

The Use of Hedging Devices in Humanistic Buddhist Written Works

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Abstract

People put importance to communication regardless of cultural, political, intellectual or spiritual stance. They seek balance in life by developing their self-actualization and flourishing their social interaction. This mantra is embodied by a particular Buddhist philosophy – Humanistic Buddhism led by Venerable Master Hsing Yun (2011). He believes with the three acts of goodness, one of which, the use of right words to achieve happiness and peace. One language phenomenon that speaks of careful usage of words to produce harmonious relationship between and among people is hedging device. Hedging devices are words or phrases that allow writers/speakers to express their claims with caution, humility, and accuracy. The use of hedging device is an effective linguistic strategy in delivering balanced and well supported claims (leaving some rooms for their readers/listeners to judge). Hence, this paper focused on the three written works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun entitled “The Four Noble Truths: The Essence of Buddhism”, “A Glimpse of Chan through the Six Patriarch’s Platform Sutra”, and “The Essence of Chan” translated by Amy Lam and Susan Tidwell. Using these three booklets, this paper studied the hedging devices by enumerating the most frequently used hedging devices (e.g. *can, if, will, may* and more), presenting their functions, and detecting any trends or patterns present in the three stated works. The linguistic pattern may set as an angle to recount or analyze in Humanistic Buddhism’s written works.

Keywords: hedges, hedging devices, Buddhism, Humanistic Buddhism

1. Introduction

Communication, among the fields of innovation, is a very essential element that can destroy or attain harmony in every relationship. Most people put importance to communication regardless of their cultural, political, intellectual or spiritual stance. Despite the tremendous effects of the technological advancements specifically in communication, people still find it hard to attain happiness and peace; hence, they seek balance in life by developing their self-actualization and flourishing their social interaction either in verbal or written form. This particular mantra is embodied by a particular Buddhist philosophy – Humanistic Buddhism.

Humanistic Buddhism is a modern Buddhist philosophy that claims to beset all of the Buddhist teachings. One of the forefront leaders in the modern reformation of Buddhism and one of the most notable proponents of Humanistic Buddhism is Venerable Master Hsing Yun. He is a Chinese Buddhist monk who commenced and established Fo Guang Shan and Buddha's Light International Association - the two of the largest international Buddhist organizations. Venerable Master Hsing Yun, a revered Buddhist leader, is an inspiring speaker and writer who is known for delicately handling his words in his speeches, lectures, and books. He has written numerous books and three of these great works are "The Four Noble Truths: The Essence of Buddhism" (Yun, 2011) , "A Glimpse of Chan through the Six Patriarch's Platform Sutra" (Yun, 2004), and "The Essence of Chan" (Yun, 2008) translated by Amy Lam and Susan Tidwell.

2. Importance of the Study

These three booklets were chosen for three reasons. First, the three booklets are all interrelated with each other. They propose a formative notion that in order to attain true happiness and perfect peace all forms of sufferings must be annihilated, Chan teachings must be applied, and Chan must be effectuated. Second, regardless of race or religion, these booklets can easily be understood by many readers because they are all introduction of Chan concepts or Buddhist teachings. Third, they are all translated by the same writers – Amy Lam and Susan Tidwell. It is important to choose materials translated by the same writers in order to preserve a similar quality of the finished translated product. By doing so, this could uphold and retain the consistency expected from the translators.

It is important to note that since religion is something personal and could be a sensitive topic to other people, words should deftly be chosen and written. However, there have been very few or no studies yet regarding this. Therefore, studying and finding out if there is an evident care in choosing words to write these booklets may positively gain acceptance to its readers regardless of race and religion, attain the goal of distributing "The Buddhism in Every Step" booklets to people all over the world, and counterbalance the Dharma of Humanistic Buddhism that is to teach but not to over impose and to be compassionate but not superficial and thoughtless. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze these three reading materials.

