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GRADUATION MINOR THESIS
THE USE OF HEDGES IN MAKING REQUEST
BY EFL STUDENTS AT HA TINH UNIVERSITY

Ha Tinh, May, 2017
GRADUATION MINOR THESIS

THE USE OF HEDGES IN MAKING REQUEST BY EFL STUDENTS AT HA TINH UNIVERSITY

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Ha Tinh, May, 2017
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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the use of hedges by users of English; more specifically, by HTU final-year students majoring in English. The main purpose of this study is to investigate how hedges are used in making request in English spoken language. Another purpose of the study is to do an analysis to see whether EFL students, when making a request, use hedges or not and if hedges are in use, how they are used. The investigation draws on the data collected from the students’ group discussions on given topics. This research is expected to make some contributions to enhance the use of hedges in oral communication of EFL students at Ha Tinh University.
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Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale of the Study

This is a linguistic study focusing on the pragmatic differences in the use of hedges in making request. They tend to express the core information and do not have any intention to use hedges in any speaking situations. This makes their English conversations sound unnatural and their communicative purposes unsuccessful.

Making requests is part of everyday life. We often have to make requests, we may have to ask someone to do something we need, for example, asking for directions to the postoffice or the bank; or asking for other information such as train or bus schedules, for permission to do something, or we may have to ask someone to help us in some way.

Making requests is an act of language in certain contexts, the speaker issues a spokesperson to negotiate, request listeners to do a certain action in the future by honoring the listener's face to achieve certain goals.

It is important that we make our requests in acceptable ways. In request that may give the people we ask a lot of trouble, or they are our superior, we usually express our desire to be polite in some other way. Remember that a request we make will be influenced by a number of factors. For example:

1. Who are we talking to? A friend, boss, teacher, subordinate or stranger? The relationship between the people involved is important.

2. What kind of request are we making? Will it be easy for the person we ask to agree to or will it give them a lot of trouble? For example, if we are asking a friend for a $1000 loan, probably more than one reason would be given. If we want to borrow a pencil, however, a reason is hardly necessary. When asking for
the loan we would also be more likely to use a pre-request, or we can call *hence*.

So what is a hence in language? It is the notion of hedges in pragmatic. Many researchers have studied about English hedges in linguistics. Crystal & Davy (1975) said that the hedges, as a means of "softening" of words that the speaker can insert into their speeches to avoid hurting the feelings of the hearer. According to Coates (1996), hedges show indecision or uncertainty of people talking about their speeches. Hedges play a very important role in communicative success; however, learners of English are not confident enough to use hedges in communication.

Every day people use language to communicate both in conversations and in writing, they not only share bare facts, and descriptive information but also include their attitude by providing additional information. In addition to the purpose of conveying a certain message, people who join communication must consider carefully that they will talk or present what they want to say appropriately and effectively because sometimes the content of information is not as important as how the information is transmitted. In fact, hedge expressions are really useful in making us realize interpersonal and attitudinal meanings in our communication.

Using hedges to make request helps increase politeness, and delicateness, and minimize imposition on the listener. In communication, every individual wants others to respect themselves, their ego to be appreciated, especially in contexts which require people to do something for them. Behavior requirement is a behavior that will threaten inevitably the listener’s face, therefore, to achieve the desired communication, the person making the request will actively use
hedges to express appreciation of listeners by pointing out the good points of the listener, etc. to compensate for the listener face before speaking.

In the process of communication, whether between new acquaintances or those who are very close, it always potentiates risk situations, for instance, the listener misunderstand the conveyed information by the speaker, or the information that the speaker transfers cannot satisfy the listener, etc. When the speaker preconceives that after receiving information listeners can have negative reactions, the speaker will be the first person to take the consequences, the speaker will speak clearly in request to prevent or minimize the degree of response actions.

In conclusion, when we make a request, we must consider the hearer’s social relationship as well as the degree of imposition on the hearer regardless of the hearer’s personal background. At the same time, the speakers must try to minimize the face threat or avoid embarrassment by using hedges. Consequently, depending on the social status, the speakers may want to preface the request with an explanation for making the request and then determine how hedges to make request are used appropriately in a conversation.

Thus, a successful request must be made carefully, with the ultimate aim being acceptance of the utterances. When we learn English, we should pay attention to these rules so that we can avoid communication breakdowns. How to make a request naturally requires learners much knowledge of the language. Above are the main reasons that motivate the researcher to carry out this research paper “The use of hedges in making request by EFL students at Ha Tinh University”. Through the study, the researcher will investigate the reality of using hedges in communication of students at HTU and offer some suggestions
to improve the effectiveness of using hedges. Hopefully, this study would help EFL students in particular to improve their ability to communicate fluently by using hedges when they make request.

1.2. Aims of the Study
a. Survey the extent of students’ understanding of the role of hedges in communication
b. Raise their awareness of the role of hedges in making request, and of the importance of using the right politeness strategies in making request in particular and in communication in general
c. Explore problems of students in terms of using hedges in making request.
d. Give some suggestions to improve students’ ability to use hedges when they take part in a conversation.

