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Allameh Tabataba'i University  
College of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages

**The Use of Hedging Devices in the Two Disciplines of  
Humanity and Sciences; a Contrastive Study**

**Submitted in the Partial Fulfillment of Requirement for the Degree  
of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

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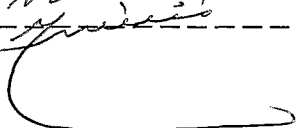
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We hereby certify that this thesis by Seyyed Abdorreza Fathi entitled on **The Use of Hedging Devices in the Two Disciplines of Humanity and Science; a Contrastive Study** is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in teaching English a foreign language (TEFL).

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*Dedicated to all those who helped me achieve my goals,  
especially my parents and wife.*

Abstract:

It is acknowledged nowadays that the roles of the writer and the reader have an effect on the style of ESP texts. Writers need to present their claims cautiously, accurately and modestly to meet discourse community expectations and to gain acceptance for their statements. Hedging the expression of tentativeness and possibility is often held to be a central feature of more technical ESP texts such as scientific specialist- to- specialist research articles. Academic writing is rich in hedged propositions which allow writers to express their uncertainty concerning the factuality of their statements and claims. Hedging devices serve as significant features of academic writing. The study aims at seeing the differences between the two disciplines in the application of hedging devices and also to see the differences of the incidences, types and frequencies of hedges among different fields of the two disciplines. 108 articles from the two disciplines were chosen and the conclusion sections of the articles were scrutinized for the hedging devices. The chi-square test analysis was also used to compare and contrast the data. The study demonstrated that the field of science, due to its preciseness, uses much less hedge words while the humanity and specially the social sciences used the highest number of the hedge words

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# Chapter 1

## **Introduction**

## **1-1.Introduction:**

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the process of scientific discovery has been closely linked with the actions of the writing and publishing the results of researches. During recent years, researchers have increasingly grown interest in the types of variation marked within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

It is now unanimously agreed that, in addition to the wide range categories of English for General Purposes and ESP, varieties within special languages should be considered. Thus, lots of studies relating to such variations have appeared which normally motivated by the pedagogical implications involved.

Recent studies have shown interest in the interaction between readers and writers, because the only channel of communication between a writer and a reader is through the text which gives utmost importance to the choices of the words and expressions.

It is commonly acknowledged nowadays that the roles of the writers and the readers have an effect on the style of ESP texts. We have different ESP text categories which vary in their presentation of information on the basis of the presumed audience, ranging from the uneducated layman to the specialist. In this regard, ESP texts can be seen as a continuum of technicality levels according to the intended readership.

Over the years, researches in the field of English for specific purposes (ESP), mainly those which rooted in sociological and linguistic aspects of discourse have created loads of information regarding the linguistic side of the texts in scientific fields.

Although the studies which have been done in this regard sought ways into different kinds of discourse (e.g. student writing, textbooks, presentations), it might be the nature of the scientific research article which has drawn attention in writing the texts. In this way, research article writers tend to involve their readers in a process of discussing and talking about the facts and avoid spoon-feeding their readers. When in a research article there is a piece of information that is to be pondered upon, the writer tends to put it very warily and humbly. For example when a writer may not wish to be exact on an occasion, instead of saying something is the case s/he may mention that something may be the case, using uncertainty in his expression of the information.

It is believed that the writers of research articles have an inclination to present their materials in a way that corresponds to relating to imprecision, vagueness, or tentativeness. In academic writing, these devices are most appropriately described as: "Either (a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition or (b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically".

Through using these devices, writers leave some room for their readers to judge the truth value of the statement for its assertion. It is through using appropriate devices that a writer can influence a reader. Moreover, research from a variety of disciplines (e.g., sociology of science) has revealed ways in which academic writing is both socially situated and structured to accomplish rhetorical objectives. Linguistically these objectives are realized as *hedges* which deal with degrees of probability. Hedges can be considered as the interactive elements which serve as a bridge between the



propositional information in the text and the writer's factual interpretation. Hedging is part of a concept which is called *metadiscourse*.

Metadiscourse is a widely used term in current discourse analysis and language education which refers to an interesting, and relatively new approach to conceptualizing interactions between text producers and their texts and between text producers and users. We use metadiscourse when we filter our ideas through a concern with how our readers will take them. It's an umbrella term which covers all areas of ESP, genre analysis, and discourse analysis and therefore in this regard we delve into hedging as one of the components of metadiscourse.

