# To Hedge or Not to Hedge: A Pragmatic Study of Hedging in Jordanian Arabic

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the frequency of use and types of hedging devices produced by Jordanian Arabic speakers. The study also seeks to ascertain the pragmatic functions of hedging in Jordanian Arabic. Two types of instruments are employed; a survey instructing the participants to provide some instances from their daily use of language, representing hedging as a linguistic device in Jordanian Arabic and notes of daily observations that take place between friends, colleagues, and family members. A total of 763 hedgers of all types are piled from the daily observations and the survey comprising 86 participants. The data are analyzed and transformed into numerical values in the form of percentages. The findings of the study depict that hedging is a common linguistic device, characterizing Jordanian Arabic and the commonest type is compound hedgers with 50% of the total instances. The findings also reveal that hedging performs various functions in Jordanian Arabic: interpersonal politeness, subjectivity markers, vagueness, fuzziness, and depersonalization. The study presents a novel syntactic categorization of hedging in Jordanian Arabic that differs from Modern Standard Arabic and English.

**Keywords:** compound hedging, depersonalization, fuzziness, hedging, Jordanian Arabic, subjectivity markers

## 1. Introduction

Language is a medium of communication used by people to express their feelings, thoughts, experiences, cultures, and traditions. A basic requirement for communication to be successful is to convey meanings in a smooth, tactful, and agreeable way that is free of offence, insult, or underestimation of others' actions or personalities. An instrumental linguistic device that helps accomplish this purpose is the use of hedging between the addresser and the addressee. The term hedging was first coined in the work of Lakoff (1972:195), who contends that hedging words "make things fuzzier or less fuzzy". Following Lakoff's definition of hedging, many other linguists made attempts to put forward working definitions of hedging. Sharing a similar view of hedging, Yule (2014) argues that hedging is a cover term for all utterances of uncertainty and tentativeness. To put it in other words, hedging refers to the use of words or phrases that the speaker is not sure enough of. Hyland (1998: 23) views hedging differently "any linguistic means used to indicate either a lack of a complete commitment to the truth of a proposition or a desire not to express that commitment categorically". One can assume that hedging on one side is a linguistic device used by speakers to make utterances

vague, unclear, and tentative, and on the other side, it is a linguistic device, utilized to mitigate or soften the harshness of utterances on the recipient.

Hedging is used to serve many functions. It can be used to express politeness to establish harmony with others and avoid clashes and criticism (Cabanes 2007; Taweel , Al-Saidat, Rfay'ah and Saidat 2011). Politeness could appear in various forms; positively showing solidarity with the group or negatively showing distancing from imposition (Holmes 1988; Myers 1989). In addition, hedging is utilized for many other purposes such as uncertainty, vagueness, fuzziness, attenuating harshness and offensiveness, and showing commitment (Lakoff 1972; Prince, Frader and Bosk 1982). The use of hedging is not limited to a specific part of speech, in that any part of speech can include hedging expressions e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (Makkanen and Schroder 1997). Hedging can be used in a single word e.g. modal auxiliaries like may, might, can, could, semi-lexical verbs like seem, sound, appear, look, suggest, adjectives such as possible, probable, or adverbs such as likely, unlikely, apparently, approximately. In addition, hedging appears in the form of a phrase or clause such as I suggest, I think, or in my viewpoint (Amin 2018) or it can be employed to make a polite request in the form of a full sentence as below.

(1) I wonder if I could borrow your pen.
(2) If I do not bother you, would you please pass me the salt?

In the above-referenced examples, the whole sentence is treated as a hedging utterance as it is a polite request containing more than one element of hedging in each. In the first sentence, the phrase *I wonder* is utilized for mitigating imposition and the modal auxiliary *could* is a hedger, whereas, in the second sentence, three hedgers are used, namely the auxiliary *would*, the adverb *please*, and the phrase *if I*.

Speaking of the Arabic context, no linguistic items are treated as hedgers on their own in the Arabic grammar books; however, few attempts have been made by some researchers to categorize the utterances that serve the function of hedging. Taqi (2021) classifies some language items, functioning as hedgers in Arabic in the sense that he lists all items attenuating the harshness of speech, assigning less responsibility to the speaker, and expressing the meaning of tentativeness or uncertainty. The suggested list includes; the conditional "ʔinn" (if) which is used as a hedger. In addition, many other verbs appear in the Arabic context as hedging expressions such as verbs of probability, e.g., 'iʔtaqada' (to believe), 'ħasiba' (to reckon), 'taṣawwara' (to imagine), 'zaʕama' (to claim) and verbs of appropinquation, e.g. 'ʕasa' which means perhaps (Taqi 2021). Due to the urgent need to tabulate all linguistic items, functioning as hedgers in Jordanian Arabic, the present study formulates a corpus of hedging expressions used in Jordanian Arabic, illustrating a unique syntactic pattern of hedging in Jordanian Arabic. The proposed taxonomy appears in the findings section.

