SUDANESE WOMEN'S USE OF HEDGES

Muna Babiker Mohamed Tabidi

Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University, Riyadh, KSA

Abstract
This paper investigates the way Sudanese women interact in friendly talk in relation to the use of 'hedges'. It examines women's adoption of hedges in interactions. The main assumption the researcher has in mind is that Sudanese women's linguistic behavior, considering hedges, has a role to play in creating co-operation and intimate social relationships among them. The analysis is based on recordings of naturally occurring talk among women friends in Khartoum, the capital state of the Sudan. The results show that the subjects tended to use hedges excessively in their private conversations. The women in the sample adopted this linguistic device to co-operate in completing communicative tasks during natural interactions.

Key words: *hedges, collaborative talk, co-operation, intimate social relationships*

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s researchers believe that women and men differ in their communication behaviors which created different speech communities (see Weatherall 2002). Feminists argue that language establishes and maintains negative attitudes towards women and their social status. In the past women's speech style had been viewed as weak, and unassertive (see Lakoff 1975). But recent research on women's speech perceive women's conversational behavior as supportive and collaborative. It is regarded as a strategy of making extended conversation and maintaining good social relations (e.g. Coates 1989, 1993, 1996; Holmes 1984; Tannen 2007).

Women's speech was believed to be degrading and trivial and easy to ignore. Accordingly, women have been ignored in the structure of language itself. That is, masculinity forms such as chairman, mankind, guys, etc, are used when referring to people in general or persons whose gender is unknown (see Weatherall 2002). Another way of women marginalization in language in most of the Arabic world is referring to them with the names and titles of their fathers or husbands (e.g. daughter of x, wife of x) while men are addressed with their immediate names. Lakoff (1975) argues that women's language is inferior to men's. Women's speech style conveys weakness, uncertainty, and unimportance while men's language is described as direct and clear. Lakoff maintains that women use more precise color description (e.g. mauve, beige), empty adjectives (e.g. divine, lovely) than men. At the syntactic level, women use more tag questions and hedges (e.g. sort of, you know) than men.

Hedges are seen as a stereotypically women's forms and they have been misinterpreted as weak, tentative, and unassertive (see Lakoff 1975). Then, the use of hedges was linked to unassertiveness. Such usage is typically women's because they are socialized not to be assertive since assertion is not viewed as lady-like or feminine. However, Coates (1996) maintains that women's use of hedges doesn't mean that they are unassertive. Rather, the use of hedges facilitates interaction, and thus, it is a way of doing friendships.

Holmes (1987) argues that hedges are multi-functional which is to be taken into account in the analysis of gender differences in talk. In fact, Holmes opposes Lakoff's (1975) assumption that women use more hedges than men, and that they use them because they lack confidence. Holmes (1987) emphasizes that women's use of hedges (e.g. you know) is due to their confidence in supporting their point under discussion. Coates (1993) notes that men use less hedges than women for they avoid speaking about personal issues. Rather they speak about impersonal topics (e.g. current

affairs, sports, travel). Women's use of hedges, in contrast, is associated with their personal experiences where they need to be more confident (ibid).

Most of the studies on language and gender have been conducted in the West among middle-class heterosexual women and men. The main focus of these studies was to examine conversational behavior in mixed-sex talk. For instance, Coates's (1989) has examined the use of hedges in women's talk. findings show that hedges were found to be used more often by women who were friends and equals. Moreover, the women under the study used hedges to show confidence or lack of confidence of the truth of the proposition. Brown (1980), in a study of mixed-sex talk in the Mayan community in Mexico, has proved, empirically, that hedges are used by women more than by men since women are more polite in this community. Yaguchi et al.'s (2004) study of mixed sex speech in a press conference shows that women in a White House press conference used more hedges than men do because they wanted to avoid being assertive. This result supports Baalen's (2001) findings in examining the use of hedges in a mixed-sex discussion program on British TV. Female experts were found to have used more hedges than the female non-experts. These findings also are found to be the same as Coates's (1996) findings in a similar study. That is, professional females tended to downplay their authority and hedge their utterance in order not to sound assertive and to show collaboration whereas men tended to boast their expertise.