3. Hedging Device

One language phenomenon that speaks of careful usage of words to produce harmonious relationship between and among people is a hedging device. Hedge as a linguistic device is first introduced and explored by George Lakoff during the early 70s. He associated hedging devices as words that "make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (Lakoff, 1972, p. 195) which can make statements cordial because they are expressed as neither true nor false or either true or false. *Actually, essentially, sort of, in a way* are just few of the examples of this rhetorical device. Skelton (1988) also supported this idea and said that the use of hedging device is an effective linguistic strategy in delivering balanced and well supported claims (leaving some rooms for their readers/listeners to judge) because writers/speakers "use language with subtlety, to mean precisely and with discrimination" (p.107). This device can be used in formal discourses (writing research or delivering public speeches) or in informal discourses (casual conversation with friends or strangers).

Accordingly, Hyland (1996) defines hedging as "the expression of tentativeness and possibility" (p. 433). These are words or phrases that allow writers/speakers to express their claims with caution, humility, and accuracy. Indeed, using hedges is writers' or speakers' effective tool to express their thoughts in an energetic and at the same time endearing ways. Further, these hedges can increase the accuracy of works and allow writers/speakers "to convey their attitude to the truth of their statements and to anticipate possible objections" (Hyland, 1996, p.2). Imperatively, hedges are important written or spoken language strategy that may be employed to lessen the risk of being wrong because it tones down the utterances/statements; therefore, it can be said that hedges avoid face-threatening-acts (Salager-Meyer, 1994) and promote social harmony (Parton, Siltanen, Hosman, & Langenderfer, 2002).

In general, hedges embody a refinement of words and manifest politeness of thoughts as a rhetorical strategy. Thus, this strategy linguistically supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Lakoff's (1973) proposition that speakers try to observe the three maxims of the politeness principle – not to impose ideas, to give options to the listeners, and to make them feel good. Further, Holmes (1995), Brown and Levinson (2000) and Buitkiene (2006) are the four of the many scholars who exhibited the relationship of the use of hedging devices and the signs of politeness in their works. This could be the reason why this type of linguistic strategy is said to be widely used in informal or formal exchange of communications, spoken or written discourses. As a matter of fact, studies about hedging devices have been extensively done in the different areas like politics, medicine, biology, physics, engineering, business, and academic discourse.

In spoken discourses, four political interviews from CNN and BBC websites were analyzed and it is then concluded that "the use of hedges in political interviews also contributes to the implementation of positive as well as negative politeness strategies" (Jalilifar & Alavi, 2011, p. 43). Using hedges in speeches is considered to be a political rhetoric that is tactful and strategic in manner. Also, physicians' spoken discourse was analyzed by Prince, Frader, and Bosk (1982). They said that the use of hedging devices facilitates the physicians' presentation of knowledge. In line with this, Holmes (1988) enumerated 350 hedges that function as mitigating markers present in conversation.

In written discourses, Butler (1990) presented the modals being used in biology and physics texts and stated that they "serve the weighing of evidence and the careful drawing of conclusions from data, in the making of claims from evidence, and more particularly in making generalizations" (p. 139). In this particular aspect, hedges serve as a clear indicator in forming acceptable hypotheses. Additionally, Mojica (2005) presented Filipino authors' scopes of using hedging devices. This subject is important to be pointed out because hedging devices are also said to express "an attitude of objectivity" (Hatmaker, 2010, para. 1). For most academic readers, objectivity always goes hand in hand with the quality of work and the credibility of the writer. Further, Nasiri (2012) presented that American and Iranian writers of the leading Civil Engineering journals both employ the use of hedging devices. This study supports the idea that the authors' cultural backgrounds do not conduce a significant impact in writing rather it is the orientation in the field of discipline that the authors belong to.

