

A Diplomatic Discourse Dive: Unpacking Russell Pearson's Intriguing Interview Podcast

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ABSTRACT

It is crucial to establish and preserve polite language during a broadcast interview. Being linguistically polite means committing to a socially appropriate action that avoids threatening other people's feelings or face. However, using too much hedging language when giving speeches may cause a slight damage to speakers' credibility by making them seem hesitant. This study will look at the politeness principle by Leech (1983) in a business-related podcast interview entitled *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson retrieved from the BFM: *Raise Your Game*. Leech's politeness principle is expressed as the following: in its negative form, "minimise (other things being equal) the display of impolite views," and in its positive version, "maximise (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs." There are six types of maxims which are tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxim. Hence, the objectives of the study may be broken down into two categories which are 1) to identify hedges and classify them into the six types of maxim and 2) to analyse the maxims as a politeness strategy used by Russell Pearson in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* according to the politeness principle proposed by Leech (1983). This study will employ a qualitative method with descriptive qualitative approach to identify and categorise the maxims selected from the podcast interview into the various six categories of maxims proposed by Leech (1983). The data analysis procedure used for this research will be naturalistic observation where all maxims will be identified, classified and reviewed for confirmation. This study will contribute to the existing studies of the politeness principle by offering a proven, comprehensive guidance for language learners to choose efficient and polite language to attain pragmatic competence and enhance the effectiveness of verbal marketing efforts.

Keywords: diplomatic discourse, hedging, podcast, Russel Pearson's

INTRODUCTION

Humans use language as a crucial tool to express their feelings, ideas and opinions differently on a daily basis (Liu, 2020). Words and phrases are used in creative and critical manners to form utterances that bring both implicit and explicit meanings (Liu, 2020; Author, 2018). However, the effectiveness of the communication depends on the ability of the speaker to be polite when conveying the message to the hearer. It is crucial for the speaker to employ politeness in an utterance to sustain a harmonious conversation in order to ensure the message is delivered with respect, tolerance and empathy. Failure to master the politeness principle especially in a difficult conversation will result in the speaker threatening the hearer's face. Therefore, some speakers opt for one of the fundamental politeness strategies known as hedging when conversing with the others. It is believed that the ability to use ambiguous language reflects pragmatic competence. Hedges are frequently employed to sidestep inquiries, make clear statements, or commit to a specific course of action or decision (Loi & Lim, 2019). The usage of hedges suggests uncertainty about the content of information delivered in order to diminish its impact and eventually becomes a common cause of language ambiguity.

In the fast-paced business world, being persuasive when communicating is paramount (Author, 2020). When participating in a podcast interview, mastering the art of politeness can make a difference in making the speaker's responses more convincing. In addition, polite language will help the speaker establish positive rapport with the host and engage with the audience. This is because not only will it display the speaker's professionalism, but also show respect and create a sense of community towards the hearers. By employing politeness strategies, like

hedging, in a business podcast interview, the speaker will be able to make the audience feel welcomed, create a productive environment and ensure a healthy and successful exchange of ideas, elevating the effectiveness of the interview podcast in general.

Recently, hedging has drawn a lot of attention in relation to social conventions and conversational etiquette (Vlasyan, 2019). As a result, it is the main strategy used to promote taking turns, showing consideration, and minimising face-threats. Hedging is intriguing to linguists since it is a deliberate way to convey ambiguity. Speakers use hedging to express doubt or certainty about a statement and to indicate their level of confidence. By using hedges, speakers enable their audience to assess the credibility of the claim. Hedging is also regarded as a way of encoding verbal and nonverbal behaviour with the intention of maintaining face, and as such, it is important in interaction techniques.

The researcher chose a podcast interview to be the research object to observe the language politeness used by ordinary people in unscripted situations when conveying information to the targeted audience. The researcher believes that politeness reflects the professionalism of both the interviewer and the interviewee. It establishes credibility and respectability, which are crucial for building a positive reputation among the audience. Moreover, being polite also aligns with legal and ethical considerations. According to the law, any information transmitted by the media is being closely monitored by the government to safeguard the appropriate proportion between the pursuit of freedom of speech and the protection of other crucial interests such as an individual's reputation (Author, 2018). The Defamation Act 1957 introduced by the Federal Constitution restricts libel and slander to encourage the use of polite language to avoid offending others and prevent defamation (Amira et. al., 2022).

