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# Hedges Usage in Mixed-Gender Conversation among English Department Students Airlangga University

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## Abstract

Noting the importance of hedges usage in mixed-gender conversation, this paper discusses how hedges are used and the function of hedges produced by English department students Airlangga University. This paper based the analysis on Coates (2004)'s theory. Next, based on data from the conversational corpus taken on April 27th 2012, hedges produced by the participants are grouped into hedges "you know", "like" and other forms of hedges. Each of these hedges serves different functions, which are to convey certainty or uncertainty, detach the speakers from the force of evaluative utterances and mitigate the force of utterances respectively. The result of the study is described in detail in relation to how the participants use hedges and the functions of hedges produced. The paper concludes that the participants produced hedges "you know" in the form of "rek", "cak", "koen", "pak", "pek", hedges "like" is used as "kayak", and other forms of hedges such as "mungkin", "paling" and "kayak'e". The usage of hedges carries on all functions except the one expressing uncertainty. Further, from their usage of hedges, male student and female student 3 are more concerned in domination while female student 2 and female student 4 are more interested in seeking connection.

**Keywords:** English Department Students; Hedges; Mixed-Gender Conversation

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## 1. Introduction

Mixed-gender conversation can be seen as an interactive talk involving men and women. It occurs in daily life as a social interaction among men and women in both formal and informal setting. This kind of conversation examines the ways in which men and women communicate each other. In line with this, Davies and Elder (2005) stated that the study of language and gender involved the study of how men and women use language differently. The differences of men and women in talking may lead to problem in mixed-gender conversation. This is so because they may interpret the same thing differently. According to Tannen as cited in Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003: 49), "The conversational style associated with each gender can lead to miscommunication and difficulties in accomplishing one's goals". In other words, communication between people from different sex may lead to misunderstanding.

In order to avoid misunderstanding between male student and female student, both of them need to understand each other way of talking. Therefore, they need to have a better understanding of the conversational strategies used by the members of the opposite sex in conversation. Tannen (1993) argued that conversational strategy is the strategy which consists of linguistic strategy such as interruption, silence and tag questions to get purposes either creating domination or establishing connection. There are several conversational strategies outlined by Coates (2004) such as minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo languages and compliments. In this case, the writer focuses in analyzing one of those strategies, which are hedges.

It is interesting to find out the usage of hedges in mixed-gender conversation in Surabaya, particularly among a group of English department students in Airlangga University because there is a shift in the development of society and culture nowadays. The increasing equality between men and women possibly diminish the hierarchical status among them which may lead to different usages of hedges these days. Previous research conducted by Siegel (2002) found that hedges particle "like" loosens meaning criteria for the expression following it. She found that girls using

hedges particle “like” more often than boys. Yet, according to Precht as cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 184) “Precht’s recent corpus study also looked at some of the hedging modifiers; she included forms like *kinda*, *sorta*, and *pretty*. ... The only significant differences Precht found were ones where men were in the lead.” Hence, those two researches were done in the country where they use English in the conversation while this study examines hedges used in Javanese and Indonesian language as it is the language used by the participants in everyday conversation between friends.

For that reason, the writer is interested in doing a study on how hedges are used by male student and female student in English department in mixed-gender conversation. In analyzing hedges, the writer uses Coates’s (2004) theory. According to Coates (2004) hedges are linguistics forms such as I think, I’m sure, you know, sort of and perhaps which express the speaker’s certainty or uncertainty about the proposition under discussion. Each of the hedges has their own functions. Further, the writer intends to identify how hedges are used and the functions of hedges produced by male student and female student in English Department in mixed-gender conversation in relation to Tannen’s (1993) theory. She characterized women are more interested in establishing intimacy and promoting solidarity with others while men are more concerned in establishing autonomy or creating dominance to others.

The study attempts to help explaining hedges usage in mixed-gender conversation especially in informal setting. It provides useful information for male student and female student in English department student as it gives overview about different function of hedges in mixed-gender conversation. Therefore, both male student and female student are able to respect each other way of talking, run the conversation smoothly and decrease misunderstanding. Finally, the writer hopes that this study could give contribution to the study of language and gender in terms of sociolinguistics account and would be a reference for further studies in this field.

