Original Article

Comparative Study of Hedges Utilization by Iranian and Native American Researchers in Applied Linguistics

Sharareh Sadat Sarsarabi[1,] , Samaneh Zolfaghari[1]*

[1] Department of English, Farhangian University, Shahid Beheshti Campus, Mashhad, Iran

Abstract

Academic writing, similar to the other types of writing, would be operative if authors employ conventions which the other associates of their community recognize familiar and conclusive. Principally, writing includes generating a text that we accept the reader will understand and believe, and reading includes drawing on conventions according to what the author is demanding to do. It is widely believed that, one of the most important aspect of scientific discourse is to consider data and the results obtained from the gathered data. The sentences of a written discourses signify the writers' opinions (Stubbs,1986), academic authors are required to offer their statements thoughtfully, and specifically to satisfy expectations of discourse community, and to start a dialogue with their readers. The purpose of the present study was to examine the frequency and types of hedging devices in Discussion and Result sections of applied linguistics articles. To this end, 20 articles were selected form the leading journal; 10 by native English speaker EFL scholars and 10 by Iranian EFL scholars. After categorizing hedging devices based on Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy, and recording the type and frequency of hedges, it was found that there was no significant difference between Iranian and American writers in terms of utilizing hedging devices in their discussion and result sections.
Keywords*:* Discourse Analysis, Discussion, Hedging devices, Native and Non-native, Result

Corresponding Author's E- mail: dr.sarsarabi@cfu.ac.ir/dr.sarsarabi@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Human communication engages a dynamic process of construction, understanding and negotiation of meanings encoded in a text. In academic discourse, the chief objective of writers is to present their views in an influential technique by constructing a coherent and probable representation of themselves and their research and by building up a relationship with their discourse community. Since in written discourse there is no straight contact between writers and readers, the formation of a dialogic room for the negotiation of meaning is relied on the capability of academic writers to predict the possible feedbacks of readers and to employ a variety of discourse strategies so as to convince the addressees to believe declarations and viewpoints, while guiding them towards an intended, coherent understanding of the text.

Hedging is a linguistic device of useful communication and collaboration between individuals in all facets of living. Scientists look for suitable techniques to show ambiguity, suspicion, etc. Salager-Meyer believed, "scientists like all language users adhere to the forms that better fit their communicative objectives and the statements they offer to the world's store of information" (Salager-Meyer, 1997; p. 117). Hedging exists in every language but the degree of its use differs from one language to the other. This linguistic means in the Armenian language has not been recognized as a distinctive lexical-grammatical class, so there exists no distinctive word for it. It is related to the idea of the class of modality, but is much broader in meaning, including proper modal words and expressions, besides lexical verbs of modal meaning, if - clauses, etc.

Studies demonstrated that English scientific discourse is well-known for its rich utilization of hedges (Vassilieva, 2001). As the English language is recognized as an international language, the main language of interaction among individuals through the world, the scientific community included, it may be concluded that English is allowed to function as a model for offering written and oral scientific discourse at different academic situations. This property of English is recognized as an important phenomenon in view of ever-increasing academic associates and the distribution of scientific facts around the world.

Isabel (2001) assumed that the use of hedges is significant because of two key factors. Firstly, it is to demonstrate the writer's idea considering his statement and then, to demonstrate the writer's idea regarding the readers. Horn (2001) stated that for science to develop, the writer has to achieve approval from addressees for the additional information.

Approving does not relate to complete agreements rather, a cautious promise by the scientific society. One way to realize this agreement is over the quotation of the past study. he assumed that using, or altering the hedges would influence the agreement concerning that an author is trying to progress. Marco and Mercer (2004) believed that citation generates documented ways to consider various papers from a research society. They asserted that utilization of hedge improves or lessen the writers' statement, and aid the writer instantaneously states his assertion, question existing views and preserve his situation in the society. They believed that citation frequently occurs in sentences marked by hedging cues. Lewin (2005) suggested five main functions for hedging in scientific articles: respect, avoiding accountability, and hide reality. Unlike different writers, the outcomes of Lewin's study demonstrate that writers of various research papers do not reflect "politeness" as the central reason for the utilization of hedge.

