a mother (M) and her 5-year-old son (S) watching a documentary movie:

- (13) S: “maman awa chiya awa chiya?”
 “Mom! What’s this? What’s this?” (pointing to the animal he saw on TV)
- M: “**naw?e** balandaya”
 “**A kind of** a bird”
- S: “balanda?”
 “A bird? ”
- M: “shteka ka haldafre dandoki haya bali haya ...”
 “A thing which fly, has a peak, and has wings.”
- S: “newi chiya?”
 “What do we call it?”
- M: “pey dalen boqla...”
 “It is called turkey.”
- S: “ay kotr chiya?”
 “And what’s a pigeon?”
- M: “awish balandaya”
 “That’s a bird too.”
- S: “farqiyani chiya?”
 “What’s the difference?”
- M: “**are chozanm** rola..... **taqriban wako** yakwan amaa **kamek** boqla gawratra....”
 “**I don’t know** , son. ...they are **almost the same** but a turkey is **a bit** larger.”

The hedge *sort of* is a device provided by the linguistic system itself to guide the hearer in the sort of pragmatic process. According to the above example, not “*naw?e*” (sort of) is the matter of semantics, but it is a matter of pragmatics. For instance the sentence:

(14) “...**naw?e** balandaya.....”
“A **kind of** a bird”

(15) “...balandaya.....”
“It is a bird.”

The sentence (14) is different from the following sentence (15) since there is not as much certainty in sentence (14) as there is in sentence (15).

Since there is not as much certainty in sentence (14) as there is in sentence (15). What has reduced the certainty of the sentence (a) is the use of the hedge (*naw?e*), meaning sort of. A child is aware of the fact that a pigeon is a bird; nevertheless, he hesitated to accept that turkey is a bird, as well. But hesitancy is reduced when his mother uses the hedge (*naw?e*) along with the word “turkey”. The following example by Lakoff (1972) affirms our claim:

- (a) A robin is a bird
- (b) A penguin is a bird
- (c) A penguin is sort of a bird

While (a) is uncontroversial, some people hesitate to affirm (b) since a penguin does not fly and is thus not felt to be a good example of a bird; in Lakoff’s terms, it is a peripheral member of the bird category. Hesitancy is greatly reduced when *sort of* is employed, as in (c). It seems that the effect of *sort of* is to loosen or broaden the concept encoded by *bird*, so that it more comfortably encompasses creatures which do not have all the stereotypical properties of birds. In other words, the hedge *sort of* is a device provided by the linguistic system itself to guide the hearer in the sort of pragmatic process he is to carry out in order to arrive at the intended interpretation of a particular word. The pragmatic use of epistemic devices is further complicated by the fact that they not only convey the writer’s confidence in the truth of referential information, but also help contribute to a relationship with the reader. This affective dimension involves the need for cooperation and deference. In addition, devices of imprecision such as *about* and *almost* can also modify the epistemic strength of statements (Dubois, 1987) while expressions used to manipulate definiteness, such as *frequently* and *usually*, also contribute to the “scales of probability and usuality to which the term modality strictly belongs” (Halliday, 1985, p. 86). Moreover, while the expression of writer “commitment” is mainly a lexical phenomenon; conditional clauses, questions, contrast markers, and tense can also be used to convey epistemic meanings (Perkins, 1983).

However, consider the following example:

(16) S: “ay kotr chiya?”
“And what’s a pigeon?”

M: “awish balandaya”
“That’s a bird too.”

S: “farqiyān chiya?”
 “What’s the difference?”

M: “are chozanm rola..... taqriban wako yakwan amaa kamek boqla gawratra...”
 “I don’t know , SON. ...they are almost the same but a turkey is a bit larger.”

“*taqriban*” (almost) is an epistemic device in Kurdish which indicates a sort of imprecision.

Table 1: Types of hedging used in Kurdish along with their English equivalence

Hedging device in Kurdish	Its equivalence in English	Type of hedging device
daley	As if	Pseudo-conditional
agar	if	Pseudo-conditional
qawl	promise	Performative verb
hamisha	always	Reinforcement
Jaar jaar	Sometimes	Approximant/downgraders
pemvaabe	I guess	Plausibility shield
Nazanm	I don’t know	Tentativizaer
wahshatnak	Terribly	Downgrader
bley	Do you think	Plausibility shield
mo?taqidm	I believe	Plausibility shield
waqean	Really	Reinforcement
ehtimali qawi	To a large extent	Reinforcement
maluum nia	It is not clear	Plausibility shield
kam	A few	Approximant/adaptor
ehsas dakam	I feel	Plausibility shield
zortr	More	Reinforcement
bawar nakam	I don’t believe	Tentativizer
Bochuuni mn	I guess	Plausibly shield
zorbay	Most	Reinforcement
Hin...	Vocalization
aw shtaa...	Vocalization
korra to ble	Boy you say	Vocalization
la sar zmanma	It is on tip of my tongue	Plausibility shield
ba tawajoh ba	According to	Attribution shield
fkr kam	I think	Plausibility shield
datwaanin	We can	Plausibility shield
naw?e	A sort of	Tentativizer
are chozanm	I don’t know!!!!	Tentativizer
taqriban	almost	Approximant/adaptor
La jegayek taqriban	Somewhere almost	Approximant/adaptor Rounders

5. Conclusion

The research showed that hedging as a mitigating device is extensively employed in different conversations. An attempt has been made to identify, quantify and analyze different hedging devices employed in spoken discourse in Kurdish. The study has sought to examine how hedging devices are used in Kurdish and also investigate the types of hedging devices which are used in Kurdish conversations. The study shows that hedging devices have the same roles in Kurdish as they have in English. They are used to reduce the certainty and sureness of the utterances. It is typical that some pragmatic devices modify the epistemic strength of the statement. Analyzing the pragmatic use of some hedging devices, we found out that a hedging device which reduced the accuracy, truthfulness, and certainty of the statement in one context could play as reinforcement in other context. Hedging devices used in Kurdish indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically, or to lessen the impact of an utterance. As a result people employ hedges as a means to tone down utterances and statements, to reduce the riskness of what one says, to mitigate what might otherwise seem too forceful, to be polite or show deference to strangers or superiors or someone else. It was understood that attributed shield (*ba tawajoh ba*: according to), plausibility shield (*ehtimalan*: probably), approximates (*kamek*: a little), tentativizers (*naazanm*: I don't know), pseudo-conditional (*agar*: if), vocalization (*hin*: umm) and amazingly the term "*la sar zmaanma*" meaning "It's on tip of my tongue" were used as hedges in Kurdish.

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