1.3. Research questions

1. To what extent are students aware of the role of hedges in request?
2. What problems do students have in using hedges?
3. What preferences do students have for using hedges in making request in different social communicative situations?

1.4. Scope of the Study:
Within the scope of the study, we focus on the use of hedges only in making request out of so many speech acts in communication. In addition, the research investigate a relatively small group of subjects who are English majors at Ha Tinh University, and particularly who have already finished the subject of pragmatics during their course

1.5. Organization of the Study
Chapter one: Introduction presents the rationale, the aims, the research questions, the scope, and the organization of the study. This part helps provide a general look at the study.

Chapter two: Development consists of 4 main parts:

2.1. Literature review
2.2. Methodology
2.3. Findings
2.4. Discussion of findings

Chapter three: Conclusion.
2.1. Literature review

2.1.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics has been defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in speech situations with speakers and hearers involved. Utterance meaning is the main research object in pragmatics, whereas semantics focuses on sentence meaning.

For instance, from a pragmatic point of view, a statement like “It is hot today” can be an assertion about the weather, a request to turn on the air conditioner, depending on the intention of the speaker in specific situations. By contrast, from a semantic point of view, it has only a single meaning. By that way, it only indicates the state of the weather: hot and not comfortable. Evidently, depending on the speakers’ intention, the first or the second meaning would be aimed at. As can be seen, a sentence is not just a simple utterance also does a specific action.

2.1.2. Speech acts

Many utterances do not communicate information, but are equivalent to actions. These utterances are called speech acts.

According to Austin’s theory of speech acts, he said: “In attempting to express themselves, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, they perform actions via those utterances.” It means that actions performed via utterances are speech acts. They may be given some specific descriptions such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise or request. Because people often do more things with words
than simply convey what words translate, speech acts have to be seen from real-life interactions. For example, in a classroom situation, when a teacher says: 
*May I have your attention?*

The sentence is a request more than a question. The distance between what is said and what is mean are very different. Some utterances are not statements or question about some piece of information, but are actions. In this case, it is really a request which asks the hearer to pay attention, stop making noise.

In everyday interactions, people always produce utterances to achieve certain communicative intentions. And one of these interactional goals is represented by the speech act of request.

Richards defines speech acts as an utterance or a functional unit in communication. Similarly, Hymes (1972) defines them as the acts we perform when we speak. When we say “*Hello*” or “*How are you?*” that is, we have just performed an act of greeting, “*Please open the window*” – an act of requesting and so forth.

A speech act is a functional unit in communication. It is an act that the speaker performs when he makes an utterance.

We performed an act of language when we want to make a request, an apology, a greeting, an invitation, a word of permission, or a complaint ... verbal behavior can only be made in a word like "*sorry!*" to indicate acts of apology. "*Could you tell me how to use the computer?*" to make a request.

One of the speech acts that attract many people is the act of requesting. Requests are a type of speech act. In fact, the speech act of requests is important in interpersonal and intercultural communication.

2.1.3. Politeness strategies
In everyday life, communication is the common activity of human beings. Many messages are transferred through communication. Verbal acts convey a lot of different purposes of the speakers. They are used for giving information, expressing personal viewpoints or making comments, greetings, invitations, compliments, apology, complaints, or requests. Speakers want hearers to do their intended actions.

Obviously, the hearers’ willingness to follow or not follow the speakers’ wants depends on the speakers’ authority and politeness to ask them to do the actions. In this study, the politeness is referred as an important aspect observed to examine how it affects the efficiency of communication. Because people in the world always try their best to be successful communicators, politeness hence can be considered as an important communicative strategy which helps to maintain good relationships between speakers and hearers and keep the conversations going on.

According Lakoff, politeness is developed by society in order to reduce disagreement in personal interaction and it comprises three rules of politeness:

1. Don’t impose
2. Give options
3. Make the receiver feel good

The first rule, “Don’t impose”, is associated with distance and formality. The speaker shows his/her politeness by asking for permission or apologizing in advance to lessen the imposition on the hearer when requiring the hearer to do something. The second rule, “Give options”, is associated with deference. Her third rule, “Make the receiver feel good”, accounts for the case in which the speaker employs devices which will make the hearer feel liked and wanted. It is
very important when we make request, if our sentence include politeness, it will contribute to successful communication. And hedges are a part of politeness strategy mentioned.

2.1.3.1. Positive politeness

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is usually seen in groups of friends, or where people in the given social situation know each other fairly well. It usually tries to minimize the distance between them by expressing friendliness and solid interest in the hearer’s need to be respected.

2.1.3.2. Negative Politeness

According to Brown and Levinson, negative politeness is the strategy that oriented toward hearer negative face in which the speaker respects the hearer’s negative face wants. It is used to help the speaker makes an effort to minimize the imposition, and directness of his/her utterance. Therefore, negative politeness is commonly done between the interactions whose social distances are not close.