Cabanes (2007) identified three central linguistic meanings or communicative aims for utilization of hedge in research papers that contain demonstrating respect, and alteration regarding addressees from results of incorrect statements and bearing in mind some amounts of accuracy. Duenas (2007) considered impersonalization or lessening the role of the writer as the key purpose of hedging.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Although hedge words are used more in spoken language (Stubbs, 1986), most research has so far focused on written works. Considering only written language, Hyland (1996) argued that the distribution of hedges across various sections of research articles shows their fundamentally rhetorical role in the dialogue. There could be various ways to divide a research paper into many parts. Lau (1999) examined 100 research papers. He aimed to find written structures of different parts in scientific papers. He concluded that hedging is generally utilized in discussion parts since authors have contended with rational reasoning when they offer experimental outcomes in discussion parts. Similar results were achieved in more recent work by Durik et al. (2008). They examined the influences of hedging placement and the kind of utilized hedge on ideas and awareness of argument strength. The outcomes of this investigation demonstrate that in the discussion part of research papers different types of hedges have been utilized. Durik et al. (2008) mention that this happens since the writers wish to deduce the information. Similarly, Salagar-Meyer (1994) attained the identical

outcomes that hedging is utilized more recurrently in the discussion part since in this part of research articles that authors wonder, reason, compare and generalize from the defined outcomes, and simultaneously evade declaring outcomes too decisively so as the audience may understand that the writers are not demanding to have the concluding word about the topic. Banzermen and Kelly (2003) described an arrangement for the distribution of hedging in this manner: high, low, and high. This implies that mostly in the introduction section, the authors rarely utilize hedge. In the methodology section, the authors frequently use hedging. And, finally, in the result and discussion part of a research article, the writers use hedging more frequently. Similar results were obtained by Skelton (1988), who found similar outcomes, and divided science papers into three different parts including beginning, middle, and end.

There exist numerous features affecting the way a writer utilizes hedging. It is believed that the degree of utilizing hedge words relies heavily on the addressees who the writer wishes to address. Some authors do not use hedge words while reporting risky data (Simpson, 2000), besides there exists a fairly stable arrangement for the spreading of hedging in research papers. One more significant element is the field that the writer signifies. For instance, as Spillner (1983) states in writings in which the utilization of experimental research and logical interpretation are not central, the style of text develops as an important factor in realizing reliability.

In a study conducted by Yang (2003), articles in English and Chinese were compared. Regardless of some relationships, it was observed that Chinese authors wish to be more straightforward in speech considering the greater frequency of approximates and the number of shield types called plausibility. In another study, Winardi (2008), English text transcribed by American writers, and writers from China were compared. He found out that American writers employed more adjectives, and nominal phrases compared to Chinese writers. Instead, Chinese writers employed modal verbs more than English writers.

In a study carried out by Tatis and Rowland (2006), compared Greek and English articles in the field of mathematic were compared. In this investigation, stress was placed on contributor's face work. The writers recommended that while in both languages writers tend to maintain their addressees' face and employ unclear language to achieve the goal, the Greek writer might decide to warn audiences face to preserve her face.

The most rational effort to consider hedging in a complete practical organization relates to Myers (1989). He states that hedging is related to a more comprehensive method of respect intended to amends the caution investigator maintains to the face of other researchers. While authors look for increase identification by producing the statements they could, these statements are probable to test the present hypothesis of the field and weaken other study programs. A variety of strategies are then utilized in order to alleviate declaration as well as to reduce those obligations. Myers' study has been regarded as evidently evocative as well as essential to all explanations about the use of hedge, but Brown and Levinson's (1987) informal replica offers just a limited explanation of utilization of hedge in technical speech. The idea which claims that the status and proficient place of each expert relies on the effort and recognition of other experts mean a disappointment in monitoring suitable models of behavior that avoids obtaining objectives, but will acquire supports as a result. Utilization of hedge is the main element in educational communication that allows authors to express confidence and uncertainty concerning their claims, to display the extent of support they allocate to their statement, as well as to begin a discussion with those who read their paper (Rounds 1982). Influenced by Lakoff, many linguists such as Brown and Levinson (1987) describe the concept of hedging as a tool for realizing a linguistic vagueness.

