

Comparative Analysis of Studies on the Concept of Hedging in Native and Non-Native English Contexts

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Abstract. *The article explores the concept of hedging as an essential linguistic strategy used in academic and professional communication. It analyzes and compares several studies on hedging used by native and non-native English speakers. The article explains that hedging helps writers express uncertainty, politeness, and caution when presenting ideas and research results. Hedging in academic writing, diplomatic newspapers, and students' research papers is given special attention in the article.*

The analysis indicates that native English writers use hedging more effectively, whereas non-native English writers show a lack of awareness of its functions. The article also discusses the influence of gender and cultural background on the use of hedges. Moreover, the necessity of teaching hedges in higher education in Uzbekistan is emphasized. It can be concluded that improving knowledge of hedging can help learners to create more persuasive and academically appropriate texts.

Key words: *Hedging, academic writing, native and non-native writers, pragmatic competence, discourse analysis, politeness strategies, cultural differences, academic communication, EFL learners, Uzbekistan*

Introduction

The concept of hedging has become one of the central issues in discourse analysis, pragmatics, and research on academic writing. Hedging refers to the linguistic strategies writers and speakers use to express tentativeness, caution, and politeness, especially when presenting claims, interpretations, or evaluations [1]. According to Hyland (1996, 2004), hedges constitute a major contribution to the social negotiation of knowledge and to writers' efforts to persuade readers and gain community acceptance of their work. Thus, hedging as a linguistic device is essential in academic texts and professional communication [2].

This article provides a comparative analysis of studies investigating hedging in academic writing and communication, focusing on both native English speakers and non-native English (EFL/ESL) contexts. It also discusses gender and cultural influences and highlights the relevance of hedging in Uzbekistan [3].

Hedging in Diplomatic and Professional Communication

Hedging is not limited to academic discourse; it also plays a crucial role in diplomatic communication. Noor et al. (2022) examined hedging strategies in diplomatic press releases issued by the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2020 and 2022. Their study analyzed 27 press releases concerning global crises.

The findings demonstrated that hedges function as pragmatic tools to mitigate strong statements, reduce potential confrontation, and maintain international harmony. The researchers emphasized that hedging allows nations to "save face," protect national reputation, and maintain global trust. Cultural values strongly influenced the degree and type of hedging used. Press releases containing fewer hedges typically conveyed factual information rather than evaluative content [4].

This study highlights that hedging serves peace-building purposes and contributes to effective diplomatic relations.

Cross-Linguistic Studies in Academic Abstracts

Afshar and Bagherieh (2014) examined the use of hedging devices in English and Persian MA/MS thesis abstracts written by Iranian students. Based on Salager-Meyer's (1994, 1997) taxonomy, 40 abstracts from Persian Literature and Civil Engineering were analyzed using Chi-Square tests [5].

The results revealed no statistically significant differences in the frequency of hedges between Persian and English abstracts across disciplines. However, English-speaking students used slightly more hedges than Iranian students. The researchers concluded that Persian graduate students might lack awareness of the importance of hedging in academic writing and recommended integrating hedging instruction into university curricula [6].

Similarly, Livytska (2019) analyzed hedging in 20 research articles in Applied Linguistics using Hyland's (1996) taxonomy. The study showed that reader-oriented hedges were dominant, emphasizing interaction between writers and readers. Differences were found in typology, frequency, and distribution even within the same discipline, suggesting that hedging practices vary across subfields [7].

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative research method to analyze hedging in academic and professional communication among native and non-native English speakers. The research is based on a comparative literature analysis of previously published studies on hedging in different discourse contexts [8].

The analysis focuses on research examining hedging in academic writing, diplomatic communication, and student research papers. Studies were selected according to three criteria: relevance to hedging in English discourse, comparison between native and non-native English users, and the availability of empirical findings. The selected studies include research conducted in different linguistic and cultural contexts such as Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, Cameroon, and Yemen [9].

The study also relies on well-known theoretical frameworks of hedging, particularly the classifications proposed by Hyland and Salager-Meyer, which describe hedges as linguistic devices that allow writers to express caution, uncertainty, or politeness in academic discourse [10].

The comparative analysis examines several aspects:

- frequency of hedging devices
- types of hedging expressions used
- influence of cultural and educational background
- gender differences in the use of hedging

By synthesizing findings from multiple studies, the research identifies similarities and differences in hedging practices across native and non-native English contexts.

Hedging in Students' Dissertations and Essays

Demanou and Tabe (2020) investigated hedging in abstracts of dissertations written by non-native English students in Cameroon. Using Hyland's framework, they found that hedging use was generally limited (only 2.6% of total words) [11]. Students relied mainly on simple hedges such as *some*, *few*, *may*, and *could*, indicating insufficient awareness of their pragmatic function [12].

In Sri Lanka, Karunarathna (2015) explored improving hedging use in argumentative essays through reading journal articles. Thirty-two ELT undergraduates participated in the study. The findings showed significant improvement in students' use of hedges after exposure to authentic academic texts, suggesting that reading scholarly articles enhances pragmatic awareness and writing competence [13].

A comprehensive doctoral study by Alward (2019) investigated hedges and boosters in persuasive

essays and job application letters written by Yemeni EFL undergraduates. Using classifications by Salager-Meyer (1994), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008), the study analyzed 120 essays and 120 letters. The findings indicated that proficiency level, gender, and instructional background significantly influenced hedging practices. Explicit instruction improved students' pragmatic competence [14].

