

Concealment and Equivocation as Hedging Strategies in Political Interviews: Perspectives from Pragmatics and Sociology of Communication

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Abstract

Previous frameworks used in conceptualising hedging in linguistic research have limitations when applied to political interview discourse, where hedging does not manifest as property of word classes or indicator of non-prototypicality of objects but as use vague, false and ambiguous language. This study examined hedging phenomena in political interview context based on insights from pragmatics and sociology of communication. The specific objectives of the study were to determine how hedging manifests through couplet linkages in political interviews, identify the nature of hedging in political interview discourse, and to extend hedging classificatory framework proposed in research conducted in pragmatics. A corpus-qualitative research design was adopted in order to achieve the objectives of the study. The corpus comprised fifty (50) conversational turns from a political interview granted to TELL Magazine by former Nigerian president, Rtd Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB). The interview was segmented into three sections comprising sections on June 12 Presidential Elections, events During Rtd Gen. IBB regime and events during Rtd Gen. Sani Abacha's regime. Adjacency pairs in the three sections were identified and mapped on to Stensrom's typology of couplet linkages to determine their structure. The propositional content of each of the adjacency pairs were then micro-analysed using pragmatic constructs (Grice Cooperative Principles) and sociology of communication (Interpersonal Deception Theory). The results indicated that hedging manifests as chaining, embedding, coupling and elliptical coupling in terms of structure. The results of the analysis of propositions in the conversational turns further showed that concealment and equivocation are the strategies used to withhold information and evade questions during political

interviews. Based on these findings, a revised hedging classificatory framework which extended traditional pragmatic models is propose. Significant progress now awaits studies that will account for the pragmatic triggers of concealment and equivocation in political interview discourse. The general applicability of the findings needs to be compared with large data set across diverse interview settings.

Keywords: *Hedging, Adjacency Pairs, Political Interview, Couplet Linkages, Interpersonal Deception Theory, Grice Cooperative Maxims.*

Introduction

Interview is a form of public interaction, where diverse issues are discussed and journalists asked probing questions that can be provocative, contentious and tough questions that infringe on privacy of respondents, and lead to conflict(Entman,2004).While some personalities avoid granting interviews to journalists, others often employ vague, false and ambiguous language to save face or mitigate risks from questions that could disrupt social cohesion with people implicated in the interview.This communicative practice is referred to as hedging(cf. Markkanen & Schroeder, 1992). It is a common rhetorical strategy in interview discourse that manifest through the use of evasive, false and ambiguous responses from the standpoint of the structural and propositional content of spoken and written expressions.

Hedging phenomena has been studied from the standpoints of its linguistic functions in spoken and written discourses (e.g. Salager-Meyer,1994;Hyland,1996,1998),manifestations in language acquisition process (e.g.Yang, 2013) and its nature across languages and cultures (e.g. Takhtarova, 2014; Kranich, 2015). Hedging has also been studied in respect to its pragmatic functions as vagueness (e.g. Channell, 1994; Overstreet, 2011), modality marker (e.g. Holmes,1982; Farr and O’Keeffe, 2002); a mitigation strategy (Fraser, 2010; Takhtarova, 2014) and as politeness strategy for hiding information on terminal diseases during counselling(Jolaoso & Olajimbti, 2020).

Research on hedging has also being conducted in respect to its typology ranging from content-oriented and reader-oriented hedges(Hyland,1996;Caffi,1999).Salager-Meyer(1994)identified some pragmatic features such as adaptors, rounders and shields as hedging strategies employed in English medical discourse.The study by Clemen (1997) identified politeness, indirectness, mitigation, vagueness and understatement are the major

