THE HEDGES USED BY THE MAIN CHARACTERS
IN THE DA VINCI CODE NOVEL

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ABSTRACT: In uttering sentences, people need to minimize threat to others by employing negative politeness strategy. Hedges as one of the politeness strategies are words or phrases that are employed to soften utterances. This study deals with hedges in the conversations employed by the main characters in the Da Vinci Code novel, relates the results with Gricean maxims and mimetic theory based on qualitative-descriptive study. The findings show that most of the main characters employ hedges in the form of modal auxiliary verbs addressed to maxim of quality.

Keywords: Hedges, Gricean maxims, the Da Vinci Code

In uttering sentences, people sometimes say something that represents a threat to others’ expectation regarding self-image (Yule, 1996: 61). As an upshot, they employ negative politeness strategy to lessen the possible threat. Here, the speakers do not give information as is required for it might be impolite or dangerous to listeners to have cooperation with. It is contrary to what Grice (1975) says in his maxims of cooperative principle that people are normally going to provide an appropriate amount of information by telling the truth, being relevant, and trying to be as clear as they can (Yule, 1996: 37). Hedges as a part of negative politeness act to soften the impact of sentences. It means that even though people are aware of the cooperative principle, they employ hedges as a means in avoiding the danger.

Salager-Meyer (1997) affirms hedges as threat minimizing strategies, strategies to deal with certainty of knowledge that include politeness strategies in the social interactions and negotiations between writers (speakers) and readers (listeners). In this study, the researcher employs the taxonomy of hedges based on Salager-Meyer (1994) and Brown-Levinson (1987): modal auxiliary verbs (may, might, can, could, would, should); modal lexical verbs (to seem, to appear, to believe, to assume, to suggest, to estimate, to tend, to think, to argue, to indicate, to propose, to speculate); adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases (probability adjectives: e.g., possible, probable, un/likely; nouns: assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion; and adverbs: perhaps, possibly, probably, practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently); approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time (approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of); introductory phrases (I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that); if clauses (if true, if anything); compound hedges: a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (it would appear), and a lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective (it seems reasonable/probable), prosodic and kinesics hedges covers raised eyebrow, earnest
frown, the *ummm* and *ah*, and hesitation that indicates the speaker’s attitude towards what he is saying.

This current study attempts to analyze the use of hedges in real life and focus on the literary work in the form of novel entitled *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (2003). The researcher relates the hedges used by the main characters with cooperative principle and Gricean maxims. Then she relates the result with mimetic theory based on Abrams (171) concerning literary works as the resemblance of the real life.

The researcher chooses *The Da Vinci Code* for it becomes a hot topic in numerous Catholic circles. It suggests that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus Christ and had children with him. Besides, the researcher finds literatures that discuss the use of hedges in the novel but they do not relate it to mimetic approach. Because of those reasons, the researcher takes it as her point to discuss hedges in *The Da Vinci Code* novel.

**METHOD**

This research was qualitative descriptive research, since it was conducted to interpret and to formulate the patterns of the findings. Merriam (1988) and Creswell (1994) stated that qualitative research was descriptive because the researcher was interested in processing meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures. In addition, this research did not involve any statistical analysis of *The Da Vinci Code* and it describes the phenomenon which is present in the dialogs in order to study the use of hedges from researcher’s point of view.

This present study is conducted by applying mimetic and pragmatic approaches based on Abrams (1971) related to the literary works, in this case novel, which presents the analysis of hedges used by the main characters in a novel titled *the Da Vinci Code* based on pragmatics theory by Brown and Levinson (1990), types of hedges Brown and Levinson (1987) and Salager-Meyer (1994), Cooperative Principle by Paul Grice (1975) and relates it to the mimetic approach by Abrams (1971).

The study describes and analyses intensely kinds of possible hedges used by the main characters which appear in the conversation in the story. The study is conducted by taking pieces of conversations or dialogs between two or more different characters identified as having probability in using hedges. Then, the researcher also takes the conversation involving a second party or by the presence of third party, either from the same or different social status which has possibility to create misunderstanding or conflict since those parts create a possibility of hedges to appear.