In 2008, Atai and Sadr examined the occurrence and forms of hedging in the discussion part of 108 papers in language studies. The papers used both different designs and moreover were carried out by Iranian and American native speakers. The results of the investigation displayed meaningful dissimilarity in the utilization of hedges, regarding form and frequency, between the two groups of writers. Above all, employing questions, one type of hedging strategy, was observed infrequently in the papers of Persian speakers and verbs, and adverbs, and causals have been employed repeatedly in English native speakers' articles. Furthermore, English native speakers employed modalities, clausal, and question forms more regularly in articles.

Hyland (1998) examined 28 papers. The results demonstrated that hedges were the most common set of metadiscourse. It was also shown that interpersonal metadiscourse was very common in language studies and marketing firms. In a similar study conducted by Hyland (1996), it was observed that metadiscourse indications, principal connectives,

have been employed at a fairly high rate. The results showed that there observed a considerable difference between the utilization of interpersonal meta-discourse signs.

Behnam et al. (2012) examined the use of hedge in the conclusion parts of 100 articles considering language studies. They employed Hyland's (1996) classification of hedging in the investigation and observed a meaningful difference between the utilization of hedges in different articles related to their design.

Abdi (2002) examined the utilization of interpersonal metadiscourse indicators considering 50 articles. He observed that the utilization of hedging was meaningfully more common in social science papers, though this dissimilarity was not observed regarding the utilization emphatics. Besides, findings revealed that the writers employed emphatics less than hedges.

Jalilifar (2011), carried out a study to find out meta-discourse differences in the discussion sections of articles prepared in Persian and English and published. The results showed the important differences regarding the frequency, forms, and functions of these devices. The writer believed that this variation is due to limited knowledge about conventional principles of academic English, and the absence of clear training in pragmatic and sociolinguistic principles of English by Iranian investigators.

Azarbad and Ghahraman (2018) conducted a study to find out the distribution of functions and forms of hedges used in the abstracts of master's theses in two languages (English and Persian) done by Iranian scholars. Analysis of the data revealed a meaningful difference between English and Persian manuscripts in the utilization of hedging devices. There found more hedges in English abstracts, whereas the Persian forms used fewer hedging. These differences were understood to be associated with the degree of consciousness, goal, etc.

Livytska (2019) carried out an analysis of the use of hedging considering papers in the field of applied linguistics. It was concluded that reader-oriented hedging devices establish the highest pragmatic kind of hedging in research papers in applied linguistics, diagnosing the requirement for the reader's confirmation of the writer's statements and politeness resolutions of academic discourse intrinsically.

Gherdan (2019), studied hedging in the academic context. She concluded that the use of hedging devices needs consciousness of pragmatic competence related to writing. She also concluded that using hedging devices allows writers to find a technique to describe their findings.

Results of an investigation completed by Karunarathna (2020), showed that there exists an important improvement in the utilization of hedging devices. besides, the writer claimed that desire and mindful reading of journal papers offer both cognitive and affective understandings for novice academic authors of English.

Based on the literature the following research question was employed:

Q1: Is there any significant difference between native and non-native EFL articles in terms of the frequency and types of hedging devices in their discussion and their result sections?

3. Methodology

Participant and setting, the procedure, as well as the corpus of the study are mentioned in this section.

3.1 Design and context of the study

In the current paper, a descriptive method of analysis was used to specify the frequency of hedge devices used by Iranian, and native Americans. To select the corpus for the study the researchers collected many journals published in the field of applied linguistics through searching the internet. In order to select articles from selected journals first 350 articles published from 2010 to 2019 were selected from a table of contents of journals. Then the nationality of the authors was checked. Finally, the researchers chose 20 papers completed by Iranian authors and 20 papers completed by native English authors.

