

**COMPARISON OF HEDGES IN M.A. THESES AND PH.D.
DISSERTATIONS IN ELT**

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Abstract:

Writers use some textual devices like hedges and boosters in order to contribute to their textual voice. Differences between M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in English Language Teaching (ELT) Department in terms of hedges in Turkish context seem to be an overlooked area. Thus, this paper aims to find the similarities and differences between M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about English Language Teaching in terms of hedges. For this purpose, 10 M.A. theses and 10 Ph.D. dissertations were randomly chosen. Data were analyzed and categorized on the basis of contextual features with the help of content analysis. Various hedging tools emerged as a result of content analysis and it was found that hedges used in the Ph.D. dissertations nearly double those in the M.A. theses. Moreover, modals -followed by passivization- are the leading form of hedging while nouns have the least frequency of hedging type, which could explain some of the differences between novice and experienced writers. In the light of these findings, important implications are drawn for graduate and postgraduate students to enhance their writing skills and be familiar with the principles of academic writing for their future career.

Key words: Metadiscourse Markers, Hedging, English Language Teaching, Discourse Analysis, Academic Writing.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learners may reach high competency levels in terms of language skills and domains but these competencies may not mean much if they fail to read between lines or get the correct interpretation from discourse markers used. Thus, language learners must differentiate among the written input found in texts and get the correct interpretation or implied meaning and construct their claims accordingly. They must be persuasive in their writing if they want to be accepted in the discourse communities they belong to. This requires the inclusion of discourse markers such as hedges and boosters into the writing skills of language learners since exposure to discourse markers via explicit instruction could help students improve their writing (Alward, Mooi & Bidin, 2012).

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Being a part of meta-discourse markers, hedges play a crucial role in writing skills of learners. There are different definitions of hedges in that they are seen as a way of tentativeness and possibility (Hyland, 1996), an interaction and communicative strategy as well as the struggle for objectivity (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997), a kind of tolerance for individual stylistic variation (Duzsak, 1997), and pragma-linguistic communicative features of academic language (Doyuran, 2009). Another reason for the writer to use hedges in academic papers is to show lack of certainty and leave room for readers to persuade them. Hedges give clues in terms of the degree of confidence and interpersonal relationship (Falahati, 2004).

Writers also seek for acceptance in the related discourse communities since these communities share common goals and provide feedback to its members. In a similar vein, genres are produced for a particular group of people with common purposes and expectations. Thus, writers employ certain linguistic tools for each genre. As examples of genres, M.A theses and Ph.D. dissertations offer writers to step into a different community so writers write in a specific way to be accepted in the related academic environments (Swales, 1990).

M.A theses and Ph.D. dissertations deserve and require specific attention by the students, supervisors and researchers since they gather a large group of people from different backgrounds in ESL and EFL contexts and unify them with their lines. Therefore, this study aims to compare the hedges used in the conclusion and discussion parts of the M.A theses and Ph.D. dissertations about English Language Teaching (ELT) in Turkish EFL context.

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cultural differences should be taken into account while teaching rhetorical features (Kaplan, 1966) since writing conventions may differ in different cultures and languages. Being a meta-discourse marker, the term 'hedge' was first introduced by Lakoff (1972) to refer to words or expressions which make meaning fuzzy or fuzzier in the study titled A study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts. Epistemic modality and hedging are thought to be associated since both address writers' degree of confidence in conveying their messages in that writers pay attention on how they say as a way of self-protection, defending their claims, limiting their voice and decreasing fuzziness suggested by Lakoff (1973). People may have different ideas and interpretations upon the same topic like beauty, weight and height. Likewise, the same linguistic devices used may lead reader to different interpretation in different contexts. As a linguistic tool, hedges must be interpreted in contexts as well since they interact with felicity conditions and conversation rules (Lakoff, 1973).

Hedges are regarded as pragmatic particles, which are affected by formality of the context, the sex of the addressee, the conversational roles of the participants, and the type of discourse. These pragmatic particles are used in different amounts by men and women (Holmes, 1990). Through using hedges, writers leave some room for their readers to judge the truth value of the assertion (Falahati, 1994). Writers seek acceptance in the research community of which they are a member and they are required to adjust their certainty in their claims. Thus, hedges attract attention of researchers and writers (Hyland, 1994).

