

# A Pragmatic Study of Hedges in English News on Climate Change Based on Adaptation Theory

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## Abstract:

Climate change is closely related to the daily lives of human beings and the development of nations. A comprehensive and in-depth understanding of climate change has become particularly important. As a key medium for disseminating information on climate change, news with its linguistic features plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and guiding behavior. Paying attention to the linguistic features of climate change news can help the public raise awareness of the impacts of climate change and its severity, thus promoting a positive social response. Based on adaptation theory, this paper analyzes the multiple functions of hedges in conveying climate change messages in 35 climate change news reports published by *China Daily*, aiming to help readers understand the use of language in news, enhance public awareness and responsiveness to climate change issues and motivate positive actions by all sectors of society.

**Keywords — English News on Climate Change, Hedges, Adaptation Theory, Pragmatic Study**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the multiplicity and complexity of human thinking, language itself carries ambiguity, which has become a fundamental feature of natural language. Ambiguity endows language with the flexibility to adapt to changing communicative scenarios, and hedges, as a form of expression of ambiguity, allow speakers or writers to communicate without complete clarity, which is especially crucial when discussing complex, multidimensional, or uncertain topics. As a global topic, climate change cuts across scientific, political, economic, and social spheres. This issue increasingly becomes the focus of global attention. The news media, as the main channel of information dissemination, play an indispensable role in shaping public perceptions and promoting policy discussions. The way the media use language has a profound impact on public perceptions and attitudes towards climate change. The complexity and controversial nature of the climate change topic,

coupled with the intertwining of political, economic, and cultural factors, makes it likely that the news media are more inclined to use hedges in their reporting to convey uncertainty, deal with the incomplete information, or express a cautious attitude and balance the perspectives of different stakeholders.

This paper aims to analyze in-depth the use of hedges in climate change news through the lens of pragmatics and adaptation theory. This paper will explore the role of in conveying climate change messages, shaping public perceptions and guiding social actions, aiming at enriching the application of pragmatics theory in news discourse analysis through systematic research and providing empirical foundations and recommendations for the development of climate change communication strategies. Through this study, it is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the actual functions of hedges in news reporting and how they

influence the public's understanding of and response to the global challenge of climate change.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review consists of three main parts. The first part is the introduction to hedges; the second one is the review of news of climate change, and the third part is previous studies on hedges from different perspectives. It is of profound significance to investigate hedges in English news about the topic of climate change.

### A. Introduction to Hedges

Hedges, as a linguistic phenomenon, are subject to various interpretations in academia, and to date, a comprehensive and widely accepted definition has not yet been established. Numerous scholars in the field of fuzzy linguistics have engaged in extensive and in-depth discussions on hedges from their perspectives. This section will delve into some definitions and categories of hedges that are considered significant in both foreign and domestic academic circles.

The renowned American linguist George Lakoff in [2] first introduced the term hedge in his article. He pointed out that hedges are "words that make things vaguer or less vague", and such words can change the degree of accuracy of language, modifying and limiting the main components. Zadeh, in [5] his article *Fuzzy Set Theoretic Interpretation of Linguistic Hedges*, adopted Lakoff's new definition of hedge, considering it a tool for adjusting the level of uncertainty in fuzzy concepts, and deeply analyzed these concepts from semantic and logical perspectives. Brown and Levinson in [6] defined hedges as "particles, words, or phrases that can partially affect the degree of truth of a topic under certain conditions". This definition is similar to Lakoff's view, as they both believed that hedges had the function of modification or limitation.

With the development of linguistics, more and more scholars have begun to study hedges from the perspective of pragmatic analysis. Prince et al. regarded fuzzy language as an intermediary and emphasized the importance of fuzziness in pragmatics in [7]. Hyland pointed out that hedges

such as "sort of", "may be", and "possible" are used to express uncertainty and possibility in [3]. Levinson viewed hedges as rhetorical devices for adjusting the degree, scope, and tone of discourse and texts. Brown and Levinson proposed that hedges are part of polite strategies, reducing the threat to the listener's face by adjusting the certainty of the statement in [6].

Some Chinese researchers also have discussed the definitions of hedges and advanced the study of hedges in China. Wu Tieping in [9] pioneered the study of hedges in China with a seminal publication in the *Journal of Foreign Languages*. He introduced Zadeh's definition and classification as well as further proposed that fuzzy restrictive components can be subdivided into two categories. Zhang Qiao in [8] started from the perspective of functions to define hedges, believing that hedges can change the degree of membership of fuzzy semantics, that is, achieve a quantitative change, or achieve a qualitative change, making precise semantics vague.

