

## Cautious and Critical Hedging

One of the main characteristics of academic writing is that the writer is supposed to come across to his/her reader as a reserved, objective and controlled recorder of facts, interested and exploring all sides of the issue under discussion. S/he should not attempt to force his/her own opinion on the reader but rather persuade the reader to appreciate his/her viewpoint. In order to achieve this aim, the academic writer will try to seem cautious and contained in his/her opinions by applying the often-used writing strategy called **hedging**. Hedging is an important interactional strategy both in spoken and written text and it is important that you, the foreign language student, reflect on awareness-raising rules of appropriateness so as to be able to pitch your language at a suitable level of forcefulness that your reader of academic discourse expects from academic writing. To sound native-like in a foreign language, a speaker or writer should, then, have a rich repertoire of hedging expressions at his/her disposal and use an appropriate amount of them. Lack of hedging expression may risk sounding more impolite or aggressive than he/she intends to be.

**1. Different levels of probability** When we make a claim or give an opinion, we often use a variety of phrases connected with modality to express how sure we are of something. Consider the phrases below and the different impact they might have on a reader.

- It is certain that ...
- It is almost certain that
- It is very probable/highly likely that...
- It is probable/likely that X will result in fewer ...
- It is possible that...
- It is unlikely that
- It is very unlikely/highly improbable that ...

**2. Distance** A common way to hedge what you state is to distance yourself by sounding less sure of your knowledge of the facts:

- Consumers *have* less confidence in the economy today than 10 years ago.
- Consumers *seem to have* less confidence in the economy.
- Consumers *appear to have* less confidence in the economy.
- *It would seem/appear that consumers have* less confidence in the economy.

The use of 'weaker' verbs can also have the same effect. For example:

- Deregulation *caused* the banking crisis. (strong)
- Deregulation *contributed to* the banking crisis (weaker) = confidently uncertain

**3. Forcefulness** Another alternative is to make your ideas 'appear' less forceful by adding adverbial phrases which reduce the definite nature of the facts:

- On the limited data available,...
- In the view of some experts, ...
- According to this preliminary study, ...