## 2. Research questions

The present study poses three research questions as follows:

1. What are the most common types of hedging devices in Jordanian Arabic?
2. What are the pragmatic functions of hedging devices in Jordanian Arabic?
3. Do hedging devices used in Jordanian Arabic show any aspect of the syntactic-pragmatic interface?

## 3. Literature review

This section is split into two parts. Part A discusses the types of hedging expressions, which entails revealing a taxonomy of hedging that is widely adopted by today's studies. Part B discusses some previous studies conducted on hedging with a special emphasis on the Arabic context.

### 3.1 Taxonomy of hedging

This part presents the taxonomy proposed by Salager-Meyer (1994).

**Salager-Meyer's taxonomy**

It is proposed that hedgers are a product of mental attitude and are not confined to one linguistic structure, meaning that they can be found in all linguistic items of a language. Salager-Meyer states that hedging as a linguistic device can be recognized through text analysis and introspection with the aid of specialists in the area of investigation (Salager-Meyer 1998). The taxonomy of hedging by Salager-Meyer consists of five categories.

1. Shields

This category is composed of all epistemic auxiliary verbs such as can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should, must and ought to. Semi-lexical verbs like appear, seem, propose, believe, estimate, tend, think and indicate. Adverbs such as probably, possibly, definitely, certainly, maybe, possibly, perhaps, probably and likely.

2. Approximators: hedging devices indicating imprecision of quantity. The items of this category fall into two main types.

A. Adaptors: Those expressions signal the degree of relationship or membership such as kind of, sort of, little bit, to some extent, almost, somewhat, exactly, near, precisely and pretty.

B. Rounders: Those expressions convey the notion of range or intensity e.g. about, approximately, around, roughly, approximately and usually.

3. Expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement e.g. to my knowledge, in my view, I think, I believe and I guess.

4. Emotionally-charged intensifiers, which increase the emotional content in speech. Those expressions include extremely difficult/interesting, of particular importance, unexpectedly and surprisingly.

5. Compound hedges: This category is composed of three classes, namely double hedging e.g. it might be proposed that, or it can be recommended, triple hedging e.g. it seems probable that, it seems reasonable to assume and quadruple hedges e.g. it would seem somewhat unlikely that and it may sound to some extent possible that.

### 3.2 Related studies

Previous studies seem to examine hedging expressions with regard to the functions they play in discourse such as uncertainty, vagueness, fuzziness, harshness, offensiveness, commitment, or politeness (Lakoff 1973; Prince et al.1982). Similarly, researchers of the Arabic language whether Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or the various Arab dialects appear to follow the same line of approach in terms of categorization (linguistic/pragmatic) description, and then, revealing the universal aspects of those expressions. However, there is still a limitation in the literature to categorizing Arabic hedges and hedging functions syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically.

Taqi (2021) attempts to categorize Arabic hedges based on denotation and syntactic categories as their counterparts in English. However, the contrastive study does not go beyond selectively choosing specific items of conditionals and verbs in Modern Standard Arabic. In fact, Arabic research needs to include a linguistic analysis (whether semantically, pragmatically, or even syntactically) of hedging expressions found in the Arabic vernaculars rather than limiting research work to the formal variety of Arabic. Arabic hedges are used abundantly whether in newspapers, conversations, or speeches. For example, researchers have been interested in political discourse as politicians constantly mitigate uncertainty, fuzziness, possibility, politeness or persuasion in response to questions during press conferences or interviews. (Andriani 2019; Almahameed, Al Bataineh and Ammari 2022; Almutairi, Alkous and Zitouni 2022). Arabic political discourse appears to contain plenty of hedges including modality, approximates, lexical verbs, or introductory phrases to mitigate similar functions (Taweel et al. 2011; Rabab'ah and Abu Rumman 2015). Similar hedges are also found in Arabic newspapers and Media (Al-Ghoweri and Al Kayed 2019; Amine 2019; Hamdi and Salman 2020; Kheryadi, Abdul Muin and Syahid 2022). While Modern Standard Arabic (high variety) is the dominant language in written documents and formal discourse, researchers have recently felt the need to explore hedging functions in Arabic dialects as well (low varieties). According to their findings using tap recording to collect the data, Al-Salami and Raheem (2021) reveal "plausibility shields" hedges (i.e., expressions like /ʕala ħasab ʕilmi/ meaning "as far as I know") are the most frequent spoken hedges in the Iraqi dialect; however, the work does not provide explanation why such high frequency for this hedging type is triggered in the first place. Investigating euphemism and hedging amongst undergraduate students and taxi drivers from both nationalities equally: Jordanian and Egyptian, ElShiekh (2013) finds a certain choice of structure (active vs. passive), some verbs of appropinquation, or some cultural expressions employed as hedging and euphemism as a strategy to avoid blame or escape from responsibility.