## **2. Method**

The data for this study come from the transcription corpus of the recording of mixed-gender conversation taken at April 27<sup>th</sup> 2012 from 14.00-15.15. The study was conducted in the informal setting since Holmes’s (1995b) suggested that at least in more formal interaction, members of each sex speak least in situations they find most uncomfortable. In other words, the more relaxed the speakers are the more natural the data will be. Thus, the recording was taken in the WiFi area of Faculty of Humanities which involved a group of English department students consist of one male student and four female students. Then, the writer selected the participants based on purposive sampling technique which met the study’s need. Hence, the English department students chosen were those came from batches 2008, aged between 22-24 years old, included in Javanese ethnic group and were close friends.

Before the study began, the participants were selected according to the criteria met. To select the appropriate participants, the writer did an interview to gain information about the background of the participants. Then, the writer did pre-observations to familiarize the participants with the presence of the writer. After that, the conversation of the participant with another participant were recorded when they had conversation in informal setting. Also, she took notes for some details that can not be recorded. The writer was engaged in the conversation to observe since she is already familiar to the participants. Yet, she did not contribute to the conversation or distract the flow of conversation. Next, after the data gained, the writer asked permission from the participants to use their conversation to be analyzed.

In this case, the writer chose the recording of mixed-gender conversation at April 27<sup>th</sup> 2012 to be analyzed in a detailed description. The language used in the informal conversation could be the representative of spontaneous interaction by the speakers since it reflected real life conversations. Then, the recording was transcribed orthographically and classified carefully in order to identify how hedges were used and examine the functions of hedges produced by the participants in mixed-gender conversation using Coates’s (2004) theory. After that, the writer interpreted the usage of hedges and the functions in relation to Tannen’s (1993) theory and made conclusion.