In this research, the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson retrieved from BFM: *Raise Your Game* was chosen as the object of the research. The podcast interview went into detail on what it takes for a brand to actively expand and thrive rather than just barely cling on in the current market. The guest speaker, Russell Pearson, who is also known as the Brand Design Guy and the Business Blacksmith, has 25 years of expertise in brand strategy, marketing, and sales and has worked in nearly every sector of the economy. The founder of the Forge Business Program also has an extensive experience of professional speaking and was elected National President of Professional Speakers Australia in 2019. Therefore, this research aimed to determine the use of hedging as a politeness strategy that takes place in the *From Business Recovery to Growth* podcast interview, specifically in Russell Pearson's responses. Sometimes when certain speakers deliver a speech, speakers tend to employ a lot of hedging language, which may slightly diminish their credibility by making them look tentative (Pellby, 2013). In other words, too much hedging language can damage a speaker's credibility. Certain speakers cushion their utterances with wads of fluff that imply that they are not firm with what they are saying. For instance, the use of words like *almost*, *apparently*, *comparatively*, *fairly*, *rather* etc will make the speaker appear uncertain or unconfident.

Many linguists and academics focus their research on political hedges causing political interview studies to dominate the recent literature. For instance, a recent study by Zakiatul and Lisetyo (2018) explains only how hedged expressions have a function in politician Julia Gillard's utterances in an interview by employing theories of Salager-Meyer in Miller (1994). However, there is not much research on the application of the politeness concept in the corporate world. The lack of awareness on how language politeness affects the persuasiveness of a speech will cause business owners to experience difficulties in delivering effective and persuasive presentations. Thus, this study employed Russell Pearson as the subject of the data is to venture on how hedges contribute to the effectiveness of his speech when educating the audience through the podcast interview.

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the types of maxims used by Russell Pearson found in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* retrieved from BFM: *Raise Your Game*?
- 2) Why the maxims identified in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson retrieved from BFM: *Raise Your Game* belong to the specific type of maxim?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A verbal hedge in communication, which is also known as hedging, is one of the important politeness strategies in communication. Lakoff (1975) identified hedges as “semantic modifiers or approximators” that make the meaning appear vague. Another linguist, Holmes (1995) as cited in Zakiatul and Lisetyo, (2018), regards hedge as “pragmatic particles”. When communicating, hedging helps speakers to express a strong opinion in a more respectful, professional manner by adding words that cushion the language, such as “maybe” and “somewhat”. It weakens the impact or assertiveness of a message towards the hearer (Nordquist, 2020). Speakers commonly use hedges to communicate ambiguity, softening assertions and subtly express politeness.

Many researchers redefined the traditional meaning of hedges into various forms as they continued their work. However, the current research draws on Hyland's model (1996) to guide the analysis process because it focuses on how hedging functions both syntactically and pragmatically, which is in line with the research objectives. Hyland (1996) distributed types of hedging into two; content-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. Content-oriented hedging belongs to the attitudinal dimension that corresponds to methods of when the speakers communicate their judgements, opinions and commitments (Hyland, 1996). The forms of content-oriented hedging involve attribute hedges (adverbials), reliability hedges (modal auxiliaries, full verbs, modal adverbs, adjectives and nouns), attitude markers, and self-mention (first person pronouns). On the other hand, Hyland (1996) explained that reader-oriented hedging focuses on the reader's perspective by taking into account their expectation, interpretation and knowledge. The forms of reader-oriented hedging include reader pronouns, directives and questions.

Politeness is “one of the constructions used in human interaction to consider other people's feelings, establish mutual comfort, and promote rapport” (Hill et. al., 1986). It commonly concerns two participants in a conversation: the *self*, referring to the speaker, and the *other*, which refers to the hearer. Being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of their connection to the hearer. In other words, being polite can be shown through friendliness or respect to the hearer by reducing the risk of threatening their feelings or face. This concept is supported by a theory from one of the most prominent studies that pioneered the politeness principle, which was suggested by Geoffrey N. Leech in 1983. In his theory, Leech stated that the politeness principle is minimising the expression of impolite beliefs, and there is a corresponding positive version or maximising the expression of polite beliefs which is somewhat less important (Maharani, 2017). Hedging primarily relates to this theory because it highlights the importance of bringing comfort to the hearer and establishing a feeling of community and social relationship. The theory proposed six types of maxim including the tact maxim, the generosity maxim, the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim, the agreement maxim, and the sympathy maxim.