2.1.4. The face

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), ‘face is something that emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction’.

They distinguish two components of face, “positive face” and “negative face”, which are two related in any interaction. In fact, positive face is defined as the necessity to be accepted by at least some others, whereas negative face is described as the desire to be independent, the desire that the action is unimpeded by others. Following their theories, in communication, there is possibility of appearing some Face Threatening Acts (FTA) which is “by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the speaker”. To deal with those acts, they identify a
set of strategies which can help either to avoid or minimize them. Meanwhile, negative face threatening acts should be solved by applying hedges that help to minimize the imposition.

In general, politeness strategies applied in utterances are paid much attention so that the speakers avoid the imposition on the hearers and then make them possible to achieve their goal.

When speakers want to say something that may impose on hearers, they must attempt to avoid threatening the hearer’s face while saving their own face. Making requests can usually be considered to be an FTA (face threatening acts) because the speaker imposes on the hearers. When speakers are making requests, they will try to minimize the face threat either by using an appropriate strategy or by avoiding the FTA. And it is a reason why we study hedge in making requests. Because it helps the speakers reduce the power of their requests and hold the hearers’ face.

2.1.5. The concept of request

According to Nelson, a request is defined as a polite demand made by a requester who asks a favor of the other person. People make requests for various reasons in everyday when they want to interact with other people, either to obtain information or certain action, to seek support, or to acquire assistance from others. Requests show the fact that a language is not just a simple utterance at all. Because there are many problems which will certainly happen if politeness factors are ignored. In some cases, people make direct requests while others make indirect requests. Obviously, it is very important to get ourselves well prepared for those matters. No matter how different they are, politeness strategy is always a goal to reach and to do it, we have to use hedge devices.
Moreover, Brown and Levinson (1987) considered that, requests are basically threaten the hearer’s face because they are intended to threaten the hearer’s negative face (i.e., freedom of action and freedom from imposition). So there is a need to put hedges into action in order to minimize the threat and to avoid the risk of losing face. To accomplish the speech act of requests so as to maintain or establish a harmonious relationship with the hearer, there is a preference for hedges on the part of the speaker producing the request to smooth the conversational interaction. Using hedges to make request will maintaining a good relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The speaker should show sensitivity to the hearer’s feeling. For example a higher status person may or may not care so much about a lower status person’s feeling, it depends on the subjects we communicate.

2.1.6. Definition of hedges

There are many different definition of hedges, the word “hedge” or “hedging” can be broadly defined as referring to a barrier, limit, defense or act or means of protection (see The Oxford English Dictionary vs. hedge and hedging). According to Lakoff, hedges as words whose function are to make meaning fuzzier or less fuzzy. Lakoff argues that the logic of hedges requires serious semantic analysis for all predicates. Lakoff defines hedges as follows:

“For me, some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness- words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. I will refer to such words as “hedges”.

According to Brown and Levinson, hedges create a gap or distance between the utterances itself and the hearer so that the hearer’s face is not
threatened. The true intentions are encoded with the use of hedges to communicate in a way that avoids interactional threats.

In Vietnam, according Thuy (2009), she confirmed that through communicating, Vietnamese mainly focus on prolonging harmony, peace, and close friendship. Vietnamese distinguished behavior style encourages them to use hedges regularly to retain friendliness and good relationship. Therefore, hedges are mostly used to serve the purpose of saving the listener’s self-image. When giving opinions in terms of scolding, criticizing, giving advice and making claims Thuy (2009) found Vietnamese often accompanies hedges.

Furthermore, according to Nhung (2015), the purpose and cases of hedges included ask for permission when carrying out an action such as declaring, announcing, giving remarks, make softening expressions.

In conclusion, hedges are considered as a tool for everyone to protect themselves from the audience. Using hedges make a sense of neutral for the statement. Hedges are not only expressions which do not add any false or truth values to the content of an utterance, but also it is attitude makers that can be taken as an indication of speakers’ sensitivity towards the hearer.

2.1.7. Hedges in both positive and negative politeness

Based on Brown and Levinson’s treatment of hedges, it is reasoned that hedges can be used to avoid ‘assuming or presuming that anything involved in the FTA is desired or delivered by H’. This is meant that hedges can be used to indicate that speaker does not want to impose upon hearer’ desires, thus, hedges help the speaker protects negative face when they make a request to the hearer.

- The cooperative principle:
Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle (CP) which combines the basic rules operating in a conversation. The four maxims of Grice recognized are quality, quantity, relation, and manner.

- The quality states:
  + Make yourself as informative as required
  + Don’t make us contribution more informative than it is required

- The quantity maxims say:
  + Don’t say what you believe to be false
  + Don’t say that for which you lack adequate evidence

- The relevance maxims say:
  + be relevant

- Grice’s specific maxims of manner are:
  + be perspicacious
  + avoid obscurity of expression
  + avoid ambiguity

The use of hedges in positives politeness is to show that speakers want to minimize social distance with others. In the other hand, hedges in negative politeness are used when speakers recognizes and respects the hearer’s negatives face wants, and avoids or minimizes the imposition of a face – threatening act on the hearer.