Hedges has been classified from different points of view, such as semantic classifications and pragmatic classifications.

From the perspective of semantics, Hyland classified hedges into three categories, i.e., accuracy-oriented, author-oriented and reader-oriented hedges. Accuracy-oriented hedges are used to express the writer's cautious attitude towards research results or assertions, reducing the absoluteness of the claims and increasing the precision of the statements in [3]. They are often used to qualify or moderate statements, such as using "possibly", "approximately", "virtually" and other words or phrases. Author-oriented hedges are used to express the author's personal viewpoints, attitudes, or beliefs, commonly employed to establish the author's authority and credibility. For example, "I believe", "in my view" and similar expressions. Reader-oriented hedges are to guide the reader's understanding and interpretation, assisting the reader in constructing an understanding of the text. They may include indicative language, such as "obviously", "it is worth noting" and so on, aiming to establish a dialogue with the reader.

In terms of pragmatics, Prince and colleagues proposed a classification of hedges that has significantly influenced the understanding and analysis of uncertainty and vagueness in language. He divided hedges into two categories, i.e., approximators and shields. The following is a detailed description of Prince's classification in [7].

Approximators include adaptors and rounders. Adaptors express the similarity or degree of closeness between things without being exactly the same. They are commonly used to soften statements and make them less absolute. For example, "kind of" and "sort of" are common adaptors that can express that something has some characteristics or attributes of another thing but does not possess them entirely. Rounders are used to provide an approximate quantity or range rather than an exact number. They are typically employed in situations where an estimate or approximation is needed. Words like "about", "approximately" and "around" can express numerical uncertainty.

Shields can be divided into plausibility shields and attribution shields. Plausibility shields are the expression of the speaker's belief or judgment about a proposition and often include the first-person pronoun, directly reflecting the speaker's viewpoint. Phrases such as "I think", "I believe", and "I suppose" can make the speaker's viewpoint appear more cautious and less assertive. Unlike plausibility shields, attribution shields hedge by citing the opinions or research findings of others, reducing the speaker's personal responsibility for the proposition. Phrases like "according to", "based on" and "as reported by" convey that the speaker is recounting others perspective or research findings, rather than making a direct assertion.

#### **B. Previous Studies on Hedges from Pragmatic Perspectives**

Scholars have primarily focused on the practical applications of hedges in real-world contexts, integrating them into various pragmatic fields such as speech act theory, cooperative principles, and politeness strategies.

Brown and Levinson in [6], leading figures in pragmatics, utilized the politeness principle and face theory to interpret hedges as politeness strategies that mitigate the risk of impoliteness and face threats, particularly in oral communication.

Salager-Meyers in [1] researched hedges in medical English discourse highlighted their role in controlling communication objectives through varied frequency and distribution, underscoring their significance in scientific discourse. Price and colleagues in [6] investigate into physical discourse identified hedges as indicators of linguistic uncertainty, reflecting a cautious approach to commitment in medical-technical communication. Qin Yunxia in [10] delved into hedges in business English news, collecting samples from *China Daily* and *The New York Times*. The paper juxtaposed similarities and differences across the two corpora, probing into the underlying factors contributing to these disparities.

This section provides a review of the definitions, categories, and studies of hedges as interpreted by scholars both internationally and domestically. However, it can be obviously found that there are a few researches on hedges used in English news on climate change. Considering the critical role that climate change news plays in shaping public discourse and raising awareness about environmental issues, it is essential to advance the pragmatic study of hedges in English climate change news.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As the theoretical framework, Adaptation Theory offers a comprehensive and nuanced lens through which to examine the intricate dynamics of language use and communication. It transcends the traditional boundaries of linguistic analysis by integrating a holistic approach that accounts for the multifaceted nature of pragmatics.

Adaptation Theory proposed that language possesses three features, i.e., variability, negotiability, adaptability that form the basis of its adaptability and make a choice. Language is marked by an intrinsic variability, which signifies its ability to adopt diverse forms and expressions across a spectrum of communicative contexts. This trait illuminates the adaptability and versatility of language, equipping speakers with a rich palette of linguistic options to suit the subtleties of each interaction. Communication is envisioned as an ongoing negotiation, where meaning is

collaboratively constructed through an interactive dialogue. This process demands that language users be agile in their linguistic choices, responsive to the cues of their conversational partners and the shifting dynamics of the context, thus ensuring the clarity and impact of their messages. The adaptability of language is its hallmark quality, reflecting its flexibility to align with various communicative goals and environments. It empowers speakers to navigate through language conventions, styles, and substance with finesse, ensuring that their communication resonates with the unique sociocultural and psychological contexts they engage within.