The Tact Maxim

Jewad (2020) defines tact maxim as minimising cost to others and maximising benefit to others. The tact maxim is put into practice through directive/impositive utterances. The directive or also known as impositive utterance is a popular way to convey a direct or indirect command. The use of directive utterance is prevalent for these purposes: inviting, commanding, ordering, advising and etc. For instance, the directive utterance “May I have the honour to have a cup of coffee with you?” implies an invitation from the speaker to the hearer to have a cup of coffee together. The utterance also reflects a high level of politeness of the speaker for making the hearer get more benefit. Thus, the speaker is being tactful in delivering an invitation to the hearer.

The Generosity Maxim

The generosity maxim shows the speaker's respect to the hearer by minimising benefit to self and maximising cost to self (Darwis, 2018). The generosity maxim distinguishes from the tact maxim by being self-centred, while the tact maxim is to the *other*. To illustrate, the directive utterance “You must come over and have dinner with us,” puts pressure on the hearer to accept the speaker's offer while implying benefits to the hearer.

The Approbation Maxim

The approbation maxim, as described by Liu (2020), is minimising dispraise of *other* while maximising praise of *other*. It prevents the speaker from saying unpleasant utterances that will offend others, especially the hearers. The approbation maxim is prominent in assertive/representative and expressive utterances. The assertive or representative utterance binds the speaker to the truthfulness of the stated statement and, as a result, has a veracity value. Meanwhile, the expressive utterance conveys the speaker's psychological attitude towards a circumstance such as when expressing gratitude, congratulating, apologising and praising (Mahyuni, 2018). For example, the speaker praises the hearer's performance by saying "You look good today!". When the speaker gives a positive feedback on the hearer's appearance, he is expressing his admiration towards the hearer, and thus, maximising the praise of *other*.

The Modesty Maxim

Unlike the approbation maxim, the modest maxim encourages the speaker to minimise the praise of *self* and maximise dispraise of *self* (Liu, 2020). However, a concept that the approbation and modesty maxim have in common is both are concerned with the speaker's level of positive or negative judgement of others or of themselves. The approbation maxim is typically practised when congratulating others while the modest maxim is commonly used when apologising. An example of the modesty maxim can be seen in the utterance "Please accept this small gift as a token of appreciation from me,". The phrase "small gift" reflects modesty and maximises dispraise of the speaker.

The Agreement Maxim

The two sub-maxim in the agreement maxim consist of maximising agreement between *self* and *other* while minimising disagreement between *self* and *other* (Liu, 2020). In this maxim, a disagreement is typically communicated by regret or partial agreement. Furthermore, the agreement maxim commonly occurs in assertive/representative utterances. An example of the agreement maxim is as below:

Child : "Mother, let's go see penguins at the zoo." Mother : "We will go to see the penguin later."

From the dialogue, it can be seen that the mother disagrees with her child going to the zoo, but chooses not to express her disagreement strongly. However, she commits to see the penguins another time instead. The politeness shown by the mother will influence the child as she reduces disagreement between her and the child.

Famous studies that have pioneered into politeness strategy include Lakoff (1975), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987). Lakoff came up with three rules that are frequently applied in conversation: don't impose, give the hearer options, and make them feel good. These, according to her, are crucial for effective communication. Speaking without following these rules is referred to as "flouting the maxims."

Leech (1983) defined politeness similarly to Lakoff but with added more details. He refers politeness as "strategic conflict avoidance which can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation." Leech started from the analysis of illocutionary acts. By classifying them into four categories (competitive, convivial, collaborative and conflictive), he was able to create his own two maxims of politeness (the tact and generosity maxim).

Another influential research on politeness strategy is proposed by sociolinguists Brown and Levinson in their seminal work "Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage," published in 1978. The theory seeks to explain how people manage and maintain their face (i.e., their public self-image or social identity) throughout communication by using a variety of politeness methods. There are five strategies proposed that have impacts on the face of the speaker and the hearer including 'bald on-record', 'positive politeness', 'negative politeness', 'off-record' and 'no act'.