### 3. Distribution of hedges produced by the participants

| Participants          | Utterances   |
|-----------------------|--|
| Male student (M)      | Confidence “you know”:<br>(54) M: <looks at the parking area> Lho, ilang Edward <b>rek</b> . Waduh, ilang <b>rek</b> .<br>(72) M: Gak isa wes bek. Ya Allah, setengah telu <b>rek</b> .<br>(174) M: Mangkane apa? Mangkane apa? Yo gak usah <b>rek</b> .<br>(356) M: Yo sak ulan moro.<br><takes something> Ndhelok, rek. Eh, premium <b>rek</b> maringene mundak iki.<br>(389) M: Gak. Langsung di nyet, nyet. ((Gak sak paket)) <b>rek</b> .<br>(542) M: Dolar, <b>rek</b> . Beat box, beat box.<br>(688) M: Gak noleh <b>rek</b> .<br>(740) M: <b>Cak</b> , longor kok. Sumpah.<br>(792) M: Kemprom, <b>cak</b> . Langsung, nang bemo ambu-ambu apa, wong-wong...<br>(805) M: Kajenge metu, banyune enthek. Kajenge metu, kudu nangis, <b>pek</b> . Ya apa iki.<br>(822) M: Lha lapo seh mikir. Digarap <b>rek</b> sing bener.<br>(840) M: Enak <b>rek</b> .<br>(865) M: Oh, wes gak di ((xxxx)) rek, ehem. |
|                       | Unconfidence “you know”: -   |
|                       | Hedges “like”:<br>(251) M: Iki bentuk’e <b>kayak</b> persemayaman.   |
|                       | Other forms of hedges:<br>(61) M: Kelas’e Mr. River <b>paling</b> iku.<br>(774) M: <b>Paling</b> beset titik, jantung’e beset titik.<br>(778) M: <b>Paling</b> parah-parahne jek beset titik lah. Beset limang senti.  |
| Female student 1 (F1) | Confidence “you know”:<br>(152) F1: ...<looks at what Yerima does> Iki loh tambah skype’an <b>koen</b> . Wes gak usah ta Yer.<br>(379) F1: ...<looks at the sky> Mau hujan, <b>rek</b> .<br>(390) F1: Beda, <b>rek</b> . Oh, polaroid, langsung dadi. Seleret.<br>(802) F1: Wes, Yer. Wes ta, Yer. Aduh wetengku kaku, <b>pek</b> . Lok’en ta. Mangkane arek-arek cek-cek ngerti kemampuanmu, beat box.  |
|                       | Unconfidence “you know”: -   |
|                       | Hedges “like”:<br>(289) F1: Yang <b>kayak</b> di ASC itu lho.<br>(127) F1: Ini tuh sama Mas <b>kayak</b> yang tadi. Sama semua udah di ini semua.<br>(615) F1: <comments on Yerima’s laptop> He Mas, kok wes nglentek, nglentek, hih jijiik, jijiik. Tak iki yo, tak klentek. Mangkane ta toko sing mahal mesisan <b>kayak</b> aku.<br>(641) F1: Biasane wingi <b>kayak</b> tanggaku mari nyolong hape/ <LAUGHS> ...   |
|                       | Other forms of hedges:<br>(11) F1: <b>Paling</b> dibarengi <b>paling</b> . Kan iku mau Jessica.<br>(402) F1: ...Cuma <b> mungkin</b> punyanya dia banyak.<br>(431) F1: Oh nggk Mas, <b>kayak</b> e pengaplikasian teori Plato dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Ini dia mikir sendiri memang. Mungkin udah sampe tujuh, eh- sampe empat, empat apa lima gitu. Trus ini yang <b> mungkin</b> dia yang copas-nya itu yang dari ini lho... Plato, filsuf dari ini, gitu.<br>(773) F1: Ditubruk ya <b>paling</b> beset-beset.<br>(777) F1: Utek’e, utek’e. Utek’e <b>paling</b> mlengse.<br>(787) F1: Lha ya. Aku dikenek’i Nike. Isa Nike sampek shock <b>paling</b> <LAUGHS>.   |
|                       | Confidence “you know”:<br>(862) F2: Ayo, ngantuk <b>rek</b> .  |
| Female student 2 (F2) | Unconfidence “you know”: -   |
|                       | Hedges “like”:<br>(38) F2: <b>Kayak</b> ana sesuatu.<br>(891) F2: Kalo Camri itu rada mepet, <b>kayak</b> sempet ngunu loh.<br>(893) F2: Enggak, <b>kayak</b> mepet ngunu.   |
|                       | Other forms of hedges:<br>(772) F2: Yo <b>paling</b> kita gak ini/<br>(831) F2: Aku gini. <acts like taking handphone> Eh, eiiiit. Memey <b>paling</b> , haaah.  |
|                       | Confidence “you know”:<br>(179) F3: Full, <b>pak</b> .<br>(238) F3: SR, 2012. Ditulis ngunu ambhek Ivonne, <b>cak</b> .<br>(352) F3: Seminggu gak moleh pek aku <b>pek</b> .<br>(570) F3: ...Ya Allah Mas Yer, puerang gak karu-karuan. Sampe ngomong gini <b>koen</b> , sampe tulisannya itu digedein semua hurufnya.<br>(577) F3: =Langsung dia gini “Wes Tod, delete-en ae post-mu iku, Tod. Jarene ngunu <b>koen</b> . ...<br>(658) F3: Enak <b>rek</b> , pengen klepon ambek putu <b>rek</b> .<br>(885) F3: Nggilani <b>cak</b> .   |

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Female student 4 (F4) | Unconfidence “you know”: -   |
|                       | Hedges “like”:<br>(596) F3: Ehem, Mas Yeremia iku longgone <b>kayak</b> arek wedok, sumpah tonthok’ en.<br><LAUGHS>. |
|                       | Other forms of hedges:   |
|                       | Confidence “you know”: -   |
| Female student 4 (F4) | Unconfidence “you know”: -   |
|                       | Hedges “like”: -   |
|                       | Other forms of hedges: -   |
|                       |  |