3.2 Participants

According to the corpus selected for the present study, 10 papers written by native American scholars, and 10 papers written by Iranian authors in the field of applied linguistics were selected randomly from different international journals.

3.3 Instruments

No specific instruments were used in the present study. the writers selected the corpus from different international journals and started gathering the data to find out the similarity, as well as differences regarding utilization of hedge by Iranian and native American authors in the field of applied linguistics.

3.4 Data collection procedure

First articles written by Iranian scholars and American scholars were selected, then they were checked to assure that they have the discussion and result sections. Articles that lack one of these parts were excluded from the study. Then, after choosing the papers from the related journals, the authors decided to work on the discussion and result sections of the papers due to the significance of the sections and their greatly hedged nature (Swales, 1990).

3.5 Data analysis procedure

After selecting the corpus of the study, the researchers considered the particular section cautiously to conclude the use of hedges related to Salager-Meyer's (1994) classification. After that, the researchers compared the utilization of different hedges in Iranian scholars as well as native scholars' writings. The model used as the basis of analysis was Salager-Meyer's (1994) classification, which includes 5 parts called; shields (e.g., can, could, etc.), approximators (e.g., approximately, about, etc.), emotionally-charged intensifiers (e.g., unexpectedly), compound hedges (e.g., would seem somewhat), and the writers' private uncertainty and direct contribution (eg. to our knowledge),

4. Results

This study examined the differences between the frequency of hedge utilization by Iranian and American scholars' papers regarding language studies. The study used a descriptive method to examine the occurrence of hedging expressions employed in the discussion parts of applied linguistics research articles. The model used as the basis of analysis was Salager- Meyer's (1994) taxonomy for discussion and result sections. In order to explore the difference between the kinds and frequencies of hedge used in discussion and result sections of applied linguistic articles written by Iranian and native EFL scholars using Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy. To probe the null hypothesis, the used hedges of the discussion and result sections of applied linguistic were analyzed in terms of their kinds and frequency and also Chi-square through SPSS software. Considering Salager-Meyer's (1994) classification from the five hedges proposed by him, two types are employed by Iranian and American scholars. These hedges are shields and approximators.

Table 1.

Frequencies of Hedges in Result and Discussion Sections Written by IEFL and NEFL

Hedge type	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Total
Scholars	*F.*	*F.*	*F.*	*F.*	*F.*	*F.*
IEFLs	48	8	7	13	14	90
AEFLs	89	13	8	7	7	124

According to Table 1, both groups of scholars employed type 1 as the most frequently used hedge. Native scholars utilized 89 hedges, whereas Iranian authors used 48 hedges from the entire number of 124 and 90 respectively. According to table 1, type 2 of the classification was utilized more in native speakers' articles than Iranian ones (native speakers= 13, Iranian authors= 8). type 3 from the classification shows that Native authors used 8 hedges, whereas Iranian writers employed 7 hedges in the published papers, type 4 of the classification showed that hedges' frequency in native scholars' texts were 7, while it was 14 in Iranian scholars' writings, and finally type 5 of hedges' occurrence in native scholars' writings were 7, while it was 14 in Iranian scholars' writings.

Table 2.

Chi – Square for the Frequency of Hedges Sections Written by IEFL and NEFL

Chi-square= 2	*Df*= 1	Criticals= 3.85			
Hedging type	1	2	3	4	5
IEFLs	F. 48	F. 8	F. 7	F. 13	F. 14
AEFLs	F. 89	F. 13	F. 8	F. 7	F. 7

Because the chi-square detected value 2 at 1 degree of freedom in the discussion and result sections of EFL articles transcribed by IEFLs as well as NEFLs is lower than the critical chi-square (3.85), the researchers stated that there found no meaningful difference between the occurrences of hedging in this two studied groups (EFL as well as NEFL writers).

