

ПЕДАГОГИКА ЖӘНЕ ОҚЫТУ ӘДІСТЕРІ

PEDAGOGY AND TEACHING METHODS

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THE IMPORTANCE OF HEDGING IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Abstract. Academic writing in the English language must comply with certain rules and conventions accepted in the scientific communicative culture. Writers should be careful in expressing their statements and try to soften the claims to avoid being extremely categorical. One of the ways to achieve this is using hedging techniques. Therefore, teaching hedging strategy should become an obligatory aspect in the development of EFL (English as a foreign language) learners' academic writing competence. The article presents definitions of hedging from different points of view, the importance of using this strategy and the diversity of hedging. This brief overview of hedging techniques aims to inform novice writing instructors of this indispensable part of academic writing and to highlight the significance of teaching them in academic writing classes.

Keywords: Hedging, academic writing, techniques, strategy.

Аңдатпа. Ағылшын тіліндегі академиялық жазу ғылыми коммуникативті мәдениет саласында қабылданған белгілі бір ережелер мен конвенцияларға сәйкес келуі керек. Авторлар өз талаптарын білдіруде абай болу керек және шамадан тыс категориялықты болдырмау үшін мәлімдемелерді жұмсартып айтуға тырысуы керек. Бұл мақсатқа жетудің бір жолы - хеджирлеу әдістерін қолдану. Осылайша, хеджирлеу стратегиясын оқыту EFL (ағылшын тілі шет тілі ретінде) студенттерінің Академиялық жазбаша құзыреттілігін дамытудың міндетті аспектісі болуы керек. Мақалада хеджирлеудің әр түрлі анықтамалары, осы стратегияны қолданудың маңыздылығы және хеджирлеудің түрлері келтірілген. Хеджирлеу әдістерінің бұл қысқаша шолуы жаңадан келген жазу нұсқаушыларына академиялық жазудың осы ажырамас бөлігі туралы хабарлауға және оларды академиялық жазу сабақтарында оқытудың маңыздылығын көрсетуге бағытталған.

Түйін сөздер: хеджирлеу, академиялық жазу, әдістер, стратегия.

Аннотация. Академическое письмо на английском языке должно соответствовать определенным правилам и условиям, принятым в научной коммуникативной культуре. Авторы должны быть осторожны в выражении своих утверждений и стараться смягчать претензии, чтобы избежать чрезмерной категоричности. Одним из способов достижения этой цели является использование методов хеджирования. Таким образом, обучение стратегии хеджирования должно стать обязательным аспектом в развитии академической письменной компетенции учащихся EFL (английский как иностранный язык). В статье представлены определения хеджирования с разных точек зрения, важность использования этой стратегии и виды хеджирования. Этот краткий обзор методов хеджирования направлен на то, чтобы проинформировать начинающих инструкторов по письму об этой неотъемлемой части академического письма и подчеркнуть важность обучения их на занятиях по академическому письму.

Ключевые слова: хеджирование, академическое письмо, методы, стратегия.

Introduction

When writing scientific or academic papers, one should distinguish statements from facts, and thus be careful in expressing opinions or ideas. Hedging is a communicative strategy of the author of a scientific text, assuming the expression of judgment as a possible, rather than an indisputable statement of a certain state of affairs [1]. Obviously, knowledge of Hedging has a great significance for academic writing. This is a strategy that aims to weaken the illocutionary power of statements, without which it may sound impolite, overly emotional or even aggressive. Hedging tools are “vital” [2] and should be taught in textbooks as a significant strategy, especially, to EFL learners. Due to the fact that readers interpret and evaluate the author's judgments through the prism of the existing disciplinary postulates, the addressee of the text calculates in advance what informative weight to give to a particular judgment, determining the degree of its accuracy and reliability. Hedging implies that the justification supports the author's judgment, revealing the degree of conviction that it is advisable to attribute to the proposed statement.