It is clear from earlier studies conducted by numerous authors worldwide that there is a significant disparity in how hedges are defined. This is due to there being no fixed definition of hedges that could be universally agreed upon. Authors of more recent studies agreed on a similar definition for politeness based on the pioneering research mentioned. According to Zulaikha (2020), politeness is the act that attempts to consider the feelings of

the intended person, while Jewad et. al. (2020) believe that politeness is "the expression of the speakers' intention to lessen face dangers brought to another by specific face-threatening acts". From these definitions, it can be realised that being linguistically polite is to commit a socially appropriate behaviour that does not threaten other people's face and feelings.

While there have been numerous studies on hedging in various contexts, such as academic and political discourse, there is a noticeable lack of research that focuses on politeness strategies in the business field. For instance, a research conducted by Makejeva (2017) investigated hedging and politeness strategies used by native and non-native female English speakers in academic settings. Similarly, Rahayuningsih et., al. (2020) studied the sociological factors affecting the choice of polite language in an EFL teacher-student classroom interaction in a bilingual school. While in political discourse, Zulaikha (2020) revealed that public figures such as Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey tend to use a positive politeness strategy during the 2020 Vision Tour interview to express friendliness to minimise social distance between one another. There are only little studies that ventured into the use of the politeness principle in broadcasting and media. For example, a research carried out by Pangestuti (2015) focusing on the politeness strategy employed by Deddy Corbuzier, through the Brown and Levison's politeness strategy, revealed that the host of Hitam Putih Talk Show used bald on-record technique the most frequently. The researcher did not manage to find sufficient reliable sources on politeness in business-related podcast interviews, specifically focusing on the use of hedging and employing Leech's politeness principle. Thus, she viewed the gap as an opportunity to explore and contribute to an area that has been relatively underexplored. The research aimed to address this imbalance and offer valuable knowledge into the use of hedging as a politeness strategy in a professional business setting.

Moreover, previous studies found that speakers employ hedged language when communicating because of several fundamental purposes. Zakiyatul and Lisetyo (2018) in their study entitled *Hedges in interview of Sunday television programme: Julia Gillard*, modal lexical verbs were used by Julia Gillard to express her doubt and evaluation. The purpose of using modal lexical verbs is typically to express commitment or assertiveness toward a proposition. In contrast, Habeeb (2019) suggested that hedging can be utilised to reduce fuzziness and boost the utterances' precision. This is because hedges may be seen as indicators that either the conceptual category involved does not adequately represent politeness theories, or that it does not meet the criteria for being "true," but is phrased more precisely when hedged. The clash between these two previous research findings highlighted an intriguing contradiction in the literature. This research aimed to investigate deeper by looking at Russell Pearson's speech to address this discrepancy and justify the new findings.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research methodology, with descriptive qualitative as the approach. According to (Mohajan, 2018), qualitative research is "a form of social action that stresses on the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals". Qualitative research is an ideal option when a researcher intends to gather in-depth insights about an issue or to develop a new theory or a conceptual framework. The research design entailed a thorough content study of Russell Pearson's podcast interview, entitled *From Business Recovery to Growth* taken from one of the *Raise Your Game* series on BFM 89.9: The Business Station, hosted by Christine Wong. Annotating the research objectives which are to determine the hedges used in Russell Pearson's responses in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* and to analyse the various types of maxims implemented by Russell Pearson in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth*, the rationales for choosing a descriptive quantitative approach for this research are; in contrast to other qualitative designs, it does not necessitate a conceptual or highly abstract portrayal of the data, requires less movement away from or towards the data, and is less interpretive than a "interpretive description" approach.

The setting of this study involved a podcast interview retrieved from BFM 89.9: *Raise Your Game* entitled *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson as the guest speaker and Christine Wong as the host. The reason the researcher chose Russell Pearson is because he is a designer, an artist, a business strategist, and an experienced public speaker. Russell Pearson is a well-known figure in the field who co-founded the Awesome Show Podcast and has written extensively about competitive business strategy. He is also currently a director on the board of Professional Speakers Australia.

Sampling

The sampling method that was used in this study is purposive sampling which can be categorised in the non-random sampling technique. It entailed deliberately selecting specific individuals or groups that are knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon in interest (Andrade, 2020). Thus, this sampling technique is relevant to the research because the research requires specific criteria from the participant in order to achieve the objectives of this research; the participant must portray sufficient use of hedges in interpersonal communication. Therefore, the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson was chosen because the responses from Russell Pearson contain hedges as one of the politeness strategies used in a spontaneous manner.