In line with the studies that have been prospected in written discourse, it can be said that cautious language is a prominent earmark of academic writing. In properly executing

this, writers utilize hedging devices in their written works. Most writers' four major reasons in using hedges are enumerated in "Hedging in Academic Writing". They are as follows:

1. By hedging, authors tone down their statements in order to **reduce the risk of opposition...**
2. Writers want their readers to know that they do not claim to have the final word on the subject...One could consider hedges as **ways of being more precise in reporting results...**
3. Hedges may be understood as positive or negative politeness strategies in which the writer tries **to appear humble rather than arrogant or all-knowing**. Hedging is a rational interpersonal strategy which supports the writer's position, builds writer-reader relationships and guarantees a certain level of acceptability in a community...
4. A certain degree of hedging has become conventionalized; hedging now functions **to conform to an established writing style in English**. para. 5

Since hedges are said to be polypragmatic in nature, each hedging device can function in multiform (Hyland, 1996). This can be the reason why many linguists proposed several taxonomies of hedging devices. As can be seen in Table 2, Salager-Meyer (1995) has modals, introductory phrases, approximators, compound hedges, and conditional clauses in her work. The five categories, she presented, are as follows:

Table 2. *Salager-Meyer's Taxonomy of Hedges*

Type	Functions	Strategies
Type 1	All modal verbs expressing possibility, semi auxiliaries, probability adverbs, epistemic verbs	Shields
Type 2	Quantity, degree, frequency, and time: Approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally	Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time
Type 3	I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that	Authors' personal doubt and direct involvement
Type 4	Extremely difficult/ interesting, of particular importance, unexpectedly, surprisingly	Emotionally-charged intensifiers
Type 5	Could be suggested, would seem likely, would seem somewhat	Compound hedges

Source: Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*. 13(2), 149-171.

Clemen (1997) has a work that closely resembles with Salager-Meyer (1995) except that she added passive voice, concessive conjuncts, particles, and comments on value- and truth-judgement as hedges too. Later, Hinkel (2004) and Hyland (2005) came up with a more detailed distribution of items for their list of hedges. But the most recent is that of Laurinaityte (2011) who came up with a table summarizing the works done by some of the aforementioned linguists regarding the suggested taxonomies.

Table 1. *Laurinaityte's Summary of Taxonomy of Hedges*

Items		Salager-Meyer	Clemen	Hinkel	Hyland	Other	
Conventional hedges	Modal auxiliary verbs	+	+	+	+	Vold	
	Modal lexical verbs	+	+	+	+	Vold	
	Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases	Probability (possibility) adjectives	+	+	+	+	Vold
		Nouns					
Adverbs							
Passive voice		N/A	+	+	+ ²	Hagge and Kostelnik	
Modal-adverb expressions		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hoye	
Introductory phrases		+	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hagge and Kostelnik	
Concessive conjuncts		N/A	+	+ ³	N/A	Hartman	
Particles		N/A	+	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Approximators	Degree	+	+	+	+	N/A	
	Indefinite quantifiers						
	Indefinite frequency and time						
Compound hedges	Modal auxiliary verb with lexical verb	+	+	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	Lexical verb with adjective or adverb						
Conditional clauses		+	+	+	+	N/A	
That clauses		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Buitkienė	
Comments on value-judgement		N/A	+	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Comments on truth-judgement		N/A	+	N/A	N/A	N/A	
References		N/A	N/A	N/A	+	N/A	
Qualification		N/A	N/A	N/A	+	N/A	
Pronouns		N/A	N/A	+	+	Hagge and Kostelnik; Banks	
Indefinite article		N/A	N/A	N/A	+	N/A	
Questions		N/A	N/A	+	+	N/A	
Tag questions		N/A	N/A	+	N/A	Holmes	
Pragmatic tags		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Holmes	
Conversational hedges		N/A	N/A	+	N/A	Quaglio	

Source: Laurinaityte, R. (2011). *Hedges in political discourse*. Unpublished M. A. English Philology thesis, Vilnius Pedagogical University, Vilnius, Lithuania. (pp. 21-22).

Evidently, many linguists have explored different fields to study the use of hedging devices but there seem to have very rare studies (or none yet) in the field of religion specifically Buddhism. Hence, this paper attempts to discover the hedging devices used by Humanistic Buddhist writers by answering the following questions:

1. What are the most frequently used hedging devices in the three booklets of “Buddhism in Every Step”?
2. What are the functions of the used hedging devices?
3. What trend(s) or pattern(s) can be presented in the three stated works?