From the findings above, it could be seen that male student produced “you know” in the form of “rek”, “cak” and “pek”, hedges “kayak” and other forms of hedges “paling”. Female student 1 used hedges “koen”, “rek”, “pek”, “kayak” and other forms of hedges “paling”, “mungkin” and “kayak’e”. Female student 2 employed “rek”, “kayak” and other forms of hedges “paling”. Lastly, female student 4 utilized hedges “pak”, “cak”, “pek”, “koen”, “rek” and “kayak” without produced other forms of hedges. Thus, all of the participants produced hedges “you know”, “like” and other forms of hedges except female student 4. In the usage of hedges “you know”, the participants merely produced confidence “you know”. None of them employed unconfidence “you know”.

#### 4. The usages of hedges and their functions

In this case, the focus of the analysis was on mixed-gender conversation that was when male student and female students were engaged in conversation and did not the conversation which involved merely female students. In the dialogue, there were five participants. They were one male student called Yeremia that later on was abbreviated as M. Meanwhile the four female students were named as Gracia or female student 1 (F1), Nike or female student 2 (F2), Keyzia or female student 3 (F3) and Liana or female student 4 (F4). Hence, all participants’ names mentioned in the data were not real names but they were replaced with pseudonyms.

Further, the analysis of hedges between male and female students was done for hedges such as “kayak”, “mungkin”, “paling” and “kayak’e”. Next, the emergence of “rek”, “cak”, “koen”, “pak” and “pek” had the same meaning as hedges “you know” if they were verbal fillers and were not used as pronoun like “koen” or “you” or to greet someone like “rek” or “guys”. Thus, it could be seen from the context in order to determine which one was considered as hedges. For example, hedge was like in “Iki loh tambah skype’an, *koen* (This guy even uses skype, *you know*)” instead of “*Koen* yo ngerasakno dewe kan panas (*You* also feel that it is hot)”.

In addition, hedges had numerous functions. One of the forms, “you know”, expressed two functions which were expressing certainty and expressing uncertainty. Another form of hedges, “like”, were used to detach the speakers from being evaluative. Other forms of hedges such as “perhaps”, “maybe” and “I think” functioned to mitigate the force of utterances. In the conversation, male student and female students were found to use hedges to carry on these functions, except “you know” which express uncertainty. Some of hedges and the functions found in the participants’ utterance were:

##### Datum 1

(790) M: Ehm, koen. Nggawa sabun, diempet engkok bengi. (“Ehm. Bring soap, defecate this night.”)

(791) F1: Engkok bengi jare... Engkok ae loh di pending. (“You said this night... Just delay it after this.”)

(792) M: Kempro *cak*. Langsung, nang bemo ambu-ambu apa, wong-wong... Tangan kirimu delikna ae, delikna nang mburi ae cek gak mambu. (“It’s shabby, *you know*. Then in the public transportation people will be, what kind of smell is it... Just hide your left hand, hide it thus it will not smell.”)

In datum 1, the participants were talking about loosen the bowels. Male student made a joke that the person who felt it could do it this night but female student 1 argued to delay it until they went home. Next, male student responded that it was disgusting to delay such thing due to the unexpected

thing that would happen. Even, if they had to take public transportation, it would cause other people to smell bad odor.

From the dialogue, it could be seen that male student used hedge “cak” to show his certainty about what he said. He was sure that delayed to defecate was really disgusting behavior. Therefore, he used hedge to add weight to his utterance or signal his certainty. In this case, male student used hedge not to signal hesitancy and the usage of hedges was not associated with tentativeness.

Datum 2

(570) F3: ...Tak giniin, “Lho Mas emang salah ya kalo aku suka sama messi, tapi aku nggak suka club-nya?” Ya Allah Mas Yer, puerang gak karu-karuan. Sampe ngomong gini *koen*, sampe tulisannya itu digedein semua hurufnya. (I said, “Lho Mas, is it wrong if I like Messi but I dislike his club?” Ya Allah Mas Yer, we had a quarrel. Then, he said this, *you know*, even he capitalized the font.”)

