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# Softening the Propositional Claims: Investigation of Appropriate Use of Hedging Strategies in Academic Writing

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**Abstract:** *The current study examines the appropriate usage of hedging strategies in the discussion sections of doctoral dissertations in applied linguistics produced by American and Pakistani writers. To do this, a corpus of 50 discussion sections from doctoral dissertations completed between 2018 and 2020 has been compiled. The primary objective of the current study is to examine the hedging strategies utilized in the discussion part to soften the propositional assertions. Martin's (2008) taxonomy of hedging strategies was utilized to categorize the various types of hedges found in the texts. A computer concordancing tool (AntConc 3.4) was used in order to analyze two corpora for quantification, which was further supplemented with manual analysis. The findings indicated that American writers utilized more hedging devices in their discussion sections, whereas Pakistani writers used fewer hedging tactics. The findings of this study have implications for academic writing and EFL writing instruction.*

**Key Words:** Hedging Strategies, Discussion Section; Doctoral Dissertations; Academic Writing

## Introduction

It has been almost three decades or so since scholastic work has attained impressive academic consideration about the important role of academic writing (Irvin, 2010; Drury, 2001). This subject has also been broadly studied in applied linguistics and all its associated fields. For this purpose, a number of researchers have coordinated their studies on pedagogical and educational issues like speculations, theories and approaches (Benesch, 2008; Zemach & Rumisek, 2005; Fulmiler, 2002), whereas the main focus of some scholars is directed at the practical approach of academic composition. The focus of a few researchers has been on practices in academic writing where different etymological structures and logical as well as rhetorical techniques have been investigated.

Hedging, according to Zuck and Zuck (1986), is a process of reducing the strength of an assertion. However, Crismore and Farnsworth (1990, p. 135) emphasize the meaning of hedging as "the mark of a professional scientist, one who acknowledges the caution with which he or she does science and writes on science." Investigating the reader's reaction

towards hedging, Vande Kopple and Crismore (1990) argue that hedged statements are considered more evaluative by students than unhedged statements. In this line, Varttala (1999) also stresses that the function of hedges in academic writing is to indicate textual precision and interpersonal relationship.

It has also been uncovered from extensive research in a huge number of disciplines that academic writing is socially arranged and organized in a particular way for the fulfilment of rhetorical goals (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). Academic writing is considered to be a socially performed act for a specific readership in a certain context (Bruffee, 1986). That is to say, the objective style of academic writing seems to attenuate the overt presence of particular writers while referring to their interpretative perspective. Therefore, it seems that the writers who favour this concept, are more likely to condemn the deployment of vagueness in academic writing and subscribe to the notion of precision and accuracy with the belief that imprecision and vague expressions while making arguments may leave various doubts in readers' minds in comparison to the precision and reliability of the writers' claims (Booth, 1985; Alley, 1987; Hedge, 1994). In other words, they contend that the use of hedging strategies and other epistemic expressions is objectionable in academic writing.

On the contrary, the use of hedging strategies in academic writing is favoured by some researchers (Hyland, 1995, 1998). Hedging is a multi-objective linguistic device which can help researchers explain their propositional claims appropriately. The proper use of hedging strategies can help scholars gain acceptance from the discourse community for their scientific claims. Additionally, researchers use hedging strategies to strengthen their arguments by admitting to the limitations and uncertainties of their studies. Based on this premise, the expressions of vagueness and imprecision that are conveyed by hedging strategies are thought to be appropriate, especially while making scientific claims. Accordingly, like other communicative forms, academic writing is considered to be rational and is supposed to conform to rules of communication where rhetorical strategies like persuasion are viewed as basic components of discourse where form and content are inseparable (Musa, 2014). All in all, it can

be observed from this discussion that for academic writers, hedging can be used as an essential rhetorical strategy and ought to be seen as another useful ingredient of scientific texts, not as a decorative addition to an otherwise informative text.