strategies used in achieving hedging. Caffi (1999) distinguishes between propositional hedges and speech act hedging i.e. hedges that are aimed at attenuating the strength of an utterance. Despite the significant progress made in previous research in pragmatics, classificatory models of hedging in lexical semantics, such as Prince, Frader and Bosk (1982) and Hyland (1996,1998) have limitations when applied to political interview discourse. This inadequacy necessitated a need for further exploration of hedging using naturally occurring data.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining hedging in political interviews based on insights from pragmatics (Grice cooperative Principles, Theory of Couplet Linkages) and sociology of communication (Interpersonal Deception Theory). The specific objectives of the study are to: use couplet linkage theory to describe how hedging manifest in political interview discourse, use constructs from IDT to analyse the propositional content of hedging in political interview discourse and to extend hedging classificatory strategies proposed in previous research based on findings derived from objectives 1 and 2. The study was guided by the following research questions: (a) how does hedging manifest in political interview discourse? (b) what is the propositional content of hedging in political interview discourse and (c) to what extent can constructs from pragmatics and interpersonal deception theory be used to revise existing hedging strategy classificatory framework?

Literature Review

Notions of Hedging: Insights from Lexical Semantics

The term hedging has many acceptations in lexical semantics and text linguistics. It can be viewed as a lexical item or expression “whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy.” (Lakoff,1972). Fraser (1980) and Blum-Kulka & Ohlstein (1984) define a hedge as a means of modifying certain types of speech acts. vande Kopple (1985) defines a hedge as a means of showing lack of commitment to the propositional content of an utterance. Prince, Frader & Bosk (1985) classify hedge to include approximation, i.e. a hedge that affects the truth condition of an utterance and shield, i.e. a hedge that does not affect the truth condition of an utterance. The notions of a hedge by Fraser (1980); Blum-Kulka & Ohlstein (1984) and vande Kopple, 1985) have been also used as a basis for developing theories of politeness.

Lakoff’s politeness theory suggests that interlocutors follow a certain set of rules when they interact with each other in order to prevent interaction from breaking down. Lakoff proposes two rules of politeness which are meant to minimize conflict in an interaction. The theory is summarized as follows: ‘don’t

impose,’ ‘give options’, ‘make the other person feel good’ and ‘be friendly’. Leech’s (1983) politeness theory on the other hand identifies six major maxims and three minor ones which are culture bound. The first six are connected to the hearer while the other three are related to the speaker. They include: i) tact maxim which minimizes benefits to the audience; ii) generosity maxim which maximizes benefits for others and minimizes benefits for self; iii) approbation maxim which has emphasis on the dispraise of and praise of the audience; iv) modesty maxim concerns ‘minimizing praise of self and maximizing dispraise of self’; v) sympathy maxim which emphasizes the ‘maximization of sympathy towards hearer and minimization of antipathy towards hearer’; and, vi) agreement maxim which ‘minimizes disagreement with the audience and maximizes agreement. The three minor principles which also exist are banter principle, which allows one to be polite while superficially rude, irony principle, which allows one to be impolite while being superficially polite and pollyana principle, which allows one to be euphemistic.

Brown and Levinson’s Face Threatning Theory, which is influenced by Lakoff’s politeness theory, posits that interlocutors should save face when confronted with embarrassing and humiliating situation such as i) acts that threaten the negative face of the audience; ii) acts that threaten the positive face of the audience; iii) acts that threaten the negative face of the speaker; and iv) acts that threaten the positive face of the speaker. The postulation of a textual strategy called hedging is traced to a communicative model proposed by Markkanen & Schroeder (1992). The model rejects previous approaches arguing that hedging is a textual strategy of using pragmatic means to achieve certain communicative purposes. Table 1 shows the strategies and the modifying devices used in achieving hedging based on Clemen (1997).