Some examples of using hedging are the following:

Research proves the link between alcohol drinking and liver disease. (categorical claim)

Research suggests/indicates a (possible) link between alcohol drinking and liver disease. (hedged claim).

The fire was caused by the lightning storm. (categorical claim)

The fire was probably caused by the lightning storm. (hedged claim). [3]

Since 1980, a considerable number of scientists have expressed their viewpoints concerning the significance of hedge words. At the moment, linguists

unanimously believe that the use of hedge words in language mainly depends on the genres. Lakoff [4] first introduced the term hedge. In his opinion, hedges are words and expressions that make statements "more or less blurred" [4] and contribute either to softening the meaning of statements (a little bit, sort of), or vice versa strengthening some of its characteristics (very, really, extremely). Brown and Levinson [5] also believed that the function of hedge words is two-sided - they are able to both strengthen and soften the statement. They were the first to use the term "face threatening actions" and developed positive politeness strategies aimed at avoiding criticism in order to preserve goodwill and solidarity. According to the theory of Wright and Hosman [6], intensifier can strengthen the power of claims, and in contrast, hedging can soften it. This view is contradictory to Lakoff's ideas, but nowadays linguists prefer to distinguish between these two phenomena. Probably, taking into account other different strategies in writing, researchers have done little research on the importance of hedging and its use. In this article, we will discuss the significance of hedge words in academic papers and how to soften claims and statements to avoid overconfidence.

Main part

Hedging definitions

Hedging can be defined as a type of language use that "protects" one's claims. Using hedging can protect your statements from criticism. It also helps to indicate one's level of confidence regarding evidence or support. According to Hyland [7], hedging makes it possible to compose expressions of modesty and caution, and the status of such statements should be discussed with diplomacy, especially when it comes to the work of colleagues. In this regard, Salager-Meyer's [2] contribution should be noted, which gives a definition of hedging along with three concepts: 1) purposeful uncertainty, in other words, it is a strategy to reduce criticism; 2) the author's modesty in relation to his achievement and personal participation; 3) unwillingness or inability to achieve an absolute and accurate evaluation of all observed phenomena. Holmes [8] defined hedging as such: "Hedging is self-reflexive linguistic expressions used to express epistemic modality and change the illocutionary power of speech acts". Different scientists have suggested their own points of view on the use of hedging, for example, we can use it to: determine the author's commitment to the proposal [9], demonstrate uncertainty of the statement [10], renunciation of obligations and open dialogue [11]. It can be summed up that hedging methods are strategies of academic writing, where flexibility and softness in the formulation of statements are manifested. Such statements are not considered categorical by them [3].

The significance of Hedging

The implementation of hedge words in academic papers enables the writer to be academically cautious, as it is important to show a degree of uncertainty in statements without asserting the absolute truthfulness of the fact. A considerable

number of scientists expressed their viewpoints concerning the significance of hedge words. For example, Chen and Zhang [12] suggested that writers should be aware of how important hedging is in writing and thus advised writers to improve their skills in using stylistic and rhetorical expressions. In accordance with the previous author, Dafouz-Milne [13] found that academic papers in which rhetorical expressions are used in an appropriate way become more convincing to the audience. Also, a study of Hyland and Milton [14] demonstrated that it is problematic to set a balance of proper certainty in academic and scientific papers. Based on this, we can say that hedging has an important role in pragmatic functions, namely in the case of convincing and influencing readers to accept the author's statements [15].

To sum up, the use of hedge words is important because it gives an opportunity to the authors to:

- a) contribute to scientific research in a significant, cooperative, and productive way;
- b) leave space for other research perspectives or voices;
- c) take participation in academic dialogue in areas where new proofs and evidences are generated through the time, it is not possible always to stay aware of new findings;
- d) avoid making categorical statements which can be understood as the scientific researcher has revealed the only answer [3].