Jordanians are reported to employ a variety of hedging strategies in expressing their opinions through using personalized or introductory phrases i.e. widʒhit naẓari, "from my point of view", baʕtaqid "I think", binnisba li "according to me" (Al-khawaldeh and Abu Rahmeh 2022). While, Badarneh (2010) shows

that diminutives are used for the purpose of hedging in different contexts and for various pragmatic purposes.

This study aims to explore the various pragmatic functions of those colloquialhedgers in Jordanian Arabic since hedges are contextual-based. As a result, the data collected in Jordanian-spoken Arabic are expected to provide more insight into the pragmatic functions of hedges in Jordanian Arabic. Moreover, unlike other studies, it ventures to explore the special syntactic make-up of hedging expression in Jordanian Arabic. It seems that Jordanian Arabic uses "special" structures for the construction of a hedging expression and the data shows instances of syntactic-pragmatic interference.

## 4. Methodology

This study is quantitative and analytic, where the raw data obtained from the respondents are analyzed and transformed into numerical values in the form of percentages. Quantitative research is a research method that requires the use of data collection tools resulting in figures and numbers and then analyzed by the researcher statistically (Dornyei 2007). This section briefly touches on three primary elements related to the study: data collection procedures, sample of the study, and selection of hedging utterances.

### 4.1 Data collection procedures

In collecting the required data for the present study, the researchers utilize the means of two tools: first, daily speech observation in that the researchers observe closely some everyday conversations, taking place between family members, friends, and colleagues at work. All conversations are in Jordanian Arabic, discussing several topics, basically everyday life affairs. Meanwhile, all utterances attenuating the effect of speech, revealing less commitment, or expressing politeness in speech are written down and then tabulated for analysis. Second, a survey, requesting the respondents to provide examples of the utterances that they use in their daily life, mitigating harshness of speech or reducing the authorial voice of the speaker. Following that, all relevant utterances are selected, written down, and then analyzed. Finally, all collected hedging utterances from the two methods of data collection are piled together to form a corpus.

### 4. 2 Sample of the study

In addition to observation of everyday life dialogues, the data required for the present study, are collected from a sample of respondents comprised of 86 Master's degree students, registered in the English qualifying course during the fall semester in the academic year 2022/2023. A total of 763 phrases containing hedging utterances of all types are compiled from the two data collection tools utilized in this study: daily life observations and the survey. All the respondents are Jordanians of both genders and from different age groups ranging from 25 to 55 years of age.

### 4.3 Selection of hedging utterances

In selecting hedging utterances in Jordanian Arabic, two criteria are followed.
1. The corpus of 763 hedging utterances obtained from the participants in daily life observations and the survey, are written down. Following that, the collected data serving as hedgers are tabulated and considered for the purpose of the present study.
2. The selection of hedging utterances rests basically on the Salager-Meyers Taxonomy, stated in the literature review section. To put it another way, the hedgers obtained from the participants are filtered based on the five categories proposed by Salager-Meyer's Taxonomy, namely; shields, approximators, expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement, emotionally-charged intensifiers and compound hedges.

## 5. Findings

This section deals with the results of the data obtained from the sample of the study. The results are depicted in the view of the research questions of the study. Table 1 below presents hedging utterances together with their subtypes namely; shields, approximators, expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement and compound hedges. To be more specific, the results pertinent to each type of hedging alongside their subtypes appear in the form of figures representing the percentages of respondents' use of hedgers in Jordanian Arabic.