Table 1: Hedging Strategies and Modifying Devices

Level of strategies	Modifying Devices
(1) Politeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hedge performatives, Epistemic Qualifiers
(2) Indirectness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modal verbs, Down toners, Adjectives, Adverbs
(3) Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain Personal Pronoun, Passive, Infinitives
(4) Vagueness	Impersonal, Indirect Constructions

(5) Understatement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenthetic Constructions, Subjective. Conditional Concessive Conjunctions, Negation
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Source: (Clemen, 1997)

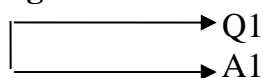
As Table 1 indicates, hedging strategies are polypragmatic and are indexed by any or a combination of of the following: politeness, indirectness, mitigation, vagueness and understatement. The typology draws insights from Brown & Levinson (1987) study on politeness; Fraser & Flowerdew (1980;1991) on mitigation; Blum-Kulka (1982) on vagueness and Hubler (1983) on understatement and indirectness. The strategies are further assigned to a range of modifying devices attributed to each strategy but limited to only lexical item as illustrated in Table 1.

Framing Hedging : Perspectives from Pragmatics and Sociology of Communication

Research on the structure and the propositional content of conversation in pragmatics (Couplet Linkage popularized by Stenstrom (1994); Grice Cooperative Principles) and Interpersonal Deception Theory propounded by Buller et al (1994) can provide new insights on alternative ways of construing of hedging. Stenstrom (1994) views conversation as interaction: (1) that occurs within a social context, (2) that does not assign structure to the whole of a piece of data, (3) that focuses on the delicate and often disregarded complex features of a talk, (4) that interprets conversation as an activity in its own right. Stenstrom (1994) identifies four couplet linkages, which comprise chaining, coupling, embedding and elliptical coupling. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the typology of Couplet Linkages proposed in Stenstrom(1994).

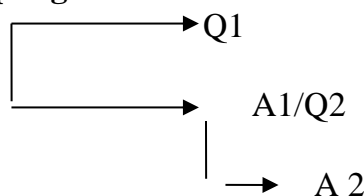
Figure 1: Typology of Couplet Linkages proposed based on Stenstrom (1994)

Type 1: Chaining



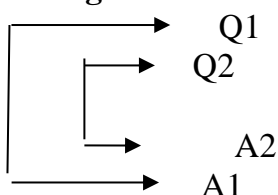
Chaining takes the pattern of [Q1–A1}, which means that speaker (i.e. a journalist asks a question Q1 and a respondent (the respondent A1) gives an answer.

Type 2: Coupling



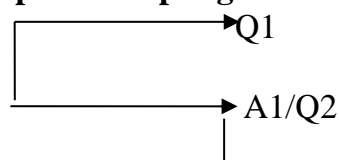
Coupling takes the pattern [Q1—Q2/A2—A1] meaning that speaker A initiates an utterance while speaker B responds evasively then A seeks further clarification and speaker B now responds to A's question.

Type 3: Embedding



Embedding takes the pattern of [Q1—A2; Q2—A2]; this pattern is interpreted to mean that speaker A I possess a question and speaker B responds inappropriately, but speaker A goes on to ask a further probing question due to the inappropriate or vague answer given by A1 and the respondent now answers the question.

Type 4: Elliptical coupling



The question is evaded

Elliptical coupling on the other hand takes the pattern [Q1— A1--Q2—]. Here, the question is evaded. It is similar to coupling but in this case, elements of the expected answer are omitted.

The model proposed by Stenstrom is adopted because it can foster the allocation of structure to delicate and often disregarded complex features of talk e.g. an interview. It is also more robust compared to other methods, where the aspects of interactional patterns are described mainly in terms of conversational turns or in terms of the structure of hedge as a single word (e.g. almost, actually, somewhat), a phrase (e.g. in a manner of speaking, to my knowledge), a clause

or an entire sentence (e.g. if you don't mind me saying so, if that would be the right word)(cf. Schegloff, 2007).