Verschueren gives four angles to study language adaptation, including contextual correlate of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability and salience of adaptability. These four angles provide a comprehensive pragmatic perspective for investigating language use. The contextual correlate of adaptability includes all ingredients of the communicative context, ranging from language users to the physical world, social world and mental world. These elements are closely linked to the choices made by language users and influence the adaptability of language. Structural objects of adaptability refer to the various levels of linguistic structure, including phonology, grammar, lexicon, and discourse, and how language users make adaptive choices within these structural dimensions. The third concept addresses the evolutionary process of linguistic adaptability over time. Language choices and contexts are not static but are subject to change as they are influenced by various factors throughout the communicative process. The salience of adaptability means the metapragmatic awareness at the pragmatic level, including how they are conscious of their linguistic choices and how these choices are impacted by their sociocultural backgrounds.

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The corpus, comprising 35 climate change news articles from *China Daily*, has undergone a meticulous process of annotation and refinement

that integrates both manual analysis and the application of AntConc.

The data for this paper has been carefully gathered to be as representative as possible, ensuring that it is sourced from texts that are both well-known and credible. Recognizing the importance of a respected and widely-read publication, *China Daily*, a leading newspaper in China, has been selected for its authoritative nature and broad appeal to both Chinese and international audiences. Thus, it has been chosen, and this study takes the material in *China Daily* as the research object.

Firstly, the author collects linguistic data from the *China Daily* which is related to the selected topic by searching the keywords “climate change”, “climate”, “warming” and “global warming” on *China Daily*'s official website. A total of 35 pieces of news from January to June 2024 with about 12,000 words were randomly selected. The materials have been classified in terms of the type of hedges according to the classification of Prince et.al.

From the perspective of pragmatics, this study aims to analyze the hedges in English news on climate change. This paper will answer the three questions:

- (1) What is the frequency of hedges in English news on climate change?
- (2) What hedges are used in English news on climate change?
- (3) What are the pragmatic functions of hedges in English news on climate change?

#### V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into four parts. Frequencies of different hedges are introduced in the first part. The second and third part is about approximators and shields in news on climate change. The last part discusses different hedges based on adaption theory.

##### A. Frequencies of Different Hedges

The times of hedges is important in the study of pragmatic analysis. By analyzing the frequency of hedges, the research cores in general are expressed. According to the classification of Prince, the

frequency of hedges in the selected 35 samples of news discourses is counted.

TABLE I  
THE FREQUENCY OF HEDGES

Category		Hedges	Fre	Total	Percent-age	
Approxim-ator	Adaptor	really	1	8	4%	
		some	4			
		almost	1			
		very	2			
	Rounder	about	11	48	27%	
		at least	15			
		nearly	2			
		more than	8			
		recently	4			
		hundreds of	2			
		thousands of	1			
		around	5			
	Shields	Plausibility shield	may	10	98	56%
			might	8		
could			27			
should			15			
would			18			
must			13			
likely			5			
hard to say			2			
Attribution shield		it said	3	21	12%	
		according to	8			
		reported	10			

The table provides a summary of the frequency and distribution of different categories of hedges used in the news on climate change. In this summary, plausibility shields, especially the word “may”, dominate with the highest usage, reflecting a prevalent need to indicate possibility or likelihood in the texts. Rounders, particularly “about” also

show significant use, suggesting a common requirement to discuss approximate values. While adaptors and approximators are less frequently used, they still contribute to the subtleties of language by adapting statements to the context and providing approximate descriptions. The percentages reflect the proportion of each hedge category’s usage in relation to the total count within that category, highlighting the varying degrees of emphasis placed on different types of hedging language throughout the text.

**B. Approximators in News on Climate Change**

Approximators, also known as hedges that modify the truth conditions of propositions, can be further divided into two sub-types, adaptors and rounders. These linguistic tools can adjust or even nullify the original meaning of an utterance to varying degrees based on the actual context. Here are examples illustrating adaptors and rounders.

**1) Adaptors in News on Climate Change**

Adaptors are used to mitigate the certainty of a statement, making language more flexible and easier to interpret. They can provide a certain degree of uncertainty or approximation, rather than an absolute assertion.

