THE USE OF HEDGING MARKERS IN STUDENTS' THESES: A CASE STUDY AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES PROGRAM, HASANUDDIN UNIVERSITY

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POST GRADUATE PROGRAM OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES

FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES

HASANUDDIN UNIVERSITY

MAKASSAR

2024

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THESIS

As one of the requirements for achieving

Master degree

English Language Studies Program

Written and Submitted by

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To

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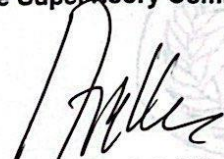
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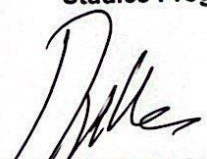
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Makassar, 2nd August 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

Alhamdulillah, all praise be to Allah, for His blessings and guidance that I was able to complete my Master's degree in English Language Studies at the Faculty of Cultural Science, Hasanuddin University, Makassar. I am deeply grateful for His mercy and the strength He has bestowed upon me throughout this academic journey.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and contributions of many individuals and institutions. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those who have played a part in the successful completion of this work.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Dr. Harlina Sahib, M.Hum., and Dr. Karmila Mokoginta, S.S., M.Hum., M.Arts. Their invaluable guidance, continuous support, and patience throughout the research process have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. Their profound knowledge, insightful feedback, and encouragement have greatly enhanced the quality of this work, and I am truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work under their supervision.

I am also profoundly grateful to my examiners, Dr. Sukmawaty, M.Hum., Dra. Herawaty, M.Hum.,M.A., Ph.D. and Prof. Dr. M. Amir Pattu, M.Hum. Their time, effort, and insightful feedback during the examination process have been crucial in refining and improving this thesis. Their constructive criticism and suggestions have provided me with new perspectives and deeper insights into my research.

A heartfelt thank you goes to my parents for their unconditional love, support, and belief in me throughout this journey. Their unwavering encouragement and sacrifices have been my greatest source of strength and motivation. They have always been there for me, providing emitional support, and I am forever grateful for their presence in my life.

To my beloved husband, thank you for your consistent support, patience, and understanding. Your constant encouragement has been a pillar of strength for me, and your belief in my abilities has helped me overcome many challenges. I am truly blessed to have you by my side.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my classmates in the Linguistics class: Mirdad, Kak Farah, Orlen, Ryza, and Putri. Your camaraderie, support, and shared experiences have made this journey enjoyable and memorable. The discussions, study sessions, and moments of laughter we shared have been invaluable, and I am grateful for your friendship.

Special thanks to HIMA LPDP Unhas; Rezky, Maryam and Rika for providing a supportive and enriching environment during my studies. The activities, events, and

resources offered by the organization have greatly contributed to my academic and personal growth.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to LPDP for giving me the opportunity to continue my studies and for all the support provided throughout my academic journey. The financial assistance and resources made available by LPDP have been instrumental in allowing me to focus on my research and achieve my academic goals.

Thank you all for your consistent support and encouragement. This achievement would not have been possible without each and every one of you. I am truly blessed and humbled by the support I have received, and I dedicate this work to all of you who have helped me Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the subjects and participants of this study, without that cooperation this research would not have been feasible.

Makassar, August 2nd 2024

Husnul Khatimah Nur

ABSTRACT

HUSNUL KHATIMAH NUR. *The Use of Hedging Markers in Students' Theses: A Case Study at English Language Studies Program, Hasanuddin University* (supervised by Harlinah Sahib and Karmila Mokoginta)

This study was aimed to explore the utilization of hedging markers in theses written by English Language Studies (ELS) students, with specific objectives to identify common types of hedging markers used, determine the dominant hedging marker types, and assess the students' familiarity with hedging in academic writing. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, this research utilized the AntConc application to analyze the hedging markers within a corpus of ELS theses. Data were gathered through observation, document analysis, and interviews to offer a comprehensive understanding of hedging practices among ELS students. The findings revealed that students predominantly employed four types of hedging strategies as identified by Ken Hyland (1996): attribute, reliability, writer-oriented, and reader-oriented hedges. The analysis showed that students preferred using attribute and reliability hedges. This means they often made statements that could be true, but not definitely. This preference showed that students were somewhat unsure about their arguments. Reliability hedges, in particular, showed that students had doubts about how accurate their statements were. This strategy allows students avoid criticism by making statements that could be true or false. On the other hand, using reader-focused hedging was the least popular, showing it's an area ELS students could improve in their writing. The study also pointed out students liked to use vague language on purpose, especially in attribute hedging, and often used words that show uncertainty in reliability hedging.