It has been found in the previous literature that researchers from other cultural backgrounds have utilized hedging strategies in English less frequently than native speakers of English (Vassileva, 2001; Dahl, 2004; Hinkel, 2005; Hu & Cao, 2011; Yang, 2013). It is interesting to note that findings from several studies also show that researchers from non-English-speaking cultures not only use a lower amount of hedging while writing in English, but less amount of hedging is also evident when they write in their L1 (Vassileva, 2001; Hu & Cao, 2011). Therefore, it can be said that non-native speakers' employment of hedging while writing in the English language is influenced by certain deep cultural factors.

As the current study focuses on doctoral dissertations for the purpose of investigating the use of hedging strategies, it should be noted that PhD dissertations require special attention from student writers, supervisors, and researchers because they bring together a diverse group of people from diverse backgrounds working in ESL and EFL situations. The present study also aims to carry out a contrastive analysis of the appropriate employment of hedging strategies in the Discussion sections of American and Pakistani doctoral dissertations obtained from various universities in the USA (for native speakers) and leading universities in Pakistan (for non-native corpus). For this purpose, the taxonomy proposed by Martin (2008) is applied in order to identify and classify various categories of hedging strategies. The major purpose of the current study is to explore whether there are any specific disciplinary variations in the use of strategic hedges by researchers while making a propositional claim in approaching dissertation writing.

The current study also aims an investigation of the overall distribution, forms, and functions of hedging strategies in American (native-English writers) and Pakistani (non-native-English writers) doctoral dissertations in applied linguistics. In academic writing, hedging is a common linguistic

feature used to express tentativeness and certainty in propositional statements, to present them with apt exactitude, precision, and humility, and to facilitate dialogue with readers. Hedging also helps to soften the utterances and mitigates the force of the statement, reducing the risk of rejection. By utilizing hedging, academic writers express a degree of confidence in uttering their claims by leaving some room for readers to give their opinion about the truth value of the proposition.

Keeping in mind the significance of hedging strategies in academic writing, the current research study seeks to examine the overall distribution, forms, and functions of hedging strategies in the discussion sections of American and Pakistani doctoral dissertations by carrying out a comparative analysis of hedging within the discipline of applied linguistics. To be specific, the following research questions will be answered in the current study:

1. What is the overall frequency and distribution pattern of hedging strategies in the Discussion section of doctoral dissertations by American and Pakistani writers in applied linguistics?

2. Are there any differences in the employment of hedging strategies in the doctoral dissertation Discussion section by American and Pakistani writers?

## Literature Review

The terms hedge and hedging could somehow be defined as a source of defence, protection, or a barrier, limit, or resistance (see The Oxford English Dictionary). It is, therefore, argued by Hyland (1998, p. 01) that "straightforward definitions of the notions are rather rare." Different terms have been used by different scholars in order to refer to the linguistic features that may be seen as hedging. Some scholars have utilized references like understatement (Hubler, 1983), downtoners (Quirk et al., 1985), stance marker (e.g., Atkinson, 1999), and vagueness (Channell, 1994; Myers, 1996).

Besides, in the past few decades, there have been a remarkable number of research studies on the concept of hedging. It has been noticed that almost all of those studies are based on Zadeh's (1965) concept of fuzzy logic. This notion suggests that there are some expressions in the real world that might not effortlessly find their way into the linguistic classifications accessible for depicting different areas of the universe. George Lakoff's (1973) inspirational study is actually the principal of these pioneering works because it describes the issues regarding the relationship between natural linguistic notions and naturally occurring phenomena.

Since then, several researchers have transformed their focus from the semantic function of hedges and started to stress more on their function as a communicative strategy between discourse partners in social surroundings. Hedging here can be seen as serving its pragmatic function rather than semantics. Along these lines, hedging has been seen as attributable to the interpersonal function of language where we may "recognize the speech function, the type of offer, command statement, or question, the attitudes and judgments embodied in it, and the rhetorical features that constitute it as a symbolic act" (Halliday & Hassan, 1989, p. 45).