According to Hyland (1998), hedges can be categorized as content-oriented and reader oriented hedges. Content-oriented hedges are mainly concerned with accuracy and its representation in real world, whereas reader-oriented hedges mainly deal with the interpersonal relationship and the rules of conduct between writer and reader. Furthermore, content-oriented hedges are related to proposition and reality while reader-oriented hedges are related to acceptance from readers. The importance of hedges results from the role they play in uncertainty, scepticism, mitigation, softening and open-mindedness in writing. They also shape the writer's attitude and result from informational, rhetorical, and personal choices of writers (Hyland, 1996b). Writers feel the need to set relationship with the reader and balance between the objective information and subjective evaluation with the help of meta-discourse tools. Being one example of meta-discourse tools, hedges help readers distinguish facts from opinions. Besides, soft and hard sciences have different hedging preferences in academic papers (Hyland, 1998). Gaining competency in productive skills of academic language is seen to be problematic for some learners and writing skill draws attention especially in academic writing style because if learners are be unable to decode writer's intention, they might be left with wrong interpretation (Hyland, 2000).

Writers in different cultures may rely on different academic writing styles in their scientific papers in that they may differ in how they prefer to be authoritative, categorical, personal or assertive since they try to anticipate the possible negative consequences of overstatement (Salager-Meyer, 2001). Writers in different cultures may differ in their preferences for tentativeness in their claims as is observed between English and Farsi writers. Even writers in the same country may have different rhetorical preferences in different disciplines. Foreign language learners may have difficulties in using hedges in their writing due to these differences especially in distinguishing facts and interpretations (Falahati, 2004). Academic literacy does not only mean what to write but also include how to write to convince the reader. Learners can reach high level of literacy if they are equipped with the necessary classroom activities in order to gain consciousness about the rhetorical features in academic writing (Tardy, 2005).

Writers may choose to downplay their authority as they want to sound unassertive. We could witness differences in hedging types and amounts in different languages and such differences could cause learners have difficulty in expressing their thoughts in writing. There could be differences between native and non-native speakers of a language in terms of hedging in articles in that native writers and non-native writers may differ in the amount and type of hedges employed. Below is an example showing the categorisation of hedging types (Hamamcı, 2007).

Table 1: Categorisation of Hedging Types (Hamamcı, 2007)

Modals	Verbs	Adverbs	Adjectives	Nouns
can	believe	perhaps	possible	belief
could	appear	mainly	likely	view
may	assume	usually	primary	expectation
might	think	partly	general	claim
should	claim	usually	common	idea
will	appear	potentially	probable	perception
would	seem	generally		argument

Writers follow a specific scientific path and use a specific language in their academic writing since each genre, as a social and a cognitive notion, has its own purposes, formats and readers (Hyland, 2008). As authors we feel the need to be accepted and approved by the academic environment we belong to since stakeholders play a key role in success. Hedges can be a good fellow in our academic journey by assisting us in conveying our thoughts or theories with the help of self-protection and lessening impositions (Diaz, 2009).

While expressing opinions upon a subject, writers create their persona with the linguistic tools used according to the conventions or rules of a particular discourse community. Different disciplines tend to prefer metadiscourse markers like hedges, boosters, emphatics, attributers and attitude markers in different amounts as is seen in hard sciences and soft sciences (Vázquez & Giner, 2009). Hedges could be employed to tune down a claim or soften a statement for gaining credibility and acceptance. They carry the role of interpersonal function of meta-discourse and act as a way of protection. Hedges are one of the meta-discourse markers highlighted in Turkish academic language in spite of the disciplinary differences in the rhetorical preferences of authors (Doyuran, 2009). Hedging devices are used for various purposes like persuasion, commitment and detachment in claims. Writers in different disciplines may prefer to use different levels of

confidence in or detachment. Therefore, hedges must be the focus of writing skill instruction for the future academic career of students (Nivales, 2011).

Writers employ discourse markers as tools to voice their perspectives and convince their reader. These tools can act as guns since they could be both protective or damaging in that they could be useful while communicating related thoughts but at the same time harmful due to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. As is seen, discourse markers such as hedges could be regarded as a knife with two sharp ends as they require careful use. If hedges are used excessively or less than expected, it could mislead the reader and be counterproductive.