Methodology

This paper conducted both qualitative and quantitative methods. The three written works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun entitled “The Four Noble Truths: The Essence of Buddhism” (TFNT), “A Glimpse of Chan” (AGC), and “The Essence of Chan” (TEC) translated by Amy Lam and Susan Tidwell were used. Master Hsing Yun, together with the translators, is addressed as the writers of these three works.

Procedure

In order to get the results of this study, the researcher completed a three-step methodology. Firstly, the researcher applied frequency count of the hedging devices used in each booklet to enumerate the most frequently used hedges. All hedges were highlighted, counted, and tabulated. To ensure quality measurement of the first step, three inter raters were asked to thoroughly read and evaluate the chosen booklets. Secondly, in order to present the function of each hedge in the frequency count table, each of it was classified according to the different levels of strategies. Modifying Laurinaityte (2011) and Markkanen and Schroder’s (1991) studies, the functions and strategies of the used hedging devices were classified. This study only focused on the four classifications (conventional, compound, conditional, and passive hedges) because the other classifications appear very minimal and insignificant. Lastly, the pattern was affirmed according to its dominant existence in the frequency count and classification tables. From the predominant answers, the trends or patterns were presented.

Results and Discussion

The Most Frequently Used Hedging Devices

Table 3. *The Most Frequently Used Hedging Devices in the Three Booklets of “Buddhism in Every Step”*

Hedging Devices	TFNT	AGC	TEC	Freq	%
can	95	38	35	168	26
if	45	31	17	93	14
will	47	16	19	82	13
may	18	18	0	36	6
some	26	6	4	36	6
many	15	11	4	30	5
would	8	15	5	28	4
should	17	3	3	23	4
have been	8	2	3	13	2
could	1	4	5	10	2

Table 3 presents the frequency count of the top ten predominantly used hedging devices of the three booklets of “Buddhism in Every Step”. As can be seen, *can*, *if*, and *will* are consistently the top three hedging in the three booklets.

Can in all the three booklets garner the highest percentage (26%). *Can* is a modal auxiliary verb that expresses possibility (Keck & Biber, 2004). Additionally, the use of *can* in this study can support Hyland’s (1998) proposal that “hedges are the means by which writers can present a proposition as an option rather than a fact” (p.5). This particular hedging device expresses openness to possibilities that “refers to the external circumstances making something possible” (Coates, 1983 as cited in Hidayati, Muhammad, & Dallyono, 2008, p. 33). By using *can*, Humanistic Buddhist writers open themselves to the idea that their readers may have other choices; hence, they give them the option to do it or not to do it. This can be an integral approach to use especially in this type of reading material like religious doctrine. To quote some statements:

- (1) *Therefore, every one of us can experience Chan. (TEC)*
- (2) *From this exchange, we can see that while our teachers are there to guide our practice, only we can realize the truth for ourselves. (AGC)*
- (3) *Once we know the true nature of suffering, we can find a way to end our suffering. (TFNT)*

It can be implied in sentence (1) that *can* is used to present the idea that everyone has capability and is given a chance to experience Chan. By stating this, the reader may feel that it is not compulsory to experience Chan but it can be an option. Sentence (2) reiterates the use of *can* as a hedging device as it allows the readers to see the circumstance (that teachers are there to guide their practice) and gives them the option (to realize the truth for themselves). Sentence (3) has *can* to tell the readers that they have the possibility to “find a way to end their suffering”. It can then be stated that Humanistic Buddhist writers give their readers option to decide for themselves. If not, they could have expressed the statements as something forceful or prescriptivist. But they expressed their ideas in a more polite way by using *can* so that their claims can appear to be tentative and flexible. Also, they have the option to remove *can* in sentences (1) to (3). However, they would sound like their propositions are exclusive only to Buddhists; consequently, this will limit the audience of the

booklets. Having said so, Humanistic Buddhist writers' use of *can* made the propositions endearing.