The reason this podcast was chosen in comparison to other podcasts is because it discusses empirical steps of getting businesses back to the drawing board after the pandemic hit. The podcast may be beneficial for the English as secondary language learners, who are also taking entrepreneurship as an elective subject, for two reasons. The first reason is the marketing and sales strategies shared by Russell Pearson might help them in enhancing their comprehension of the business-related courses taken. Secondly, the use of hedging in Russell Pearson's speech will not only sharpen their understanding of the importance of the politeness principle in interpersonal communication, but also level up their pragmatic competence. These two benefits, when combined and put into practice, will encourage the English language learners to take advantage of their current surroundings to attract more business opportunities.

The hedges identified from Russell Pearson's responses in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* were classified into the six types of maxims from Leech's Politeness Principle (see Appendix A). Appendix A comprises the tact maxim, the generosity maxim, the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim, the agreement maxim, and the sympathy maxim.

The type of qualitative data collection that suits this research best was naturalistic observation. Naturalistic observation is defined as exploring the research object's behaviour in their own environment without any outside influence or control (Bhandari, 2022). This method suited this study best because the data that will be obtained for this research was taken from the observation from Russell Pearson's spontaneous responses to the interview questions. The data collection procedure of the research started with the researcher looking up BFM 89.9: Raise Your Game on the internet by using Google as the search engine. The researcher selected the podcast entitled *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson and hosted by Christine Wong, dated 9th January 2023. This was due to the fact that the podcast is one of the latest interview podcasts produced by BFM 89.9. After listening to the podcast interview of approximately half an hour duration, the researcher started transcribing the podcast interview by using an application named Otter.

Data Analysis

In order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher performed a naturalistic observation on the podcast interview transcription to identify hedges in Russell Pearson's interview responses via note-taking. Note-taking is jotting down pertinent information based on the research topic in an unstructured way. The hedges identified were categorised into the six types of maxims as suggested by Leech's Politeness Principle.

In this qualitative data analysis, the researcher applied a deductive approach, guided by the Leech's politeness principle. The aim was to explore how Russell Pearson utilised hedging strategies to adhere to politeness norms during interpersonal interactions, particularly in the podcast interview. After transcribing and organising the podcast interview data, the researcher identified instances where Pearson employed hedging devices such as modal auxiliaries, adverbs, verbs, attitude markers and tag questions to mitigate the assertiveness of his statements. Through careful thematic analysis, the researcher observed that the use of hedging was consistently linked to the maxims of Leech's politeness principle. Pearson demonstrated an awareness of maintaining a positive face and avoiding potential face-threatening acts through his choice of hedging language. These findings provided valuable insights into the interplay between hedging and politeness, contributing to a deeper understanding of politeness strategies employed in the business context.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research, the study employed a qualitative strategy known as audit trails to ensure the field notes and pertinent documents are accessible when necessary. Audit trails involve any records kept when conducting qualitative studies. In this research, audit trails consisted of the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson from BFM 89.9: Raise Your Game mp3 file, the transcription of the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth* by Russell Pearson from BFM 89.9: Raise Your Game, and sampling decisions. The goal of keeping audit trails for this study is to be able to explain to the readers the justifications for the choices made, decreasing the likelihood that the study's validity will be contested.

FINDINGS

The following tables outline the analysis of the different forms of hedging as the politeness principle Russell Pearson from BFM 89.9 employed in the podcast interview *From Business Recovery to Growth: Raise Your Game* alongside with the implicit context of the sentences, which provide a solution to the second research question. It covers five out of six types of maxims suggested by the politeness principle which are the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, and agreement maxim.

