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## Investigating Fourth Year College Students' Awareness in the Use of Hedging and Boosting in Their Academic Research Project

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### Abstract

Writing, in all its varied forms and purposes, is a complex process. It calls upon us to bring our left and right brain together to shape experience and feeling into something another person can read and understand. Written communication is an essential element of expression; the ability to articulate oneself through the written word provides one with the opportunity to share their knowledge in a meaningful and effective way. Therefore, developing written skills will enable students to learn how to compose ideas as well as organize their thoughts and arguments. Acquiring these skills will also prepare students for their future academic and professional endeavors. In an electronic world where verbal communication has become less frequently used, learning to write in a cohesive, structured manner allows individuals to convey their thoughts effectively. The need to present claims with precision caution and the use of appropriate uncertainty means, demands the use of hedges and boosters, in which they represent a significant for academics in anticipating their propositions to the readers. Despite its importance, however, little attention has been given to how hedges and boosters are expressed or the functions they serve in different texts.

The present study is a pragmatic analysis of the use of hedges and boosters in the students' academic research project. This study aims to reveal the tendency and preferences of fourth year students in the use of hedges and boosters in their research project. In addition, the present study is an attempt to investigate the spread and the frequency of hedging and boosting in the introduction and the discussion sections of the students' research projects.

The data analysis of the present study is based on corpus of academic research project written by fourth year students from two departments of English- college of languages and human sciences and college of education- in Garmian University. The corpus constitutes (36) academic researches in which they were written on linguistics and literature. These academic researches were selected randomly from the academic years 2009-2010 till the end of 2017-2018.

## 1. Introduction

The basis of any texts might be depending on how writers and readers interact with each other through the language used by the writers.

However, the language employed in scientific writing is deemed critically essential to enhancing its quality. As a result, recent

investigations of academic discourse have revealed variations in the use of language, in which it is used to express knowledge, ideas, attitudes, and experience in academic discourse. Therefore, to be successful in academic writing, the writers must have the ability "to control the level of personality in their texts, claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views" (Hyland, 2004: 133-134). To clarify, research articles are avenues for the researchers to publicly propose new ideas which are likely to support or conflict findings of other scholars; hence, writers employ cautious language as the acceptance of their research contributions depend largely on how these are presented to the academic community. Using cautious language means mitigating the strength of a proposal by increasing or decreasing its illocutionary force through hedging and boosting devices.

Hyland believes that "effective academic writing actually depends on interactional elements which supplement propositional information in the text and alert readers to the writer's opinion" (1994: 240), i.e. what marks a 'good' article is the writer's ability to supply the reader with a tentative analysis of the collected data and leaving the door open for alternative interpretations. One significant way in which the reader's degree of confidence can be expressed in academic writing is through the use of hedges and boosters. Hedges are expressions of doubt in relation to the propositional information provided, such as *seem*, *suggest*, and *indicate*. Boosters, on the other hand, are expressions of the writer's certainty, such as *clearly* and *obviously* (Hyland, 2000: 197). Holmes (1995) also affirms that while hedging devices reduce the strength or force an expression by expressing tentativeness and possibility, boosting devices intensify or emphasize the force by expressing conviction and asserting a proposition with confidence.

Hedging and boosting refers to communicative strategies used for augmenting or lessening the strength of statements (Hyland, 1998a). Similarly, hedges and boosters are related to a subject's personal attitudes toward the propositional content. For instance, in 'It may be true', *may* is a hedge and in 'It must be true', *must* is a booster. It appears that the hedges and

boosters significance in creating an academic discourse, is in their role in carrying not only the speaker's or the writer's degree of assurance in the truth value statements, but also an attitude to the listener or reader.

Commitment and detachment in one's claims are linguistically manifested in the use of hedging and boosting devices. In that respect, Skelton (1988) as cited in (Swales & Feak, 2004: 125) has wittily remarked that student-writers must learn the importance of being confidently uncertain in making claims. Therefore, how fourth year students show their confidence in or detachment to their proposed ideas has been the primary focus of the present study.

Unfortunately, it is still rare for students to be taught explicitly about hedging and boosting. The educational materials are almost universally weak in this area and provide inadequate information and explanations which misrepresent the importance of both the concept and the use of the different devices. Therefore, teachers and educational material writers have to acknowledge the importance of hedging and boosting, and ensure that the students recognize this importance. Thus, it is hoped that the present study could be beneficial to students, English subject curriculum developers, research textbook writers, as well as to teachers of college academic writing.

## **2. The Previous Studies**

A considerable number of studies have been conducted on hedging and boosters as rhetorical devices in academic texts such as (Varttala, 1999; Hyland, 1994; Hyland, 1998b; and Hyland, 2000). These studies primarily focus on the distributions and use of rhetorical functions of hedges and boosters in academic discourse. Other studies such as (Hyland & Milton, 1997 as cited in Behnam, Naeimi & Darvishzade, 2012) have compared the use of hedges and boosters between native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English. Meanwhile, there also studies have focused on gender differences concerning the use of different politeness strategies in spoken and/ or written discourse such as (Coates, 1987 and Holmes, 1990). Finally, Behnam and Khililqadam (2012) took the hedging devices in account in the Kurdish spoken language, i.e. in conversation. They attempted to discover whether Kurdish speakers

used hedging devices with the purpose of being less commitment to their utterances.