2 BACKGROUND

In the Sudan, women tend to be intimate, supportive, and co-operative. This nature is reflected, more or less, in the language they use. Women display their sensitivity to the language by using some politeness strategies such as hedges since they are socialized to speak differently from men. Sudanese women use many euphemisms in order to show their interest in the topic under discussion, and confirm each other's opinions, even if they do not see eye to eye in some views. In other words, women employ some linguistic functions such as hedges to create intimacy and socialization. Having demonstrating different kinds of assumptions about hedges, this study has focused on the use of hedges by Sudanese women, and intends to explore their functions during interaction.

3 METHODOLOGY

In the present paper, I analyze Sudanese women's interaction adopting descriptive and qualitative research methods. Recording was used in data collection as it is the most reliable method in such kinds of studies. Researcher's observation was also taken into account in the process of the analysis. The recordings covered the period between March 2010 and January 2011. The recordings took place in different settings: in a mourning house, a university teaching staff room, a university campus, and friends' houses. The participants were forty-one women from different age groups and educational levels. The subjects were divided into three groups (named as Maya, Malak, Homy) according to their ages. The total period of the recorded data was twenty-three hours and thirty minutes. One hour transcribed talk from each group was used in the process of data analysis (three hours in total). Pseudonym was used to identify the participants (using the initial letters of the informants' names). The selection of the samples was based on the occurrence of the linguistic device (hedges) to be examined. Following Jefferson's (2004) transcription system, the data have been transcribed, transliterated, and translated into English. The Conversation Analysis approach (henceforth CA, see Have 2007; Liddicoat 2007) was adopted in analyzing the data since it gives more detailed analysis, considering the immediate communicative situation.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

It is argued that hedges, sometimes called epistemic modality (e.g. may be, sort of, I mean) are used frequently and sensitively by women in their casual speech (Coates 1989, 1996; Holmes 2006; Preisler 1986; Tannen 2007). Since women friends' talk is characterized as supportive and collaborative,

hedges play an important role in creating such functions. Women use hedges more than men in creating a supportive floor (Coates 1996; Weatherall 2002).

The types of hedges used by Sudanese women, as they appeared in the data, are as follows- "ya‹ni" (like), "‹irifti?" (you know?), "kida" (kind of), "zay kida" (like this), "mã" (not), "hinãy" (sort of), "lãkin" (but), "iḥtimãl" (probably), "ḥassa/assi" (now), "hi/hu" (it's), "aṣllan" (actually), "shufti keif?" (you see how?), "yalla" (so), "shinu?" (what?), "itkhayyal ley" (I think), "shufti?" (you see?), "etgu:l" (sort of), "‹ãyni" (look), "itti ‹ãrfa?" (you know?), "addi:k kalãm" (I tell you), "da" (this one), "zãta/zãtu" (itself), "barḍa" (too), "la" (no).

For practical reasons, I will divide the use of hedges that were found in the conversations of the three groups under the study into four types according to their functions.

4.1 Uncertainty

The basic function of hedges is to signal uncertainty in the speech. That is, sometimes speakers hedge their talk to avoid certainty, as such, there will be different propositions. Women hedge when they are not sure about the truth of the proposition of their speech (see Coates 1996). The following are brief extracts from the three groups under investigation.

a- [Maya: discussion about an injection used for skin lightening]

1-S: alḥugna di bitnnaghi ejjisim(.)ya‹ni ‹irifti?(.)//

1-S: this injection purifies the skin(.)like, you know?(.)

2-S://bigu:lu eshnu?(.)mã ‹ãrif(.)shinu kida(.)mã ‹ãrif//

2-S: what they say?(.)i don't know(.)kind of what(.)i don't know

3-S://muḍãḍ lilaksada(.)ḥãja zay kida(.)<mã ‹ãrfa

3-S: anti-oxidant(.)something like this(.)i don't know

4-N: <mã bitwaggif elhinãy(.)//

4-N not, it stops, sort of(.):

5-N://al[al(stops)

5-N: the, the(stops)

6-S: [mã bitwaggif ḥãja(.)wala khaṭara

6-S: it doesn't stop anything(.)it's not dangerous

The women in the above extract spoke about some kind of injection that makes women's skin light. As S (1-3) was not sure about the exact effect of the injection, she, strikingly, produced eight hedges in one turn "ya‹ni, ‹irifti? bigu:lu eshnu? mã ‹ãrif, shinu kida, mã ‹ãrif, ḥãja zay kida, mã ‹ãrfa" (like, you know?, what they say?, i don't know, kind of what, i don't know, something like this, i don't know). "mã ‹ãrif" (i don't know), in this context, was used as a hedge. N (4) overlapped S (3) starting by hedging her speech where she said "mã" (not) trying to comment on S's talk. "mã" (not), here, was used as a hedge rather than a negative particle which is very common in Sudanese women's talk. N (4) also had a doubt about her own proposition since she uttered, before tailing off, "elhinãy" (sort of), a hedge which is used for a missing reference. This led S (6) to interrupt her insisting that the injection was not dangerous.