2.1.8. The importance of hedges in conversations

With hedges, the willing attitude to cooperate with the others of the speakers is highlighted. George (1998) explained about hedges that “such forms also communicate the speaker’s concern that their listeners judge them to be cooperative conversational patterns”. The talkers signal that hearers do not have
to infer whether what they say has hidden meanings or not. They volunteer to consider the necessary conditions such as the hearers’ knowledge about mentioned topics, surrounding contexts before observing one or more maxims in their remarks. Speakers also open a smooth path for listeners to get the transmitted information with a lower requirement for cognitive activities. In linguistic aspect, hedges are helpful for the speakers for two prominent reasons. First, the existence of hedges in some cases gains confidence for speakers in term of giving opinion in front of the crowd, or answering journalistic interviews. Sometimes, people cannot avoid saying about unfamiliar topics; and it is not wise to use declarative statements since listeners are always ready to assess the exactness of what are said. Therefore, the second advantage is that it both reveals the speakers’ modesty and protects speakers’ self-image from their unfriendly listeners.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Research questions:

1. To what extent are students aware of the role of hedges in request?
2. What problems do students have in using hedges?
3. What preferences do students have for using hedges in making request in different social communicative situations?

2.2.2. Data collection

2.2.2.1. Instruments:

To get the data for the study, the researcher designs a questionnaire. The researcher wishes to find out the answer for three research questions. So, the questionnaire designed is appropriate with aims of the study. It is a combination of 3 open questions and 3 closed questions in the form of multiple-choice. One
of those three was made up of 6 situations that they may meet in their everyday lives. The subjects were each presented with the 6 situations, in which they were asked to request some form of action by choosing the best answer.

The subjects used hedge to express request in each situation in different social relationship (with friends, strangers, someone they dislike, teachers or boss and partners in office). Those questions particularly emphasize the social relationships in each situation, which means the use of hedges varies depending on situations.

2.2.2.2. Participants:

The participants of the study are 32 fourth-year students of English at Ha Tinh University. They are at the same ages of about 22-24 years old, all females and are mostly at intermediate level of English. All of them are native speakers of Vietnamese in Ha Tinh Province. They have learned pragmatics and it is assumed that they have knowledge of hedge in communication.

2.2.2.3. Procedure:

After designing the questionnaire, it was delivered to the participants, then, they wrote down their answers. The researcher collected and analyzed data to find out the choice of using hedges to make request from the participants. From the result of survey questionnaire, the researcher knew how the subjects use hedges to make request when they want to express their requests to different objects in different request situations in second language. Finally, their answer was explained to take the final results.

2.3. Findings

In order to find out whether students have a thorough understanding of hedges knowledge, the first three questions were introduced to ask them.
The first question asked about the purpose of using hedges in communication.

*Question 1: What is the purpose of using hedges in communication?*

Generally, the students’ answers center around these purposes: lessening the degree of directness, making the statement more polite, neutralizing the statement, and avoiding threatening the face of the hearer.

Another question is to ask the students in what situations people often use hedges.

*Question 2: In what communicative situations are hedges often used?*

Exactly half of the participants said that hedges are used in making requests and delivering bad news. Nearly one third suggested that hedges are used in asking for permission as well as responding to permission, accounting for 31.2%. A relatively small number of the students, 15.6% selected declining invitations as a situation in which hedges are used.

**Table 2.3.1:** Situations in which hedges are commonly used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decline invitations</td>
<td>5/32</td>
<td>15.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a request</td>
<td>16/32</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver bad news</td>
<td>16/32</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for permission and response to permission</td>
<td>10/32</td>
<td>31.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Question 3: To what extent does an appropriate use of hedges contribute to the success and effectiveness of communication?*

**Table 2.3.2:** The extent of influence of hedges on communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


A great deal | 10/32 | 31.3 %
Considerable | 17/32 | 53.1 %
Somewhat | 3/32 | 9.4 %
Not at all | 2/32 | 6.2 %

As indicated in Table 2.3.2, a vast majority of students said an appropriate use of hedges contribute greatly or considerably to the success of communication, making up 31.3% and 53.1% respectively. On the other hand, 9.4% said the extent of contribution is only somewhat, and it is worth noticing that a few students supposed that whether hedges are used or not does not affect the success of communication at all, making up 6.2%.

Question 4: How often do you use hedges to make request in English?

Table 2.3.3: Frequency of using hedges to make request by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>0/32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>24/32</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>8/32</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly</td>
<td>0/32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0/32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the table, we can see that when the students make a conversation, especially when speaking in English, their tendencies are they often use hedge, with 24/32 spokesmen, accounting for 75 % and 8/32 other cases chose sometimes, appropriated 25 %. Whereas the number of people said always, hardly and never is no one.
Question 5: What difficulties do you have with hedges when communicating?