The above-mentioned conceptual complexities of the notion of hedging are immensely entwined with the problems regarding the provision of a concrete categorical account of hedging strategies that actually make an excessively wide, diverse and indefinite category. According to Nikula (1997, p. 190), despite the fact that hedges are generally based on context, single terms, phrases, and linguistic expressions do not make sense or function as hedges until they are contextualized. However, there is an infinite number of these devices, which makes creating a complete record practically impossible. Prince et al.'s (1982) classification of hedging between semantic-based 'approximators' and pragmatically-oriented 'shields' seems to be a pivotal work regarding the typology of hedges. Semantically-oriented hedges are deemed to be the devices that alter the argumentative stance of an utterance by showing the amount of ambiguity in individual components. Contrastingly, pragmatically-oriented hedges are regarded as proponents of uncertainty between the propositional content and the writer. This clear disparity appears to be essential not only because it helps to draw attention to the difference between semantic and pragmatic while describing hedging, but also because it explains the different manners of their effect, which is clear in the aspects

they alter, like approximators when single words or phrases are related, and shields when the whole proposition is related. Considering this disoriented use of hedging terminology in the literature, all the expressions under the umbrella of 'shields,' Furthermore, Hyland (1998, p. 3, 44) asserts that the relationship between hedging and epistemic modality can be realized as "unwillingness to make an explicit and complete commitment to the truth of propositions" and is related to "items used to display confidence, or lack of confidence, in the truth of propositional information."

Essentially, it can be observed from the above discussion that either hedging is regarded as a blanket term that encompasses epistemic modality as a lower-order category, or the converse is true (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997, p. 7; Hyland, 1998, p. 3). In any case, there is an incredible overlap between these two concepts. Therefore, the correspondence between them, albeit difficult in theoretical concept, seems somewhat easy and forthright in practice. One of the most frequently cited and explanatory examples of such an affinity could be the modal auxiliary "may" in the English language, which can perform both epistemic and hedging functions when used pragmatically in propositional content. Nonetheless, modal auxiliaries are not the only devices that may project either epistemic or hedging functions.

## Methodology

### Research Methods

This is a corpus-based study that used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data collection stage begins with the sample choice of doctoral dissertations on the basis of online sources. It is followed by extracting the discussion sections from the rest of the dissertations and compiled in separate files. The analysis of hedging strategies is done by taking naturalized frequency, especially in the discussion sections, by using a lexical software called Antconc.

### Instruments

The present study has used several instruments to explore multiple aspects of research objectives. First, to analyze the samples collected, a computerized

lexical software, AntConc concordance software, was used to create a word list of hedging forms from the Discussion sections, which was then used to generate the frequency of hedging incidences. The present study also employed the analytical frameworks for hedging strategies proposed by Martin (2008) for the purpose of coding the data for analysis. There are several reasons for choosing Martin's (2008) framework for hedging strategies. The first reason might be the strategic approach of hedging devices used by Martin, which seemed rather appropriate for analyzing hedging strategies in our corpus-based study. The second reason might be that it appears suitable to fulfil the aims of the present study, which attempts to explore specific hedging strategies in academic discourse.

## Corpus of the Study

The corpus selected for conducting the comparative analysis consists of doctoral dissertations by native English writers (Americans) and Pakistani second-language users of English. Different criteria were considered for selecting the corpora. The first was that the date for compiling a corpus was required to pertain to university-level dissertation writing, especially doctoral dissertations. To do the comparative analysis, it was also important to make sure that each corpus included both native and non-native English users.

Overall, a sub-corpus of native English speaking candidates were chosen alongside a sub-corpus of Pakistani candidates. However, an equivalent number of dissertations from both sides of the data were taken. For Pakistani corpus, the researcher sent an application to the authorized member of the Higher Education Commission via email asking for permission to access the Pakistan Research Repository. Within a few days, unlimited access was granted to the researcher. For the American corpus, the doctoral dissertations were retrieved from OATD (Open Access Theses and Dissertations) and the ProQuest Database. A total of 50 doctoral dissertations (25 American and 25 Pakistani) were collected from the repositories mentioned above. All the doctoral dissertations followed the IMRD (Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion with the addition of the Conclusion

section) sequence of academic genre writing. Moreover, all these doctoral dissertations were submitted between 2011 and 2018 years.