The researcher chooses the main characters: Robert Langdon, Sophie Neveu, Bezu Fache, Silas, Manuel Aringarosa, Leigh Teabing, Remy Legaludec, Andre Vernet and Jerome Collet since they are mostly involved in the conversation. Besides, she does not analyse all the chapters in *The Da Vinci Code* but she chooses chapter 40 to chapter 140 for those chapters are the most thrilling chapters where the hedges mostly appear. Thrilling here means that those chapters are causing intense excitement to readers since the climax of the story started from chapter 40 and ended in chapter 104.
There were several stages in collecting the data. First, the researcher found out the data in the form of conversations by two characters or more using hedges. There were no criteria how many utterances should be examined for each character, since sometimes they were different depending on the situation and their involvement. Second, the data were identified. The researcher categorized and coded the data into a table containing the data conversation, hedges and the Gricean maxims in order to make it easier in analyzing the data. The categorization of hedges are based on the taxonomy of hedges by Brown and Levinson (1987), Salager-Meyer (1994) and Gricean Maxims (1975). The researcher then made some codes based on the initials from kinds of hedges and Gricean maxims such as modal auxiliary verbs (MAV), modal lexical verbs (MLV), maxim of quality (MQI), maxim of quantity (MQt), etc.

There were also several stages that were done following the data collection. First, the researcher analyzed the data from the conversation by relating the hedges that appear in the conversation with the situation that makes the characters employ certain kinds of hedges in certain situation between Robert Langdon, Sophie Neveu, Bezu Fache, Silas, Manuel Aringarosa, Leigh Teabing, Rèmy Legaludec, André Vernet and Jerome Collet as the main characters in the Da Vinci Code novel. Afterward, she identified and coded the data according to the type of hedges contained in the conversation. In this stage, the typology of hedges constructed of Brown-Levinson (1987) and Salager-Meyer (2001) were employed (see Chapter 1 page 4 and 5). Second, the researcher described the data which contained hedges, which were found from the novel and then she explained what kinds of hedges based on Brown-Levinson (1987) and Salager-Meyer (2001) as stated in Chapter 1 page 4 and 5 were used by the main characters in the Da Vinci Code novel. Afterwards, the data were utilized to identify the Gricean maxims based on Grice (1975) that were related to the hedges used. Third, the researcher then related the first and second research question that there is any relation between the hedges used by the main characters and the Gricean maxims or not. Finally, the researcher determined and selected the findings to be presented in the paper. The findings were selected in order to provide the findings that best represent the situation and the characters in the novel.

**FINDINGS**

This part presents the findings of the study which are divided into two findings: types of hedges based on Brown-Levinson (1990) and Salager-Meyer (1994);'s Taxonomy and the Gricean Maxims Based on Grice (1975) and hedges related to Gricean maxims (1989). There are tables presented in this study in order to ease the readers in examining the findings. Table of Type of Hedges Employed by the Main Characters in The Da Vinci Code Novel helps the readers in knowing the percentage of each type of hedges in the study. The table is presented as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Hedges</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Modal Auxiliary Verbs</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>50.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Modal Lexical Verbs</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aside from table consisting of type of hedges employed by the main characters in *The Da Vinci Code* novel, another finding is presented in the form of a table containing Gricean maxims in *The Da Vinci Code* novel.

#### Table 2 Gricean Maxim in *The Da Vinci Code* Novel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Gricean Maxim</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Maxim of Quality</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>51.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Maxim of Quantity</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Maxim of Relation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Maxim of Manner</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION**

As stated in the findings, the most commonly used hedges is modal auxiliary verbs as much as 50.19% (see Table 1). From 261 data, the example of hedges employed by the main characters can be examined as follows:

Sophie : "Is it possible," Sophie asked, drawing Langdon back, "that the key you're holding unlocks the hiding place of the Holy Grail?"

Langdon's laugh sounded forced, even to him.

Langdon : "I really can't imagine. Besides, the Grail is believed to be hidden in the United Kingdom somewhere, not France." He gave her the quick history.

Sophie : "But the Grail seems the only rational conclusion," she insisted. "We have an extremely secure key, stamped with the Priory of Sion seal, delivered to us by a member of the Priory of Sion—a brotherhood which, you just told me, are guardians of the Holy Grail."

Langdon : "Sophie, I really don't see how this key could have anything to do with the Grail."