There are research studies about hedging differences in research articles among different disciplines, different cultures and languages. There are also studies conducted on the rhetorical moves and steps employed in the introduction parts of the M.A. thesis about Turkish language education and it was found that establishing a territory and occupying the niche are conventional moves -based on Swales (1990) model- and there was a tendency at the closing moves (Kan & Uzun, 2015). However, hedging differences in M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in Turkish EFL context seems to an overlooked area. Thus, we need to have a closer look at the parts of M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in terms of hedging especially in EFL contexts where learners from different languages and cultures may have difficulties due to the writing habits and transfer some writing skills from their native languages. This study will answer the following research questions:

1. What is the role of hedging in the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT in Turkish EFL context?

2. What is the frequency of hedges used in the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT in Turkish EFL context?

3. What are the similarities and differences in the conclusion and discussion parts of the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT in Turkish EFL context in terms of hedging?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to compare the hedges used in the conclusion and discussion parts of the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about English Language Teaching (ELT) in Turkish EFL context. Thus, this study is a descriptive study by means of comparing textual devices namely hedges. Only discussion and conclusion parts were analyzed in order to limit the scope of the study because readers may prefer to read conclusion and discussion parts of the studies in order to get an overall understanding of the

study in question, be informed about the main findings and search for a gap for further studies.

The universe of the study includes the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in ELT so 10 M.A. theses and 10 Ph.D. dissertations were randomly chosen as sample. Data collection and analysis procedures were mostly qualitative but the researcher also referred to some quantitative procedures especially in data analysis to confirm the findings, that is, frequency and percentage of hedging types were employed to get a more precise perspective in interpreting the hedging categorisations. In this way, textual and numerical data provide opportunities to confirm the gathered data. The textual data coming from the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in ELT were analyzed with the help of content analysis in order to interpret, code and categorise the emerging hedging types. The hedging types were analyzed expanding on the hedging categorization of Hamamcı (2007). Coding textual data could be criticised for being subjective due to the qualitative nature of data analysis and needs both intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. For this purpose, the researcher first coded and categorized the hedging types and did not make any changes but after about four weeks the researcher analyzed the hedging types and made some changes in the hedging categories previously defined, which was done for intra-rater reliability. As for inter-rater reliability, a separate coder also coded and categorized hedging types and then compared the emerging hedging types with those made by the researcher. Some differences appeared between the interpretation and categories of the researcher and those of the second coder in terms of hedging types. In addition, the modal “will” was excluded from the list of hedging types since it was thought to be an example of booster by the two coders. Therefore, necessary revisions were made in light of the suggestions till there was complete agreement between the two coders.

2.1. Materials

The study is limited to the hedges used in the discussion and conclusion parts of the 10 M.A. theses and 10 Ph.D. dissertations conducted in Turkish EFL context, that is; conclusion, discussion, implications, and suggestions for further research, summary of the research were taken into consideration. In sum, the related last chapters of the 20 studies were analyzed and interpreted in terms of hedging. Thus, this is a comparative study. The differences between the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations will be given to show how they differ from each other due to the institutional, contextual, rhetorical, structural and discourse community differences since they were taken from different universities in different years in Turkish EFL context.

The M.A. theses were taken from six different universities. They were all conducted upon English language teaching in Turkey. Their publication

differs in that they were completed between 2004-2008. There were four male and six female authors. Pages of the MA theses also differ in that the page numbers of the theses are as follows:

172, 129, 104, 89, 121, 106, 88, 169, 130, and 92.

As for the Ph.D. dissertations, they were all conducted upon English language teaching in Turkey, too. The Ph.D. dissertations were taken from four different universities. They were completed between 2005-2010 and there were four male and six female authors. Page numbers of the Ph.D. dissertations are as follows:

156, 158, 424, 227, 224, 217, 182, 236, 225 and 166.

The word numbers of the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations greatly differ from each other. There are great differences between the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations. When we look at the word numbers of discussion and conclusion parts of the 10 M.A. theses we encounter differences as in the following respectively:

839, 1124, 1497, 1321, 2127, 3199, 731, 741, 4200, and 722.

As for the word numbers of discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations, again we witness great differences as in the following numbers, organized in parallel with the order of the 10 Ph.D. dissertations analyzed:

3011, 549, 2668, 5989, 2068, 1902, 2785, 1532, 2379, and 1055.