The second mostly used hedging is *if*. In nature, *if* states a conditional statement. It expresses that proposition is hypothetical or probable. As in

- (4) ***If*** we can fully understand the sources of suffering and find ways to overcome them, then we can free ourselves from the deep sea of suffering and enjoy real happiness. (TFNT)
- (5) ***If*** we can comprehend this point, we can experience the world of Chan. (AGC)
- (6) ***If*** we use our typical way of thinking then we will fail to understand the Chan masters. (TEC)

If in sentence (4) states that detachment from suffering and attainment of real happiness are likely to happen with full understanding of the roots of suffering and finding ways to conquer them. Master Hsing Yun somewhat wants to tell in sentence (5) that when readers understand the importance of contemplation, Chan may probably be experienced. In sentence (6), *if* connotes a hypothetical thought. Say, there is a failure to understand Chan when one observes the typical way of thinking.

Using *if* as a hedging device when presenting a possible cause and effect but trying to reserve some rooms for uncertainty could be another courteous way of stating the writer's propositions. Omission of *if* can make the statements appear over bearing and may attract misunderstanding or contradiction; thus, it may be considered as a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and may defeat the purpose of modern Humanistic Buddhism. Accordingly, the writer appears to be accustomed to using *if* when stating conditional statements; otherwise, he could have used *unless*, *provided that*, *as long as*, and others. This may suggest to the readers that toning down the propositions is part of the writer's nature to properly acknowledge the other position by using *if*.

The next predominantly used hedging device is *will*. Some of the sentences written with *will* are:

- (7) Similarly, our actions ***will*** determine our karmic effect. (TFNT)
- (8) One day, in a flash of insight, we ***will*** be able to see the truth. (AGC)
- (9) The moment you succeed in passing his test, he ***will*** use his words of wisdom to rid you of your arrogance. (TEC)

Humanistic Buddhist writers preferred to use a futuristic tone by using *will* as a hedging device. In a way, this "protects him [them] from making possible false statements, provides him [them] a graceful way out and increases the credibility of his [their] utterance[s]" (Clemen, 1997, p. 241). A futuristic tone is important to be emphasized since an effect of one action may vary from person to person due to the many factors to be considered (e.g. person's disposition, past action, culture). Aside from the fact that *will* in these sentences "forecast" a possible occurrence, this also projects ascertainment to the readers (Hidayati, et al., 2008, p. 33).

Although *may* has an overall rank as the fourth most recurrently used hedging, its appearance is not consistent unlike with *can*, *if*, and *will* as projected in Table 4. Although, it

can be said that same with other modal auxiliaries, *may* expresses possibility. The use of *may* in the booklets can be a sign of cautionary device by the writers to give their readers the freedom to choose. Chiefly, *may* has a nature to denote permission, option, and/or assumption.

1. The Hedging Devices' Functions

After learning about the most frequently used hedging, it is also significant to discover the functions of these hedging devices.

Table 4. *The functions of the used hedging devices*

Classifications	Functions	Freq	%
Conventional Hedges	Modal Verbs	358	55%
	Introductory Verbs	13	2%
	Adverbs	55	9%
	Adjectives	78	12%
Compound Hedges	Compound Hedges	18	3%
Conditional Hedges	Conditional Hedges	93	14%
Passive Voice	Passive Voice	31	5%

The functions used in the three booklets are presented in Table 4. To better understand the distribution of the hedging devices, the examples are:

- (1) For modal verbs
can, will, could, would, should, must, may, might
- (2) For introductory verbs
seem, like, suggest, consider, think, want
- (3) For adverbs
sometimes, often, almost, about, closely, already, please, actually, accordingly, supposedly, similarly, hardly, fortunately, unfortunately, hurriedly, indirectly, gladly, immediately, apparently, finally, highly, directly, concurrently, certainly, completely, constantly, unconditionally, eventually, reluctantly
- (4) For adjectives
some, many, numerous
- (5) For compound hedges
very much like, must tirelessly, at other times, would like, some kind of, for example, will surely, will appear, hope you will, automatically think, most people think, some of us may, entirely up, while at other, may think

(6) For conditional hedges

if

(7) For passive voice

The use of by, for example, "He was highly respected by his subordinates."