*Research question 1- What are the most common types of hedging devices in Jordanian Arabic?*

Table 1. Percentage of hedgers and their subtypes

| Hedger type | | percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Shields | A. Epistemic auxiliary verbs | 4.7 |
| | B. Semi-lexical verbs | 7.3 |
| | C. Adverbs of possibility | 6.5 |
| | | **Total**: 18.5 |
| Approximators | A. Adaptors | 8.5 |
| | B. Rounders | 4.8 |
| | | **Total:** 13.3 |
| Expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement | A. Affirmative Mood | 8.5 |
| | B. Imperative Mood | 9.7 |
| | | **Total:** 18.2 |
| Compound hedge | 50 | |

A close look at Table 1 reveals that Arabic expressions categorized as shields account for 18.5 percent of overall Arabic hedgers. Pertinent to the subtypes of shields, it is obvious from Table 1 that semi-lexical verbs ranked first with 7.3 percent of Arabic hedging expressions, whereas adverbs of possibility constitute

6.5 percent. In addition, epistemic auxiliary verbs ranked last, accounting for 4.7 percent. The use of shields as a hedging device is best manifested in the examples below.

(3) jabdu ʔinni raħ ʔana:m bakki:r
seem-3SM C-1SM will sleep early
'It seems I will sleep early'

The above-referenced example 3 includes one instance of hedgers frequently used in Jordanian Arabic; the semi lexical verb "jabdu". The use of this verb as a higher in Jordanian Arabic serves the function of tentativeness, in the sense that the meaning conveyed by the speaker lacks certainty and definiteness.

(4) bjdʒu:z nzu:rak bukra
might visit-1MPL-2SM tomorrow
'We might visit you tomorrow'

Sentence 4 illustrates the use of the epistemic auxiliary verb "*bjdʒu:z"* (might) in Jordanian Arabic as a hedging device. The purpose of using "*bjdʒu:z"* as a hedger in this sentence is to express speaker's uncertainty of the proposition or to decrease the degree of commitment towards the listener.

(5) min ʔalmuħtamal ʔasa:fir qari:ban
from DEF-possibility travel-1 soon
'I probably travel soon'

In a similar vein, the adverb "*min ʔalmuħtamal"* (probably) is used in Jordanian Arabic as a hedger as appears in sentence 5 to express the notion of lack of certainty, which in turn reduces the degree of the speaker's commitment.

In addition, Table 1 above depicts that the total percentage of approximators classified as hedging expressions in Arabic is 13.3 percent. With regard to the subtypes of approximators, it is also clear from the table that adaptors came in first place with 8.5 percent of the total percentage of Arabic hedgers, while rounders ranked second with 4.8 percent of hedging expressions. The use of hedgers as approximators in Jordanian Arabic appears in the examples below.

(6) nawʕan ma: huwa ʃaxs ʔidʒtima:ʕi
Sort of what he person sociable
'He is sort of sociable person'

The above-mentioned sentence 6 comprises one hedging device in Arabic; '*nawʕan ma:'* (sort of). This hedging device is categorized in Arabic as approximator, particularly adaptor and used primarily to convey the notion of imprecision, meaning that the speaker is not providing precise information as a way of protecting his face or self-image.

(7) ħawa:li ʕiʃri:n ṭa:lib ʃa:raku fi: ʔlmusa:baqa
roughly twenty student participate-3MPL in DEF-competition
'Roughly, twenty students participated in the competition'

Similar to English, the rounder '*ħawa:li'* (roughly) in sentence 7 above is used in Arabic to signal approximation when the speaker is not sure enough of the quantity of the proposition.

A further analysis of Table 1 above displays that the total percentage of expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement is 18.2 percent. As for the

subtypes of expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement, it is evident that imperative mood hedgers are ranked first with 9.7 percent, while affirmative mood hedgers account for 8.5 percent. For further illustration on this type of hedgers, it is fitting to consider the example below.

(8) ħasab ʕilmi ʔinu ʔiṭṭaqis raħ jku:n ħilu
To knowledge-1SM C weather will be nice
'To my knowledge, the weather will be nice'

It is evident from the above stated example that the phrase '*ħasab ʕilmi'* (to my knowledge) is used as a hedger in Jordanian Arabic. The use of '*hasab ʕilmi'* exemplifies the case of personal doubt and direct involvement to perform the function of lack of certainty, in the sense that the speaker is not completely sure but expressing his personal opinion.

In addition, the results of Table 1 show that compound hedgers constitute the vast majority of hedging expressions used by Jordanian speakers of Arabic, accounting for 50 percent of hedgers used by the respondents. Therefore, one could assume that the most common type of hedging utterances produced by Jordanian speakers of Arabic is compound hedges. The analysis of the data obtained from the sample of the study reveal that all types of compound hedgers are utilized including double hedging, triple hedging, and quadruple hedges. The use of compound hedgers is exemplified in sentence 9 below, based on the data obtained from the respondents.

(9) ʕala ma: jabdu min ʔalmumkin
on what seem-3SM from possible
'It seems likely that'

The above example illustrates the case of double hedging, where the speaker uses two hedging expressions. In this sentence, the speaker uses the semi lexical verb in Arabic "*jabdu"* (seem) which is used as a hedger to mitigate the effect of speech alongside the Arabic adjective "*ʔalmumkin"* (likely).