In the 40439 word corpus, 16501 words belong to the discussion and conclusion parts in the M.A. theses while 23938 words belong to the ones in the Ph.D. dissertations analyzed. There were differences in the conclusion parts of the theses and dissertations studied in that while some theses and dissertations only have just one main heading as conclusion, others have different sub-headings like summary of the study, educational implications, suggestions for further research, and discussion of main findings in line with the research questions. Since all are included within the conclusion section which is the umbrella term, they were all taken into account in content analysis and interpretation phases except for the tables, figures and headings given in the conclusion and discussion parts.

3. RESULTS

In line with the research questions, it has been found that hedging plays a crucial role in the the discussion and conclusion parts in the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT conducted in Turkish EFL context since hedging has high frequency of occurrence in both genres. However, there are significant differences between M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in terms of hedging types as is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Type of Hedges Used in the M.A. Theses and Ph.D. Dissertations

Type of Material	Modals	Passives	Adjectives	Verbs	Nouns	Adverbs	Total
M.A.	148	124	1	83	-	-	356 (35,3%)
Ph.D.	247	244	9	129	5	13	647 (64,5%)
Total	395 (39,4%)	368 (36,7%)	10 (1%)	212 (21,1%)	5 (0,5%)	13 (1,3%)	1003 (100%)

Table 2 displays the type of hedges used in the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT. According to the emerging hedging categories in the table, there are six different types of hedging in the discussion and conclusion parts: modal, passivation, adjective, verb, noun and adverb. While the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations possess all emergent hedging types, those of M.A. theses do not include hedging types in the form of noun and adverb, which shows hedges are more varied and frequent in the discussion and conclusion parts in the Ph.D. compared to M.A. theses.

There were 1003 (100%) hedges in the discussion and conclusion parts of the studied theses and dissertations. 356 (35,3%) of them belong to the M.A. theses while 647 (64,5%) of them belong to the Ph.D. dissertations. As is seen, the number of hedges in the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations nearly double the ones in the M.A. theses. Another point which draws attention is the frequent use of modals 395 (39,4%) and passivation 368 (36,7%) since they form the high majority (76,1%) of the hedges employed. Passivation, an example of writer-oriented hedges, was found to have frequent occurrence both in the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations examined.

In both categories (M.A. and Ph.D.), modals are the most frequent hedging types in that there are 148 modals in the M.A. theses and 247 modals in the Ph.D. dissertations. Hedging in the form of modals is closely followed by passivation because there are 124 passivation hedging types in the M.A. theses and 244 hedging types in the Ph.D. dissertations. Verb choice as a hedging type comes in the third place with 83 occurrences in the M.A. theses and 129 occurrences in the Ph.D. dissertations. As for adjective in the form of hedging, there is only one example in the M.A. theses while there are nine examples of it in the related parts of the Ph.D. dissertations. As to nouns and adverbs as hedging forms, there no examples for these two categories in the M.A. theses while there are five noun examples and 13 adverb examples in the Ph.D. dissertations.

Now the detailed examples of hedges will be given in the following tables for each category and some examples from the theses and dissertations will be given in order to provide concrete proof and exemplify the hedging use in the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations.

3.1. M.A. Theses Hedging Types

First of all, the emergent hedging types in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses will be given in tables and then exemplified from the studied M.A. theses.

Table 3: Hedging Verbs in the M.A. Theses

Frequency	Verbs
1	conclude, see, argue, indicate, tend to, suppose
2	interpret
3	feel, understand, help, claim, believe, appear
4	think, seem
5	expect
6	consider, imply
8	observe
12	show, suggest

As is seen in Table 3 the verbs *conclude*, *see*, *argue*, *indicate*, *tend to*, and *suppose* were used once as a hedging form in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses, while the verb *interpret* was used twice. Verbs *feel*, *understand*, *help*, *claim*, *believe*, and *appear* were used three times; *think* and *seem* were used four times; *expect* was used five times; *consider* and *imply* were used six times, *observe* was used eight times and finally *show* and *suggest* were used 12 times. Below are some extracts of hedging verbs taken from the M.A. theses studied:

This indicates that...

They believe that...

It can be claimed that...

This study suggests...

Participants believe that...

Table 4: Hedging Adjective in the M.A. Theses

Frequency	Adjective
1	Reasonable

There is one example of hedging adjective in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses as in the following:

It would be reasonable to...