**Table 1.** Corpus of American and Pakistani Applied Linguistic PhD Dissertations.

|                | American corpus | Pakistani Corpus | Total   |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------|
| No. of Texts   | 25              | 25               | 50      |
| No. of Tokens  | 126,952         | 132,724          | 259,676 |

## The Analytical Framework

### Martin's (2008) Taxonomy

Martin's (2008) taxonomy of hedging strategies includes linguistic items which are used by writers at a lexico-grammatical and syntactic level to fulfil the functions of hedges. These linguistic devices can be described below:

## Strategy of Indetermination

The strategy of indetermination is one of the most common strategies proposed by Martin (2008). The main function of this strategy is to give a proposition a hint of less semantic, qualitative, and quantitative explicitness as well as uncertainty, vagueness, and fuzziness. This strategy is further characterized by two categories. The first is an epistemic modality, and the second category is approximators of quantity, frequency, degree, and time that serves to show the reluctance to generate an accurate and precise commitment to the proposition expressed.

## Strategy of Subjectivism

Another hedging approach is the subjectivism strategy. This method can be implemented in two ways. One of them is the use of first-person personal pronouns (I/we) followed by cognition-related or performative verbs (think, belief) (suppose, suggest). The primary goal of this category is to assist writers in signalling that what they have expressed is purely personal or subjective. In this scenario, the writers demonstrate respect for the readers' perspectives while also persuading the reader to join in the communication situation. Martin (2008) has also added to this group the linguistic strategies that demonstrate the writer's direct inclusion and personal opinions, such as to our knowledge, in our opinion, and in my experience. The second type includes adjectival and adverbial terms that place a premium on quality (such as extremely interesting,

and particularly important). In practice, this category is also known by other names, such as emphatic expressions dubbed "boosters" by Hyland (1998) and "emotionally-charged intensifiers" by Salager-Meyer (1991, 1994), which serve as a tool for persuading readers about the significance and certainty of the assertions made by writers by expressing their emotional state. Similarly, these utterances can be viewed as a form of positive politeness (Myers, 1989), as they demonstrate solidarity with the discourse community by assuming shared knowledge and objectives.

## Strategy of Depersonalisation

This approach refers to occasions in which writers attempt to reduce their involvement in the texts through the use of various categories such as impersonal constructions and agentless passives in order to avoid bearing full responsibility for the truth value of propositional statements. This method can be classified further into two groups. The first category is agentless passive and impersonal constructions (such as an attempt was made to see..., it appears/appears that...), and the second category is impersonal active constructions that assist in displacing personal involvement by some non-human entity, such as findings, results, or data, as in the following examples: The findings imply/expose..., these statistics imply…, and so forth.

## Data Analysis Procedures

### Antconc

To begin, a computer concordance tool is utilized to analyze two corpora in preparation for quantification analysis. Antconc 3.4 concordance software was used to identify occurrences of hedging methods within the discussion parts of PhD dissertations. This software allows for the extraction of all sentences that contain the specified types of

hedging. The next step was to process the strategies used by writers line by line to formulate which one of these forms and strategies were used as a hedge. The diverse nature of hedging makes this stage quite challenging for the researcher. It might not be possible to just take a frequency count directly from the concordancing tool, as linguistic items used in hedging cannot always function as hedges.

Second, the frequency of occurrences of hedging markers in both corpora is calculated using both raw numbers and percentages, which are provided in the Results Chapter. Additionally, a word-based technique is used to compare the frequency of two corpora. Thus, because the two corpora employed in the study were not completely similar in size, the findings in terms of item detection for frequency analysis are normalized. Thus, the overall frequency of hedging marker instances is standardized to occurrences per 10,000 words to ensure the two corpora are comparable in terms of validity and equality.