Example 1: Chinese special envoy for climate change Liu Zhenmin’s visit to the US on Wednesday and Thursday could help the two sides settle some of their differences over climate action and deepen cooperation in energy transformation, reducing methane and other non-carbon dioxide greenhouse gas emissions and promoting the circular economy. (Sino-US cooperation on global warming crucial amid ‘cool’ ties, May 11, 2024)

The word “some” serves as a determiner that introduces a degree of uncertainty or approximation, which aligns with the characteristics of a hedge. As a hedge, the word “some” can highlight the precision of a statement, allowing for a more nuanced expression that acknowledges variability or partiality rather than a totality or exactness. And the use of “some” in the sentence encompasses the inherent complexities of global climate governance and the hierarchical and complex nature of international diplomacy. The adaptor also suggests that while the visit may address a number of

disagreements of climate change, it is not expected to resolve all of them. This usage of “some” as a hedge reflects the complex and ongoing nature of diplomatic negotiations, where progress is incremental and typically involves addressing a portion of the issues at hand rather than achieving a comprehensive resolution in a single meeting.

Example 2: South Asia has been sweltering in recent months as a confluence of factors has led to a very hot summer, with extreme weather events killing dozens in the region. (Extreme weather events, exacerbated by climate change, claim dozens of lives, June 4, 2024)

In this example, the adaptor “very” modifies the adjective “hot” to reflect the degree of its modification of the adjective, suggesting a level beyond the normal or expected. The expression “very hot summer” intensifies the description of the summer’s extreme heat, implying a level of warmth that surpasses typical levels. The role of “very” here is to emphasize the unusual intensity of the summer heat, which is attributed to a confluence of factors leading to extreme weather events and resulting in dozens of fatalities in the region.

## **2) Rounders in News on Climate Change**

Rounders refer to a term that conveys an approximate or rounded estimate of quantity or degree. They are used to reduce the certainty of a statement by offering an approximate estimate.

Example 3: The orange alert showed that at least four provincial-level regions had experienced temperatures exceeding 37 Cover the past 48 hours, with at least two of them exceeding 40 C. (Heat waves have intensified in recent decades, June 12, 2024)

The rounder “at least” is a quantifier that refers to a minimum threshold of quantity or degree, rather than an exact one. It suggests that due to limitations in information or to maintain a level of uncertainty, the actual quantity or degree is not showed in the writing. In this example, “at least” modifies “four provincial-level regions” and “two of them” indicating that over the past 48 hours, at least four provincial-level areas have experienced temperatures above 37 degrees Celsius, with at least two of them exceeding 40 degrees Celsius. The role of “at least” here is to emphasize that even with the

most conservative estimates, the impact of the high temperatures is significant, while also suggesting that the number of affected areas and the degree of heat may be greater than what is currently known.

Example 4: Geo-engineering offers a price tag in the tens to low hundreds of billions of dollars over the 21st century compared with standard policy costing tens of thousands of times more. (Politicization of research not good climate action, March 20, 2024)

The expression “hundreds of” is the rounder in this example. It can substitute the exact number and convey the notion of a substantial quantity. In this case, “hundreds of” is utilized to offer a general indication of scale, suggesting that the cost of Geo-engineering in the 21st century may range from tens of billions to several hundred billion dollars. It makes readers know the order of magnitude of the expenses and the varying figures of the cost. And the author also gives a cautious estimate and potential fluctuations in cost. This usage helps to prevent over commitment or overly definitive statements, especially in areas involving future costs and policy decisions where there is often considerable uncertainty.

## **C. Shields in News on Climate Change**

### **1) Plausibility Shields in News on Climate Change**

Example 4: Their experiment would have gathered data showing how particles disperse and how much sunlight they reflect.

The plausibility shield “would” in the phrase “would have gathered” serves multiple functions within the sentence. It conveys a hypothetical situation, suggesting an action that was expected or intended to occur in the past but did not actually happen. This usage expresses uncertainty and reflects a cautious tone, avoiding overstatement or definitive claims about the experiment's outcomes. Furthermore, “would” indicates a level of adaptability in language, accommodating different reader expectations by discussing potential results of the experiment, even if they were not realized.

### **2) Attribution Shields in News on Climate Change**

Example 5: Nearly 25,000 people have suffered suspected heatstroke and 56 died amid scorching heat across India between March and May, local

media reported citing government data. (Extreme weather events, exacerbated by climate change, claim dozens of lives, June 4, 2024)

The attribution shields “reported” indicates a certain level of reliability, as the information is backed by government data. This suggests that the figures are official and have been verified, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the report in the eyes of the reader.