Grice Cooperative Maxim in pragmatics is another model for framing hedging. Grice (1975) argues that conversational exchanges are governed by some fundamental cooperative maxims. This principle holds that interlocutors normally cooperate with one another and assume that the other interlocutors (participants) are cooperating too. The principle is further split into four specific components: the Maxim of Quantity, which demands that interlocutors make their contribution as informative as is required; the Maxim of Quality, which requires interlocutors not say that for which they lack adequate evidence; the Maxim of Relevance, which emphasises the need for interlocutors to make their contribution related to the issue(s) raised and the Maxim of Manner, where interlocutors are expected to be brief in their submissions. This framework is adopted because it can account for the propositional content of adjacency pairs.

IDT is a theory that applies the principles of interpersonal communication to deceptive interactions. The theory attempts to explain deceptive communication from a "dyadic, communicative perspective, rather than the more individual and intrapsychic approach" (Buller et al. 1994:398). A relevant aspect of this theory is the insight it provides on concealment (omission of relevant information), equivocation (use of ambiguity, indirection, and vagueness) and falsification (outright lies) as markers of deceit in interpersonal communication. In this study, Stenstrom (1994) couplet Linkage; Grice Cooperative Principles and Interpersonal Deception Theory (Buller et al, 1994) are adopted for the analysis of the structure of conversational turns and the propositional content of conversational turns.

Method

A corpus-qualitative research design was adopted for the study. Sinclair defines a corpus as "a collection of naturally- occurring language text, chosen to characterize a state or variety of a language"(1991:171). The corpus for the analysis is derived from a political interview titled: I'm The Evil Genius that was granted to TELL magazine by former Nigerian President, Rtd Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993). The corpus consists of three parts, with overarching themes. The first segment pertains to discussion on issues related to the annulled June 12, 1993 Presidential Election. The second segment pertains to issues during the regime of General Abacha while the third section relates to issues during the regime of Rtd Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. The corpus was chosen because some answers to questions posed

to the respondent are evasive and indirect while other information were trivialised and concealed.

The data set comprised Fifty (50) adjacency pairs derived from three sections of the interview. The total sample was used as data for the first objectives on the nature of conversational turns. For the second objective on propositional content of conversational turns, purposive sampling technique was used. The first phase of the analysis involved identification of adjacency pairs in the data set that are expected to yield data relevant to the research objectives. The adjacency pairs were then coded and analysed to determine coherence between the questions and answers in each pair. The coding was done by two applied Linguists and were verified by their research assistants to ensure inter-coder reliability. The adjacency pairs identified from each segment of the interview were then mapped on the typology of couplet linkages proposed by Stenstrom (1994) and assigned to any of the four categories.

The next phase was the analysis of the propositional content of each adjacency pair to determine whether the respondent flouts the Gricean cooperative maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner. Seen from the perspective of IDT, non-adherence to the maxim of quality is synonymous to falsification; the violation of the maxim of quantity is similar to concealment, while that of relation and manner corresponds with equivocation. The maxims of manner and relation manifest if there is a disjuncture in the flow of interaction (i.e. the preceding question is not directly answered). For objectives 1 and 2, a dynamic approach to text semantic was used to analyse adjacency pairs. The approach allows a reader to enter the flow of events and question the meaning of an utterance as it occurs and what meaning it attaches to as a text unfolds (Lemke, 1990).

For the third objective on a revised hedging classificatory framework, findings derived from research objectives 1 and 2 were used to extend the scope of hedging strategies that were based on lexical semantic considerations to include strategies derived from analysis of data from actual interpersonal communication context. For each additional strategy identified, the structure of its adjacency pair as well as the Gricean cooperative maxim flouted are indicated vertically.

Findings

Structural manifestations of hedging in political interview discourse

Tables 1-3 present results of the analysis of the structure of conversational turns in the three segments of the interview.

Table 1: Adjacency Pairs in Interview Segment on June 12 1993 Presidential Election

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
CHAINING	10	47.6	47.6
COUPLING	1	4.8	4.8
EMBEDDING	6	28.6	28.6
ELLIPTICAL COUPLING	4	19.0	19.0
Total	21	100.0	100.0

As indicated in Table 1, adjacency pairs in interview segment on June 12 1993 Presidential Election manifests as chaining (47.6%), coupling (4.8%), embedding (28.6%), and as elliptical coupling (19%). Table 2 presents results on the structure of adjacency pairs in the segment of the interview on Rtd. Gen. Abacha’s regime.