### The Procedure of Hedging Analysis

The analysis for hedging strategies is focused on the identification of hedging strategies in Discussion texts. As stated above, the analysis of the Discussion section focused on how hedging strategies are distributed in the very section of the dissertation, and how hedging strategies vary in native and non-native doctoral dissertations.

### Results

Results obtained from the initial stage of analysis were quantitative in nature. In the first round, the textual analysis was carried out on the American and Pakistani corpora which consist of 50 doctoral dissertations from the Applied Linguistic discipline and 259,676 tokens respectively. All the respective texts were run in Antconc software. Hedging strategies were recognized and then subsequently coded based on Martin's taxonomy (2008) of hedging strategies. All the hedging strategies were thus divided into 3 categories: Strategy of Indetermination, Strategy of Subjectivisation, and Strategy of Depersonalisation. The preliminary list of high-frequency items in two corpora was noted and similarities and differences between disciplines and speakers were drawn up.

As can be seen from Table 4.1, certain disciplinary differences in the overall occurrence of hedging strategies in the American and Pakistani data sets could be detected from the texts analyzed.

**Table 2.** Overall Distribution of Hedging Strategies in Doctoral Dissertations per 10,000 Words.

| Hedging Category | Native English Writers | | Non-Native English Writers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Epistemic Modality | 988 | 38.0 | 594 | 22.8 |
| Approximators | 272 | 10.4 | 277 | 10.6 |
| Personal pronouns | 34 | 1.3 | 17 | 0.6 |
| Quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions | 67 | 2.5 | 38 | 1.4 |
| The agentless passive and impersonal construction | 95 | 3.6 | 78 | 3.0 |
| Impersonal Active Construction | 161 | 6.2 | 248 | 9.5 |
| Total | 1617 | 62.2 | 1252 | 48.2 |

When it comes to the strategies of hedging, it is the epistemic modality that is used more abundantly than other strategies in the current data. The results further indicate that approximators, impersonal active constrictions, and agentless and passive constructions (strategy of depersonalization) is the second most frequently used strategies in the present corpus, with a slight disciplinary variation. Moreover, on the basis of the present data, personal pronouns and quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions are among the most infrequent categories of hedging strategies.

As shown in the Table above, the strategy of indetermination consists of the categories of

epistemic modality and approximators, which are further realized by the range of items and linguistic features. As we can see from Table 4.3, American writers have utilized epistemic modality more than Pakistani writers. However, the instances of approximators are almost the same in both datasets.

The dominant frequency of epistemic modality suggests that employment of modality is considered necessary by writers as it could be used strategically to distance their personal involvement from their propositional claims.
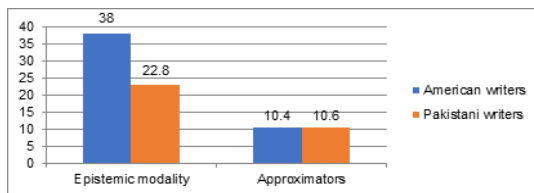


Figure 1: Relative Frequency of Epistemic Modality and Approximators in the American and Pakistani Corpora.

As can be seen in figure 4.1, there is a significant difference in the overall frequency of epistemic modality in both corpora. The relative instances with normalized frequency are higher in American discussions with 38 cases per 10,000 words than in Pakistani discussions with 22.8 instances per 10,000 words. On the other hand, it can be seen that although there is a remarkable similarity in the overall frequency measure of approximators in the two data sets, the relative incidence in terms of normalized frequency is slightly higher in Pakistani texts with 10.6 cases per 10,000 words, precisely followed by American texts

with 10.4 cases per 10,000 words. The most frequently used approximators in American texts are most (32), often (42) and relatively (33), whereas in Pakistani texts are most (68), almost (33), much (32) and often (29). It is unsurprising to note that there was no considerable difference in the normalized ratio of approximation strategies used by all the soft science disciplines of both the American and Pakistani corpora.

