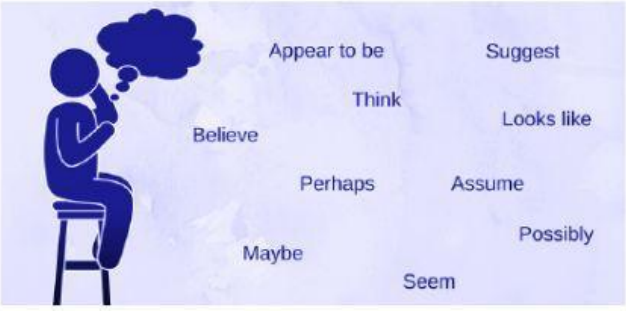
Focus on grammar: Hedging language in academic contexts



Hedging or *cautious language* is a way of softening the language by making the claims or conclusions less absolute. It is an important part in academic contexts and necessary to make decisions about our stance on a particular subject, or the strength of the statements we say or write.

Compare the following sentences from Text A and Text B. Identify and underline the differences in their written message. Do these differences affect the meaning of the sentences? Why or why not?

Text A
Culture is "the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts".
Today, the influences of Western culture are in almost every country in the world.
Eastern culture refers to the societal norms of countries in Far East Asia
However, the wide variety of dialects makes communication difficult.
Culture is the key in our interconnected world, which is made up of so many ethnically diverse societies.

Text B
Culture could be roughly defined as "the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts".
Today, the influences of Western culture can be seen in almost every country in the world.
Eastern culture generally refers to the societal norms of countries in Far East Asia
However, the wide variety of dialects can sometimes make communication difficult.
Culture appears to have become key in our interconnected world, which is made up of so many ethnically diverse societies.

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Hedging is achieved by using various introductory verbs, modal verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives and some other phrases.

Observe the following examples of hedging sentences:

1. Studies tend to show a link between cultures and geographical locations.
2. Learning about other cultures of the world could be beneficial for intercultural communication.
3. The likelihood of defining culture as an unchanging concept is low.
4. Apparently, the world can be divided into three main culture types.
5. It is probable that communication can be impaired by cultural differences.

Watch the following video Hedging Language and complete the following task:

a. In which scenarios would you use hedging language? Mention 2 examples.

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b. Write down hedged claims using:

- verbs:

- "*That*" clauses:

- Modal Verbs:

Use the hedging language boxes to qualify or soften the claims below.

Introductory words:
- tend to
- assume
- indicate
- estimate
- seem to
- appear to be
- believe
- Suggest

Nouns:
- probability
- possibility
- likelihood
- assumption
- tendency
- indication
- estimate
- evidence
- trend
- claim

Modal verbs:
- may
- might
- can
- could

Adjectives:
- probable
- possible
- likely
- doubtful
- unlikely
- uncertain

Adverbs:
- Probably
- Possibly
- Seemingly
- Apparently
- Arguably
- Perhaps
- Presumably
- Conceivably

Words to show frequency, degree, quantity and time:
- sometimes
- often
- generally
- commonly
- frequently
- approximately
- somewhat

Introductory phrases:
- It is generally agreed/perceived that…
- It could be affirmed/stated that…

Adapted from: www.eapfoundation.com/writing/skills/hedging

1. The diversity within cultures exceeds the differences between cultures.

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2. Culture is not a genetic trait and it is learned and transmitted from generation to generation.

3. Colombian people are less interested in schedules or punctuality.

4. Germans, like the Swiss, are really serious people.

5. Argentines are very conscious of their history and their past.

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