#### ***D. Pragmatic Analysis of Different Hedges Based on Adaption Theory***

News reporters are making choice while writing news, which is a dynamics process. In pragmatics research, contextual correlates of adaptability play a crucial part on applying for hedges due to the ever changing of the communicative situation and purpose. In the specific realm of writing English news about climate change, the selection of hedges is seen as a process of contextual adaptation. The writers, as the utterers of the message, employ hedges to convey the original information, subtly guiding the narrative with a nuanced approach. Meanwhile, the readers seeing as the interpreters will extract the intended information by grasping the meanings of the hedges used by the writers. Therefore, this symbiotic interaction ensures that both parties reach a shared communicative goal on the basis of the context by means of the adaptation of physical, social, and mental world.

##### ***1) Adaptation to the Physical World***

The physical world refers to the physical space and conditions in which language communication occurs, including geographical location, climate, time, utterer and interpreter in the physical world, which may influence the choice of language. The physical world shapes the language of news on climate change by demanding a careful balance between precision and accessibility. Journalists employ linguistic hedges like “around” and “more than” to convey the gradual and uncertain nature of climate phenomena, ensuring that their reporting is both scientifically sound and broadly comprehensible. These adaptive language choices aim to deepen the public's understanding of climate change and its escalating implications for our planet.

Example 1: The average onset of high temperatures (those exceeding 35 C) has advanced

by 2.5 days per decade, moving from starting around June 24 between 1981 and 1990 to starting around June 7 between 2011 and 2020, Zheng said. (China endures intensifying heatwaves amid global warming, June 6, 2024)

The rounder “around” can strengthen the adaptability to the physical world. In this example, the word “around” modify time deixis. The use of “around” subtly conveys the incremental nature of climate change, indicating that the onset of high temperatures is not shifting abruptly but rather advancing gradually over time. This hedge is an adaptive selection that accommodates the inherent variability and uncertainty in climate data, aligning with a general understanding that readers might have of the progression. Moreover, “around” facilitates comprehension by making readers know the broader trends of climate change without focusing on the specific dates, thus enhancing the understanding of long-term patterns.

Example 2: The planet is set to warm by more than 1.5 C above its pre-industrial temperature during the coming five years, exceeding targets in the 2015 Paris Agreement and moving us closer to disaster, according to the World Meteorological Organization, or WMO. (Global warming increases allergy risks, April 14, 2024)

In the statement provided, “more than” is a rounder to express an approximate range for the temperature change rather than an exact figure. The phrase “more than 1.5 C” indicates that the global temperature is expected to rise by at least 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level, suggesting that the increase could be greater but not specifying an exact amount. It also emphasizes the urgency of climate change, indicating that the rate of temperature rise may outpace the targets set in the 2015 Paris Agreement, thereby raising concerns about the climate crisis. Meanwhile, “more than” is an adaptive linguistic choice that accommodates the uncertainty inherent in scientific predictions of temperature changes and also aligns with the general public’s concern about the impacts of climate change.

##### ***2) Adaptation to Social World***

Social world involves the social context in which language communication occurs, including cultural

norms, social structure, group relationships, power dynamics, social identity, and role expectations. It significantly influences the choice of language because it determines which modes of expression are appropriate, acceptable, or persuasive. The social world affects the linguistic choices in climate change news. Journalists must find a balance between maintaining the reliability of information, adapting to social norms, and addressing the complexities of economic costs, while also meeting societal expectations for journalistic objectivity and in-depth discussion. This adaptive linguistic choice helps to convey the news content and fosters a more comprehensive public understanding of climate change issues.

Example 3: Nearly 25,000 people have suffered suspected heatstroke and 56 died amid scorching heat across India between March and May, local media reported citing government data. (Extreme weather events, exacerbated by climate change, claim dozens of lives, June 4, 2024)

The attribution shields “reported” indicates that the information about the heatstroke cases and deaths comes from a secondary source, local media, which in turn cites government data. This use acknowledges the media’s role in disseminating information within society. It is an adaptive choice that fits the social norms for reporting and sharing news. By stating that the figures are reported, there is an implicit suggestion of the reliability of the information, as it is backed by government data. This reflects the trust placed in official sources within the social context. In the meantime, “reported” serves as a hedge that maintains the objectivity of the statement by clearly indicating that the information is not the speaker’s own but is being conveyed from another source, thus adapting to the social expectation of journalistic neutrality.