As far as the strategy of subjectivism is concerned, Table 4.1 shows that American authors have utilized personal pronouns and quality-emphasizing strategies more than Pakistani authors.
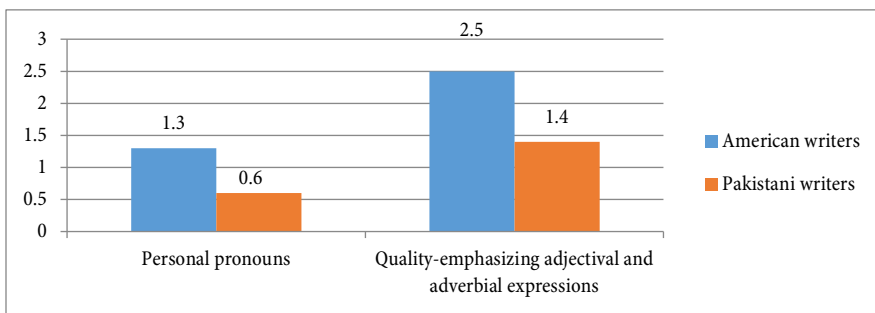


Figure 2: Relative Frequency of Personal Pronouns and Quality Emphasizing Adjectival and Adverbial Expressions in the American and Pakistani Corpora.

In our corpus of American and Pakistani doctoral dissertations, although we have found both types of subcategories used by writers to put forward their personal opinions, the ratio of this category is far

lower than the other categories. 1.3 instances of personal pronouns with verbs of cognition and performative verbs were found to show a hedging strategy in American texts, whereas only 0.6

instances per 10,000 words were found in Pakistani texts. The second category of the strategy of subjectivism is mainly used to convey the writer's emotional state about the propositions. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, in comparison with Pakistani authors (1.4

cases per 10,000 words), quality emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions may be noticeably more frequent in the discussions of American linguists, which showed 2.5 cases per 10,000 words.
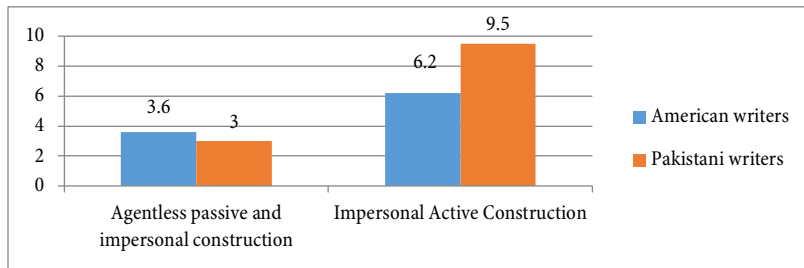


**Figure 3:** Relative Frequency of Strategy of Depersonalization in the American and Pakistani Corpora.

As can be illustrated in Figure 4.3, the analysis of the strategy of depersonalization reveals that the overall frequency of impersonal active construction is relatively higher than agentless passive and impersonal constructions in the two data sets. Let's have a closer look at both these categories of the strategy of depersonalization being employed by American and Pakistani authors. The employment of the first category, as shown in Figure 4.3, is slightly higher in American texts with 3.6 instances per 10,000 words than in the linguists of Pakistan with the same 3 cases per 10,000 words. The common linguistic realizations of agentless passive and impersonal expressions found in the current data are "it seems/appears, the effects are found, an attempt is made, it was hypothesized, it was attenuated…" However, the analysis of the data also revealed that Pakistani authors prefer using a strategy that is not dependent on the human agency to present the propositional claims. Both the American and Pakistani writers employ a vast array of linguistic realizations to present this category. As Figure 4.3 illustrates, the ratio of this category is relatively higher in Pakistani texts, with 9.5 incidences per 10,000 words, than the normalized frequency of American texts, with 6.2 incidences per 10,000 words. The typical linguistic expressions of this category found in our data are "Findings indicate/suggest/support…, Results indicate/suggest/show/support…, Analysis revealed…, Study suggested/found…"

## Discussion of Results

The objective of the present study is to investigate overall differences between American and Pakistani writers' use of hedging strategies in doctoral dissertations. The discussion sections, composed of two groups of writers, make up the bulk of the data, but the main focus is given to the employment of hedging strategies to tone down the propositional statements. This section of the current study is essential because it provides a rich source of hedging because both native and non-native speakers are naturally making claims and minimizing contradictory remarks.