Table 5: Hedging Modals in the M.A. Theses

Frequency	Modals
1	would
8	might
9	could
29	may
32	should
69	can

Six different modal types came to the fore as hedging forms namely *would*, *might*, *could*, *may*, *should* and *can*. “Must” and “will” forms were excluded from the interpretation since both coders agreed that they are examples of boosters, not hedges. When one examines Table 5 it is seen that *can* is the most common modal verb used as a hedge, with 69 occurrences in the M.A. theses corpus, amounting to nearly half of the modal verb hedges used in the total M.A. corpus. *Can* is followed by *should* with 32 occurrences and *may* with 29 occurrences. Then comes *could* with nine occurrences, *might* with eight occurrences and finally there is only one occurrence of *would*. Some examples of hedging modals are as follows:

... constructivism can be applied as a new approach...

... it may be implied that...

...they could be examined that would make research findings...

...CEFR should be taken into consideration...

As previously mentioned, there were 124 passive voice occurrences in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses in question and passive voice use is in the second place in terms of hedging frequency following modals which are the most common hedging type in both the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations corpus. Below are some extracts taken from the related sections of the M.A. theses:

It was suggested that bigger numbers of masculine...

It was observed that majority of the students...

These categories may be investigated basing...

It can be done with the help of detailed interviews...

3.2. Ph.D. Dissertation Hedges

First of all, the emergent hedging types in the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations will be given in tables and then exemplified from the related Ph.D. dissertations.

Table 6: Hedging Nouns in the Ph.D. Dissertations

Frequency	Nouns
1	chance, evidence, indication
2	belief

When we examine Table 6, we see that nouns namely *chance*, *evidence*, and *indication* were used once while the noun *belief* was used twice in the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations. Below are the noun hedge examples:

This result is the indication of a.....

...the result of their belief that language and...

... give learners a chance to improve...

... gives a slight evidence of...

Table 7: Hedging Modals in the Ph.D. Dissertations

Frequency	Modals
1	had better
8	would
9	need to
11	might
18	could
31	may
60	should
109	can

Eight different modal types came to the fore as hedging forms namely *had better*, *would*, *need to*, *might*, *could*, *may*, *should*, and *can*. Again

“must” and “will” forms excluded from the interpretation as both coders regarded them to be boosters. When we examine Table 7 we see that *can* is the most common modal verb used as a hedge, with 109 occurrences in the Ph.D. dissertation corpus, amounting to nearly half of the modal verbs hedges, and this finding is in parallel with that of M.A. theses corpus. *Can* is followed by *should* with 60 occurrences and *may* with 31 occurrences. Then comes *could* with 18 occurrences, *might* with 11 occurrences. These findings are also in parallel with those of M.A. theses corpus, which shows that there are similarities between the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in terms of the hedging modals used in the discussion and conclusion parts. However, unlike the ones found in the M.A. theses, there are two more categories of hedging modals namely *had better* and *need to* aside from *would*. *Need to* has nine occurrences, *would* has eight occurrences and finally there is only one occurrence of *had better*. Some examples of hedging modals are as follows:

- ...mimicry can be seen in their concern...
- ...it would seem that instructors...
- ...it may be said that teachers ...
- ...might be a turning point in their career...
- ...reforms should be implemented...
- ...could be examined to determine...
- ...teachers need to have a good mastery...
- ...studies had better be supported...

Table 8: Hedging Adverbs in the Ph.D. Dissertations

Frequency	Adverbs
1	probably, largely, partly, usually
2	widely, generally, highly
3	mainly

According to Table 8, there are three different frequencies of various adverbs used as hedges in that *probably*, *largely*, *partly*, and *usually* occurred only once while *widely*, *generally*, and *highly* occurred twice and *mainly* occurred three times in the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations. These examples show the variety of the adverb choices to be employed as hedges. Hedging examples are given in the following:

- This will probably result...
- ... advantages which will highly contribute...

... she seemed to have partly overcome...
 ... was concerned mainly about teacher's...
 ... this change was largely due to the collaborative...
 ... because of the dilemma participants usually have...

Table 9: Hedging Adjectives in the Ph.D. Dissertations

Frequency	Adjectives
1	foreseeable, reasonable
2	likely, probable
3	possible

When we examine Table 9, it is seen that there are various types of adjectives used as hedges in the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations. The adjectives *foreseeable* and *reasonable* have only one occurrence while *likely* and *probable* have two occurrences and *possible* has three occurrences. Here are hedging adjectives taken from the corpus:

It is foreseeable that it is pedagogical...
 ... it would be reasonable to explain...
 ... which are likely to help them develop...
 ... that it is possible for teachers to continue learning...

