It Seems You May Need To Learn To Hedge, Possibly
Jennifer Brooke
Saginaw Valley State University

What is a Hedge?

Seem -- it may be that -- could -- probably -- it could be the case -- it is possible that

Academic discourse requires writers to situate their claims within the context of previous research and relationships within the field.

ESL writers struggle with audience orientation and taking an appropriate stance towards their readers (e.g. Hinkel, 2005).

They can improve their writing by learning to both identify hedges in academic texts and produce them appropriately.

Why Do ESL Writers Need Hedging?

ESL writers struggle with audience orientation and taking an appropriate stance towards their readers (e.g. Hinkel, 2005).

Lesson Plan Objectives

1. SWBAT state the main idea and audience of an academic article.
2. SWBAT identify statements that convey factual information versus those that draw conclusions.
3. SWBAT identify words and phrases that convey tentativeness.
4. SWBAT rewrite tentative statements with greater certainty and discuss how this changes the message of a text.

Procedure

1. Students and teacher discuss main ideas and vocabulary from an informal research article. 10 minutes
2. Teacher guides discussion to identify each paragraph’s purpose and whether it communicates facts or conclusions drawn from facts. 5 minutes
3. In pairs, students rewrite one hedged paragraph to make it sound completely certain (i.e. without hedges). 10 minutes
4. Pairs report their re-written paragraph to class. Teacher writes deleted and substituted words on the board and elicits more words of this kind. Teacher guides discussion of how the new paragraphs differ from the original version. 15 minutes
5. Students summarize the article in an email to a friend who may disagree with its message (completed as homework). 10 minutes

References


Further Benefits

This lesson plan is appropriate for advanced learners learning English for specific purposes.

Choose an article in accordance with the learners’ interests and/or current events.

Adapt for proficiency by choosing simpler texts or a different genre.

Contact

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In a corpus of MICUSP untimed argumentative essays, NSs used 12 hedges per thousand words, while NNSs used a little over 8. Occurrences were judged by two or more raters to be instances of hedging.

Hedging Occurrences in MICUSP Argumentative Essays

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Instances of Hedging per 1,000 Words

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2 This consciousness-raising hedging activity is adapted from the pedagogical implications section of Hyland (1996). The article chosen and follow-up procedures are those of the author.

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