The distribution of hedging methods in the American and Pakistani data reveals that the two languages have distinct rhetorical preferences. Hedging forms were more prevalent in American applied linguistics dissertations than in Pakistani applied linguistics dissertations. These findings show that American authors are more hesitant to make assertions and reject or validate other people's ideas than Pakistani writers. To put it another way, Pakistani writers "overstate," whereas American academics "understate." These findings are consistent with Falahati (2004), who discovered that native authors utilize more hedging forms and functions than non-native writers and are hence less assertive when expressing propositional statements. The findings of this study corroborate those of prior

studies that have found differences between languages. In comparison to native writers, non-native data shows that Pakistani writers like Chinese writers (Yang, 2013), favour less detachment from their ideas. Researchers have shown that German (Clyne, 1988) and Finnish (Crismore et al., 1993) use a lot more epistemic devices than English and a few other languages.

An interesting point of difference between the American and Pakistani writers is the frequency of hedging strategies used in the discussion sections of both datasets. Though the results show a higher number of hedging devices used in applied linguistics by native and non-native speakers, the percentage of these strategies used by American writers is considerably higher than by Pakistani writers. While epistemic modality markers were the most commonly used by American writers, the relative amount of these strategies used by Pakistani writers was slightly lower than that of American writers. Moreover, personal pronouns and quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions were used more frequently in American data than in Pakistani data. The distinction could be seen in the employment of the strategy of depersonalization, as impersonal active constructions are found more frequently in Pakistani corpora. However, it is interesting to note that both native and non-native writers display a similar number of approximators used in the discussion section. Concerning the employment of hedging strategies in the applied linguistics discipline, we can see that American linguists tended to employ more mitigating strategies than Pakistani linguists.

A comparison of the frequency and types of hedges used in dissertations written by American and Pakistani authors revealed the difference between the American and Pakistani corpora was in the frequency with which hedging tactics were used, which was significantly lower in Pakistani writers' discussions. These findings corroborate those of Nguyen Thi Thuy (2018), who discovered a larger proportion of hedges in native English-speaking authors. This disparity could be explained by the culturally varied backgrounds of the authors, the intended readers, and the established rules of the two discourse communities. In their cross-cultural and cross-generic investigation of interpersonality in written academic discourse, Lorés-Sanz et al. (2010) discovered similar findings as it revealed that hedges were used more frequently in the English sub-corpus than in the Spanish sub-corpus.

In another comparison, we discovered that American dissertations had significantly more instances of self-mention than Pakistani dissertations. This could be a result of cultural influence, as it may prevent Pakistani rookie authors from expressing their personal doubts and becoming intimately involved in an issue that stems from their culture. As Wishnoff (2000) points out, culture has a crucial role in defining what we say, how, where, and when we say it, and so impacts and forms language and the images it represents. Additionally, American writers showed their certainty and attitudes more than their Pakistani counterparts. Emphatics rhetorically assert a proposition or emphasize a conviction (Meyers, 1997). They convey an emotional connection to the audience by emphasizing shared information, group participation, and direct engagement with readers (Hyland, 2001a). Pakistani writers employed strong language to emphasize common knowledge in support of their results and to emphasize discoveries that corroborate their initial hypothesis. Furthermore, as Crismore et al. (1993) argue, "many people in the United States regard certainty as a sign of strength and hedging as a sign of weakness, possibly because certainty is associated with assertiveness and self-confidence (p. 65)." Pakistani culture, on the other hand, discourages assertiveness and overt displays of confidence, and views taking a back seat to one's asserted position as a sign of modesty and respect. These cultural predispositions may influence these authors' rhetorical behaviour, particularly their use of emphatic or strong language.