### 3. The Hedges and the Boosters

In our writing, we often indicate how confident we are about the claims we make. If we are doubtful that something is true, we may use words like perhaps or possibly. If we're confident, we may say that something is clearly or obviously true. These words are called hedges and boosters. They affect the tone of our writing, and good writers use them effectively. On other words, hedges suggest that the writer is careful, nuanced, and keen to avoid generalizations. A text that contains hedging is an open text, a text that invites debate and further research. However, if we use boosters sparingly they can convey the right amount of self-assurance. The selective use of boosters will convince our readers that we know our stuff and are experts in our field. In general, hedging and boosting devices are modal elements; that is, elements that modify the force of a statement, either weakening it or intensifying it.

#### 3.1 The Hedges

The concept of the hedge was popularized as a linguistic term by Lakoff (1972), who defined it as "words whose job it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (Lakoff, 1972: 195). Lakoff basic concept is that hedges modify words or phrases within a proposition, making the border fuzzier or making the border less fuzzy.

One of the early and well-known definitions for hedges has been provided by Lyon (1977). He defined them as "any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters is an epistemically modal or moralized sentence"(Lyon, 1977:797)

In general, hedging can refer to displaying hesitation, uncertainty, indirectness, and politeness. Therefore, the concept of a hedge includes not only the modification of words or phrases within a proposition but also the modification of one's commitment to the propositional content.

Crompton (1997) has defined hedging as a linguistic strategy allowing the writer to avoid committing to the truth of a proposition. Faber (2003: 408), on the other hand, asserts that:

In the case of scientific texts, hedging conveys a sense of objectivity, the lack of a personal stake

in the research, and, potentially, a claim to status as new ideas are more often hedged the hedge creates the appearance of stability, and the progressive aspect obscures issues of time and fact completion.

#### 3.1.1 The Functions of the Hedges

Hedges serve many functions in scientific writing. Holmes (1982) believes that hedges are rhetorical devices whose main function is taking the readers into account and provides them with an opportunity to have their own ideas through reading. In addition, Getkham (2011) believes that hedging is a mechanism whose main function is managing the tone, attitude, and information within spoken or written discourse.

According to Hyland (1995), hedges serve three main functions in gaining reader acceptance of claims. First, hedges allow writers to express propositions with greater precision in areas often characterized by reformulation and reinterpretation. Hedges here distinguish the actual from the potential or inferential and imply that a proposition is based on the writer's plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge and the readers are expected to understand that the proposition is true as far as can be determined. The second function concerns the writer's desire to anticipate possible negative consequences of being proved wrong. In fact, writers gain their academic credibility by stating the strongest claims they can for their evidence, but they also need to cover themselves against overstating their case. Therefore, hedging here help the writers to avoid personal responsibility for statements in order to protect their reputations and limit the damage which may result from categorical commitments. Finally, hedges contribute to the development of the writer-reader relationship, addressing the need for deference and cooperation in gaining reader ratification of claims.

However, Hyland in (1998a; 1998b) has claimed that hedges can also be functioned as downtoners and can be divided into four categories, namely: (a) compromiser, such as 'quite', 'usually', 'normally'; (b) diminsher such as, 'partially', 'slightly'; (c) minimizer, such as, 'rarely', 'occasionally'; (d) approximator, such as, 'almost', 'virtually', 'relatively'. While Salager-Meyer (1994) categorized different kinds of hedges in terms of their functions, these are:

shields, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, author's personal doubt and direct involvement, emotionally-charged intensifiers, and compound hedges.

On the other hand, Hinkel (2005), presents another classification of the hedges functions in the discourse. These are: epistemic hedges, such as, actually, theoretically, indeed; lexical hedges, such as, kind of, hopefully, perhaps; downtoners, such as, barely, slightly, a good deal; assertive pronouns, such as, anybody, someone, something; adverbs of frequency, such as, daily, seldom, regularly; common intensifiers and universal and negative pronouns, such as, no one, each, everyone; amplifiers, such as, absolutely, very much, by all means; and emphatics, such as, for sure, no way, total.

According to Prince & et al (1982); Leech (1983); and Markkanen & Schroder (1997), hedging can be classified according to their forms and their functions that they perform into the following:

#### **3.1.1.1 Impersonal Constructions**

Impersonal constructions such as agentless constructions and agentless passive, are used in most cases when authors madder references to higher authority, or simply detached themselves from information they provide. For example: suggest that, is hoped, is believed, is expected,... etc.

#### **3.1.1.2 Shields and other Conversational Hedges**

Shields and other conversational hedges such as epistemic modal verbs, epistemic verbs, possibility/ probability adverbs and adjectives, are used in order to reduce the level of certainty of the truth of the propositions. For example: may, could, apparently, it is likely, ... etc.

#### **3.1.1.3 Approximators or Imprecision-Markers**

Approximators or imprecision-markers hedges represent adverbs of (quality, degree, frequency, and time) and adverbs expressing vagueness, imprecision and variability. For example: approximately, nearly, to tend, about, more or less, somewhat, ... etc.