Most of the participants said that they did not know how to use hedges exactly or express it rationally. They mainly based on Vietnamese’s meaning to translate into English, so they tend to use a direct statement without hedges. So in some cases, their conversations failed, and among them happened arguments.

Question 6: In the last question, there are 6 communication situations which require making request. The informants are asked to choose one out of 3 options which they think they would use in real communication. In these 3 options are one direct and less polite statement, one positive polite statement and one negative polite statement. These 6 situations are varied by 2 main factors: age and social status difference between the speaker and the hearer.

- A friend (same age, same sex)
- Someone you dislike
- A stranger
- A boss
- A teacher
- A colleague

a. Friend

In 6 situations, we have 2 situations to make for friend’s cases, from question 6.1. Each question we have 3 chosen answers:
A: Direct statements without hedges
B: Positive politeness hedges
C: Negative politeness hedges

Table 2.3.4: Students’ preferences for using hedges in situations with friends
**Q 6.1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Number of turns</th>
<th>Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct statements without hedges</td>
<td>4/32</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness hedges</td>
<td>27/32</td>
<td>84.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness hedges</td>
<td>1/32</td>
<td>3.1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown from the table, a majority of turns were given to use positive politeness hedges to make a request with their friend, accounting for 84.4 %. 12.5 % of the students were for direct statements without hedges, and 3.1 % for negative politeness hedges. So we can see that when people make a conversation with their friends, they tend to use hedges in positive politeness hedges with the highest rate. They only speak something informal to easy communicate together.

**b. Someone you dislike**

We made a question (Q6.2) to ask people when they were being bothered by a person they dislike, and there are their answers:

*A:* Don’t bother me!

*B:* Could you stop bothering me?

*C:* I was wondering if you could stop bothering me?

And we have a statistical table:

**Table 2.3.5:** Students’ preferences for using hedges in situations with people they dislike

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct statements without hedges</td>
<td>11/32</td>
<td>34.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness hedges</td>
<td>14/32</td>
<td>43.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness hedges</td>
<td>7/32</td>
<td>21.8 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are 34.4 percent students chose answer is direct statements without hedges in situations if they have to create request to someone they do not like, 43.8 percent the people used positive politeness hedges and 21.8 % is for negative politeness hedges.

c. A stranger

**Q 6.3**

**Table 2.3.6:** Students’ preferences for using hedges in situations with a stranger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct statements without hedges</td>
<td>0/32</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness hedges</td>
<td>22/32</td>
<td>68.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness hedges</td>
<td>10/32</td>
<td>31.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data show that 68.8 % students said they would like to use positive politeness hedges when they want to produce a request to a stranger who they have never met before, while none of them would use direct statements without hedges and 31.2 percent prefer to use negative politeness hedges.

d. Boss: **Q 6.4**

**Table 2.3.7:** Students’ preferences for using hedges in situations with their boss

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct statements without hedges</td>
<td>10/32</td>
<td>31.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness hedges</td>
<td>9/32</td>
<td>28.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness hedges</td>
<td>13/32</td>
<td>40.6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this situation, the data point out that although the listener is their boss but there are only 40.6 percent of students said they would use negative politeness hedges and 28.1 percent for using positive politeness hedges and 31.3 percent wanted to use direct statements without hedges.
e. Teacher: Q 6.5

Table 2.3.8: Ss’ preferences for using hedges in situations with their teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct statements without hedges</td>
<td>2/32</td>
<td>6.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness hedges</td>
<td>5/32</td>
<td>15.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness hedges</td>
<td>25/32</td>
<td>78.1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the listener is the teacher, most of the participants chose hedges which are more polite, the rate from data analyzed is 78.1 percent, 15.6 % is for positive politeness hedges, and there are only 6.3 % students who would choose direct statements without hedges in this conversation.

f. A colleague in office: Q 6.6

Table 2.3.9: Ss’ preferences for using hedges in situations with their colleague

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct statements without hedges</td>
<td>5/32</td>
<td>15.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness hedges</td>
<td>17/32</td>
<td>53.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness hedges</td>
<td>10/32</td>
<td>31.3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the data, we can see more than half of the students selected positive politeness hedges when the listener is a partner in their work place. There are 15.6 percent of students choosing direct statements without hedges and 31.3 % for hedges use at higher politeness degree.

In summary, we have a final statistical table below for the reader can easy have a general view about the data analyzed.

Table 2.3.10: Students’ preferences for using hedges in different situations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social relationship</th>
<th>Direct statements without hedges</th>
<th>Positive politeness hedges</th>
<th>Negative politeness hedges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone you dislike</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A stranger</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boss</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A colleague in office</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After we analyze all of the data from the survey questions, we had made a statistical table, we can see that the people tend to use hedges when they communicated with other people to contribute to the success and effectiveness of their communication. When their subjects are friend, they tend to use positive politeness hedges, accounting rate of 69.2%, while 16.1 percent said that they do not use hedge and 14.3 percent choose use negative politeness hedges.