Gender and Cultural Influences on Hedging

Gender differences in politeness and hedging have been widely debated. Lakoff (1975) argued that women tend to use more linguistic devices such as hesitations, tag questions, and hedges to express politeness and reduce assertiveness.

Dozie (2018) examined politeness and hedging among Igbo speakers and found that female participants used more politeness strategies than males. Similarly, Trihartanti and Fadilah (2018) reported that Indonesian female students used more plausibility hedges and hesitation markers in conversations.

However, such findings are culturally specific, and generalizations should be made cautiously. Cultural norms strongly shape linguistic behavior, including the degree of certainty expressed in discourse [15].

Comparative Corpus Studies: Native vs. Non-Native Writers

Several corpus-based studies have compared native and non-native academic writing. A study analyzing 30 PhD dissertations (15 native English writers and 15 Saudi non-native writers) found that native writers used more hedges overall, indicating differences in pragmatic competence (Alshahrani, 2017).

In contrast, Tokdemir Demirel (2018) compared 100 research articles from the American Academic Corpus (AAC) and the Turkish Academic Corpus (TAC) and found no significant differences in hedging frequency or categories, suggesting high awareness among Turkish researchers.

Similarly, Adrian and Al-Fajri (2022) analyzed 400 soft science articles and found that modal auxiliary verbs were the most frequent hedging devices. Cultural and linguistic influences shaped preferences for particular modal verbs.

These comparative studies demonstrate that awareness and educational background significantly influence hedging use among non-native writers.

Awareness of Hedging in Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the concept of hedging has not traditionally been systematically included in higher education curricula. Foreign language learners need greater exposure to metadiscourse devices such as hedging to develop polite and persuasive communication skills.

Knowledge of hedging is particularly important in academic writing, especially for students majoring in the English language and literature. Students must learn to differentiate facts from claims, express viewpoints appropriately, and persuade readers effectively. Incorporating explicit instruction on hedging into academic writing courses would significantly improve students' academic competence and intercultural communication skills.

Results

The analysis of the selected studies reveals several important tendencies in the use of hedging in academic and professional communication.

First, many studies indicate that native English writers tend to use hedging devices more frequently and more effectively than non-native English writers. Native speakers usually demonstrate greater flexibility in expressing uncertainty, probability, and caution in academic texts. Their writing often includes a wider range of linguistic devices that soften claims and make arguments more persuasive.

Second, research focusing on student writing shows that non-native English learners often use a limited range of hedging expressions. They commonly rely on basic modal verbs or simple quantifiers to express uncertainty. In many cases, these students are not fully aware of the pragmatic role of hedging in academic writing.

Another important finding concerns the types of hedging devices used in academic discourse. Modal verbs, adverbs of probability, and certain lexical expressions are among the most common linguistic tools used to express caution and reduce the strength of statements.

The results also show that cultural background and gender may influence the use of hedging in communication. Some studies suggest that female speakers tend to use more politeness strategies and hedging expressions in conversation. However, these differences may vary depending on cultural context and communication norms.

Finally, research findings indicate that explicit instruction in academic writing can significantly improve students' ability to use hedging effectively. Students who read academic texts and receive training in academic discourse tend to demonstrate greater awareness of hedging strategies.

Discussion

The findings of the comparative analysis emphasize the significant role of hedging in academic and professional communication. Hedging allows writers to present ideas cautiously, express uncertainty, and maintain politeness in scholarly interaction. As a result, hedging is considered an essential element of effective academic writing.

One of the most important issues revealed by the analysis is the difference in hedging use between native and non-native English writers. Native speakers generally demonstrate stronger pragmatic competence in academic discourse, while non-native writers may experience difficulties in selecting appropriate hedging strategies. This difference often reflects variations in educational background, linguistic experience, and familiarity with academic conventions.

Educational practices appear to play a crucial role in developing hedging competence. When students receive explicit instruction about academic writing conventions and are exposed to authentic academic texts, their ability to use hedging improves. Such training helps learners understand how to balance certainty and caution when presenting arguments.

Cultural norms also influence the way hedging is used in communication. Different cultures may have different expectations regarding the level of certainty and politeness in discourse. These differences can affect how writers formulate claims and present their opinions in academic texts.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the development of academic writing skills in English has become increasingly important. Students who study English language and literature need to develop not only grammatical knowledge but also pragmatic skills that enable them to communicate effectively in international academic environments.

Therefore, integrating the teaching of hedging strategies into academic writing courses in higher education could significantly improve students' writing competence and help them produce more persuasive and academically appropriate texts.

Conclusion

The review of international research clearly indicates that hedging plays a central role in academic writing and professional communication. While native English writers often demonstrate greater pragmatic flexibility, non-native writers' performance is strongly influenced by educational background, cultural norms, and academic training. Gender and cultural background also affect hedging practices, though these influences vary across contexts.

These studies show that explicit instruction enhances learners' awareness and appropriate use of hedging devices. Therefore, integrating hedging into academic writing curricula in Uzbekistan is relevant and necessary. Strengthening students' ability to apply hedging strategically will enhance their academic writing quality and support their active participation in the international scholarly community.

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