(10) min baʕid ʔiðnak, ʔana ʃa:jif ʔila ħaddin ma ʔilmawḍu:ʕ ṣaʕib
from after excuse-2SM I see-PART on extent what DEF-issue difficult
'Pardon me, I think the topic is somewhat difficult'

In the above-stated example10, three hedgers are used namely; *'min baʕid ʔiðnak',* which means in Arabic *pardon me* and is used mainly to make a polite request. In addition, '*ʔana ʃa:jif*,' which means in Arabic *I think*, and is used as a hedging expression as it denotes subjectivity and personal opinion so that the proposition is not precisely made and remains to some extent vague. The third hedger in the sentence is '*ʔila ħaddin ma:'* which conveys the meaning of approximation in Arabic. The use of triple hedgers in this sentence is explained by the desire of the speaker not to impose upon the hearer and at the same time to express the notion of imprecision.

(11) ʔiða ma: bitma:niʕ ʔana baqtariħ
If not mind-2nd I suggest-1st
'If you do not mind, I suggest'

In sentence 11, double hedging is employed; the first one is '*ʔða ma: bitma:niʕ'*, meaning that if you do not mind, followed by '*baqtariħ'* which means I suggest. The two hedgers are mainly used to request something in a polite manner and then to convey the meaning of personal belief through the use of semi lexical verb '*baqtariħ*'. The use of compound hedgers in Jordanian Arabic more than other types of hedgers can be explained on one hand by the desire of the speaker to express an exaggerated form of politeness and on the other hand avoid imposing upon the hearer, so that the request or the statement is made in a polite manner, leading the hearer to feel good of himself and free of imposition or insult.

As for research question two, which inquires about the pragmatic functions of hedging utterances, the question is raised as follows;

*Q2: What are the pragmatic functions of hedging devices in Jordanian Arabic?*

According to Brown and Levinson (2011), Hedging is used to serve many pragmatic functions in the sense that those functions vary based on the type of hedging expressions uttered by language users. The first function of hedgers mentioned by Zheng is to express interpersonal politeness; positive and negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (2011) treat hedging as a politeness strategy in interpersonal contact, so that hedgers are viewed as a linguistic device used to convey the notion of negative politeness and soften the harshness of speech. In addition, politeness strategy as a hedger is used to avoid imposition on the hearer or to give a compliment to the hearer. Based on the analysis of data obtained from the respondents, many instances of hedging utterances, serving the function of politeness are attested as below.

(12) fi: ʔimka:nijja
there possibility
'Is there any possibility?'

The above-mentioned example expresses the notion of politeness, in the sense that if the addresser intends to request something from the addressee and he/she does not want to impose upon the addressee, then the expression '*fi: ʔimka:nijj*a' is utilized. Using this expression indicates that the speaker inquires politely about the possibility of doing something so that this utterance is used as an introductory phrase, paving the way for the following sentence. One more instance, revealing the case of polite requests as hedgers is depicted in the examples below

(13) min fadˤlak
from excuse-2nd
'Excuse me'

(14) min baʕd ʔiðnak
from after excuse-2nd
'If you pardon me'

In the Arabic language, the utterances '*min fadˤlak'* and '*baʕd ʔiðnak*' are frequently used to perform the function of polite request. To put it another way, those utterances are mainly utilized as introductory phrases, aiming at opening the

channels of speech between the hearer and the speaker, or can be used to request something politely. Another instance of the use of polite expressions as hedgers appears below.

(15) maʕ kul ʔl-iħtira:m
with all the-respect
'With all due respect'

This expression in Arabic is basically used to make the hearer feel good about himself. In other words, this expression is utilized to perform the action in a less threatening way and get engaged in an interpersonal relationship in harmony. Thus, this expression can be categorized as a hedger in Arabic since it attenuates the effect of speech between the parts of the conversation.

(16) ma: ʕale:k ʔamir
not on-2nd command
'If I don't bother you'

The above-referenced example 16, is used in Arabic to avoid imposition upon the hearer. To be more specific, providing that there is a conversation between two people, the addresser normally starts out his request with the utterance '*ma: ʕale:k ʔamir'* in order to make the addressee feel good about himself and avoid imposition. Following that, the addresser may request something. This manner of request in Jordanian Arabic is composed of '*ma: ʕale:k ʔamir'* followed by the request demonstrates a high degree of politeness.