Table 2: Adjacency Pairs in Interview Segment on Rtd Gen. Abacha’s Regime

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
CHAINING	17	85.0	85.0
COUPLING	1	5.0	5.0
EMBEDDING	2	10.0	10.0
ELLIPTICAL COUPLING	0	0.0	0.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0

Results presented in Table 2 indicate that, adjacency pairs in interview Segment on Rtd Gen. Abacha’s Regime manifest as chaining (85%), coupling (5 %), embedding (10 %) and as elliptical coupling (0 %). Table 3 presents a summary of interactional patterns in the segment of the interview on Rtd Gen. Ibrahim Babangida’s regime.

Table 3: Summary of Adjacency Pairs on Interview Segment on Rtd. Gen.IBB’S Regime

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
CHAINING	29	82.9	82.9
COUPLING	5	14.3	14.3
EMBEDDING	1	2.9	2.9
ELLIPTICAL COUPLING	0	0.0	0.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0

Results shown in Table 3 indicate that, the segment of the interview on Rtd Gen. Ibrahim Babangida’s regime manifest as chaining (82%), coupling(14%), embedding(01), with no instance of elliptical coupling(00%) across the data set. Taking as a whole, these results suggest that adjacency pairs in the data set have different conversational structures ranging from Chaining, Embedding, Coupling and Elliptical Coupling as well as frequencies across the data set.

Propositional content of hedging in political interview discourse

Concealment in IDT is described as the act of withholding information for specific purposes. It manifests as embedding as exemplified in the following conversational turns. The results of the analysis of the propositional content of the adjacency pairs revealed that concealment and equivocation are used to conceal information and evade questions that are personal, contentious, and questions that might cause disaffection or lead to conflict.

Q: People say Abacha’s government is a continuation of your regime and what has really changed is the headship and the name. what’s your reaction to this?

R: What you are telling me is typical of Nigerians. They haven’t said anything new that they have not said of other governments before. It is just typical of Nigerians

Q: So why did you leave Abacha behind while you were removing other service chiefs?

R: Again we have reasons for doing that. And that decision is correct up till today.

The respondent in this case evaded the question on why Rtd Gen. Abacha was left when other service chiefs were retired. The refusal to disclose the reason is a violation of the Gricean maxim of quantity because the response is not as informative as is required for the current purpose of the conversational exchange. Another instance where information is withheld by the respondent is illustrated in the following conversational exchange on the role Rtd Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo played in the formation of interim national government after nullification of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election.

Q: We learnt General Obasanjo sold the idea of an interim national government to you and participated in the process of fashioning it.

R: Why don't you ask him?

Q: We have asked him and he more or less denied it.

R: All I know is that I met him and we talked.

In terms of structure, concealment manifests as elliptical coupling in the adjacency pair, where the journalist posed a question that demands the interviewee to confirm whether the idea of the Interim National Government was proposed by Rtd Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. The preferred answer to the question is either a confirmation or disapproval; but instead the respondent withheld the details of the encounter he had with Rtd Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo and retorted that "*All I know is that I met him and we talked*". The failure to specify what was discussed instantiates violation of the maxim of quantity. Concealment also manifests structurally as embedding resulting to disjuncture in the flow of information as illustrated in the conversational turn below.

Q: So why did you leave Abacha behind while you were removing other service chiefs?

R: Again we have reasons for doing that. And that decision is correct up till today.

Q: Now, can you tell the nation this reason?

