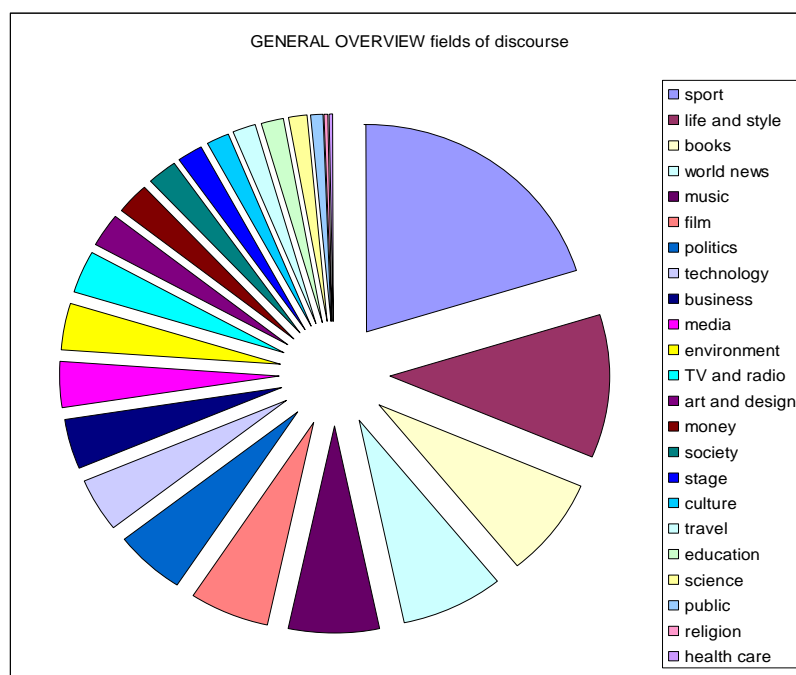


Some Discourse Functions of English Hedges

People have the urgent need to establish a certain boundary between themselves and their interlocutors. That is why they use such expressions as *actually*, *technically*, *as a matter of fact*, *sort of* etc which are generally called hedges. They are popular not only with politicians and PR experts who try to tell us sweet lies, but they also are also actively used by ordinary people.

Hedging frequently occurs in newspaper articles since it is an efficient strategy to persuade somebody in such a way that readers don't feel that the ideas are being imposed on them. Hedged expressions are neither true nor false they are somewhere in between and that is exactly the quality that makes them so popular with many writers and speakers. Hedging is often employed when the author is addressing some burning issues of the day since they need to be presented in the most cautious way. So, the use of hedges can tell us a lot about the society we live in. What are the issues speaking and writing on which we use hedged expressions? The analysis of the articles taken from *The Guardian* showed that here belong such topics as: climate change, green house gases; the world cup, economic crisis; South Africa; Mr. Obama; criminalization; rock music; EU, EU Parliament; China; Taliban, Afganistan; nuclear weapons; Iraq, Islam, terrorism, Hezbollah; homosexuality, homophobia; Facebook, Twitter; racism; fascism; anti-semitism; domestic assaults, women's Rights; drugs, light drugs, marijuana; medications, treatment.

It was possible to carry out a research in which we concentrated on the distribution of hedges depending on the field of discourse. The material used for the analysis was also taken from the British magazine *The Guardian*. The research showed that the most 'hedged' fields of discourse are sport, life and style, books, world news and music. The following diagram shows the distribution of hedges depending on the field of discourse.



More precise data can be presented in the following table. The total number of the ‘hedged’ texts analyzed is 2083. The number of hedges is measured in percents.

The Most “Hedged” Fields of Discourse

sphere	total	%
sport	423	20
life and style	229	11
books	166	8
world news	154	7
music	141	7
film	118	6
politics	111	5
technology	90	4
business	77	4
media	76	4
environment	75	4
TV and radio	69	3
art and design	54	3
money	50	2
society	45	2
stage	44	2
culture	36	2
travel	34	2
education	33	2
science	30	1
public	14	1
religion	9	0
health care	5	0
total	2083	100

These data give us a general overview of the fields of discourse in which vague categorization is frequently used. It is also relevant from the sociologic point of view as it deals with overall tendencies in our society. It’s obvious that we usually get very emotional when our opinion does not coincide with the opinion of the others. However, as far as we don’t really mean to offend them, we put it mildly. Sport, books, music and films are such things that prove the the English saying ‘tastes differ’. Some people think that the player did his best and the referee was biased. The other considers that the player was bad while the referee was just. Different people read different books, listen to different music and watch different movies. These things are highly subjective and imply personal evaluation.