Hedgers are also used as subjectivity markers in which they reveal the addresser's personal attitude or position towards the message. Those hedging utterances aim basically at boosting the degree of subjectivity of the utterance so that they express the speaker's judgment and personal opinion regarding a specific topic, which indicates that the argument is built on the speaker's opinion so that it cannot be definite or conclusive (Wilamová 2005). Below, are some examples obtained from respondents' feedback on the use of hedgers among Arabic speakers.

(17) /baʕtaqid/
'I believe'

(18) /baħiss/
'I sense'

(19) /baʃʕur/
'I feel'

(20) /batwaqaʕ/
'I expect'

(21) /baʃu:f/
'I see'

All the above-stated examples are used in Arabic to demonstrate the speaker's expectations, position, attitude, and personal view toward a particular issue. In other words, those phases can be treated as hedgers in Arabic as their embedded meaning includes the notion of tentativeness or uncertainty, meaning that the speaker is not completely confident of what he says. In some cases, this type of hedging utterance is used in Arabic either because the speaker is not sure

enough of his argument or because the speaker does not want to assign any responsibility to himself so that the argument is open to all possibilities.

Additionally, hedging is used as tentative, conveying the notion of vagueness, fuzziness, and imprecision (Markkanen and Schroder 1997). The use of hedgers as tentativeness in Jordanian Arabic is best exhibited in the examples below.

(22) ʔil-ma:dda nawʕan ma: ṣaʕbah
DEF-subject sort what difficult
'The course is sort of difficult'

This expression is used in Arabic to communicate the message of fuzziness or vagueness so that the speaker does not want to tell the hearer directly that the course is difficult but the speaker makes the statement fuzzy or vague.

(23) ka:nat ʔrriħla la ħaddin ma: ra:ʔiʕa
was-FEM the-journey on extent what great
'To some extent, the trip was marvelous'

The use of '*la ħaddin ma:'* in the above-stated example indicates the notion of imprecision, meaning that the speaker either is not certain about his statement or is hesitant to give a conclusive opinion about the trip because it was not hundred percent perfect.

One more function of hedgers is depersonalization. Utilizing the means of depersonalization in Jordanian Arabic aims chiefly to suppress the identity of the speaker or reduce the presence of the speaker. Depersonalization appears in the form of agentless passive construction, inchoative construction, and impersonal active construction, where the agent is substituted for the non-human entity (Zakia, 2018). The example below illustrate such use.

(24) ʔinkasara ʔiʃʃubbak
broke-PASS the-window
'The window was broken'

(25) ʔinqaṭaʕa ʔalħabl
cut-PASS DEF-rope
'The rope cuts'

In the above-stated sentences, hedging is expressed by using the passive construction in the first sentence and inchoative construction in the second sentence. The speaker employs the passive and the inchoative forms in order to conceal his identity and diminish his presence to the minimum, which in turn leads to evading assigning any responsibility to the speaker. In the first sentence, the identity of the doer of the action is totally concealed by using the passive so that nobody knows the identity of the person who broke the window. In a similar vein, the identity of the cause of the action is not revealed by using inchoative construction, so that the action appears as occurring on its own. In other words, the inchoative form entails the presence of an internal participant who brings about a change of state (Almahameed, Al-Aajalein and Ahmad 2018).

(26) ẓaharat nata:ʔidʒ ʔilimtiħa:n
showed results DEF the-exam
'The exam results showed…'

In this sentence, the speaker replaces the subject with a non-human entity for the purpose of suppressing the identity of the doer of action. To be more specific, rather than saying the instructor revealed the results of the exam, the speaker used an impersonal entity, replacing the real doer of the action. One could conclude that hedging as a linguistic device is used abundantly in Jordanian Arabic in daily conversations to serve a wide range of functions e.g., politeness, subjectivity markers, tentativizers, and depersonalization. The results pertinent to research question three are depicted below.

*Research question 3- Do hedging devices used in Jordanian Arabic show any aspect of the syntactic-pragmatic interface?*

During the course of carrying out the current study, particularly the part of data collection, it has been noticed that Arabic has a unique grammatical pattern of hedging. Although hedging expressions are known to be context-based, providing a syntactic analysis might manifest a linguistic distinction between Jordanian Arabic compared to other languages and how hedges are realized syntactically among native speakers of Arabic. It might be challenging to control hedges syntactically in terms of their pragmatic functions, however, there are instances where the syntactic makeup of a hedging expression matches with a particular pragmatic function. Based on the data provided in the paper, the syntactic patterns of hedging in Jordanian Arabic, together with their pragmatic functions, are revealed and discussed below.