With the one they dislike, or a stranger or their partner in office, they often use hedges at low level. The table show that if they dislike someone, they often use positive politeness hedges accounted for 43.8 percent, 34.4 percent never use hedges when communicating but while 21.8 percent consider that although sometimes someone bothered them but they also choose hedging devices in higher polite. Beside, in a situation, their subjects are strangers they usually use hedges at low level, accounting 54.3 %, and 27.6 % do not use hedges whereas 16.4 % use hedging devices at higher level. Similar to someone you dislike and a stranger, a colleague in office also has a same rate, because we have 53.1 % use
positive politeness hedges, 31.3 % use negative politeness hedges and 15.6 % use direct statement without hedges.

To compare with situations if their subjects are their boss or their teachers, almost people use hedges at high level. 40.6 % choose it in situations their subjects are their boss, and 78.1 % if their subjects are their teachers. There are 31.3 % they use direct statement and 28.1 % use hedges at low level if it is their bosses. Meanwhile if is their teachers, there are only 6.3 % said that they do not use hedges, and 15.6 % use hedges at low level.

So we can note that when they make a conversation with other subjects, especially their boss or their teachers who have above social position them. They always use hedges in higher polite than others, and formal.

2.4. Discussion of findings

2.4.1. To what extent are students aware of the role of hedges in request?

The data from the questionnaire indicate that most of the students are quite aware of the role that hedges play in communication in general. To illustrate this, each of the students mentioned in their survey responses about one to three purposes hedges in communication. These mentioned purposes are in accordance with the literature in chapter one. They include helping utterances minimize the imposition on the hearer, lessening the degree of directness, making the statement more polite, neutralizing the statement, and avoiding threatening the face of the hearer.

The students were also able to point out the common communicative situations in which hedges are often used, for example, in declining invitations, making a request, delivering bad news, asking for permission and responding to
permission. This proves that the students basically have the right knowledge of hedges.

With regards to the influence of hedges on the success of communication, a vast majority of participants realized that hedges either contribute greatly or considerably to the effectiveness of communication. The figure is over 80%. It means that the participants recognized the important role of hedges in communication. However, the rest of the students are still unaware of the role of hedges as nearly 16% said that this pragmatic device have insignificant or no contributions at all.

In conclusion, it can be inferred from the data we got that generally most participants have a basic and necessary understanding of the function of hedges and its important role in communication.

2.4.2. What problems do students have in using hedges?

The students all use hedges in their request, with three quarters of them saying they often use them while only a third of them use hedges sometimes.

One of the purposes of this study is find out difficulties of the students when they use hedges to make request. The answers obtained from the students revealed that most of them have difficulties in deciding which form of hedge to use for a certain situation of request. They mostly do not know which would be best and most appropriate to be used. Some of them even shared that they sometimes felt that what they had just said was just not very right and suitable.

A number of the students said that they can not escape the influence of mother tongue. They often translate directly from Vietnamese into English, which causes problems since expressions in Vietnamese are not the same as the ones in English when making the same request. As a result, the meaning could be
conveyed to the hearer, but they do not gain a natural style and use of the English language. One student wrote that if the two speakers were Vietnamese, that would not be a big problem, but if she were speaking to a native speaker, she thought that would be very awkward to make a request which sounds not like an English request.

A few students shared that they are not able to use suitable request for different social relationships. It means that in different situations with speakers of different relationships, they tend to make only direct request. As a result, a request may sound more like a command and may not be appropriate when the speaker is smaller than the hearer in age or when the speaker and the hearer are not close in relationship. One student added that this problem arises from the fact that students have not given enough and adequate practice in making request, and so making request in an English way has not become a fluent act of communication.

2.4.3. What preferences do students have for using hedges in making request in different social communicative situations?

According to Lakoff (1973), there are two types of distance: social distance and psychological distance. Social distance is a function of such variables as age, sex, and social relationship. Psychological distance is related to the way one person perceives another in relation to himself. The surveyed subjects are all girls in term of sex, from 22-24 years old in term of age, and they are all the fourth-years students at Ha Tinh University. That means in reality they do not have social distance. But we gave imaginary communicative situations in which distance is almost absent or insignificant in 2 situations, and is present in the other 4 situations in different degrees. For example, two colleagues will often
have less distance than an employee and the boss; or two colleagues of different sex will often have more social distance than those of the same sex. Normally, communication situations between people with more distance require a greater degree of formality or politeness. Positive politeness hedges are often used between 2 friends and help to minimize the distance between them and create a feeling of friendliness. Meanwhile, negative politeness hedges help to maintain social distance and to avoid imposing on the hearer and threatening the hearer’s face.