#### **3.1.1.4 Time Deictic**

Time deictic represents expressions that circumscribe the claims to a given moment, especially when the article was published. For example: now, at present, nowadays, ... etc.

#### **3.1.1.5 Hedging Realized by Conditional (if) Clauses**

In this case hedges refer to hypothetical situation and mark the writer epistemic stance. For example: if we know.

#### **3.1.1.6 Concessive Conjuncts**

Concessive conjuncts refer to words that signals a contrast or concession in relation to the idea expressed in the main clause, such hedges as still, however, even, eventhough, though, although, yet.

#### **3.1.1.7 Negation**

Negation hedges refer to politeness or simply euphemistic reticence in the expression of opinion and attitudes. For example: Many linguists don't agree that... .

#### **3.1.1.8 Comment on Value-Judgment**

Comment on value-judgment hedges such as surprisingly. For example: Surprisingly enough, the data was very fruitful.

#### **3.1.1.9 Comment on Truth-Judgment**

Comment on truth-judgment such as undoubtedly, surely, definitely. For example: Undoubtedly, the results have shaken most of the readers.

#### **3.1.1.10 Compound Hedges**

Compound hedges represent the combination of several hedges; usually double, triple, and multiple hedges. For example: nearly... approximately. For instance:

- Nearly five out six of the first group agree with the results and approximately two out six of the second group disagree with the results.

#### **3.1.2 Why Do Research Writers Use Hedges?**

In order to distinguish between facts and claims, writers often use tentative language such as it seems likely that... or regularly ... this technique is called hedging. Hedges reduce the degree of power of speech and produce interaction between the writer and the reader. Hence, many linguists such as Faber (2003), Hyland (2004), and Hinkel (2005), agree that hedges are mainly used by the writers to avoid proposing statements absolutely and reducing the force of them. Thus, the writer can use hedges as a tool for reducing his/her commitment to the written production and for presenting his/her statements cautiously and not absolutely. In addition, it will help the reader to have his/her interpretations accordingly.

### 3.1.3 What is the difference between hedged and unhedged texts?

Hedging is an important aspect in scientific writing and writers should learn how to adjust the strength of their claims and this, in turn, will convince the readers that what is written is not strongly believed or absolutely proved. Therefore, in English language, we know that the writer can remove the "active doing" from the meaning and, thus, soften a threat to the reader's face considerably and reduce a directive commitment (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

However, the question is still stand; how could we differentiate between hedged and unhedged texts? According to Hinkel (1997), hedging refers to the employment of some lexicogrammatical structures, and leads to decreasing the writer's responsibility for his utterance and claims. But sometimes, hedges may not be recognized by a specific lexicogrammatical hedging structure and the structure may be implied by the writer and understood by the reader indirectly. Furthermore, sometimes it is challenging to distinguish hedges from other expressions. In this case, Crompton (1997) has proposed a test for specifying whether or not an expression is used to make the information hedged. He claims that a proposition is considered hedged only if the unhedged version does not change the propositional content and he argues, when the expression is eliminated from the text, if the writer's commitment to it is greater than before, then it is hedged.

### 3.2 The Boosters

Boosting is the use of terms such as obviously and of course, and it is a communicative strategy for expressing firm commitment to statements.

Many linguists such as (Holmes, 1984; Skelton, 1988; and Hyland, 2000) believe that boosters are pragmatic devices for emphasizing certainty. Such as: clearly and obviously. In fact, Holmes (1984: 347) has provided an early definition: 'boosting involves expressing degrees of commitment or seriousness of intention.'

Hyland (1998a: 350) has also offered other definition, 'boosters are communicative strategies for increasing the force of a statement and emphasizing certainty to represent strong commitment, conviction, and accepted truth.

#### 3.2.1 The Function of the Boosters

Previous writers have described the pragmatic functions of boosters as being to express variously evidential or implicit truth, accepted truth, and solidarity. Skelton (1988: 128-130) says that verbs such as show, demonstrate, and find/found are writers' means of claiming that the truth they are discussing is 'evidential' – declared to be true as a result of the study in question. He adds that writers are trying to show that they are not making a judgment claim. Swales (1990: 151) and Salager-Meyer (1994: 165) both assert that the latter three verbs emphasize commitment to a proposition; Swales calls them 'powerful rhetorical tools' for signaling that claims are to be taken as substantiated.

It should be noted that the above verbs are clearly boosters, because they emphasize a writer's certainty and commitment. Thus, this type of booster covers both evidence and rhetoric.

Hyland (1998a: 371) states that modals such as (will, must) are used to signal accepted truth – that is, they downplay the writer's involvement by implying that the claim or statement made is one that is already generally accepted in the discipline. Devices such as (of course), (obviously), and (clearly) appear to have the same function (ibid: 368). A slightly different term for such boosters is solidarity boosters (Vassileva, 2001: 97). Vassileva gives an example of a solidarity booster, 'it is indeed a well-known fact'. The use of accepted truth or solidarity boosters implies to readers that they do not need further explanation because they already possess the requisite understanding, as they are already members of the relevant discourse community (also see Myers, 1989). Hyland (1998) further argued that writers use boosters such as 'establish' and 'show' to emphasize the strength and suggest the efficacy of the relationship between data and claims. In general, Hyland (1998a; 1998b) believed that boosters can be functioned as uptoners which consisted of two categories, namely: (a) intensifier such as 'very', 'absolutely', or 'extremely', and (b) certainty such as 'must' or 'certain'.