Information concerning the discourse distribution of each particular hedged expression can be represented by the following charts.

sphere	%	more or less	virtually	really	almost	enough to	in a way	roughly	more of a...
football		11	19	14	13	22	14	27	15
sport		9	12	13	11	11	9	10	13
books		9	9	11	10	10	7	8	12
politics		9	8	10	9	8	6	7	9
music		9	7	10	8	8	5	6	9
life and style		7	7	9	6	7	5	5	9
TV and radio		5	5	6	6	6	4	5	7
technology		5	5	5	6	4	4	5	6
media		4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5
stage		4	4	4	4	3	3	4	5
environment		4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4
art and design		4	4	3	3	3	3	4	2
film		4	3	3	3	3	2	4	2
world news		4	1	1	3	1	1	4	1
society		3	1	1	2	1	1	2	1
religion		3	1	1	2	1	1	1	0
culture		2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
travel		2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
money		0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
science		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
education		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
business		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
public		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
health care		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

sphere	%	practically	pseudo-	kind of	actually	literally	sort of	technically	a true
politics		12	14	14	20	9	16	21	60
media		11	13	14	13	9	12	9	10
religion		9	12	10	10	9	8	9	8
music		8	9	10	9	9	8	9	3
education		8	8	10	8	9	8	7	2
world news		7	7	7	5	8	8	5	2
money		7	5	7	5	8	4	5	2
life and style		6	5	3	4	6	4	4	1
society		6	4	3	4	6	4	3	1
football		4	4	3	4	5	4	3	1
TV and radio		4	4	3	4	3	4	3	1
stage		3	3	3	4	2	4	3	1
film		3	3	3	3	2	4	2	1
sport		2	3	3	3	2	4	2	1
books		2	1	3	1	2	4	2	1
science		2	1	0	1	2	4	2	1
business		1	1	0	1	1	0	2	1
public		1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1

health care	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
technology	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
environment	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
art and design	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
culture	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
travel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

sphere	%	quasi-	essentially	basically	crypto-	-ish	in a sense	in a manner of speaking
books	16	12	13	19	33	16	12	
education	12	11	10	17	14	13	10	
world news	10	7	10	16	8	9	8	
politics	9	6	10	8	6	8	7	
stage	9	6	9	8	5	7	7	
music	9	5	9	8	5	5	7	
life and style	7	5	8	6	5	4	6	
technology	6	5	8	6	4	4	4	
media	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	
religion	3	4	3	3	4	3	4	
sport	2	4	2	3	3	2	3	
art and design	2	4	2	2	3	2	2	
film	2	4	2	1	1	1	2	
money	2	3	2	0	1	1	2	
business	1	3	1	0	1	1	1	
travel	1	3	1	0	1	1	1	
science	1	3	1	0	0	1	1	
society	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	
TV and radio	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	
football	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	
environment	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
culture	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
public	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
health care	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

The charts given above reveal that some particular hedges are characteristic of a particular social sphere. So, for example, *virtually* is frequently used while speaking about music, *enough to*, *quasi-*are used in connection with politics, *roughly*, *practically*, *in a sense*, *crypto-*, are to be used while discussing books, *a true and sort of* are characteristic of life and style. *Actually* is frequently used while urging someone to take measures in order to fight some environmental problems. *Technically* and suffix *-ish* are used in sport, particularly in football. Some hedges are more universal, they appear in a wider variety of fields of discourse. Here belong *more or less*, *really*, *almost*, *more of a...*, *practically*, *pseudo-*, *kind of*, *literally*, *basically*, *in a manner of speaking*.