The data confirm Brown's (1980) finding in a study of the usage of hedges in Mayan community in Mexico. The women were found to hedge more when they knew little about the topic of their conversation.

b- [Malak: N said that Y could have come with them]

1-N: hi(.)hayya' ley ya‹ni(.)nashi:ṭa(.)dᾶyman bit bit ↓ya‹ni(.)//

1-N: she's(.)i think, like(.)active(.)always is, is, like(.)

2-N://mᾶ ‹inda elmarga mushkila[ithayya' ley ya‹ni etkhayyal ley//

2-N: going out is not a problem for her i think, like, i think

3-M: [ᾶ:y mᾶ ‹inda mushkila

3-M: yeah, she has no problem

4-N://kᾶn mumkin taji em‹ᾶna

4-N: she could have come with us

In the above conversation, the use of hedges showed that N was uncertain, and that she needed support from the interlocutors to reveal the truth of the proposition. We can divide her turn into three acts; "hi(.)hayya' ley ya‹ni(.)nashi:ṭa" (she's(.)i think, like(.)active), "dᾶyman bit bit ↓ya‹ni(.)mᾶ ‹inda elmarga mushkila" (always is, is, like(.)going out is not a problem for her), "ithayya' ley ya‹ni etkhayyal ley kᾶn mumkin taji em‹ᾶna" (i think, like, i think she could have come with us). Here, N hedged her doubt about three propositions; Y's being active, going out was not a problem for her, and coming with her friends. Notice the way the hedges "ithayya' ley ya‹ni etkhayyal ley" (i think, like, i think) were combined in the last chunk of her turn to show uncertainty of "kᾶn mumkin taji em‹ᾶna" (she could have come with us). This suggests that the doubt in this act was much more than that in the previous two acts.

This example supports Coates's (1993) argument that when speakers intend to show their uncertainty about some point they use more hedges in one turn. Preisler (1986), on the other hand, carried out a study in mixed-sex conversation focusing on the expression of tentativeness. The results support the assumption that heavy use of hedges indicates uncertainty. The women in Preisler's study were found to use more hedges than men when they were uncertain about the topic under discussion. Similarly, N, in my example, used a good number of hedges because she was not sure whether Y would have accompanied them.

c- [Homy: discussion about the nationality of some people]

1-M: Su:dᾶniy:n walla mᾶ?(stops)

1-M: Sudanese or not?(stops)

2-N: Sa‹u:diy:n

2-N: Saudis

3-M: ᾶ:?

3-M: what?

4-N: lᾶkin mᾶ ‹ᾶrfa(.)iḥtimᾶl(stops)

4-N: but i don't know(.)probably(stops)

5-M: ḥassa mᾶ ‹ᾶrfa(.)annᾶs ebgu:l leik Su:dᾶniy:n

5-M: now, i don't know(.)people say they are Sudanese

N (2) said that the mentioned people were Saudis then she (4) retreated after M (3) asked for clarification. N (4) employed some hedges which showed her doubt about the information she was reporting. It seems that N's (4) doubt arouse when M (3) conveyed her misunderstanding, where she uttered "ã:?" (what?), that is N might give the wrong notion. Then N said, before dropping out, "iḥtimãl" (probably) in an attempt to express her doubt that the people in question were Saudis. M (5), in turn, hedged her doubt about the nationality of the people. Notice the words (4) "lãkin" (but), (5) "ḥassa" (now), "mã ʿãrfa" (i don't know) were used as hedges. Generally, in the Sudanese context, the word "lãkin" (but) is mostly used as a hedge rather than as a coordinator.

In comparison, an example by Coates (1996) shows how three friends mirrored each other's relative confidence in what the mother of one of them did through their choice of the adverb 'probably'. The three friends used the adverb 'probably' as they believed that the mother begged a milkman to give her lift to a funeral. Coates notes that the adverb 'probably' was used to expresses certainty. This is, however, not the case in my data where "iḥtimal" (probably) indicated an absolute doubt.