Describing boosters by pragmatic function is quite helpful for conceptualizing boosters and their roles. However, it does not address the

question of context – that is, the fact that the same booster can perform different functions at different times. Context is vital in booster research. Salager-Meyer (1994: 154) says that we must look at both form and function when looking for hedges, and clearly the same applies to boosters. Merely counting the boosters in a corpus is entirely inadequate because of the importance of context, since the same form can act as a booster in one sentence but not in another.

### 3.2.2 Why Do Research Writers Use Boosting?

Hyland believed that there are different reasons behind the use of boosters by research articles writers. He suggests that research writers boost to gain credit and credibility for their achievements, to persuade readers that their claims are justified, to transform claims into knowledge (1996b: 435-436), to ‘galvanize support, express collegiality, to avoid disagreement’ (ibid: 79), and to show that their observations are facts (1997: 21).

## 4. Hedges and Boosters and the Relationship Between the Writer and the Reader

The academic text is nowadays increasingly understood as dialogical where the writer and the reader are involved in an academic discourse governed by certain conventions; the writer's and the reader's voices are recognizable from the use of specific techniques, including hedging and boosting. It is generally assumed that hedging and boosting "help academics gain acceptance for their work by balancing conviction with caution" (Hyland, 2000: 197).

The English language, even when used exclusively for academic and research purposes, which seemingly priorities the propositional content over and above the expression of interpersonal relations, has deeply ingrained strategies of dialogical communication. Hedging and boosting constitute as two of the most important aspects in the texture of interaction between the reader and the writer/ researcher. Furthermore, Markkanen and Schroder (1997) suggested that hedges can offer a possibility for textual manipulation in the sense that the reader is left in the dark regarding the truth value of what is being expressed and who is responsible for it. On the other hand, Hyland (1998) argued

that boosters leave the reader little room for their own interpretations and are used to create interpersonal solidarity with the reader. Accordingly, hedging and boosting are necessary ways for making scientific statements in social contexts, and they are not only accuracy-oriented but also writer-oriented and reader-oriented. Thus, hedges and boosters refer to the textual strategies of using linguistic means in a certain speech act for specific communicative purposes.

According to Nikula (1997: 193), the employment of hedges and boosters in a piece of text is "meaning negotiations and reformulations for both speaker and hearer". As well as, Crismore and Vande Kopple (1977: 235) hold, "hedges stimulate a personal interaction between a producer and receiver of language in that they signal that the truth of the material is tentative and the receiver has room to evaluate and judge for him/ herself".

In addition, Hyland (2012) explained that hedges and boosting are also used to invite the readers to get involved in open discussion about the nature of the propositions. The frequent use of hedges and boosters in discussion is a consequence of the fact that the writers don't seek to accomplish closure by reaching consensus on a particular issue but is more like a sign of the writers' willingness to continue the discussion. Moreover, Crismore and Vande Kopple (1977: 235) suggested that "while research articles are often seen as factual, objective and impersonal, their real goal is to persuade the reader". Hyland (2000: 12-14) also agrees on calling the research article writer's main purpose 'persuasive: convincing peers' and establishing credibility, adding that making an 'appropriate level of claim is a critical aspect of research reporting'.

Generally speaking, writers express their judgments, opinions, and commitments toward the propositional content of the text and their readers through the use of hedges and boosters, modifying the truth-value of the whole proposition. While hedging devices reduce the strength or force of an expression by expressing tentativeness and possibility, boosting devices intensify or emphasize the force by expressing conviction and asserting a proposition with confidence (Homles, 1995; Hyland, 1998). Hyland (2012) also explained that by using

hedging and boosting, the writers adjust the level of their commitment depending on the nature of the accredited facts or interpretations about the propositions and also on the anticipated effect the writers' commitments are likely to have on the readers' reactions. These considerations play very important roles in writing academic articles because they contribute to negotiating with the readers, persuading them that the writers' claims are valid, and helping the writers to obtain acceptance for their work in their disciplines.

### **5. Hedges and Boosters and the Academic Writing**

In English Language Teaching contexts, it is important that learners acquire the right kind of language adequate not only for expressing their ideas in a specific field but also for bearing pragmatic, cognitive, and rhetorical value which contributes to the overall meaning of the text.