Table 4 shows that modal auxiliaries, although composed of only eight hedging devices, have the highest frequency. In most studies done, a grammatical function that has been consistently used and cited is the modal auxiliaries as hedging (McLaren-Hankin, 2008). In this study, modal auxiliaries have the towering 55% probably because the writers have a complete awareness of their position (as writers and servants of Buddha) and the readers of their works (Buddhists and potential Buddhists). It can be said then that cautious language in the form of modal auxiliaries is highly predominant in the three booklets. It could be implied that Master Hsing Yun together with his translators open themselves to the opinion of other people by using hedging devices "to make sentences more acceptable and thus to increase their chance of ratification" (Hubler, 1983, p. 23).

According to Wilamova (2005), "pseudoconditionals are typically represented by *if*-clauses" (p. 86) which is another interesting point to highlight in this study because *if* is remarkably used as a conditional hedge. Indeed, the wide scope of this word to mitigate ones proposition is evidently present. While other studies about hedging devices mostly have modal auxiliaries as the top three frequently used hedging (e.g, Peterlin, 2010; Pindi & Bloor, 1987), it is distinguishable that conditional statements are comprehensively utilized in the three booklets. Humanistic Buddhist writers probably use a conditional hedge very often to allow their readers to imagine the situation themselves. This could be a cordial way of letting their readers know that they welcome their thoughts and opinions. In a way the three maxims of politeness principle are present in the Humanistic Buddhist written works.

In line with politeness principle and the functions of these hedging devices, Markkanen and Schroder (1997) suggested five relevant levels of strategies (politeness, indirectness, mitigation, vagueness, and understatement). They presented that a single function may have overlapping strategies, that is, a modal auxiliary may show politeness, indirectness, and mitigation all at the same time. This is indeed true to the present study where politeness, indirectness, and mitigation are most of the time all together noticeable in a single function. For example,

(10) *Once we know the true nature of suffering, we **can** find a way to end our suffering. (TFNT)*

(11) *A proper understanding of religion **will** give us the strength to overcome hardships willingly. (TFNT)*

(12) *It **may** also be compared to a criminal who is freed after serving a prison term. (TFNT)*

A certain function may have several strategies as shown in the three examples above. Definitely, the use of modal auxiliaries in his propositions made his way of writing aligned

with the rules of politeness: “formality, hesitancy, and equality” (Lakoff, 1977, p. 88). Humanistic Buddhist writers tried to make themselves clear by giving readers options, by making them feel equal to him, and by not imposing strong claims. This made them somehow project modesty and politeness to their audience. They give options to the readers, permit the readers to decide for themselves, and assume that other readers may have different preference or orientation; thereby, making the statements indirect. Indirectness also covers the nature of non-imposing statements like instead of saying, “Chan is achieved” it is, “Chan may be achieved”.

Vagueness and understatement strategies are not significant at all in this study. Wilamova (2005) stated that “markers of intentional vagueness are represented by pragmatic expressions such as *a kind of, sort of thing*” (p. 90). The appearance of these expressions is only four out of the six hundred forty-six hedging devices.

2. The Trend(s) or Pattern(s) of The Three Works

There are three significant patterns noticeable in the three booklets.

First, the top three frequently used hedging devices are *can, if, and will*. This result may say something about this study’s chosen type of genre. This form of reading material can fall under a persuasive form of writing which could possibly explain the presence of *if* (not a modal verb) in the list. Whereas most linguists would only have modal auxiliaries like the study done by Pindi and Bloor (1987) that presented *may* as the frequently used hedging by economic forecasters and Peterlin’s (2010) study which revealed *may, would* and *could* as the most frequent modal verbs used; this study reveals two modal auxiliaries and one conditional hedge as its top three.