Hedging classifications

With the help of hedging, writers have the opportunity to soften their claims in order to reduce criticism for being overconfident. Thus, in this study, we examined different types of hedging in order to choose a suitable classification as a basis for data analysis. There are different types of hedge language suggested by various scholars. For example, Hu & Cao [16] presented four hedging categories:

- 1) modal auxiliaries;
- 2) miscellaneous;
- 3) epistemic lexical words;
- 4) epistemic adverbs and adjectives.

At the same time, Salager-Meyer [2] categorized types of hedges by taking into account their functions. The classification consists of shields, frequency and time, emotionally-charged intensifiers, approximates of degree, writer's personal doubt, quantity, and compound hedges. One more example of categorizing hedgings is the following classification:

- 1) verbs;
- 2) modal verbs;
- 3) adjectives;
- 4) adverbs;
- 5) expressions showing writer's distance [17]

Hyland [18] presented eight types of hedges:

- 1) lexical verbs;
- 2) adverbials;
- 3) adjectives;
- 4) limiting conditions;
- 5) modal verbs;
- 6) lack of knowledge;
- 7) models, methods, theories;
- 8) modal nouns.

Taking previous classification as a basis, one more taxonomy was created, which includes five types of hedges, such as:

- 1) tentative and modal verbs ;
- 2) tentative adjectives and adverbs;
- 3) distancing phrases;
- 4) solidarity features;
- 5) self-mention reference [19].

Oprit-Maftei [20] suggested the following classification and its descriptions:

- 1) Modal auxiliary verbs: can, should, must, may are overused, however, could, would and might are used rarely.
- 2) Introductory verbs: appear, indicate, estimate - sentences with this type of hedge words can be more tentative.
- 3) Certain lexical verbs: assume and believe – express caution in a sentence.
- 4) Modal adverbs: probably, perhaps, possible, apparently, unlikely, about, mostly - these words reduce the force of statements expressing uncertainty.
- 5) Adverbs of frequency: sometimes, often, seldom - can not show a certainty.
- 6) Modal adjectives: apparent, most, many, some, several, supposed – these hedge words are used to demonstrate the level of commitment
- 7) Modal nouns: uncertainty, probabilities, possibility, assumption.
- 8) If-clauses: if we examine...we can reach, if we consider...the analysis must be this way - these sentences can demonstrate the level of possibility.
- 9) Impersonal and passive constructions: it is known to be, it is proposed by; it has been noted, it may be perceived – this type of statement shows objectivity and the focus is on the process there, not on the person.
- 10) Approximators: about, approximately - these words can be used to soften statements.
- 11) Hedging expressions: some experts argue, another important issue, it is hard to establish. In general, such expressions demonstrate the level of possibility.
- 12) Compound hedges – it is believed, it should also be noted that. This type of combination of words helps to soften claims in some cases.
- 13) Concessive conjuncts: yet, however.

- 14) Negation: we cannot speak about, we cannot deny, it cannot be ignored.
- 15) Punctuation marks: inverted commas and parentheses, such as in words <public> circumstances, analysis of “competition” – these punctuation marks can focus on a word which refers to another context.

The above classifications may be useful for non-English-speaking writers when writing academic papers. Also, these categories of hedge words can help researchers to compare and investigate the use of hedging in different disciplines and cultures.

Conclusion

Based on the above, it can be summed up that hedging is important for entering the academic environment, for the formation of research competence, as well as for the development of intercultural and academic writing competence. Therefore, we can conclude that hedging tools can play a significant role in academic papers. Linguistic experts are emphasizing the necessity for including Hedging to be taught in relevant courses. Wallwork [21] states that the ability to soften claims accurately gives opportunities to writers to publish their scientific papers in prestigious journals which are published in English-speaking countries. Proper understanding and the use of the academic writing strategy should be accepted as mandatory requirements when writing scientific papers. Thus, writing academic and scientific papers in English is problematic for EFL writers since they should master various academic writing conventions alongside the complicated grammatical structures and formal vocabulary. Therefore, this article presented the phenomenon of hedging and informed novice academic writing teachers about its importance in academic writing.

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