Hyland's study (2005) has revealed that there are many factors govern the students' choice of linguistic features while academic writing. The first factor is the language proficiency, however, academically advanced students use more hedging, while weaker students employ more boosting devices. Another factor to be considered in the analysis of student writing is the culture that may dictate how students express commitment and detachment to ideas they propose. Skelton and Alison (as cited in Hyland, 2005) observed that EFL writers are more inclined to use direct and unqualified writing. Furthermore, they tend to use more direct and authoritative tone, simple sentence constructions with stronger modals that convey stronger commitments to statements. However, it is very important for the students to learn how to differentiate between propositional information such as facts and data, from interactional elements such as hedges and boosters. As well as, it should become evident that academic writing will have to contain both of these parts in order to make any sense. Skelton (1988:38) stresses this necessity:

It is by means of the hedging and boosting system of a language that a user distinguishes between what s/he says and what s/he thinks about what s/he says. Without hedging and boosting, the world is purely propositional, a rigid place where things either are the case or are

not. With a hedging and boosting system, language is rendered more flexible and the world more subtle.

Hyland (1994) purported that hedging and boosting devices play an important role in academic writing. He believed that these devices deal with presence or absence of confidence on the behalf of the writer in the truth of propositional information. The exact nature of academic writing makes it necessary and sometimes obligatory for the writer to utilize hedges and boosters in their writing in all academic disciplines. Moreover, Hyland (2000: 179) believed that "hedges in academic writing convey a cautious approach to the material or research results being presented, which in turns helps academics gain acceptance for their work". In addition, Jordan (1997) argued that hedging and boosting are suggestive and advisable and he urged their existence in academic writing as a requisite. However, it seems that some writer try to persuade the readers of their findings by making use of intensifiers and exaggerations rather than hedging devices, but according to Martinez(2003) and Hinkel(2005), believe that resorting to intensification is inappropriate in the context of academic writings.

### **6. Hedges and Boosters and the Cross- Cultural Differences**

Cross-cultural differences may be considered as a factor leads to utilizing intensifiers in articles or researches. It is believed that EFL students find the expression of commitment and detachment to their propositions notoriously problematic and a failure to hedge statements adequately is a common feature of EFL writers, even those how have a good control of English grammar and lexis (Hyland,1995). This can seriously impact a student's participation in the research world. However, the main reason for this failure is the features of the academic writing are culture specific, i.e., EFL students at various proficiency levels transfer writing strategies from their L1 to the target language. As a result, the cross- cultural pragmatic failure- the inability to express what one means- will occur. For more elucidation, Thomas (1983) refers to as 'pragmalinguistic failure' is a problem of inadequate linguistic knowledge and essentially involves different interpretations of equivalent

speech acts. Thus, for example in presenting a knowledge claim, a writer may select a strategy which conveys the right illocution but has the wrong degree of politeness.

According to many previous studies, EFL students don't have the language to say what they want to say. Arab students, for example, appear to have difficulties in this area. Scarcella and Brunak (1981, 67-8) affirm that in addition to lacking a complete repertoire of hedges, Arab students lacked the knowledge of their semantic function and distribution. This is because they learn to think and write differently in their own cultures. As a matter of fact, the problem is not just with Arab students but it is also has been proved by many linguists with other EFL students such as Dutch and French (Robberecht and Peteghem, 1982), Japanese (Hinds, 1983), Korean (Eggington, 1987), German (Clyne, 1987), Arabic (Ostler, 1987), and Finnish (Ventola, 1992).

In academic contexts, it is essential to be cautious in claims or statements, thus overstatements make the text unnatural and are considered to be damaging to the writing. This problem mostly occurs in texts written by non-native speakers, e.i., the tendency to overstate claims and utterances and use of boosters in academic context, perhaps, is a characteristic of non-native writers. The probable reason, according to Bitchener and Basturkman (2006), is their inability to hedge in writing and this makes them resort to overstatements.

## 7. Methodology

The present study sought, in particular, to investigate fourth year college students' awareness in the use of hedging and boosting in their academic research projects. It aims to reveal the students' tendency and preferences as well as their overall frequency in the use of hedges and boosters in their research project.

The data of the present study was obtained from analyzing the corpus of academic research projects written by fourth year students from two departments of English- college of languages and human sciences and college of education- in Garmian University. The corpus constitutes 36 academic researches in which they were written on linguistics and literature. It should be noted that students take academic writing courses as part of their curriculum throughout all over the

four years of their studies. They start with paragraph writing, essay writing, and then they move to writing reports, proposals, term papers, and end with writing graduation research papers.

The present research has been limited to investigating the introduction and discussion sections of students' research papers. As Yang (2013) stated that one of the aims of the introduction part is to introduce the topic of the research and researchers should review previous studies to note their limitations and estimate various view points. West (1980, cited in Mirzapour and Mahand, 2012), also believed that the reason of the study is justified in the introduction part by showing the gap in the literature and the significance of the study. Therefore, authors employ hedging as a useful strategy to cautiously introduce their views toward other studies.

In fact, "introductions are generally thought of as less hedged sections than discussion, but more hedged than method sections" (Hyland, 1995: 37-38). The discussion sections, on the other hand, are considered as the most heavily hedged parts in the research papers. According to Hyland (1994) and Getkham (2011) the major aim of the discussion part is to report the result and draw conclusion as well as authors make claims and argue the result of their study in discussion, therefore, hedges are highly represented in this part.

The researcher has analyzed the hedges and boosters that founded in (36) academic research projects, they were written between 2009 and 2018 by fourth year students. These academic research papers were selected randomly.