(571) M: Di caps lock. (“It is caps locked.”)

(572) F3: Di caps- naah... (“It is caps- naah...”)

In this case, female student 3 was telling a story about her quarrel with one of her seniors. Because of her comment on her friend’s posting in social network site, her senior condemned her for idolizing Lionel Messi but not his football club. Next, female student 3 continued her story by telling that the senior even capitalized the font he typed. Male student responded was merely that the font was made bigger using caps lock button in the keyboard of the computer and female student 3 agreed on it by echoing male student’s utterance.

Female student 3’s usage of hedge “koen” which literally had no meaning actually conveyed that she guaranteed the truth of the proposition she uttered. She wanted to emphasize that she did know well about the incident by using hedge. Also, she wanted to assert her certainty that the senior capitalized the font to express his fed up as she experienced it herself.

Similar to male student, the usage of hedge “koen” in datum 4 implied that she expressed her certainty about what she said and assured its truth. She was in no doubt at all about the utterance she was asserting. Also, she wanted to emphasize that she did know well about the topic under discussion by using hedge. In this case, female student 3 expressed her confident about what was said since she knew it herself. Thus, “koen” in this case served as an emphatic function to reassure the addressee of the validity of the proposition and showed female student 3’s certainty.

Datum 3

(250) F1: <comments on the pensil case> Anu, anu’e catwalk. (“It is something within catwalk.”)

(251) M: Iki bentuk’e *kayak* persemayaman. (“The shape is *like* throne.”)

In datum 3, the participants were talking about pencil case. Female student 1 said that the material used was similar to the one used in catwalk. Then, male student stated that it was like a throne. He used hedge “kayak” to comment on the shape of the pencil case. The usage of hedge here implied that he wanted to detach himself from the negatively evaluative utterances. This is to say, male student did not want to give negative evaluation about the pencil case as he related it to sensitive topic, throne. In this case, male student used hedges when sensitive topic such as something related to death was discussed.

Datum 4

(886) M: <looks at a car which pass by> Toyota Camri. (“Toyota Camri.”)

(887) F2: Bukan. (“No.”)

(888) M: Oh, dudhuk. (“Oh, no.”)

(889) F2: Vios. (“Vios.”)

(890) M: Vios. (“Vios.”)

(891) F2: Kalo Camri itu rada mepet, *kayak* sempet ngunu loh. (“If it is Camri, it is quite shallow, *like* tight.”)

In datum 4, male student commented on a car which passed by in front of him. He thought that it was Toyota Camri, one of the brands of the car. Female student 2 argued him and declared that it was not Toyota Camri. Considered his mistake, male student agreed on her. Then, female student 2 said that it was Vios, another brand of car. Male student echoed female student 2 stating that it was

Vios. Later on, female student 2 added that Camri was different from Vios since it was quite shallow and sort of tight.

The usage of hedge “kayak” here suggested that female student 2 did not want to judge that Camri was shallow and tight. Hedge implied her unassertiveness. Thus, the usage of hedge corresponded to the idea that female speakers were socialized to believe that asserting their utterances strongly were not nice or ladylike.

Therefore, female student 2 used hedge “kayak” as she did not want to criticize the physical appearance of Toyota Camri with her own judgment. She did not want to be seen as assertive by using hedge “kayak”. It could be seen that she tried to distance herself from the force of what she said that could be considered negatively evaluative for the car. Therefore, the usage of hedge by female student 2 functioned to distance herself from the force of utterance that could be considered evaluative.

Datum 5

(776) M: Lek parah meneh yo/ (“The worst thing is/”)

(777) F1: Utek’e, utek’e. Utek’e *paling* mlengse. (“The brain, the brain. *Perhaps* the brain is tilted.”)

(778) M: *Paling* parah-parahne jek beset titik lah. Beset limang senti. (“*Perhaps* the worst thing is just slender wound in the brain. It is injured five centimeters.”)

The dialogue above discussed about the consequence of a car crash for someone who was collided. Male student said that there must be the worst effect. After that, female student 1 added male student’s utterance by saying that the worst effect was the brain was titled. Male student, then, added that the brain would merely get wound and injured five centimeters.