The Tact Maxim

Table 1 : Classification of the tact maxim identified in the podcast interview

Tact Maxim			
No	Sentence	Forms of Hedging	Analysis
1.	“So if you're saying , ‘Who should I be engaging with?’ And then you do know where they are, then you probably know who. If you don't know where they are, your “who” is probably not specific enough.”	Attitude markers	In the line “So if you’re saying...”, Pearson is implementing tact maxim by putting himself in his audience’s shoes. He takes into consideration what would have the audience wonder when deciding their target market. Thus, Pearson is minimising cost and maximising benefits to others.
2.	“And I think that's, that's one of the big things that uhh, at this point in time, uhh heading towards the end of 2022 that's been so important, is the ability for people to adapt.”	Verbs	The phrase “I think” relates to the tact maxim by acknowledging that Pearson is presenting his personal perspective rather than stating an unchangeable fact. This phrase softens the assertiveness of his statement and shows respect for a different opinion.
3.	“If you don't know where they are, your “who” is probably not specific enough.”	Adverbials	Prior to this utterance, Pearson mentioned that a business owner can identify his target audience by asking “who”. By including the adverb “probably” in his utterance, Pearson avoids making a definite claim about the incapacity to determine their target market by utilising the technique is due to unspecified characteristics of one’s target audience. This softens the claim while allowing for the possibility of rebuttal or error.
4.	“There is still just as many opportunities offline, as there always have been. It could be a	Modal auxiliaries	The uses of “could” in this utterance are to indicate possibility of a particular action or result. Pearson allows for flexibility and acknowledges that the

	supermarket notice board, if we could be creating a meetup with your local area that doesn't have to use the technology of meetup."		offline marketing opportunities may different for business owners by using "could" rather than more specific expressions. Thus, Pearson avoids making overly strong claims and showing respect for other viewpoints.
5.	"It can literally just be you engaging in communities and clubs and local area."	Reader pronouns	In this statement, Pearson was illustrating the possible opportunities for business owners in offline marketing. By using the pronoun "you" to address his audience, Pearson acknowledges the reader's presence and establishes a sense of direct involvement. This makes the message seem more casual and approachable, as if Pearson is chatting to the audience directly and recognising their presence. Hence, he fulfils the tact maxim by encouraging a sense of involvement and respect.

The Generosity Maxim

Table 2: Classification of the generosity maxim identified in the podcast interview

Tact Maxim			
No	Sentence	Forms of Hedging	Analysis
1.	Wong: And how do you arrive at that point where you can sort of uhm, separate the wheat from the chaff essentially? Pearson: We just need to know what you're after.	Reader pronouns	In the utterance, Pearson performs the generosity maxim when he expresses his willingness to acknowledge the needs of his target market. It means that Pearson maximises the cost and minimises the benefits to himself. Instead, he maximises benefits to his target market.
2.	"It's also curation and the ability to sort of, like you said, pick and choose and to have that control a little bit as well, right?"	Reader pronouns	Pronouns like "you" are used to address the reader directly, acknowledging perspective. This acknowledgment might encourage a feeling of empowerment and respect for the reader's ideas and experiences. "Like you said" was used in the utterance to highlight the ability of business owners to have control when choosing their network, as mentioned by the hearer.

The Approbation Maxim

Table 3: Classification of the approbation maxim identified in the podcast interview

Tact Maxim			
No	Utterance	Forms of Hedging	Analysis
1.	Wong: But what does it take from here to actually go the next step to actually grow and thrive uhh on a bigger scale?	Attitude markers	Pearson's utterance in response to Wong's can be categorised as an approbation maxim. Instead of using disparaging words to describe the difficulties and challenges,

	Pearson: It's been interesting because the last couple of years have shown people's ability to adapt and evolve and they've also shown systems or processes that are working or not.		he calls his path "interesting" that reflects his observation on the capability of business owners in growing their businesses. Therefore, he is minimising dispraise and maximising praise to others.
	“I had a team of growing, having 12 People in the production team and I needed to feed these people and then on the way back from one of those events such as it has to be an easy way to do this has to be a way that just works. Which was good that that happened- when it happened because it set me up for success in a pandemic, because I built things that didn't rely on those referrals.”	Attitude markers	The sentence "they might be good people" conveys a sense of caution and tentativeness regarding the subject's character, and then proceeds to offer a critical assessment of their actions as mentioned in "they're diluting their opportunities". The first part of the sentence acknowledge the fact that the business owners are good people and it softens the second part of the sentence, which conveys a negative evaluation, suggesting that the subject is not making the most of their chances.