Recently, the use of hedging has been examined to find its usage in teaching and paper writing and this trend is in its beginning stages. The application of hedging devices is the result of the writer's awareness of audience. The writer must consider that "the reader's point of view is not predetermined" and that "there can be opposition to any sentence through negation of its propositional content".

It is now commonly accepted that any written text involves an interaction between writer and reader. Academic texts, like other forms of writing, require writers to consider the expected audience and foresee their background knowledge, processing problems, and reactions to the text. This leads the writer to attempt to meet the "standards of correspondence with what is known (or believed to be) true in the world" which as an *adequacy condition*. Propositions which are hedged due to reader considerations are thought to include an "awareness of interpersonal factors" and this

aspect of claim adjustment is referred to as an *acceptability condition*. Readers are trying to predict what the writer is going to convey and evaluate their work. Generally all sentences contain a point of view and academic texts are not different because they may contain the author's presence.

Although studies have focused on hedging in various scientific disciplines, such as biology, economics, and medicine, there is no clear cut understanding about the differences and similarities. There have been numerous investigations, done in less specialized scientific text such popular scientific magazine articles or introductory textbooks, but the results of these researches are in complete disagreement with that of RAs.

Some authors suggest that hedges are rare in popularizations, for instance, because the audience is in no position to contest what is being said and is in fact only looking for definitive conclusions in such texts, not speculative formulations. Other studies claim the contrary, arguing that hedging is common in popularizations, sometimes even more common than in specialized texts like RAs. Such conflicting views prepare the ground for misunderstanding about the incidents of hedges in scientific texts. A better understanding of hedges can provide insights into the interactional and rhetorical nature of the scientific research articles (RAs). Halliday says because hedging conveys an assessment of the reliability of referential information, it represents an intrusion by the author in the speech event". It allows academics to play down their statements and

anticipate readers' responses by adjusting the degree of certainty they give to their claims.

According to Hyland (2001) writers must present themselves as servants of the discipline while asserting an individual contribution. They have to be cautious in how they classify their relationship to the research community, and the use of hedges to express ideas is a crucial means of achieving a closer fit between their statements and the agreement of the discourse community.

It is through using hedging that writers can express a viewpoint on their statement or to present an unproven claim with caution (Hyland, 1998).

If a writer hedges against something unpleasant or unwanted that might affect him, he does something which will protect him from it. If a writer hedges a problem or question, he avoids answering the question or committing himself to a particular action or decision", because new work has to be thoughtfully placed into an existing literature, hedging is not simply a practical cover against overstating a statement, but a coherent interpersonal strategy.

In persuasive writing, hedges are an important means of both supporting the writer's position and building writer-reader relationships. These facts bring us to this conclusion that one of the most important aspects of scientific research articles is evaluating evidences and draw conclusions from data. All sentences clinch a point of view and that academic texts are not different in containing the author's presence. Scientists without doubt indicate their thoughts in their writings, because science is

not the very objective discipline as stated in many textbooks and scientific style guides and academic writing cannot be considered as a series of impersonal statements of facts which add up to the truth. As Skelton (2002) remarks, hedges could be viewed as part of the larger phenomenon called **commentative potentials** of any language. Natural languages are reflective: not only saying things, but also reflecting on the status of what they say. Although hedging has been used for some time, there is no agreed-upon idea about its definition and application.

Therefore there are differences both in the field of making a sound definition and its application. Also there are disagreements on the use of the terminology related to the area. Instead of the term *hedging*, some writers have used other terms such as stance maker, understatement, downtoner and downgrader to refer to the same concept. In addition, there are some cases where some studies call a concept hedging while others may not, such as evidentially, mitigation, indirectness, tentativeness and vagueness.

In sum, the use of hedging devices is important for two reasons: it allows claims to be made with caution, modesty, and humility, and the status of such claims to be tactfully negotiated when referring to the work of colleagues and competitors.

Therefore the aim of this study is to find the use of hedging devices in the two disciplines of humanity and science by selecting some articles in the fields of social sciences(1), psychology(2) and accounting(3) as representatives of the humanity discipline & chemistry(1), agriculture & biological science(2) and medicine and dentistry(3) as representatives of the discipline of science, and to find the similarities