5. Discussion

Arrangements of academic discourse need the writers of research papers for the operational implication of interactional techniques and developing their academic identity. To balance these two extremes, academic authors are introducing a scientific technique of

politeness (Myers, 1989) in verbalizing their announcements. Hedges assist the writers to lessen the force of their claims and make them less unqualified in the eyes of colleagues. The aim of this investigation was to observe the occurrence and types of hedges in the discussion and result parts of applied linguistics papers. Analyzing the data showed that the first classification of hedges was the most commonly employed one.

As stated by Hyland (1994), regarding the significance of hedging in educational papers, there should be a requirement for more emphasis to be paid to the significant interpersonal approach. This suggests that the students must be trained how to identify and efficiently employ hedging devices in their writing, particularly for Non-Native English Speakers who are possibly not aware of hedges and consequently, find it most difficult to hedge their statements properly.

Research papers widely offer innovative concepts and the utilization of careful language is a central feature presenting the reliability of such contributions (Nivales, 2011). Considering the significant topic, this investigation examined the use of hedges in the discussion, and the conclusion parts of articles using different research designs. The outcomes revealed that there is no meaningful difference between Iranian and American scholars regarding the use of hedges devices discussion and result sections.

The results of the present study are in line with a study conducted by Nasiri (2012) in which no statistically meaningful difference was observed between the American and Iranian authors regarding employing hedges in the Discussion sections of research papers.
The results of the current study are also in line with the findings of the study conducted by Behnam, and Darvishzadeh (2012) which showed a statistically important difference between qualitative and quantitative research designs in terms of frequency and form of the utilized hedging.

6. Conclusion

In the present study, after categorizing hedging devices based on Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy, and recording the type and frequency of hedges, it was found that there was no significant difference between Iranian and American writers in terms of utilizing hedging devices in their discussion and result sections. It should be mentioned that this study has studied only the writings of researchers in the field of Applied Linguistics. It is recommended that future researchers discover how Iranian authors from various fields of

study differ in their use of hedging devices; and how two classes of different nationalities and also different discipline backgrounds vary in using these tools. By carrying out such research, we would undoubtedly get wider insights into how cultures and sub-cultures affect writing.

Considering implications, the degree to which students studying in the field of English highlights the accuracy of their statements using hedging devices can lead to their modified performance in the future profession. Since many of these university students will be English teachers and hence they will manifest themselves in the classroom settings, the technique they make statements might be regarded as a monitor for their learners or will affect the approval of their thoughts by the learners.

Besides, some of these university students majoring in English teaching will present their thoughts or the results of their action research in conferences or manifest them in the teacher education programs, so the lecturer is required to mention the importance of utilization of hedging in the speech to avoid presenting any explicit estimation about the accurateness of specific thoughts.

Evaluating these learners' skills in employing hedging in making a comprehensible speech in the academic setting may be important. Moreover, more study is essential to consider the type, and motives behind employing various hedges in other cultural settings since the current investigation have only concentrated on the Persian context. Besides, in a single cultural setting, various situational features can lead to modification in the use of hedges. Another field of study might observe the mixed-gender dialogues which can be more useful.

References

Abdi, R. (2002). Interpersonal metadiscourse: An indicator of interaction and identity. *Discourse Studies, 4,* 139-145.

Atai, M., & Sadr, L. (2008). A cross-cultural genre study on hedging devices in the discussion section of applied linguistics research articles. *Teaching English Language and Literature, 7*(2), 1-22.

Azarbad, E., & Ghahraman, V. (2018). A comparative study on the English to Persian translation of hedges in the abstracts of MA Theses in English translation studies. *Journal of Language and Translation*, *8*(3), 57-67.

Behnam, B., Naeimi, A., & Darvishzade, A. (2012). A comparative genre analysis of hedging expressions in research articles: is fuzziness forever wicked?. *English Language and Literature Studies*, *2*(2), 20.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge

University.

Cabanes, P. P. (2007). A contrastive analysis of hedging in English and Spanish architecture project descriptions. *Revista Española de Lingüística Aplicada, 20,* 139-158.