The Modesty Maxim

Table 4: Classification of the modesty maxim identified in the podcast interview

Tact Maxim			
No	Utterance	Forms of Hedging	Analysis
1.	“Uhh yeah, Russell Pearson, uhm last twenty-nearly-six years , so 26 years.”	Adverbials	The word “nearly” in “twenty-nearly-six years” relates to the modesty maxim by downplaying or understating the speaker's achievements or experiences. It implies that Pearson prioritises clarity by not directly claiming a full twenty-six years of working experience. This can be seen as a polite way to acknowledge the likelihood of a margin of error in his assertion, preventing him from sounding as if he is boasting about their extensive experience. Thus, Pearson performs modesty maxim by minimising praise and maximising dispraise of himself.
2.	“ I was not handy at all like I would never actually do anything with my hands... But what I learned through the lens of blacksmithing is change doesn't happen well without heating things up to a critical temperature because that's what you need to do with steel.”	Attitude markers	The utterance of Pearson can be classed as modesty maxim. Even though he has basic knowledge in blacksmithing, he is being humble by saying that he is not good at handiwork. Thus, he is minimising praise and maximising dispraise of himself.
3.	“So I remember when I got started in my business, I was	Adverbials	Pearson describes the beginning of his working journey as “sort of works all right” instead of works

	told that I should be building my business off the back of referrals, and what I found is that, you know, it sort of works all right when you get started.”		all right to avoid sounding overconfident. By using the word "sort of," Pearson conveys a degree of uncertainty or doubt about his early working experience that went all right.
4.	“And so, I suggest to those people who are still resisting moving into the online space, just go and speak to your market.”	Verbs	The phrase "I suggest" indicates that Pearson is giving offline business owners advice on how to reach their target market but is not pushing it as the only course of action. It supports the modest maxim's objective of downplaying the speaker's positive face by fostering a more cooperative and open exchange of views. According to Leech's politeness principle, this encourages a more respectful and polite communication style, fostering better social relationships.

The Agreement Maxim

Table 5: Classification of the agreement maxim identified in the podcast interview

Agreement Maxim			
No	Utterance	Forms of Hedging	Analysis
1.	<p>Pearson: ...So if you stop just putting anything in there, you just get this horrible, [laughs] so horrible-</p> <p>Wong: Yeah, then that's just a trash can. [chuckles]</p> <p>Pearson: Yeah, that's right, it's a trash can. 100%. Uhm but if you- if you do put the right ingredients, if you put the right people in it, people ideally, who will be able to work with you at some point a lot of people bring into their network is anybody.</p>	Attitude markers	From this conversation, it can be seen that Pearson is being polite by agreeing with Wong's analogy which is “innovation without proper ideation is like a trash can”. Hence, he is maximising agreement between himself and Wong. Then, he minimises the expression of disagreement by adding “But if you do put the right ingredients...” implying that business owners can make their products relevant with good ideation and preparation.
	“And always thought if I worked hard, I would get results - which means that work was hard. Right?”	Tag questions	Tag question is used to get the hearer to confirm or agree with a claim or idea. Pearson indicates that he wants his audience to support his opinion by adding a question mark at the end of their utterance. The tag question “right?” seeks the audience's agreement that the hard work pays off, promoting a common understanding between Pearson and the hearer. Thus, this ensures a harmonious and agreeable communication environment.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the main objectives were to identify and examine the use of hedging in Russell Pearson's podcast interview through the lens of politeness principles proposed by Leech. As a language learner, the researcher sought to understand how hedging, as a linguistic strategy, contributes to the expression of politeness and social harmony in this particular interview context. By using Leech's politeness principle to study Russell Pearson's speech patterns, the researcher hoped to shed light on the role of hedging as a means of handling face-threatening situations and fostering a respectful and harmonious conversation between the speaker and the hearer.

Throughout the podcast interview, it can be seen that Russell Pearson regularly employed different types and forms of hedging language such as 'sort of', 'could', and 'probably' to qualify his statements. The two types of hedging language used involve content-oriented and reader-oriented hedging, while the forms of hedging language used consist of attitude markers, verbs, adverbials, modal auxiliaries, reader pronouns and tag questions.

According to Lakoff (1972), one of the reasons hedges are used is to soften the language to be polite. By using hedging expressions, Russell Pearson showed awareness of potentially face-threatening situations and took care to communicate his opinions in appropriate ways. This strategy reduced any chance of offence or conflict during the podcast interview and promoted a friendly environment to his audience.