4.2 Sensitive Speech

One of the strengths of hedges is that they can be used to take care of the feelings of all participants in conversation. This is what Coates (1996) calls Interpersonal Function of hedges. Coates draws on a model of communication developed by Brown's and Levinson's (1978) notion of 'face' needs. That is the need to be respected and free from imposition (Negative Face), and the need to be agreed with and liked (Positive Face). Tannen (1994) notes that since women speech style is supportive and co-operative, women tend to hedge their talk as a politeness strategy. In Sudanese women's discourse, hedges play an role in protecting participants' face, especially when discussing sensitive topics. That is, women adopt hedges to mitigate the force of the utterance when trying to pay attention to each other's feeling. Consider the following extracts.

a-[Maya: Conversation about N's hair]

1-N: assi ana baʿad mã gaṣṣeitu(.)ghizir

1-N: now, after, not, i cut it (her hair)(.)it became thick

2-J: ã:y(.)bighzar<hu

2-J: yeah(.)it becomes thick (after cutting) it's

3-N: <lãkin hu mã//

3-N: but it didn't become

4-N://ghizir(.)lãkin hu aṣllan ʿashãn elfo:g ya<ni//

4-N: thick(.)but, it's, actually, because the upper (hair) like

5- J:<ã::y

5-J: yeaah

6-N://shufti keif?(.)yalla hu ʿãjibni

6-N: you see how?(.)so, i like it (her hair)

As N feared that J might recognize that her hair did not become thick after cutting, she backed off her claim when she (3) overlapped J uttering "lãkin hu mã ghizir" (but it didn't become thick). To protect

her own face, N (4,6) used a number of hedges "lᾶkin, aṣllan, ya‹ni, shufti keif? yalla" (but, actually, like, you see how?, so), successively. In so doing, N wanted to shift the topic away from hair thickness to likeness, when she (6) said "yalla hu ‹ᾶjibni" (so, i like it).

N's adoption of this number of hedges, obviously, was not due to her doubt about the truth of the proposition since she was talking about her own hair. Rather, she could not predict how her friend would react to her claim that her hair became thick after cutting. So, by using hedges, N protected her negative face from being affected by disagreement. However, the situation was saved by J's support where she (5) overlapped N, uttering a prolonged minimal response "ᾶ::y" (yeaah).

Apart from women's use of hedges in private conversations as a way of politeness strategy, they also adopt them in other contexts. This supports Holmes's (2006) notion of 'relational practice' (RP; the ability to work effectively in work settings by developing co-operative speech style to gain support and equality). Holmes notes that women use hedges, to mitigate the force of the speech acts, when giving directives to their subordinates in the workplace which show their feminine style in speech.

b- [Malak: discussion about R's husband kindness]

1-M: wallᾶy biḥin yᾶ R(.)lᾶkin shinu?(.)ya‹ni(.)ya‹ni//

1-M: really, he's kind, R(.)but what?(.)like(.)like

2-M://ebṣayṭir(.)kida elḥᾶja fi:o juwwᾶtu(.)//

2-M: he controls others(.)kind of, it's inside him(.)

3-M://biḥibbu eṣṣayṭara……

3-M: they (R's husband family) like controlling others……

4-R: ṣᾶḥ(.)u:(.)fi‹lan

4-R: right(.)yeah(.)exactly

In the above extract, M's (1) use of the hedges "shinu?(.)ya‹ni(.)ya‹ni" (what?(.)like(.)like) did not indicate that she was not certain about the proposition (2) "ebṣayṭir" (he controls others), but rather that she did not know whether her friend (R) would accept this harsh opinion on her husband. Hence, she did not want to offend R's negative face. By employing the hedges, M also protected herself from being accused of describing R's husband as a dictator. The hedge "ya‹ni" (like), which M uttered twice, suggested that she could retreat from the critical position if it turned out to be unacceptable. In other words, she could deny what she said if R got offended by what was said about her husband. But R's (4) response "ṣᾶḥ(.)u:(.)fi‹lan(.)" (right(.)yeah(.)exactly), which showed her full agreement, released M's tension.

c- [Homy: interaction about siphons in A's area]

1-M: lᾶkin dᾶyman assafo:n filḥittat ezzay di bigu:l leik ya‹ni//

1-M: but, always the siphons in places like this (B; a neighborhood), it's said, like

2-M://fiya mo:ya mᾶ binjjaḥ shadi:d(.)ḥassi//

2-M: in wet areas, siphons would not succeed enough(.)now

3-M://iḥna nᾶs ummi fil Z barḍu Y talᾶta marrᾶṭ……

3-M: my mam in Z, too, Y (M's sister) dug it 3 times……..