Example 4: Geo-engineering offers a price tag in the tens to low hundreds of billions of dollars over the 21st century compared with standard policy costing tens of thousands of times more. (Politicization of research not good climate action, March 20, 2024)

The rounder “hundreds of” is a linguistic hedge that conveys the enormity of the economic cost required for Geo-engineering projects without pinpointing an exact figure, thus acknowledging the

complexity of socio-economic factors. It includes the significant financial scale and also meets society’s need to weigh such costs against the benefits of implementing these measures. This choice of “hundreds of” adeptly navigates the socioeconomic nuances, fostering a broader discussion on the economic implications of policy choices and the potential consequences of adopting different approaches to climate change mitigation. By contrast with “tens of thousands of times more”, “hundreds of” highlights the vast difference in cost between Geo-engineering and conventional policies, thereby emphasizing the economic consequences of choosing different policy paths within the social environment.

### *3) Adaptation to Mental World*

Mental world refers to the internal psychological states of language users and receivers, including beliefs, attitudes, emotions, intentions, expectations, and cognitive backgrounds, etc. Climate change is a global issue that affects everyone’s mental world, encompassing personality, emotions, beliefs, and motivations. When readers engage with news about climate change, they make choices based on their inner psychological needs. In the face of the global challenge of climate change, readers typically focus on two main aspects. Firstly, for local or national climate change news, which directly relates to readers’ quality of life and environmental safety, they pay more attention to the impact of climate change on local ecosystems, government response measures, and current climate trends, demanding timeliness and accuracy in news reporting. Secondly, for international climate change news, readers are more concerned about the progress of global climate agreements, policy responses from different countries, and the effectiveness of global climate actions, with strict expectations for the authenticity and fairness of the reporting. In light of these psychological needs of readers regarding climate change news, journalists should fully consider these factors and make dynamic language choices to realize the value of news discourse.

Example 5: The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs launched a Level 4 emergency response to major natural disasters on Tuesday, warning of the impact that persistently high



temperatures and drought may have on crops such as corn and soybean in provinces including Hebei, Shanxi, Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong, Henan and Shaanxi.

The use of “may” reflects the uncertainty about the current situation and the predictability of future events that may occur. It conveys a cautious attitude, suggesting that high temperatures and drought may affect crops, but such an impact is not absolutely certain. This expression of uncertainty helps to reduce the pressure or anxiety that the information recipient may feel, as it does not assert that a negative outcome will definitely happen. Secondly, the plausibility shield “may” also reflects the news reporter’s consideration for the psychological state of the information recipient. By using hedges, the reporters give the recipient some psychological space to accept and deal with potential adverse situations, while also encouraging them to take preventive measures. When providing potentially negative information, using “may” can reduce directness, thereby conveying necessary information without causing panic or excessive worry.

Hedges in climate change discourse play a vital role, helping journalists to balance the precision of information with its general acceptability while conveying the uncertainty and gradual nature of climate phenomena. The use of such language reflects sensitivity to social norms and the psychological expectations of the audience, as well as an adaptation to the inherent variability of scientific data. By employing hedges, journalists can maintain the objectivity of their reporting, subtly guide public understanding of climate change issues, and mitigate potential anxiety or alarm, fostering a deeper and more nuanced discussion on the topic. Ultimately, these adaptive linguistic choices aim to enhance public awareness of the urgency and impact of climate change, inspiring concern and action towards this global issue.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The study based on Adaptation Theory and a combination of AntConc and manual analysis, meticulously examines a corpus of climate change news articles from *China Daily*. It reveals that

hedges play an essential role in climate change news reporting, assisting journalists in balancing the precision of information with broad acceptability while conveying the uncertain and gradual nature of climate phenomena. The findings indicate that plausibility shields, particularly the word “may” dominate in usage, reflecting a prevalent need to suggest possibility or likelihood within the texts. Rounders, such as “about”, also show significant usage, pointing to a common requirement for discussing approximate values. From the Adaptation Theory, selection of hedges is seen as a process of contextual adaptation. As the utterers of the message, they use hedges to convey original information, subtly guiding the narrative with nuanced language. Readers, as interpreters, extract the intended information by understanding the hedges used by the writers, ensuring a shared communicative goal based on context. Ultimately, the study highlights the practical functions of hedges in climate change news reporting and their impact on the public’s understanding and response to the global challenge of climate change. These adaptive linguistic choices aim to deepen public awareness of the urgency and impact of climate change, inspiring concern and action towards this critical global issue.

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