R: No, not now. Abacha is the head of state. I do respect his office

The respondent in this case evaded the question on why General Abacha was left when other service chiefs were removed. He refused to disclose the reason for his action arguing that it is inappropriate to comment on the issue because Rtd Gen. Abacha was then the president of Nigeria. The respondent flouted the Gricean maxim of quantity, which requires interlocutors to provide explicit information, by concealing the justifications for leaving behind Gen. Abacha. By being prolix and obscure, the respondent also negates the Bakhtian notion of 'answerability', which suggests that "through engaging in conversation interlocutors become answerable for what they say and do to people they interact

with and to those implicated in conversations” (Robinson, 2016). In view of the tensed situation in Nigeria during the interview period, the issue of non-accountability or information deficit in the answers to questions posed to the respondent might have been because the respondent wants to avoid “trouble” with the seating president or disrupt social cohesion with persons implicated in the discussion(cf. Entman, 2004).

A further instance of concealment, which manifests as chaining in the data set, is the adjacency pair in respect to the issue of the winner of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election as illustrated in the adjacency pair below.

Q: Did Moshood Abiola win the election or not?

R: Quite frankly, I was not in a position and neither could anybody have been in a position

to know at that time because they had not finished the election.

The respondent in this conversational exchange concealed information on the winner of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election. In the light of a memoir *A Journey in Service* that was published thirty two years after the interview was granted, the respondent stated that Moshood Kashimawo Abiola satisfied the constitutional requirements for winning the presidency at the time the election was annulled having secured 8,128,720 votes against Bashir Tofa’s 5, 848,247 votes. This information would have been the preferred answer to the question posed to the respondent at the time of the interview.

The second hedging strategy identified in the data set is equivocation, also referred to as prevarication. Equivocation involves the use of ambiguous language to avoid commitment to claims. It also manifests in the data set as chaining as illustrated in the adjacency pair below.

Q: What will you say was the immediate cause for the annulment of the June 12 presidential election?

R: Well, I will tell you what is not the immediate cause. The annulment was not for

Babangida to stay in office. This is much I can say.

The analysis of the propositional content of the conversational turn on the immediate cause of the annulment of June 12 Election indicates that the

respondant was equivocal. From the standpoint of Grice's theory, equivocation involves the flouting of the maxim of quality, which is characterised by understatement, hyperbole and sarcasm as illustrated in the answer to the question on what the immediate cause of the annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Election is: *Well, I will tell you what is not the immediate cause. The annulment was not for Babangida to stay in office!*

A further example of equivocation is illustrated in the following conversational turn on the source of wealth of the respondent. The structure of the exchange is elliptical coupling because the journalist posed a question and the respondent gave an inappropriate answer, which was followed by a further probing question that was evaded.

Q: What are you worth exactly? Are you a billionaire?

R: This is being unfair to me. In your various interviews with other people, you never put this question to them. But if you insist, I'll answer you but off the record. Well, I did not go into the office of the president in penury. It's as simple as that.

Q: So, how did you get your money?

R: Surely, I didn't steal. Neither did I do armed robbery

In this interaction, the respondent is cagey about his source of wealth and economic status, takes offence, and is mildly sarcastic and speaking on the defensive seen in the use of the pronominal 'I' and the negative form of the 'do' periphrasis. Equivocation also manifest as understatement where something is expressed in a less or extreme way than it really is. The the adjacency pair also exemplifies chaining in terms of its structure.

Q: Over half a million copies of TELL were seized and some of the gentlemen speaking with you now were arrested...

R: You see, when I sat up there, I didn't know most of these things happened

The respondent in this conversational turn feigned ignorance of knowledge about the seizure of 500,000 copies of Tell Magazine by the secret police and the arrest of journalist with whom some are part of the crew that interviewed the respondent. The respondent distances himself from the act and trivialises the issue by downplaying the significance of question posed to him as follows: *You see, when I sat up there, I didn't know most of these things happened!*

Reclassification of Hedging Strategies: Insights from Pragmatics and sociology of communication

Results of the analysis on the propositional content of adjacency pairs showed that concealment and equivocation are also pragmatic strategies used in political interview discourse to achieve hedging. Table 4 presents an extended hedging classificatory framework based on insights from Pragmatics and sociology of communication.