4-E: lᾶkin ᾶ:(.)B kulla itkhayyal ley fᾶyra

4-E: but, um(.)B, all of it, i think, has a wet soil

5-A: hi(.)shufti lᾶmin dakhalat ʿarabiyat eshshaṭif(.)//

5-A: it's(.)you see, when the sifting vehicle appeared(.)

6-A://ʿamalu fiya etgu:l ḥᾶjᾶt

6-A: they made in them (siphons) sort of, things to destroy them

and then they may earn money from sifting water

M talked generally about how digging siphons in wet areas, like B, did not succeed. She used hedges to mitigate the force of the speech act attempting to protect A's feeling since she lived in B. M's (2) utterance "shadi:d" (enough), which implied that digging siphons might succeed, would protect her face if A disagreed with her that digging siphons succeeded in her area (B). In addition, E (4) agreed with M that B had a wet soil. To avoid affecting A's negative face, E (4) uttered "lᾶkin" (but) as a hedge, combined with her stammering sound "ᾶ:" (um) so that her remark would not be interpreted in a negative way.

E (4) inserted the hedge "itkhayyal ley" (i think) in the middle of her actual talk "B kulla fᾶyra" (B, all of it, has a wet soil) which also degraded the negative effect of her claim upon A. E was right to be anxious when A (5), immediately, challenged her and explained that the sifting tankers' owners might be responsible for bad siphons, not the soil. A employed the hedges (5) "hi(.)shufti" (it's(.) you see), (6) "etgu:l" (sort of) so as to mitigate her claim. By so doing, she could save the interlocutors' (M and E) negative face and her own positive face since she disagreed with them.

It is obvious from the analysis of the three extracts that Sudanese women tend to adopt hedges as a strategy of observing each other's feeling when discussing sensitive issues. In such situations, hedges index politeness. Brown (1980) notes that, in a study of the use of hedges in Mayan community in Mexico, women employed more hedges in single-sex interaction than men did. Such usage of hedges indicates that women are more polite in this community than men. Brown's study confirms Coates's (1989) when she examined women's adoption of hedges in single-sex groups. Coates has found out that women used hedges more than men did. She argues that hedges are used to protect both the speakers' and the addressees' face.

4.3 Opening Discussions

Opening discussion is another reason for the frequent occurrence of hedges in women friends' interactions (Coates 1996). That is, women facilitate the discussion by hedging the initial speech. This is what I found in my data where most of the talk was initiated by hedges. The following extracts show good examples of this use.

a- [Maya: N talked about new style hand bags]

1-N: ʿᾶynu awarri:kum ashshunaṭ elḥilwa eṭṭalaʿaṭ yᾶ dᾶb?

1-N: look, shall i show you the nice hand bags that appeared now?

2-S: u:

2-S: yeah

(N going on describing the hand bags)

N facilitated the discussion by hedging her speech. The hedge "ʿᾶynu" (look) initiated her talk as a starting point which helped in getting the participants' attention. N put her utterance in a form of

rhetorical question which worked together with the hedge to attract the addresses' attention. By so doing, N tried to show that she was aware of the latest fashion. Consequently, S responded, uttering "u:" (yeah), a minimal response that meant 'I'm listening' rather than for confirmation. This, by and large, encouraged N to go on describing the new style hand bags.

b- [Malak: discussion about Y's facing difficulty in fasting]

1-H: shufti ustα̃za Y jad bigat kiwwaysa(.)//

1-H: you see, teacher Y, really became better (in fasting)(.)

2-H://zamα̃n lα̃min fijjα̃mʿa(.)[kullumα̃//

2-H: earlier, at the university(.)whenever

3-M: [lamman taku:n ṣα̃yma yaʿni?

3-M: when she was fasting, like?

4-H://talga leia mα̃su:ra….