Chapter 40, page 170, line 20

In chapter 40, Langdon reflects on Da Vinci’s past involvement with the Priory of Sion. He and Sophie discover that the address written on the key is a Swiss-style bank, which allows customers to access their safety deposit boxes in complete anonymity. In the dialog above, Sophie asks the possibility that the key held by Langdon can unlock the place of the Holy Grail or not. Langdon employs the word *can* that indicates he is unable to imagine that the key he is holding can unlock the hiding place of the Holy Grail since he believes and sure that it is hidden in the
United Kingdom, not in France where they are at that moment. If Langdon is not so sure regarding his statement, he may use modal auxiliary verb *could* to show his uncertainty since it refers to something that is less certain. The narration stated in chapter 40 also indicates that Langdon knows Sophie’s contention is logical but intuitively he cannot possibly accept it since the Grail is supposed to be in England and the location of the Holy Grail is one of the best kept secrets in history so the probability of Sophie’s grandfather (who gives the key to her) being one of the four Priory brotherhood is very slim. In accordance to that reason, Langdon employs the word *can* to show his certainty that the key his is holding cannot unlock the hiding place in the Holy Grail. This reason is strengthen by Langdon’s statement “Sophie, I really don’t see how this key could have anything to do with the Grail.”

Then, from 199 data containing Gricean maxims, 103 of them consist of maxim of quality (see Table 2). There are some examples of hedges that addressed to maxim of quality found in the novel.

| Langdon | "Actually," Langdon replied, feeling a tingle of excitement ripple through him, "the keystone is believed to have been created by the Priory sometime in the past couple of decades." |
| Sophie's eyes flashed disbelief. | Sophie | "But *if* this cryptex reveals the hiding place of the Holy Grail, why would my grandfather give it to me? I have no idea how to open it or what to do with it. I don't even know what the Holy Grail is!" |

Chapter 48, page 204, line 36

In chapter 48, Langdon and Sophie discuss the way the keystone fits into the organizational structure of the Priory of Sion and relates the cryptex with the information about the location of the Holy Grail. In the dialog above, Langdon states that the keystone is created by the Priory in the past couple of decades but he does not mention the exact location of it. In response to Langdon’s statement, Sophie gets confuse that if the cryptex has very important role in finding the Grail, then why her grandfather gives it to her while she even does not know any information about the Grail. To express her confusion, she hedges her utterances by using *if clause* in the form of *if*. It implies that she is aware of maxim of quality that after listening to Langdon’s explanation, she believes the cryptex can reveal the location of the Holy Grail but she does not how to open it.

The use of maxim of quality also emerges in chapter 48. The dialog below will show the use hedges along with maxim of quality

| Langdon hesitated a moment. | Langdon | "Sophie, you realize that *if* this is indeed the keystone, your grandfather's access to it implies he was exceptionally powerful within the Priory of Sion. He would have to have been one of the highest four members." |
| Sophie sighed. | Sophie | "He was powerful in a secret society. I'm certain of it. I *can* only *assume* it was the Priory." |

Langdon did a double take.
Langdon: "You knew he was in a secret society?"

Sophie: "I saw some things I wasn't supposed to see ten years ago. We haven't spoken since." She paused. "My grandfather was not only a ranking top member of the group... I believe he was the top member."

Chapter 48, page 205, line 39.

In the dialog above, there are three kinds of hedges employed by Langdon and Sophie; if clause (if), compound hedges in the form of a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (I can only assume), and modal lexical verb (believe). First, Langdon hedges his utterances by using the word if to tone down his confidence about the membership of Saunière in the Priory of Sion. He assumes that Saunière is one of the top four members if the thing he is holding is indeed the keystone since Saunière has an access to it. Langdon does not really sure about his assumption although he knows it is true. He is aware of maxim of quality that he has to tell the truth about what he believes but to avoid the wrong assumption, he hedge his utterance by employing the word if.

Then, Sophie employs two kinds of hedges in her utterances. First, she uses compound hedges in the form of a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content (I can only assume). After Langdon opines his opinion about Saunière’s membership in the Priory, Sophie reveals the truth about her grandfather. She says she only can assume that her grandfather is one of the top members of the Priory of Sion. She hedges her utterances by employing the word can and assume since she is aware of maxim of quality that she has to tell the truth about her grandfather by giving her assumption related to the event she witnesses ten years ago. Nevertheless, to avoid the wrong assumption hedges her sentences by employing the word can and assume.

The examples above show the hedges addressed to maxim of quality that requires the speakers to say what they believe to be true.

The analysis of types of hedges according to Brown-Levinson (1987) and Salager-Meyer (1997) shows that the most commonly used of hedges in The Da Vinci Code is modal auxiliary verbs (may, might, can, could, would, should) for they are the most common and the simplest hedges. Besides, based on the analysis of hedges addressed to Gricean maxims (1989), it can be concluded that the main characters mostly employ maxim of quality for they are faced with dangerous and risky situation so that giving information which is true is very important. Besides, the researcher also finds that the main characters employ more than one maxim in one utterance.