The researcher has adopted the classification of Markkanen & Schroder (1997), Hyland (1998a; 1998b), and Hinkel (2005) for the hedging devices, i.e., the students' research papers have been analyzed according to the following hedging devices: shields, impersonal constructions, approximators, time deictic, concessive conjuncts, comment on truth, epistemic. The researcher has also adopted the classification of Hyland (1998a), and Vassileva (2001) for boosters, i.e., the students' research papers have been analyzed according to the following boosting devices: evidential, solidarity, intensifiers, and certainty. Table 1 specifies the hedges and boosters that have been used by the



students in writing their research paper project. Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 show the frequency and the percentage of the hedging and boosting devices according to individual research papers:

## 8. The Results

The present study has examined the hedging and boosting devices that used in EFL fourth year students' research papers. According to the results of the present study, it has been noticed that both hedges and boosters were used in the students' research project papers. The researcher has analyzed the students' research project papers and has found that they use different types of hedging devices, i.e.; shields, impersonal constructions, approximators, time deictic, concessive conjuncts, comment on truth, epistemic. As well as, different types of boosting devices have been used, i.e., evidential, solidarity, intensifiers, and certainty.

Table 2 represents the frequency and the percentage of the students' use of the hedging devices. The results have revealed that "shields" as a hedging device has got (162) frequency and ( 14.120 %) percentage, in which it is the highest in the table, " impersonal constructions " has got (157) frequency and (12.980 %) percentage, " approximators " has got (56) frequency and ( 4.520 % ) percentage, "time deictic" has got ( 68) frequency and ( 5.720 % ) percentage, "concessive conjuncts" has got (155) frequency and (14.330) percentage, "comment on truth" has got (59) frequency and (4.750), and the "epistemic" has got (100) frequency and (8.120) percentage. The analysis also shows that "shields" is the highest in the table, while "approximators" is the lowest one.

The overall frequency of the hedging devices is (757) and the percentage is (64.54) have been shown in Table 3.

Table 4 represents the frequency and the percentage of the students' use of the boosting devices. The results have revealed that "evidential" as a boosting device has got (127) frequency and (10.820 %) percentage, "solidarity" has got (124) frequency and (11.770 %) percentage, "intensifiers" has got (121) frequency and (10.930 %) percentage, and the "certainty" has got (177) frequency and (15.63 %) percentage. The analysis shows also that "certainty" is the

highest in the table, while "intensifiers" is the lowest one.

The overall frequency of the boosting devices is (549) and the percentage is (49.15) have been shown in Table 5.

After analyzing the students' research papers, It has been noticed that students in general tends to use hedging more than boosting and this is definitely clear from the results. The hedging devices are (757) and the percentage is (64.54) and the boosting devices are (549) and the percentage is (49.15)

(See Table 3 and 5). The finding of this research may help the students to understand the concept of hedging and boosting. It is hoped, that these findings are beneficial to academic students for developing research theses. In addition, it may help thesis developers to improve their writing ability in their uses of hedges and boosters devices. It may also enhances their ability to recognize hedging and boosting devices in written texts and increases their knowledge about how to employ these devices when necessary in their own research work.

## 9. Conclusion

Hedges and boosters can be considered to be interactional strategies for increasing or reducing the force of propositional statements. In fact, the concept of hedges and boosters includes the modification of words or phrases within a proposition and also the modification of one's commitment to the propositional content. In general, hedges and boosters alter the state of affairs by indicating some markedness with respect to class membership of a particular item within a proposition or by changing the relationship between the propositional content and the writer by inserting the writer's uncertainty or certainty.

However, using hedges and boosters in a text might be in some extent seen as the discourse choice of individual researches influenced by individual personality, writing style preferences, and experiences in the field. In academic writing, the choices writers make seem constrained by the discourse norms and rhetorical styles of each discipline and reflect the nature of different disciplinary characteristics.

The present study conducted an analysis of (36) academic research paper projects written by randomly selected students of English

department from two colleges, i.e. college of education and college of languages and human sciences at Garmian university. The study has only examined the students' use of hedging and boosting in the introduction and the discussion sections. The quantitative results have showed that hedges exceeded boosters. In addition, the results have revealed that hedging and boosting represent a major rhetorical gap for EFL students and that they often transfer hedging and boosting strategies from their L1 irrespective of language proficiency level.

To conclude, the appropriate use of hedging and boosting devices in an academic text is a significant resource for student writers and plays an important part in demonstrating competence in a specialist register. Thus, the students' writers' tendency to use strong language to show commitment implies the need for an extensive lessons on hedging and boosting in the research writing subjects as well as the need for the students to be more exposed to the conventions of research writing. It may be helpful to raise awareness among students of the usefulness of various hedging and boosting devices in mitigating claims and strengthening propositions. To add, training students to be "confidently uncertain" could prepare them for communicative situations that mostly require politeness (Skelton, 1988 in Swales and Feak, 2004: 125).

As language instructors, particularly in EFL contexts, we should familiarize our students with the role and importance of hedging and boosting devices in academic writing. EFL students should be aware that learning to use hedging and boosting devices appropriately is a crucial communicative resource for them since it can help them to develop academic arguments and establish a good relationship with their readers. Hedging and boosting devices can also help the students' writers' to gain readers' acceptance for their claims and conclusions.