4-H: she found a tap……

5-H: α̃:y(.)yaʿni fijjα̃mʿa(.)takub elmo:ya(.)fishshaʿar

5-H: yeah(.)like, at the university(.)she used to pour water(.)on hair

6-Y: bas(.)almo:ya(.)mα̃ batḥammal elʿaṭash

6-Y: just(.)the water(.)i can't bear thirst

In this example, the hedge "shufti" (you see) that H began her turn with facilitated her following speech about Y's facing difficulty in fasting. M's (3) enquiry supported H's speech when she inferred what H was talking about "ṣα̃yma" (fasting). It seems that this inference arouse because the discussion was about Ramadan (the fasting month). In order to be moderate in her claim about Y, H (5) hedged her response to M's enquiry saying "α̃:y(.)yaʿni fijjα̃mʿa" (yeah(.)like, at the university) then went on describing Y's earlier state when she was fasting. Y's (6) "bas" (just) indicated that she partially agreed with H. So, her utterance "bas(.)almo:ya" (just(.)the water) implied that she could not, only, bear thirst when she was fasting and nothing else. Then, Y made it clearer when she added "mα̃ batḥammal elʿaṭash" (i can't bear thirst).

In the above extract, H (1) did not only hedge her initial utterance to facilitate talk, but she also (5) used a hedge "yaʿni" (like) because she did not want to be firm about what she said. So, apart from hedging to facilitate the discussion, H also hedged to avoid assertion when saying that Y could not bear fasting.

This example shows, by and large, how women hedge their assertion. This was obvious where H (5) hedged her speech when describing Y's state in fasting. This finding goes in line with the belief that hedges are markers of unassertive speech. Supporting this view, Yaguchi et al. (2004) have examined the hedges 'sort of' and 'kind of' in a White House press conference. Findings suggest that women use these forms so as not to be assertive. In a similar fashion, Baalen's (2001) study of a mixed-sex discussion program on British TV shows that female experts used more hedges than female non-experts in order to downplay their authority.

c- [Homy: three women talked about B's being affected by magic]

1-A: itti ʿα̃rfa?(.)addi:k kalα̃m(.)addi:k kalα̃m(.)di mα̃ ʿein barα̃(.)//

1-A: you know?(.)i tell you(.)i tell you(.)it's not only an evil eye(.)

2-A://da zo:l sagãk ḥãja

2-A: someone gave you a drink (magic drink)

3-M: ã:y mã gãl kida(.)mã gãl ã: siḥir(.)//

3-M: yeah, not, he(the sheikh)said so(.)not, he said um, it's magic(.)

4-M://gãl ʿãmli:n leik ʿa<mal

4-M: he said someone did you magic work

5-B: <ã:y(.)gãl ley da ʿamal

5-B: yeah(.)he told me it's magic work

To facilitate the discussion, A started the turn by hedging her prediction about B's being affected by magic work. A uttered and repeated the hedge "addi:k kalãm" (i tell you), attempting to get the interlocutors' full attention before suggesting her prediction. Through the strategic use of hedges, A managed to make her point without coming into conflict with the other participants. M (3), on the other hand, produced the hedge "mã" (not) twice, and stammering "ã: siḥir" (um, it's magic) in order to be moderate if B would refute her claim. However, B (5) agreed with her friends' prediction, emphasizing that the sheikh told her that her illness was due to a magic deed.

4.4 Searching for the Right Word

In Sudanese women conversation, hedges are also a helpful device that speakers adopt while searching for the right word that expresses an idea. Coates (1996) argues that the search for the right word is part of women's intention to think about things in new ways. This hedges' function will be considered in the following extracts.

a- [Maya: post graduate friends discussed an exam material]

1-S: ã:y kãn addãna(.)addãna ekhtiṣãrãṭ

1-S: yeah, he (the lecturer) gave us(.)gave us abbreviations

2-N: lãkin gãl shinu?(.)gãl hinãy(.)ayyi zo:l bibãṣi

2-N: but, he said what?(.)he said, sort of(.)anyone will pass

3-S: ṣãḥ

3-S: right

N (2) tried to explain what the lecturer said about the exam by using hedges. As she was searching for the right words that described the lecturer's speech, N (2) used some hedges "lãkin gãl shinu?, hinãy" (but, he said what?, sort of). Then she, eventually, settled on "ayyi zo:l bibãṣi" (anyone will pass). So, the use of hedges helped N to gain some time before finding the searched words. Generally, the hedge "hinãy" (sort of) is used mainly when the speaker tries to find the right word.

b- [Malak: discussion about S's classes]

1-S: mã kutta baji elaḥad(.)tãni shãlo minni

1-S: not, i was coming on Sundays(.)then they took it from me

2-M: aha?

2-M: so?