## 1. Imperative structures

Within the context of Jordanian Arabic, the imperative structures are used as a hedging expression in the affirmative as well as the negated moods. This distinction is relevant because it reveals that the imperative structure in each mood associates with specific pragmatic functions. The syntactic pattern of imperative structures used as hedgers in Jordanian Arabic is characterized by the use of an infinitive form of the verb followed by the predicate.

### 1.1 Affirmative imperative structures.

Table 2 below presents imperative-based hedging expressions categorized according to three different meanings: uncertainty, positivity or harshness.

Table 2. Imperatives and the pragmatic meaning

| Group A: Imperatives evoking uncertainty or surprise to the received information | | |
|---|---|---|
| Transliteration | Literal Meaning | Pragmatic Meaning |
| /waħħid/ | say: no God except Allah | No kidding? |
| /gu:l wallah/ | Say: O Allah | Swear! |
| /ṣalli ʕala ʔannabi/ | recite blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad | Are you serious? |
| /maʕgu:l/ | really | For real? |
| Group B: Imperatives conveying positivity toward the hearer | | |
| /ṭammin/ | Assure us | Assure us |
| /baʃʃir/ | Tell us the good news | Any updates? |
| Group C: Imperatives used for lessening the harshness and intensity during conversation | | |
| /tħammalni/ | Bear with me | Bear with me |
| /iʕtabirni ɤalṭa:n/ | Assume I'm wrong | Assume I'm wrong |
| /ṭawwil ba:lak/ | Lengthen your patience | Be patient |
| /xuð nafas/ | Take a breath | Take it easy |
| /ṣabrak ʕalaj/ | Have some patience on me | Hold your horses |
| /xuðni bħilmak/ | Take me in your patience | Hold your horses |

For example, the imperative form '*waħħid'* as in group A is used to signal surprise or doubt of the received information. It is possible that the religious literal meaning of the verb might have emotive effect on its pragmatic signaling such as the usage of other verbs like '*ṣalli ʕala ʔannabi'* as in the following dialogue:

Speaker A. muħammad ʔinfaṣal min ʔiʃʃuɤul
Mohammad fired-PASS from DEF-work
'Mohammed got fired'
Speaker B. waħħid ʔallah
Swear Allah
'Seriously!'

Group A items react to the received information while group B asks about the information with positive pragmatic enforcement, such as the following

example in which the verb is used by Speaker A and not B because its pragmatic function depends on asking positively about some information rather than reacting to the information.

Speaker A: baʃʃir ʃu: ṣa:r ?
Tell-us-the-good-news what happened?
'Any updates?'
Speaker B: kulʃi tama:m, ʔinʃalla
everything okay by-God's will
'Everything went well, hopefully'

Table 3 specifically addresses the negated form of the imperative-based hedging expressions in JA with respect to their negative particle commonly used in the vernacular.

### 1.2 Negative imperative structures

Table 3. Negated imperative and sentential negation

| **La**-Negated Imperatives, aiming at lessening the level of harshness to the addressed or received information | |
|---|---|
| Transliteration | Pragmatic meaning |
| /**la:** tifhamni ɤalaṭ / | Don't get me wrong |
| /**la:** tẓun fijja su:ʔ/ | Don't misunderstand me |
| /**la:** tgawwilni/ | Don't put words on my mouth |
| /**la:** truːħ la bʕi:d/ | Don't go too far |
| /**la:** juxṭur biba:lak/ | Don't think that far |
| /**la:** tɤu:ṣ btafki:rak/ | Don't go too deep in your thinking |
| /**la:** jruːħ fikrak la bʕi:d/ | Don't think that far |
| **Sentential**-Negated imperatives (ma:, miʃ and bala) conveying the notion of politeness to the addressee. | |
| /**ma:** ʕale:k zo:d/ | Same as to you |
| /**ma:** ʕale:k ʔamir/ | there's no command upon you |
| /**ma:** ʕale:k | No obligation upon you |
| /**miʃ** la ʔiʃi/ | Not for a specific end |
| /mʃa:n **ma:** ʔaɤalbak/ | So I do not bother you |
| /**bala** muʔa:xaða/ | Without intruding |

Four negative particles are given: '*la:*, *ma:*, *miʃ* and *bala'* and each associates with particular pragmatic function as outlined above in the table. For example, if the verbal-negative *la:* is used, Speaker A seems to foresee a possible harshness or hostility to the information s/he tries to utter, so the particle along the verb signals to the addressee caution in case of misinterpretation.

Speaker A. la: tʁu:ṣ btafki:rak ʔana ma: ħake:t ʕannak
not drown in-thinking-your. I not talked about-you
'Don't go too deep in your thinking. I didn't talk about you'.