From the explanation above, the researcher draws a conclusion that there is a relationship between hedges and maxims that are used by the main characters in The Da Vinci Code. They use a range of linguistic devices (hedges) to qualify the things they say in regards to their adherence to the conversational maxims. As stated by Grice (1975) that we should make our contribution as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which we are engaged, it implies that in a communication, the speakers are constantly trying to understand the intention of their communication partners. Likewise, we assume that what they have to say must be relevant to us and to the current situation. In order
to obey the cooperative principle, the speakers, in this case the main characters in *The Da Vinci Code*, employ hedges to maintain a good conversational maxims.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Hedges as one of politeness strategies are frequently used by the main characters of *The Da Vinci Code* novel. There are three conclusions that are drawn by the researcher based on the answer of the research problems. Firstly, based on the first research problem about kinds of hedges which are employed by the main characters in *The Da Vinci Code* novel, the researcher finds that the main characters employ eight kinds of hedges based on Brown-Levinson’s and Salager-Meyer’s hedges that are proposed in the background of the study. From eight kinds of hedges, the most frequently used hedges is modal auxiliary verbs for they are the most common and the simplest hedges. Besides, the functions of modal auxiliary verbs are as the softener, to negotiate sensitive topics, weaken statements and also to smoothen disagreement. Moreover, modal auxiliary verbs are also employed to show the speaker’s uncertainty.

Secondly, the second conclusion is aimed to answer the second problem about maxims that are related to hedges used by the main characters. From four Gricean maxims; maxim of quality, quantity, relation and manner that are employed in this study, the researcher finds that the most frequent hedges appearing in the conversation between the main characters is related to maxim of quality (MQI) that is 103 hedges (51.76%). It is often used because the main characters are faced with dangerous and risky situation so that they have to give true information based on what they believe. Besides, maxim of quality represents the certainty knowledge about the Holy Grail, keystone, cryptex and other things related to *The Da Vinci Code* novel. Therefore, it is crucial to give information that is true according to their belief.

Thirdly, from the analysis between the first and second research problems and as the mimetic theory avowed by Abrams (1971) that says literary works as the reflection of real life, the researcher draws a conclusion that the hedges employed by the main characters in *The Da Vinci Code* novel reflect the mimetic theory. The utterances that contain hedges as shown in the novel also happens in real situation since the literary work in the form of novel is written based on phenomena which occur in real life. Besides, based on the data found in the novel that the main characters also employ more than one maxims in one utterance, it proves that the dialogs in the novel mime the real dialogs. Thus, it is true that the hedges employed by the main characters reflect the mimetic theory avowed by Abrams (1971). Besides, the researcher draws a conclusion that there is a relationship between hedges and maxims that are used by the main characters in *The Da Vinci Code*. They use a range of linguistic devices (hedges) to qualify the things they say in regards to their adherence to the conversational maxims.

This study deals with hedges as a part of politeness strategy in minimizing the impact of the speakers’ utterances. Therefore, it employs the pragmatics’ point of view. The suggestions of this study are aimed to people who deal with pragmatics and its application. There are four suggestions of this study:
The first suggestion is aimed for the teachers of pragmatics. The teachers of pragmatics may use this study as a reference to teach their students and to give the view of how actually hedges are used in conversation and in certain situation which take place in the work of art especially in mystery-detective fiction novel. The second suggestion is aimed for the students of pragmatics. The students of pragmatics may use the results of this study to enrich their knowledge about English pragmatics, especially hedges and how they are related to the maxims and mimetic approach. In addition, the results of the study provide a practical contribution in analyzing the literary work based on Linguistics’ point of view and provide students with competence in using hedges in a proper way. Then, the third suggestion is aimed for the readers of The Da Vinci Code novel. The readers of The Da Vinci Code novel may use the results of this study to improve their way to communicate by using hedges in proper way. By reading this study, the readers are expected to be critical in certain situations in which the main characters hedge their utterances. The last suggestion is aimed for future researchers. This study is still lacking in some parts and needs improvement, for instance, the researcher does not include the degree of imposition in analyzing the hedges that appear in the conversations. Hence, the future researchers who want to conduct a research in the same discipline can take the information from this study in order to get a better study. The next researchers are suggested to develop this study to get more understanding about the pragmatics and how it is applied in real life.

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