

Hedges in Spoken Academic Language: Pragmatic Functions and Teaching Applications

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I. Pragmatic Functions of Hedging

1. Express fuzziness, inexactitude (the following word is not the exact or best word)
2. Express uncertainty (lack of/decreased commitment to a proposition)
3. Softening a stance or opinion (further qualifies/modifies the statement)
4. Mitigating a criticism or request
5. Preceding sophisticated vocabulary or jargon words
6. Preceding metaphors
7. Filled pauses

II. Analysis of Hedging in Moderating Criticism

A. Framing, qualifying the statement as an opinion

1. It seems to me like in this paragraph there are lots of totally different things going on. (SS: Anth Ofc Hr)
2. It seems to me this brings up a lot of issues. (HA: Diss Def)
3. And I guess what the committee keeps pushing, pushing back on is, well it's still possible to provide, pieces of evidence (...) and you've got to sort of embrace that I think to... (PS: Diss Def)

B. Hedging the suggestion or directive

4. So, uh, I suppose I would do some work pulling this part togeth- eh, anyway this part together into an argument about sort of how it's representing the community first. and then I'd go back um, to your sort of, beginning which (SS: Anth Ofc Hr)
5. You might wanna qualify it in that kinda way (SS: Anth Ofc Hr)
6. So when you're laying out the comparison between Novi and Howell in the beginning, you probably wanna say that kinda thing right? and maybe even in that paragraph where you start to describe (...)
7. You might just wanna like again sort of draw out some conclusions (xx) a little bit
8. It seems to me if you start you you le- didn't articulate it that way and so perhaps you might, want to make it clearer (HA: Diss Def)
9. Maybe it's a good idea, to tell, us and, actually the reader, right off the bat what you mean by an unspecified interactionist, naive theory because I'm not sure... (SS: Diss Def)
10. I sort of want to see the paragraph or the page, that makes it very clear why... (SS: Diss Def)

C. Softening a descriptor

11. It's a vexed, it's a slightly vexed position, I think. (HA: Diss Def)
12. So in a way that desire to make it urban i think is, a little bit disappointing (...) not that, not that I think that your project has nothing of value. It's just different I just think that, the d- that desire is almost impossible to accomplish, right? to make North Campus urban. (HA: Arch Crit)

D. Other examples:

13. I guess I do want a little bit more of a paragraph form for the methods (BS: Grad Mtg.)
14. S1: The thing that brought me up short a little bit and, i'm not trying to catch you on anything but I wonder if you'd just comment on it (...) so I wonder if you'd just talk about that
[S2: Candidate gives detailed response.]
S1: Well I'd be u- I mean it's a good, good response I I guess I'm looking for something even littl- just a little more, on the technical side/S2: mhm/ I think it would be a good idea to /S2: mhm/ to, let your readers know... (...) I think you could strengthen your case /S2: mhm/ a little if if if, you were to do that. (HA: Diss Def)
15. I mean, seems to me that there's a fun- there's a more fundamental problem, that, i don't hear you articulating, that we're, that, i don't, i'm not sure i know how to articulate it, but, I I don't believe that, I'm not sure that you've really, done your job in looking at the various ways you could (...) you might, you might really make it, a more fundamental contribution by, trying to work out, what the pruning dimensions are. (PS: Diss Def)
16. I don't know how to do it, but I think it would be worth your while to put a fair bit of time into this. (PS: Diss Def)

III. Teaching Applications

Awareness raising

- Frequency and variety of hedging devices in academic discourse
- Meanings/functions in discourse, esp. politeness/interactional functions

Exercise A: Underline all the hedges in each passage, and discuss what functions they might be fulfilling. Do they sound natural and meaningful, or are they distracting or unnecessary?

a.) What we've tried to do with our scheme was kind of two things. One was try to reduce the suburban feel like the Media Union has, on this side of the street to the front of the building, as well as somehow try to address the quadrangle, which presently is starting to look like it's forming, and we realized that our building doesn't complete the quad and, we tried to attempt to somehow get a sense of a new way of designing buildings for North

Campus. So what we've done basically is try to bring over the Murfin Road and have our building interact with the street as well as with the quad, in a larger master plan, if you will.

b.) ...And that's basically the heart of the building. in section, that's here. And it's kind of a, it's kind of a jogged space. And here, so it it sort of does that, but it's continuous. So once you're in that space you, the r- the studio is above your head, and it's ramping, and the offices are off to either the left or right which would be, um, this is the office plate. There's some offices in there which are kind of temporary, three-quarter partition sorts things...

Exercise B: Re-word this passage by taking out all the hedges, then read it out loud. What is the effect of the original as compared with the re-worded version?

a.) we're planning on keeping that and using that as the main entrance into the building, whereby, you can sorta see it in this view right here, and um, so the main entrance, um is like, this point right here. it sorta edges you into, a what you call, passageway, because it's sorta separated from the rest of the building as a, sort of very public, uh primary ci- uh, circulation space.

b.) but somehow i feel that surface needs to be broken up. and one way would be doing with big roof and you notice this could extend down somehow maybe to kind of somehow acknowledge, the exterior of the building.

Exercise C: Contrast the usage patterns for these two words (what words precede &/or follow each?).

a.) **possible/possibly**

Well, it's still possible to provide pieces of evidence...

Is it possible that you could articulate a tiny tiny tiny scenario...?

Well I mean that's one way of, that's one possible interpretation...

So it's an interesting question it's, it very possibly could be that...

But possibly a more viable option is to get women and people of color into industry.

I guess you start to get a sense of the interaction that could possibly happen with that space.

possible or possibly?

I mean one _____ reason for the walls...

Although you can't _____ provide all the parking that's needed...

...outside the auditorium would be good for exhibition space and _____ integrated with the café as you have...

Maybe we can move this case _____... is that alright?

Yeah he couldn't _____ be that good, right.

Because they wanted to capture as true as _____ a sense of amazement.

b.) somehow/somewhat

Now this is a somewhat controversial area

There's somewhat of a reaction

There are some events that are somewhat less probable than other events

But somehow I feel that surface needs to be broken up

It's to show that the system somehow improves on previous results

Novi has to remodel or it's gonna somehow seem like some seventies strip mall

somehow or somewhat?

It seems like that should _____ be endogenous in the model.

It was _____ round.

I guess I would be told I'm _____ of a perfectionist.

Even if that's the case i think it needs to _____ recognize the diagonality
at the street.

You're providing _____ of a separation between the vehicle and
pedestrian.

Exercise D: Putting hedges back. Add one or more of the following words or phrases to the following sentences:

I think (that), kind of, just, a little (bit), slightly, essentially, might, almost, partially

1. The desire to make it urban is disappointing.
2. By assigning it this monumental presence of circulation in the building, you're limiting yourself.
3. What you need is a clearer frame.
4. You know we could leave this out.
5. It's ironic that you choose the military as the example.
6. I think you want to probe deeper into this.
7. I wonder if you wouldn't want to locate it historically more precisely.
8. I'm looking for something more on the technical side.
9. Let's just leave that vague right now.
10. Housing costs have gone up so much that it's an unfightable battle.
11. They seem so different, like the exception, but I think that's just their background.