## Conclusion

In this study, it has been observed that both native and non-native dissertation writers use hedging strategies that either diminish their presence in the propositional claims or express full responsibility for those claims. This study used Martin's (2008) analytical framework of hedging strategies for investigating the different ways student writers utilize hedging strategies to diminish their

involvement with the claims they make or show complete commitment to their claims.

Overall, the distribution of hedging strategies is higher in American dissertations than in Pakistani dissertations. The analysis also revealed that American writers would come up with a variety of items to present tentativeness when interpreting research findings and indicate caution when making claims about their research results more often than Pakistani writers. Besides, the results also indicated that there was a high amount of epistemic modality along with various other strategies like approximators and impersonal active construction. The results of the current study also indicate the distinction in the frequency of hedging strategies and their various forms used in the two corpora. The findings show that hedging strategies are more frequently used in native writers' corpora than in Pakistani academic discourse. The reason could be that Pakistani writers' proficiency in writing English may not be established greatly at the discourse level. Therefore, it might be essential for Pakistani student writers to increase their awareness regarding the various forms of hedging strategies that might be used while presenting tentativeness or accuracy in their statements, and to understand the differentiation in the use of the epistemic and strategic functions of hedging strategies in academic discourse.

The current study helps to establish a better ground of knowledge about the employment of hedging strategies by American and Pakistani linguists. The results of our study show that it might not be enough to consider that the difference in the use of the English language by non-native writers is pure because English is not their first language. Based on the current study, it can be seen that the way they hedge in their writing is also influenced by their status as doctorate candidates. Moreover, it also shows that the way they use hedging can also depend on the nature of the discipline they are involved in. Thus, if this more holistic view of language use shines a light on something as specific as hedging in the creation of the discussion portion of doctoral dissertations, it appears that this viewpoint on language may be applied to a variety of other situations as well.

The study offers some pedagogical implications for language instructors and learners, especially in a foreign language and L2 settings. They should make L2 learners aware of the particular role and significance of hedging strategies in an academic context. Language learners should also be made aware of the importance of using hedging appropriately because it is a vital interactive source as authors can build arguments in their academic writing and form a reader-writer relationship with the help of these devices (Hyland, 1996). Hedging is not only an essential resource to develop scientific arguments, but it could also help authors gain acceptance for their claims from readers as well as peer groups by showing tentativeness and caution in their statements and also by negotiation of the perspective, which could help in gaining acceptance for the conclusions (Hyland, 1996). According to Nasiri (2012), L2 learners should be instructed that in order to get their research articles published in international journals, especially those reviewed by native speakers of English, they should learn to use hedging strategies appropriately as it is beneficial for them. Meanwhile, various techniques and practices can be used by course designers and teachers to guide L2 learners to enhance their capability regarding the employment of hedging strategies. For example, according to Getkham (2011), various hedging devices related to certain functions in the curriculum should be taught by instructors. Moreover, they should provide proper awareness to learners regarding various forms of hedging strategies. Wishnoff (2000) recommends instructors teach learners by providing them with various activities that might help them improve their hedging awareness, particularly in an academic setting.

The present study is merely restricted to examining the use of hedging strategies in the discussion sections of American and Pakistani doctoral dissertations. One of the many concerns could be the problem of subjectivity hedging strategies in the study. This issue is also argued by a number of researchers (Fryer, 2007), that personal involvement might be unavoidable, and it is more apparent if the content can be misunderstood. There is a possibility that the results might not be precise enough, but they show some propensities. Other researchers (Varttala, 2001) have also argued that

investigating the linguistic process of hedging could not be thorough, detailed, and exhaustive. Firstly, hedging is defined in broad terms in broad terms in linguistic literature. Secondly, hedging has the tendency to appear in many forms other than lexical, as it can also be used as personal pronouns, tenses or passive voice. So the current research focused on Martin's (2008) taxonomy of hedges that is typically interpreted as hedges to be able to compare some aspects of this linguistic phenomenon in academic discourse.

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