## 10. Recommendations

Teaching and learning how to write linguistically and rhetorically, appropriate academic discourse with respect to target community, is of great significance in higher education. Doing this ensures greater understanding on the part of the writers and

readers. Therefore, it is believed that competence in research writing includes a developed knowledge of the use of hedging and boosting devices. As a result, the following recommendations should be taken in the consideration:

1)The students should be provided with adequate learning materials to learn and understand the different tools and devices in which one can express doubt (hedging) and certainty (boosting) in academic writing. Wishnof (2000) advised instructors to provide students with activities that help them to increase their awareness, in particular with regard to the use of hedging and boosting devices.

2)In addition, they should be provided with authenticity of syntactic and lexical devices actually used by native speakers of English selected from those occurring most frequently in relevant written texts. Accordingly, Saglar-Meyer (1994) believed that EFL students who want to function in the academic context must be able to recognize hedging and boosting devices in written texts and employ these markers when necessary in their own research work.

3)The students' writing abilities must be developed by encouraging authentic writing tasks and the evaluation and manipulation of model texts. What are urgently needed are explanatory and descriptive accounts of the use of hedging and boosting in different registers based on analyses of authentic written sources.

4)According to the findings of the present study, it is suggested that the need for upraising the awareness on the usefulness of hedging and boosting devices in mitigating claims or showing the commitment and detachment in the research papers.

5)Finally, teachers who are responsible for teaching the importance of hedging and boosting in EFL academic writing need to be persistent and cautious in their instruction. EFL students need to be instructed enough to their vocabulary knowledge and grammatical structures including hedging and boosting, in order to present their academic research more appropriately, taking in their consideration that the overuse of hedging and boosting may make their academic research unnatural and abnormal.

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**Table 1 : The Hedges and Boosters that used by the students**

Hedges		Boosters	
It is hoped	indeed	Demonstrate	The fact
It is believed	Actually	Find/ found	Clear/ ly
About	apparently	Obviously	Definite/ ly
More, less	suggest	Very	Reveal
Now	Appear	Absolutely	Evidence
However	Possibly	Must	Truth
Although	Believe	Certain/ ly	Determine
Undoubtedly	Indicate	Show	will
Surely	Probable/ly	Always	
theoretically	May/ could	Substantially	

**Table 2: The Frequency & Percentage of the Hedging Devices According to Individual Research Papers**

RP. No.	Shields		Impersonal Constructions		Approximators		Time Deictic		Concessive Conjunctions		Comment on Truth		Epistemic		Total
	F	P %	F	P %	F	P %	F	P%	F	P%	F	P%	F	P %	
1	7	58.3	9	64.2	1	8.3	2	28.5	6	54.5	4	44.4	2	28.5	31
2	4	44.4	7	58.3	2	16.6	3	3.3	7	58.3	0	0	3	3.3	26
3	5	41.6	6	42.8	0	0	3	23.07	5	41.6	3	23.07	3	3.3	25
4	9	64.2	6	42.8	1	7.1	2	28.5	5	41.6	2	22.2	2	28.5	27
5	5	41.6	2	16.6	3	23.07	2	22.2	7	58.3	2	16.6	1	8.3	22
6	4	44.4	5	38.4	2	16.6	2	33.3	7	58.3	3	23.07	2	22.2	25
7	4	44.4	4	30.7	3	23.07	2	16.6	4	57.1	2	33.3	2	22.2	21
8	5	45.4	7	58.3	2	2.2	4	44.4	3	23.07	2	16.6	3	3.3	26
9	4	57.1	2	33.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	3	23.07	0	0	2	22.2	13
10	3	3.33	9	64.2	2	16.6	0	0	3	23.07	1	8.3	4	44.4	22
11	6	54.5	6	54.5	3	23.07	4	44.4	4	44.4	1	8.3	4	30.7	28
12	2	28.5	3	23.07	2	22.2	1	8.3	4	44.4	3	23.07	1	8.3	16
13	7	58.3	2	28.5	2	33.3	1	7.1	5	41.6	3	23.07	1	8.3	21
14	2	33.3	6	42.8	2	16.6	2	16.6	6	42.8	1	8.3	2	22.2	21
15	3	23.07	3	21.4	3	23.07	3	23.07	2	28.5	1	8.3	5	41.6	20
16	2	28.5	5	45.4	1	8.3	2	22.2	2	16.6	2	16.6	3	3.3	17
17	6	42.8	7	58.3	1	7.1	0	0	2	16.6	0	0	2	16.6	18
18	2	16.6	4	44.4	1	8.3	2	16.6	1	8.3	2	16.6	2	16.6	14
19	2	16.6	6	42.8	0	0	0	0	6	42.8	3	23.07	2	22.2	19
20	5	38.4	2	16.6	0	0	1	8.3	7	58.3	2	22.2	1	8.3	18
21	4	30.7	4	44.4	1	8.3	1	8.3	4	44.4	0	0	1	8.3	15
22	3	21.4	6	54.5	2	16.6	2	16.6	3	27.2	1	8.3	2	16.6	19
23	5	45.4	3	23.07	0	0	4	57.1	4	57.1	2	16.6	0	0	18
24	4	57.1	2	28.5	2	16.6	3	3.33	5	41.6	2	16.6	3	23.07	21
25	3	3.3	3	3.3	2	16.6	2	16.6	1	8.3	0	0	4	44.4	15
26	7	58.3	2	16.6	2	2.2	2	16.6	4	57.1	1	8.3	5	41.6	23
27	4	44.4	3	27.2	1	8.3	1	7.1	6	42.8	2	16.6	5	35.7	22
28	5	41.6	4	30.7	2	16.6	0	0	3	27.2	1	8.3	4	44.4	19
29	9	64.2	5	35.7	3	23.07	2	16.6	2	28.5	1	7.1	3	23.07	25