Table 10: Hedging Verbs in the Ph.D. Dissertations

Frequency	Verbs
1	tend to, infer, conclude, think, appear, hope, present, reveal
2	offer, see, argue, imply
4	expect
7	consider
8	indicate
9	feel, suggest, believe
11	help, seem, observe
13	claim
21	show

If one examines Table 10, it is seen that the types of verbs used as hedges are varied in the related discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations. Hedging verbs *tend to*, *infer*, *conclude*, *think*, *appear*, *hope*,

present, and *reveal* have only one occurrence; *offer*, *see*, *argue*, and *imply* have two occurrences; *expect* has four occurrences; *consider* has seven occurrences; *indicate* has eight occurrences; *feel*, *suggest*, and *believe* have nine occurrences; *help*, *seem*, and *observe* have 11 occurrences; *claim* has 13 occurrences and finally *show* has 21 occurrences. It shows that the verbs “show” and “claim” are the frequently used hedging types. There are some examples taken from the sample Ph.D. dissertations:

... also shows us that we can place the...

The results showed us that...

... it can be claimed that this course...

It seems that senior staff...

... we observed a high relationship between...

...it indicates that they are..

... pre-test and post-test findings revealed that...

As previously mentioned in Table 2, there were 244 passive voice occurrences in the discussion and conclusion parts of the Ph.D. dissertations corpus at hand and passive voice use is the second place in terms of hedging frequencies following modals which are the most common hedging type in the Ph.D. dissertations corpus, too. Below are some examples taken from the Ph.D. dissertations studied:

...English has been considered as an...

It can be said that much of what happens...

Pedagogic content knowledge is considered to be...

... which can be portrayed on a continuum...

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to find the hedging similarities and differences between the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations. In light of the data gathered, it can be said that hedges play a crucial role in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT in Turkish EFL context since both genres were found to use high frequency of hedging types in the discussion and conclusion parts.

These findings confirm the fact that hedges are of great importance for academic writing and essential for an effective communication and academic success as well. Hence, English teachers need to provide written work which varies both purpose and audience so that the student will be required to refer to correct writing conventions to address specific readers appropriately. Teachers should not think that scientific writing is simply

isolated and hedges are merely conventions of an academic culture. If students are provided with the necessary amount and type hedging types in their writing skill, this could become their habits and they could benefit from it in the long term.

This study findings are in parallel with those of Hamamcı (2007) in that *can* was the most common modal verb used as a hedge, with 178 occurrences in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations. However, this study findings differ from those of Hyland (1998), in which the most frequent hedges were *may*, *would*, and *possible*, but it also shows similarities in that epistemic verbs such as *suggest*, *indicate*, *assume* and *seem* were also heavily used as hedges.

4.1. Educational Implications

Frequent and varied use of hedges in the discussion and conclusion parts of the M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations about ELT in Turkish EFL context shows that hedges are indispensable for academic writing and an important factor in discourse communities. Therefore, graduate and postgraduate students should gain awareness about the written discourse and meta-discourse tools.

Different amount and type of hedge use might result from L1 influence, that is, students may bring their native language identity to the new learning environment and thus feel at a loss when they encounter new writing conventions. L2 writers may have difficulties in improving their skills in such areas as subjectivity and assertiveness due to the L1 identity they bring from their native languages (Hyland, 2002). Students tend to transfer the conventions of the L1 to the L2 context. Therefore, they should be aware of the fact that there are some interdisciplinary differences in the use of hedging devices.

Hedges should be given importance in writing courses for the benefit of foreign language learners in order for them to notice it when they appear in the text and not to misinterpret the implied meaning. If teachers take a supportive role, learners can gain awareness about the rhetorical functions of hedges. Moreover, teachers should help students gain awareness regarding the different degrees of emphasis which writers use in their claims. The ability to draw a distinction between observed facts and interpretations should be stressed by teachers while teaching writing skills. Lecturers should teach graduate and postgraduate students how expert writers use hedging to modify their assertions appropriately. They should also sensitize the students regarding the appropriate use of hedging in academic texts.

4.2. Suggestions for Further Research

Native versus non-native speakers' hedging preferences in M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations could be studied. In addition, M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in different disciplines could also be compared in terms of hedging forms.

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