**Request to a friend of the same age**

Firstly concerning the case in which social relationship is friend (same age, same sex), we make up 1 different discourse question which is responded by 32 people. It shows that when they communicated with their friends they often tend to use positive politeness hedges. It accounts for 84.4 percent. The data show that in common, the majority of students mainly choose the way to communicate with their friend in less polite and more informal expressions. It shows their respect to their friend, and is a way of maintaining their friendship. However, there is still one student choosing negative politeness expressions, which does not seem to be an appropriate response because in normal relationships between friends, people are not too formal and polite. Being too polite to a friend even creates the feeling of the face being threatened and in some way causes social distance.

**Request to someone you dislike**

In situation 6.2 where the subject is the person they dislike, 34.4 percent use a direct statement without using hedges when they make request, but the majority of students use either positive or negative politeness hedges for this
group of people, accounting for 65.6 percent. This suggests that although they do not like the person, they still show some kind of politeness in order to save the person’s face. The figure of 21.8% who chose negative politeness hedges indicates further that they want to keep some distance from the person they do not like. So in Lakoff’s definition, this could mean psychological distance. On the contrary, 34.4% of those choosing direct request indicates that they prefer to express themselves and their own feelings of dislike rather than trying to protect the person’s face. This is an aggressive way of getting away from someone they do not like.

**Request to a stranger**

From question 6.3, the given situation is where the subject is a stranger. With a stranger they have never met before, to hope them perform the request, people are generally expected and are advisory to show their politeness and respect to them, avoid imposing the request on them, not making them lose the face and most importantly they need these people to do what they want. In this study, all of the students are aware of this communication principle, and thus none of them chose direct statements without hedges to ask a stranger for directions. However, most of them have preference for positive politeness statements more than negative statements.

**Request to the boss**

In situation 6.4 where the subject is their boss, which they ask for help from their boss to repair their computer because it was broken down. The majority of students are inclined to choose either positive or negative politeness hedges, which is suitable and expected in such a situation. However, it is noticeable that a considerable number of students have preference for direct
request. In fact, when the subject is a person who has a higher status than us, we are often supposed to use indirect ways to make request by using hedges at high politeness level. It not only shows our respect to them, but also protects their face. Of course, when the subject is our boss, to request them do what we want is a difficulty, if we are careless, we are easy to be hated. So it is important to pay attention to this by using hedges in the highest politeness to lessen the directness in our request and the boss is often more likely to accept our request.

**Request to the teacher**

Similarly, when communication occurs between a student and a teacher, the expectation is often that there should be respect from students by way of politeness expressions. In situation 6.5, a large number of students choose hedges in more politeness hedges, the rate from data analyzed is 78.1 percent. However, two of the students chose direct statements to make the request to teacher.

One limitation of this study is we did not interview these people to see the reason for these choices of direct statements to their boss and teacher. There are three main assumptions: they are not aware of this principle, or they are trying to establish closeness and friendliness to their boss and teacher, to lessen the atmosphere, or this might show the interference of mother tongue since in Vietnamese language, expression of politeness is not only done by words but also by intonation.

**Request to a colleague of the same age**

And the last, situation 6.6 is where the subject is their colleague at their work place. In this kind of environment, social distance can vary. Distance is lessened as people at the same work place often know each other quite well. But
there are factors such as difference in age or sex which can influence social distance. The situation we gave in this study is between 2 workers who are the same age, which means social distance is to some extent reduced, and so it does not require high formality in their communication. However, 10 students answered they would choose negative politeness hedges. In fact, negative politeness is not necessary in this situation. Just positive politeness hedge is appropriate, or even a direct request is acceptable if the two workers are in a close relationship.

The students’ answers to these 6 situations not only tells us about their preferences and tendencies in using hedges and in making request as well, but they also reflect some of the problems investigated in research question 2. For example, some students said they had difficulty in deciding which form of expression to use in a given communication context. Some of them would use negative politeness hedges to communicate with their friend or with their colleague, and there are students who would make direct request to such people as their boss and teacher.
Chapter Three: CONCLUSION

3.1. Summary

Overall, the results of the study showed that the EFL students at Ha Tinh University have an insight into hedges in making request and they generally understand the role of hedges in communication. A number of students shared their difficulties in using hedges and in making request which may be caused by insufficient practice and in some cases by the effect of mother tongue. Some of these problems are seen through their answers to the 6 communicative situations.

We suggest that to help our conversation to be successful and maintain our relation in communicating particularly when we want to make request to other people, we have to pay attention to politeness strategy.

Hedge is a part of a language. It is not only important for experts but also language learners. Hedges enrich the images in everyday life speech as well as in written texts. It also reflexes the knowledge of the users. In learning a second foreign language, beside the necessity of language skills and professional knowledge, whenever you want to make a request to other people, you should use hedges to lessen the degree of directness.

It is observed that the communicating partner’s parameter including distance and power has a great effect on the choice of hedging strategies of Vietnamese who learns English. As regard with social relationship, they apparently make a request in more polite to the boss and the teacher, and in less polite or no hedges to the friend, the stranger, the one they dislike and the colleague in office.