Second, Humanistic Buddhist writers employ hedging devices in their works. Similar with physicians, economic forecasters, academic writers, and famous politicians, Humanistic Buddhist writers value the usage of hedges. Hedges are vital element in ones discourse to build relationship between the sender and receiver of message. In the case of the Humanistic Buddhist writers, they were able to project polite ways, promote unity, and detach themselves to possible suffering with the use of hedges in their works. In doing so, the three acts of goodness are exercised - think good thoughts, do good deeds, and speak good words.

Third, the hedging *should* is also interesting to discuss as part of the hedging device utilized in the three booklets as it constitutes another sentence constructions aside from *should + be* or *should + perfect infinitive*. For example,

- (13) *It does not mean we **should** destroy everything, or give up everything. (TFNT)*
- (14) *When we practice contemplation, we **should** emulate the spirit of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and vigilantly watch over our own minds. (AGC)*
- (15) *With this, he was indirectly telling the monk that contemplation and realization are very personal matters that we **should** work out on our own. (AGC)*
- (16) *With this understanding, we can easily see how self-centeredness is contradictory to harmony and why the distinction of self versus others **should be** abolished. (TEC)*

It can be said that *should* from the sentences above expresses possibility. This supports Hall and Foley's (1998) study that *should* followed by *be* (or *perfect infinitive*) may express possibility and/or probability (p. 14). Further, it is important to note that *should* as hedging may constitute another sentence constructions that show mitigating factor. It can be noted that sentences (17) to (19) mitigate because the obligatory tone (*booster* as some linguists termed it) was lessened through the accompanying negation (*does not mean, indirectly*) or conditional phrases (*when we practice contemplation, with this understanding, and in order to live in harmony with others* for (18), (20), and (21) sentences).

Conclusion

In the pursuit to know if cautious language is applied in religion, this study analyzed three booklets of "Buddhism in Every Step" - TFNT, AGC, and TEC. This study reveals that *can*, *if*, and *will* are the top three frequently used hedges. These hedges function as modal auxiliary (*can* and *will*) and conditional hedge (*if*) that may have overlapping strategies such as politeness, mitigation, and indirectness. This study can confirm that Humanistic Buddhist writers observe courteous language which is undeniably essential in attaining happiness and peace. Additionally, their use of hedging devices acknowledges the capabilities of their readers, permits their readers to pick their own choice, and gives options to their readers; thereby, building good relationship with their readers.

From this, three patterns are worth mentioning. First, the top three hedging devices are not all modal auxiliaries because the second frequently used hedge belongs to a conditional hedge – *if*. Second, contradictory to Hyland's (1996) study, non-native writers do not lack the ability to use hedging devices in their works. This is evident in the three booklets of "Buddhism in Every Step" as Master Hsing Yun, together with Amy Lam and Susan Tidwell exemplifies six hundred forty-six hedging devices. Third, aside from *should + be* and *should + perfect infinitive*, *should* has another sentence constructions to make it as a hedge. This is by accompanying it with negation or conditional phrases.

In conclusion, this study supports the writer's four major reasons in using hedging devices. First, since religion is a sensitive issue among many people, it is important to lessen the peril of opposition. Second, by using hedging devices, it increases the chance of being more precise in presenting ideas. Third, the use of hedges shows humility rather than pretentiousness or arrogance. Lastly, this conforms to the established writing style in English.

Recommendation

For a more extensive study about this topic, it is recommended to cover the following angles:

a. More booklets. To study all the 46 booklets of "Buddhism in Every Step" may show stronger, more credible claims and may state the trend present among Humanistic Buddhist writers.

b. Compare this series of books to other series of books. To study two set of different series may reveal interesting usage of hedges that can possibly help attract more readers, build stronger positive relationships, and promote social harmony.

c. Study boosters as well. To study the writers' used booster devices in this religious reading material may show their determination and assertiveness to their beliefs. If hedging devices lessen the illocutionary force of the statement,

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