Durik, A. M., Britt, M. A., Reynolds, R., & Storey, J. (2008). The effects of hedges in persuasive arguments: A nuanced analysis of language. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *27*(3), 217-234.

Gherdan, M. E. (2019). Hedging in academic discourse. *Romanian Journal of English Studies*, *16*(1), 123-127.

Horn, K. (2001). The consequences of citing hedged statements in scientific research articles: When scientists cite and paraphrase the conclusions of past research, they often change the hedges that describe the uncertainty of the conclusions, which in turn can change the uncertainty of past results. *BioScience*, *51*(12), 1086-1093.

Hyland, K. (1994). Hedging in academic writing and EAF textbooks. *English for specific purposes*, *13*(3), 239-256.

Hyland, K. (1996). Writing without conviction? Hedging in science research articles. *Applied linguistics*, *17*(4), 433-454.

Hyland, K. (1998). Persuasion and context: The pragmatics of academic metadiscourse. *Journal of pragmatics*, *30*(4), 437-455.

Isabel, M. (2001). Teaching academic reading: Some initial findings from a session on hedging. *Proceedings of the Postgraduate Conference 2001*, *Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, The University of Edinburgh.*

Jalilifar, A. R. (2011). World of attitudes in research article discussion sections: A cross-linguistic perspective. *Journal of Technology and Education, 5*(3), 177-186.

Karunarathna, J. B. (2020). Improving the use of language hedges in academic writing through reading journal articles. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *11*(3), 17-23.

Kelly, G. J., & Bazerman, C. (2003). How students argue scientific claims: A rhetorical- semantic analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, *24*(1), 28-55.

Lau, H. H. (1999). Hedging expressions as signals of evidence in academic journal discourse. In *The Proceedings of the 8th International Symposium on English Teaching* (pp. 431-440).

Lewin, B. A. (2005). Hedging: An exploratory study of authors' and readers' identification of toning down in scientific texts. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *4*(2), 163-178.

Livytska, I. (2019). The use of hedging in research articles on applied linguistics. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, *7*(1), 35-53.

Myers, G. (1989). The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles. *Applied Linguistics, 10*, 1-35.

Nasiri, S. (2012). Utilization of hedging devices by American and Iranian researchers in the field of civil engineering. *International Journal of Linguistics*, *4*(2), 124-133.

.Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*, 13(2), 149-70.

Salager-Meyer, F. (1997). I think that perhaps you should: A study of hedges in written scientific discourse. *Functional Approaches to Written text: Classroom Applications*, *1*, 127-143.

Simpson, J. M. (2000). Topical structure analysis of academic paragraphs in English and Spanish. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *9*(3), 293-309.

Skelton, J. (1988). The representation of truth in academic medical writing. *Applied Linguistics*, *18*(2), 121-140.

Skelton, J. (1988). The care and maintenance of hedges. *ELT Journal*, *42*(1), 37-43.

Spillner, B. (1983). Methodische Aufgaben der Fachsprachenforschung und ihre Konsequenzen für den Fachsprachenunterricht. *Fachsprache*, *1*, 16-29.

Stubbs, M. (1986). A matter of prolonged fieldwork: Notes towards a modal grammar of English *Applied Linguistics,7(1).1-25*.

Tatsis, K., & Rowland, T. (2006, July). Vague language in Greek and English mathematical talk: A variation study in face-work. In *Proceedings of the 30th Conference of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education, Charles University* (Vol. 5, pp. 257-264).

Vassileva, I. (2001). Commitment and detachment in English and Bulgarian academic writing. *English for Specific Purposes, 20*, 83-102.

Winardi, A. (2008). The use of hedging devices by American and Chinese writers in the field of applied linguistics. *Sastra Inggris Journal*, *8*(3), 228-237.

Yang, Y. (2003). *A contrastive study of hedges in English and Chinese academic discourse* [Unpublished MA Thesis]. Jilin University, Changchun, China.