30	6	54.5	6	42.8	2	22.2	2	16.6	2	28.5	0	0	4	30.7	22
31	2	28.5	4	44.4	0	0	1	8.3	7	58.3	1	8.3	3	23.07	18
32	7	58.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	3	3.3	6	42.8	3	3.3	3	23.07	24
33	6	42.8	2	16.6	2	16.6	2	16.6	6	42.8	2	16.6	5	35.7	25
34	6	42.8	3	23.07	1	8.3	3	27.2	5	41.6	1	8.3	4	44.4	23
35	2	16.6	2	28.5	1	8.3	3	3.33	4	57.1	2	16.6	3	23.07	17
36	2	16.6	6	42.8	2	16.6	0	0	4	44.4	3	3.3	4	30.7	21
Total	162	14.120	157	12.980	56	4.520	68	5.720	155	14.330	59	4.750	100	8.120	757

Table 3: The Frequency & Percentage of the Hedging Used in the Students' Research Papers

Shields		Impersonal Constructions		Approximators		Time Deictic		Concessive Conjunctions		Comment on Truth		Epistemic		Total
F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
														F 757
16	14.12	15	12.98	5	4.520	6	5.72	15	14.33	5	4.75	10	8.12	
2	0	7	0	6		8	0	5	0	9	0	0	0	P 64.54

Table 4: The Frequency & Percentage of the Boosters According to Individual Research Papers

RP. No.	Evidential		Solidarity		Intensifiers		Certainty		Total
	F	P %	F	P %	F	P %	F	P%	
1	2	14.2	3	21.4	4	30.7	5	35.7	14
2	3	21.4	4	57.1	3	21.4	6	42.8	16
3	5	35.7	3	27.2	7	58.3	7	58.3	22
4	4	30.7	3	27.2	5	38.4	4	57.1	16
5	4	30.7	2	28.5	4	30.7	5	38.4	15
6	3	21.4	4	57.1	2	14.2	5	38.4	14
7	2	14.2	5	35.7	4	30.7	4	57.1	15
8	2	14.2	3	21.4	3	21.4	4	57.1	12
9	7	58.3	3	21.4	3	21.4	4	57.1	17
10	1	8.3	2	14.2	4	57.1	4	57.1	11
11	9	64.2	2	14.2	4	30.7	6	42.8	21
12	4	30.7	1	8.3	3	27.2	7	58.3	15
13	2	28.5	3	21.4	3	27.2	3	21.4	11
14	3	27.2	3	21.4	2	14.2	4	30.7	12
15	2	14.2	3	21.4	2	14.2	3	27.2	10
16	4	57.1	5	38.4	1	8.3	5	35.7	15
17	4	30.7	5	35.7	2	28.5	7	58.3	18
18	3	27.2	4	57.1	1	14.2	7	58.3	15
19	7	58.3	1	8.3	5	35.7	5	38.4	18
20	1	8.3	4	30.7	5	35.7	6	42.8	16
21	1	14.2	2	14.2	4	57.1	9	64.2	16
22	3	27.2	4	57.1	3	27.2	3	21.4	13
23	5	35.7	3	27.2	5	35.7	3	21.4	16
24	3	21.4	5	35.7	1	14.2	5	35.7	14
25	4	57.1	3	27.2	3	27.2	6	42.8	16

26	2	28.5	4	57.1	3	21.4	6	42.8	15
27	2	28.5	4	57.1	4	57.1	3	21.4	13
28	6	42.8	1	14.2	4	57.1	4	57.1	15
29	3	27.2	1	14.2	5	35.7	4	57.1	13
30	3	27.2	2	28.5	1	14.2	6	42.8	12
31	4	30.7	7	58.3	2	14.2	7	58.3	20
32	5	38.4	3	27.2	3	21.4	6	42.8	17
33	5	35.7	9	64.2	5	35.7	4	57.1	23
34	2	14.2	4	30.7	3	27.2	3	27.2	12
35	4	30.7	4	57.1	4	30.7	4	30.7	16
36	3	27.2	5	38.4	4	57.1	3	27.2	15
Total	127	10.820	124	11.770	121	10.930	177	15.63	549

Table 5: The Frequency & Percentage of Boosters Used in the Students' Research Papers

Evidential		Solidarity		Intensifiers		Certainty		Total
F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
127	10.820	124	11.770	121	10.930	177	15.63	F 549
								P 49.15