3-S: gᾶm elkhawᾶja da(.)al al hinᾶy(.)alvolanti:r gᾶl dᾶyru

3-S: then the foreigner, this one(.)the the, sort of(.)the volunteer said he wanted it (Sundays' classes)

S (3) was trying to recall the name of the teacher who took her Sundays' classes. She used the phrase "elkhawᾶja da" (the foreigner, this one). "da" (this one), in this context, acted as a hedge. After a short pause, S uttered the hedge "hinᾶy" (sort of) trying to find the next utterance. At the end she said "al volanti:r" (the volunteer) when she could not recall his name. Notice how S (3) struggled to gain time to recall the teacher's name uttering the hedge "da" (this one), and repeating the article "al" (the), then hedged even further by pre-modifying "alvolanti:r" (the volunteer) with the hedge "hinᾶy" (sort of).

c- [Homy: conversation about a religious centre]

1-I: lᾶkin mᾶ mᾶ mᾶ ḥatalga leya niswᾶn min wein imsiku leya//

1-I: but, not, not, not, how can she find women taking care of

2-I:// elmarkaz bitᾶʿa?.....[…..

2-I: her centre?...…..

3-E: [la hi zᾶta yaʿni barḍa bitku:n fiya//

3-E: no, it, itself, like, too, has

4-E://kida ehnᾶy(.)rahba kida

4-E: kind of, sort of(.)difficulty, kind of

In this example, both I and E hedged their utterances searching for the right words. I (1) adopted "mᾶ" (not), as a hedge, three times in order to have enough time to find words that express her point "ḥatalga leya niswᾶn…" (how can she find women…). E (3), on the other hand, interrupted her, saying what she believed about the responsibility of the religious centers. Strikingly, E used much more hedges than her basic speech. She uttered several hedges in one turn since she could not find a word that explained her view "rahba" (difficulty). Although the word "rahba" means fear, it meant in this context the difficulty that one faces in being in charge of a religious centre.

This example, by and large, supports the notion of multi-functionality of hedges. That is, hedges can perform several functions simultaneously. In this extract, E's (4) last hedge "kida" (kind of) served two functions; uncertainty, and face need. In other words, E was in doubt that the word "rahba" (difficulty) might not be the appropriate word that fits in the context. In addition, this word might not be accepted by the participants. In this sense, E protected her positive face (the desire to be agreed with) by uttering "kida" (kind of).

5. RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Results show that women in Sudan use hedges intensively in their private conversations. They do not consider hedges as sort of weakness of women's speech. Rather, hedges have different social functions. From the analysis of the speech of the women under study, we find that Sudanese women use hedges in their conversations for different purposes. They hedge their utterances when they are not certain about the propositions. Moreover, Sudanese women try not to be assertive in their friendly talk by using hedges as a politeness strategy when the topics are sensitive. In such cases, they do not want to affect their friends' negative face. Furthermore, Sudanese women adopt hedges in opening

discussions as a way of facilitating their speech. They initiate their topic using hedges as a starting point which help in getting the participants' attention. Hedges are also used when a woman needs some time to search for the appropriate word that fit her topic. Then, they hedge their utterances to avoid lapses in the interactions, and to assure continuation of the speech.

It is noted that Sudanese women show their feminine profile by using hedges frequently in mundane talk. Generally speaking, the use of hedges portrays the Sudanese women's uniqueness in their adoption of this linguistic device. That is, their speech is not only marked by hedges, but sometimes they produce a flow of hedges without any interval. In their friendly talk, Sudanese females prefer to establish a collaborative floor, and to keep distances between themselves. To do so, they tend to hedge their talk as a device that enables them to reach that aim.

The conclusion to be drawn is that Sudanese women use hedges intensively in their friendly talk. The study has also shown that Sudanese women adopt speech style helps them develop co-operation in conversation. In their friendly talk, the women under study created a co-operative floor by participating actively in interactions. This might stem from the fact that Sudanese women tend to be co-operative. This tendency is reflected in their sociolinguistic behavior. That is to say, Sudanese women use some linguistic functions such as hedges in ways that show how they work co-operatively in private interactions which leads to good social relationships. More interestingly, the amount of hedges used by Sudanese women in interaction is incomparable to that used by women in the West (see Brown 1980; Coates 1989, 1996; Holmes 1984, 1987; Preisler 1986 for comparison).