If the sentential-negative *ma:* is used, it expresses politeness in making request to the addressee.

Speaker A. mʃa:n ma: aʁalbak, bas ʃu:fli ʔil-ba:b ʔirraʔi:si
So not-to bother-you, only check out the main door

In fact, the speaker is bothering the addressee for checking the main door, however, the speaker wants to express politeness or sense of gratitude for the addressee for helping him or her.

**2. Conditional structures**

The following table shows how hedging in JA can be found in conditional-oriented structures along with their 'conditional' particles.

Table 4. *law* and *ʔiða*: Conditional

| Law-Conditional | |
|---|---|
| /bas law/ | Hopefully if |
| /law ħazʕidʒak/ | If I may bother you |
| ***ʔiða –Conditional*** | |
| /ʔiða ma: ʕindak ma:niʕ/ | If you do not mind |
| /ʔiða ma: fi:ha ʁalaba/ | If I don't bother you |
| /ʔiða btismaħ / | If you may |
| /ʔiða ma: bḏa:jgak/ | If I don't bother you |
| /ʔiða ma: fi:ha θ̲aga:lit damm/ | If I do not disturb you |
| /ʔiða ma: fi:ha taṭafful/ | If there is no intruding, can I …? |

Hedging expression '*law* ħazʕidʒak*'* can be used as an introducing phrase for polite request as in the following.

(27) law hazʕidʒak twatti ʃwai
if bother-you turn-it-down little
'If I don't bother you, turn it down little'

It is possible to use the conditional clause of 'ða:' for polite requests as well through negating a hypothetical imposition upon the addressee, as in the following example

(28) ʔiða ma: fi:ha tatafful, tsa:ʕidni biʃʃana:ti
If not there intruding help-me with-bags
'If there is not intruding, can you help me with the bags'

**3. Allah-supplication default present forms**

These forms convey supplication using the word *Allah,* followed by the default present form of the Arabic infinitive-like verbs. Each of them is used in the

conversation as politeness hedgers during the conversation through supplicating positive social concepts for the addressee such as marriage, success, having children, etc. Table 5 shows how hedging in JA can be used in supplication forms of politeness.

Table 5. Supplication forms of politeness

| | |
|---|---|
| / ʔallah jdʒawwzak/ | May Allah have you married |
| /ʔallah jirzigak min majjt ʔil-dʒannah/ | May Allah allow to drink from the waters of Heaven |
| / ʔallah la: jhi:nak/ | May Allah protect you from being insulted |
| / ʔallah jwaffgak/ | May Allah bless your life |
| / ʔallah jirzigak/ | May Allah grant you gains in life |

Those utterances are utilized in Jordanian Arabic as introductory phrases, paving the way for the following sentence, to address the hearer in a polite manner, as in the following two supplication expressions: *'ʔallah jdʒawwzak'* and *'ʔallah la: jhi:nak'*.

(29) ʔallah jdʒawwzak, btigdar tsa:ʔidni
Allah have-you-married-default, can-you help-me
'May Allah have you married. Can you help me?'

(30) ʔallah la: jhi:nak, ʃi:l ha:j maʕi
Allah not-insult-you-default, hold this with-me
'May Allah protect you from being insulted, hold this with me'

**6. Conclusion**

The current study aims primarily to investigate the use of hedging expression in Jordanian Arabic. To this end, the study explores the commonest types of hedging utterances in Jordanian Arabic. In addition, the study looks at the pragmatic functions of hedging utterances used by the Jordanian speakers. To fulfill the above stated purposes, the study collected the required data by utilizing the means of two methods; first, daily speech observations, occurring between family members, friends and colleagues at work place. Second, a survey, requesting the respondents to provide instances of daily utterances that they think serve the function of hedging in Arabic. The findings of the study reveal that hedging utterances are commonly used in Jordanian Arabic and the most commonly utilized type is compound hedgers that are composed of two hedgers and more. The findings also depict that hedgers are used in Jordanian Arabic to serve plenty of functions amongst are making polite requests to avoid imposition upon the hearer, indicating subjectivity, vagueness, and finally indicating depersonalization. It is also found that Jordanian Arabic uses distinctive syntactic patterns of hedging utterances leading to a pragmatic-syntactic interface. The dominance of compound hedging over other types can be attributed to the tendency of the speakers to be highly tactful and polite when addressing others. To be more specific, hedges play a pivotal role in permitting the speaker to make his statements in appropriate manner, with

approximate but not full accuracy, logical possibility nor excessive certainty and balanced confidence rather than over-confidence.

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