In his research, Yang (2013) asserted that hedging allows writers to express tentativeness and possibility. Although Yang (2013) makes reference to written communications, the same statement also applies to verbal communications (Makejeva, 2017). Russell Pearson exhibited a degree of uncertainty in some of his utterances, using phrases like "sort of" to indicate uncertainty. He was able to convey his ideas tentatively thanks to this linguistic approach, fostering an open discussion and providing space for opposing views. This is also in line with Hyland's view in 2005 that says hedging functions as a "device that allows the conversations to remain active, without judging other people's opinions, but rather putting them up for discussion."

Additionally, it is also evident that Russell Pearson strategically employed hedging language to seek agreement from his audience. When discussing his ideas for business model reimagination, he employed tag questions like "right?". Tag questions serve as a type of hedging, enabling him to make notions more subtly while seeking confirmation or validation from the audience. By employing tag questions, Russell Pearson invites the audience to actively engage in the podcast interview and show their support for his ideas.

Therefore, Russell Pearson's strategic use of hedging in the interview aligns with Leech's politeness theory, because it serves to uphold pleasant social interaction by minimising threats to the audience's face needs. The employment of hedging expressions reflects Pearson's communicative effort to maintain politeness and social harmony.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The use of hedging as a politeness strategy holds significant implications especially for language students in the business field. In a professional setting, comprehending the concept of hedging as an important element of politeness principle can enhance communication effectiveness and foster positive relationships with colleagues, clients, and superiors. By employing hedging techniques such as modal auxiliaries, adverbs, and attitude markers, language students can convey humility, respect for others' perspectives, and a willingness to consider alternative viewpoints. Not only this will help in avoiding potential face-threatening acts but also establish a collaborative and approachable demeanour. Moreover, in business negotiations and discussions, hedging can strike a balance between assertiveness and politeness, allowing students to maintain a cooperative and harmonious atmosphere while still advocating for their ideas or proposals. Language students who are proficient in utilising hedging as a politeness strategy will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of the business world and build strong professional relationships, ultimately contributing to their success in the corporate environment.

From the thorough analysis of this particular Russell Pearson's podcast interview, there is more evidence of other maxims in Leech's politeness principle that are not related to hedging, which the research believes should be explored deeper in the future research. For instance, Russell Pearson performs the sympathy maxim by saying "Thank you for having me on" to express his gratitude towards the BFM 89.9 and his audience for having him as the guest speaker as well as affirming their positive face. Thus, he minimises antipathy and maximises empathy to self and others.

Therefore, in light of the insightful findings from the podcast interview, the researcher recommends exploring other types of maxims, particularly the sympathy maxim, in future research endeavours. While the podcast provided valuable insights into the use of hedging as a politeness strategy, investigating other politeness principles, such as the sympathy maxim, can offer a more comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics. The sympathy maxim, which focuses on showing concern for the interlocutor's feelings and fostering positive emotional

connections, could shed light on how speakers use language to demonstrate empathy, understanding, and support during interactions. By delving into this aspect, future research can unravel how speakers effectively acknowledge and respond to emotions in diverse communication contexts. This exploration may unveil new dimensions of politeness strategies that complement the findings on hedging, enriching our comprehension of how individuals maintain positive social interactions and respectful dialogues. As the podcast interview sets a strong foundation for the investigation of politeness strategies, further research into the sympathy maxim can contribute significantly to the field of linguistics and interpersonal communication.

The research's practical relevance lies in its ability to provide insight on the implementation of hedges in the degree of spontaneity in an interview. Understanding hedges and the structural patterns they fit into is necessary for appropriate hedging behaviour that reflects a speaker's pragmatic competence. However, this ability is considered difficult to master even for second language speakers with efficient English proficiency (Loi et. al., 2016). Hence, this study benefits language learners as they are one of the main intended audiences of the Russell Pearson podcast interview. Language learners must become adept in hedging in order to increase their pragmatic competence to effectively communicate with others in various contexts. Compelling pragmatic competence assists learners to better understand the meaning of a speaker's utterance through the usage of language. This is due to the fact that non-native speakers may not have the same pragmatic ability as the native speakers and may come across as rude, obnoxious, or arrogant when they hedge incorrectly. They also risk misinterpreting the interlocutor's intention if they misinterpret a hedged utterance. Thus, the findings of this study can be a guide for language learners to be mindful of the hearers' feeling when using hedges by avoiding threatening their faces.

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