In this dialogue, both female student 1 and male student used hedges “paling”. The usage of hedges by both female and male students indicated that hedges were not always associated with female students. The participants used hedges as they discussed about sensitive topic. Sensitive topic was the one that made the speaker and the addressee felt uneasy. In so doing, it was unethical to simply say the sentences without using hedges. Yet, if the participants avoid talking about sensitive topic and preferred to talk about neutral facts, it was believed that the emergence of hedges would be none.

In this datum, male student and female student used other forms of hedges that were “paling”. It indicated that both of them wanted to lessen the strength of propositions as they discussed about sensitive topic. Sensitive topic was the discussion that made the speaker and the addressee felt uncomfortable. The discussion about sensitive topic required hedges to decrease the degree of assertiveness in the utterance spoken. The usage of hedges as a softener expressing politeness showed that the participants wanted to decrease the assertiveness in order to protect both speaker’s and hearer’s face. In so doing, hedges functioned to mitigate the force of utterances and protect both speaker’s face and hearer’s face.

From the explanation above, it could be seen that all of the participants used hedges, except female student 4. They used hedges “rek”, “cak”, “koen”, “pak”, “pek” “kayak” and other forms of hedges such as “mungkin”, “paling” and “kayak’e”. From each participant’s usage of hedges divided by each of their total utterances, it was found that female student 3 used it the most. Then, the usage was followed by male student and female student 1. Finally, female student 2 used it the least. Thus, to some extent, the idea that women used more hedges than men was proved, but not absolutely exact. What needed to be underlined was their usage was not to express uncertainty or tentativeness.

It was proved by the usages of hedges to express different functions by the participants. None of them used hedges “rek”, “cak”, “koen”, “pak”, “pek” to express uncertainty. Next, there was similarity between male student and female student 3 in using hedges. Male student was mostly used hedges to express his certainty of the proposition asserted. Female student 3 also used it mainly to convey her confidence. The different pattern occurred in female student 1’s and female student 3’s usage of hedges. Female student 1 used it mostly to mitigate the force of her utterances in order to protect both speaker and hearer’s face whereas female student 2 used it mainly to detach herself from the force of negatively utterances.

In so doing, though to some degree male student and female student 3 were concerned to mitigate their utterances and did not judge someone or something evaluatively, they used hedges which mostly functioned to express certainty. Hence, they were seen as more interested in status and independence. It implied that they wanted to emphasize their power through their certainty or confidence. Also, they wanted to show that they had power over what they said as they were certain about it and knew it better than anyone else. On the other hand, female student 1 and female student 2 also showed their certainty or confidence to a bit extent. However, they mainly considered other people's feeling by protecting both their own and addressees' face and avoid being negatively evaluative of others and positively evaluative of themselves. Thus, these two female students were seen as more concerned for seeking connection and creating intimacy with others.

## **5. Conclusion**

All of the participants in this study except female student 4 used hedges "you know", "like" and other forms of hedges. Hedges "you know" were produced in the form of "rek", "cak", "koen", "pak", "pek" whereas hedges "like" was used as "kayak". Next, other forms of hedges produced were "mungkin", "paling" and "kayak'e". In this case, the usage of hedges "rek", "cak", "koen", "pak", "pek" were merely used to express their certainty of the proposition asserted. None of the participants utilized it to express uncertainty. Hedges "kayak" was used to detach the speakers from the force of negatively utterances. Afterwards, other forms of hedges functioned to mitigate the force of utterances.

Overall, it could be noted that male student and female student 3 employed hedges to convey their domination toward others. Yet, female student 1 and female student 2 used hedges to seek good social relationship with others. Therefore, corresponding to the increasing equality between men and women, it seemed that more female students challenged the traditional gender role which viewed them submissively. Some of them used the strategies which functions were usually associated to male speaker. Hence, it could not be generalized that male student was interested in domination while female student was concerned to maintain social relationship. Each individual with their own personality had different ways in using conversational strategies regardless their gender.

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