Table 4: Revised Hedging Classificatory Framework

Strategy	Modifying Devices	
	Type of Linkage Maxim Flouted	Gricean
(1) Concealment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaining • Embedding • Coupling • Elliptical Coupling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maxim of Quantity Maxim of maner,relation Maxims of Maner,maxim of relation Maxims of manner and relation
(2) Equivocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaining • Embedding • Coupling • Elliptical Coupling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maxim of Quantity Maxims of Maner,Maxim of Relation Maxims of Maner,Maxim of Relation Maxims of manner,relation

As indicated in Table 4, the communicative model of hedging proposed in Markkanen & Schroeder (1992) has been broaden at the level of strategy as well as modifying devices that foster the realisations of hedging strategies in discourse. The revised model now has politeness, indirectness, mitigation, vagueness, understatement, concealment and equivocation at the level of strategy. The modifying devices in the revised model indicates the structure and the propositional content of adjacency pairs determined by the Gricean maxim(s) flouted.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study indicate that structurally, conversational turns in the data set manifest as chaining, embedding, coupling and elliptical coupling. These structural categories are unique and category membership for each is not determined by lexico-semantic properties or individual expressions but by the structural and the propositional content of adjacency pairs (cf. Markkanen & Schroeder, 1992). This means that the

couplet linkage model proposed in Stenstrom (1994) and markers of deceptive communication proposed in Interpersonal Deception Theory(cf. Buller et al 1996) are useful because they fostered the allocation of structure and meaning to interactional turns commonly used in political interview discourse.

Finding of the study, on the propositional content of conversational turns, revealed that hedging is achieved through concealment and equivocation during political interview. This finding is consistent with the results reported in Aberer et al (2021), where withholding information is identified as the most commonly occurring hedging strategy that characterizes spoken political discourse. It also corroborates the finding of a study that revealed that hedging is used in medical academic discourse to present claims with caution and precision (Jolaoso & Olajimbt, 2020). The finding however contradicts results reported on non-verbal deceptive communicative strategies such as eye movement, hesitation and pauses, pitch of talk and length of messages(Ebesu & Miller, 2003).

The novel approach of exploring hedging phenomena in this study is eclectic and underscores the importance of accountability in communication, and the pivotal role of interlocutors in shaping dialogue in interpersonal communication settings. The extension of hedging classificatory framework proposed in Clemen (1997) implies that the rhetorical devices used in achieving hedging are not exhaustive. Pragmatic factors, such as, type of context (or discourse type), the colloquial situation, the speaker's and writer's intention and background knowledge of the dialogue or conversation are important linguistic variables that could trigger hedging(cf. Clemen, 1997). It can however be observed that the third marker of deceitful communication, i.e. falsification or outright lies (cf. Buller et al 1996) is not discussed in this study. But like the classificatory framework proposed in Clemen (1997), where each strategy identified has modifying devices, the extended classificatory framework has variables linked to the conversational structure and propositional content of adjacency pairs.

Conclusion

The paper addresses an important area in discourse analysis by extending hedging strategies beyond traditional pragmatic models to include concealment and equivocation from sociology of communication. It highlights how concealment and equivocation can undermine accountability in political interview and their manifestations. Findings of the study have enabled us to conclude that hedging is a textual strategy determined by contexts rather than a property of a lexical item that indicates (non)prototypicality of linguistic items. Although the conclusion is based on a single interview, the discursive patterns of concealment and equivocation observed in this study may be applicable to other political interviews and high-stake communicative contexts. Further research is therefore needed to examine the correlation between questions put to respondents (Pragmatic Hedging Triggers) and the hedging

strategies(HS) adopted by respondents. There is also a need to compare the findings of the study across diverse interview settings to test their general applicability.

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