To make a successful conversation, avoid threatening to the face of other people when we want to request someone to do something, you should use
hedges in your speech, “requests may pose a threat to hearer’s negative face, for example, the freedom of action and freedom from imposition, the speaker has to mitigate the illocutionary force of his or her utterance to protect the hearer’s autonomy” (Brown & Levinson, 1987). So, this is a reason why we make the study, we want to help people recognize how to request effectively is considered really carefully.

Hopefully, this study can contribute to the improvement of English learning for students majoring in English at HTU.

3.2. Implications

3.2.1. For the students

According to Vo (2012) “The inappropriate use of request strategy, which may result in the face threat to the hearer, makes it difficult for many Vietnamese EFL learners to be accepted in interactions in the target language culture”. Therefore, below are some implications suggested to Vietnamese learners of English can get success when requesting.

First of all, the students may read materials in monolingual books to learn the use of hedges in English, when they make request or in other situations too and then practice them in everyday conversations with their partners in their class and in the real life to acquire knowledge about hedges in making request.

Hedges are a powerful strategy in communicative interactions so the students should learn this device to help them to become more successfully in communications. They have to understand both theory and practice so that they will no more feel confused when using it. When they are confident with knowledge, they will probably have ability to translate correctly what they want to the hearer in appreciate situations.
The students’ limitation in using hedges may be due to the unawareness of knowledge of different types of hedges, also the functions of hedges and the shortage of practice this device. In some of contexts, they use direct request but sometime it is not appropriate, which may be threat hearer’s face. That causes the failure in communication. There are some outdoor activities that students should take part in improving their communication skills as English speaking clubs or contests having the native speakers English.

3.2.2. For the teacher

I recommend the teachers should allow their classes to take part in the activities such as speaking matters of argument, everyday conversation, or responding to some undesirable state-of-affairs which compelling they have to use hedges and practice with many different subjects.

Through these activities, the learners can be trained in a good environment where they can have chances to use hedges to express their point of view, protect their face as well as signal their attitude towards the desirable or undesirable aspects of the things presented in their utterances. Moreover, the learners will probably express successfully their information as well as to convey their attitude to the other participants in communications.

3.3 Suggestions for further research

Future research that considers the use of hedges or virtually any other aspect of learner language should highlight what type of data and tasks are being analyzed and compare them to others. At the very least, more research studies should at least note the limitations to generalizability based on the context and task type of the data.
A further challenge in all task-based research is the variability brought in by the participant. Duff (1993) encountered the problem that the participant in her study often interpreted the task in some other way, and did something entirely unexpected. I have also encountered this situation, although rarely, in my own data. It is therefore not always clear that the examinee understands the task that they are asked to perform or that they understand it in the same way as the tester. This is a consideration that further research could examine explicitly using a questionnaire.
References.

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Brown and Levinson (1987), Politeness theory

Bruce Fraser (2010) Pragmatic competence: the case of hedging

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The definition of hedges from Cambridge dictionary


Appendices

1. What is the purpose of using hedge in communication?

2. In what communicative situations are hedges used?

3. To what extent does an appropriate use of hedges contribute to the success and effectiveness of communication?

4. How often do you use hedges to make request in English? Tick one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometime</th>
<th>Hardly</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What difficulties do you have with hedges when communicating?

6. The following are 15 communicative situations in which a request is made. If you were in these situations, what option would you take?

6.1. Ask your friend to return a book they borrowed.
   - A. Give my book back, I have to do homework
   - B. Can you return the book to me, please?
   - C. As you probably know, I need the book for a test tomorrow, I was wondering if you could return it to me?

6.2. There is a person who often bothers you, you dislike him, you want him to stop it and you will say.
   - A. Don’t bother me!
   - B. Could you stop bothering me?
   - C. I was wondering if you could stop bothering me?

6.3. You want to go to the supermarket, but you don’t remember how to get there. You stop a stranger in the street to ask for directions.
   - A. Where is the nearest Supermarket?
B. Can you tell me where the Supermarket is, please?
C. Excuse me. I wonder if you can tell me where the Supermarket is

6.4. You have to finish your work, but your computer is broken down, you want to ask your boss to help you repair it.
   A. Help me repair my computer.
   B. Could you give me a hand? My computer doesn’t work.
   C. I am sorry to bother you, but would you mind helping repair my computer?

6.5. You are having trouble with your homework. You would like to ask for help from your teacher, you phone her, you’ll say.
   A. Help me do homework, please.
   B. Ms Thuy, could you help me explain it, please?
   C. Excuse me, Ms Thuy I would really appreciate it if you could help me explain this question?

6.6. Requesting that a new co-worker who is the same age as yours helps you move a very heavy trunk.
   A. Thomas? Come on, help me move this heavy trunk
   B. May I ask you for your help?
   C. Would you mind giving me a hand with this trunk?