At the end, the study has revealed that education and age have played no role in the choice of the linguistic function examined. The women who participated in the conversations showed similar speech style, considering hedges, although they belong to different age groups with different levels of education. In short, women in the Sudan do form a homogenous social group regardless of any demographical differences such as age, education, or class. To sum up, we may claim that Sudanese women use linguistic forms which help promote mutual support, co-operation, and intimate social relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to Prof. Jennifer Coates, the pioneer of women's conversation study, for her book 'Women Talk' which has inspired me to tap into a new area of investigation. Thanks are also due to Prof. Elizabeth Stokoe at Loughborough University, UK, for her valuable papers in Conversation Analysis; and to Prof. Jack Chambers at the University of Toronto, Canada, for the useful material he provided me with. And last but not least, I want to thank the women who contributed to the process of recording the data without whom this study would not have been completed successfully.

REFERENCES

Baalen, V. I 2001, 'Male and female language: growing together'?, *Historical Linguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics.* HSL/SHL1, 19 April, P. 10, viewed 3 June 2014

<hhh://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl shl/van%20Baalen.htm>.

Brown, P 1980, 'How and why women are more polite: Some evidence from Mayan

Community', in McConnell-Ginet, S, Borker, R & Furman (eds.), *Women and language in literature and society*, New York, Praeger, pp. 111-136.

Brown, P & Levinson, S 1978, 'Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena', In E Goody (ed.), *Questions and politeness'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 56-310.

Cameron, D, McAlinden, F & O'Leary, K 1989, 'Lakoff in context: The social and linguistic functions of tag questions', In J Coates & D Cameron (eds.), *Women in their speech communities*, Longman, London & New York, pp. 74-92.

Coates, J 1989, 'Gossip revisited: Language in all-female groups', In J Coates & D Cameron (eds)., *Women in their speech communities*, Longman, London & New York, pp. 94-122.

Coates, J 1993, *Women, men and language*, Longman, London

Coates, J 1996, *Women talk*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Eckert, P & McConnell-Ginet, S 1992, 'Think practically and look locally: language and gender as community-based practice', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 14 May, pp. 461-490, viewed 19 June 2013

<http://www.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/eckert2006.pdf>.

Have, P ten 2007, *Doing conversation analysis: A practical guide*, Cornwall, Great Britain.

Holmes, J 1984, 'Hedging your pets and sitting on the fence: Some evidence of hedges

as support structures', *Te Reo*, vol. 27, pp. 47-62.

Holmes, J 1987, 'Hedging, fencing and other conversational gambits: An analysis of

gender differences in New Zealand speech', in A Pauwels (ed.), *Women and language in Australian and New Zealand society*, John Benjamin, Amsterdam, pp. 12-13.

Holmes, J 2006, *Gender talk at work*, Cornwall, UK.

Jefferson, G 2004, 'Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction', in G. H Lerner (ed.), *Conversation analysis: studies from the first generation*, pp. 13-31.

Lakoff, R 1975, *Language and women's place*, Harper & Row, New York.

Liddicoat, A 2007, *An introduction to conversation analysis*, Athenaeum Press, Great Britain.

Preisler, B 1986, *Linguistic sex roles in conversation*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.

Sacks, H, Schegloff, E. A & Jefferson, G 1974, 'A simplest systematics for the

organization of turn-taking for conversation', *Language*, vol. 50, pp. 696-735.

Tannen, D 1994, *Gender and discourse*, Oxford University Press, London.

Tannen, D 2007, *You just don't understand*, Harper, New York, London, Toronto, & Sydney.

Weatherall, A 2002, *Gender, language and discourse*, Cornwall, Greta Britain.

Yaguchi, M, Iyeiri, Y & Okabe, H 2004, 'Style and gender differences in formal contexts: An analysis of 'sort of' and 'kind of' appearing in the corpus of spoken professional American-English', *English Corpus Studies*, vol. 3, pp. 40-44, viewed 14 June 2013,

<http:/homepage3.nifty.com/iyeiri/yaguchi3.pdf>.

APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions used for the conversational data are as follows:

1- //, // double slashes sign indicates one's utterance is incomplete and will continue in the next line.

2- [a square bracket indicates the start of interruption between utterances.

3- < an angled bracket indicates the start of overlap between utterances.

4- (.) a micro pause.

5- (-) a longer pause.

6- underlined utterance indicates stressed talk.

7- CAPITALIZED utterance indicates loudness.

8- *italicized* utterance indicates quietness.

9-: a colon sign indicates prolonging utterance

10 ….. dots indicates missing utterances

11-↑an upper arrow indicates faster pace of an utterance than the previous one.

12-↓a down arrow indicates slower pace of talk than the previous one.