Keywords: Case study, English language studies, Hedging, Academic writing.

ABSTRAK

HUSNUL KHATIMAH NUR. *Penggunaan Penanda Hedging dalam Tesis Mahasiswa: Studi Kasus di Program Studi Bahasa Inggris Universitas Hasanuddin* (dibimbing oleh Harlinah Sahib dan Karmila Mokoginta).

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi penggunaan penanda *hedging* dalam tesis yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa Program Studi Bahasa Inggris (ELS); mengidentifikasi jenis penanda *hedging* yang umum digunakan; menentukan jenis penanda *hedging* yang dominan; dan menilai pengetahuan mahasiswa tentang *hedging* dalam penulisan tesis. Metode yang digunakan ialah deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, analisis dokumen, dan wawancara untuk pemahaman komprehensif tentang praktik *hedging* di antara mahasiswa ELS. Data penanda *hedging* dalam korpus tesis ELS dianalisis menggunakan aplikasi *AntConc*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menggunakan empat jenis strategi *hedging* seperti yang diidentifikasi oleh Ken Hyland (1996) yaitu: *attribute, reliability, writer-oriented,* dan *reader-oriented hedges*. Di antara keempat strategi tersebut mahasiswa lebih senang menggunakan *atribute hedging* dan *reliability hedging*. Hal ini berarti mereka sering membuat pernyataan yang dapat benar, tetapi tidak pasti. Preferensi tersebut menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa kurang yakin tentang argumen mereka. *Realibility hedging* khususnya, menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki keraguan tentang akurasi pernyataan mereka. Strategi tersebut memungkinkan mahasiswa menghindari kritik dengan membuat pernyataan yang dapat benar atau salah. Di sisi lain, penggunaan *reader-oriented hedging* paling tidak populer. Hal itu menunjukkan area yang dapat diperbaiki oleh mahasiswa ELS dalam penulisan mereka. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa senang menggunakan bahasa yang sengaja samar, terutama dalam *attribute hedging* dan sering menggunakan kata-kata yang menunjukkan ketidakpastian, yaitu *realibility hedging*.

Kata kunci: studi kasus, studi bahasa Inggris, *hedging,* penulisan akademik

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF FIGURE

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix I: The Use of Hedging in Students' Thesis

Appendix II: Students' Answer of interview

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELS   English Language Studies

L1   First Language

L2   Second Language

EFL   English as Foreign Language

TEFLIN   Teaching English as Foreign Language

MAV   Modal Auxiliary Verbs

MLV   Modal Lexical Verbs

TQS   Teacher Questioning Strategies

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of the study, research questions, limitation of the study, research objectives, and significances of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

English language has served as a media of communication in scientific and academic communities for many decades. It has been used as an important thing for spreading knowledge throughout the world, as it is apparently based on a large number of research articles and academic papers that are written in English. Thus, one of the academic writing conventions that writers, especially non-native English writers, should be concerned with is hedging. Salager-Meyer (1994) stated that non-native English writers must acknowledge hedging in their academic writing if they would like to be part of the academic community.

Academic writing is one of the requirements when finishing the study in the university. Every student in the university has to fulfill this requirement. According to Zemach (2005), in academic context, writing is an important part of studying in university. In many courses, students are given a lot of writing projects. Additionally, writing is now a requirement for graduation from the majority of institutions of higher education. Students are required to write papers, journals, theses, and dissertations. Based on the rules set forth by Hasanuddin University (2018) master's program students must publish at least one piece of work that is connected to their theses in a recognized national or international publication. As a support course for this rule, master students have been provided courses in academic writing.

A thesis is a form of academic writing that stands as an original piece of research. As highlighted by George (2022), this particular form of academic writing is commonly submitted as the final project for a post-graduate degree or as the concluding stage of a master's program. The significance of a thesis lies in its role as a comprehensive exploration and presentation of a specific research

topic, allowing students to demonstrate their research skills, analytical abilities, and mastery of the subject matter.

Basically, a thesis is more than just a lengthy essay, it is an academic project that contributes to the existing body of knowledge within a particular field. Thorough research is necessary when writing a thesis, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ultimately leading to the development of a unique argument or perspective. Thesis is expected to demonstrate a deep understanding of relevant literature, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, demonstrating the researcher's ability to participate critically in academic discussions.

Furthermore, writing a thesis often includes a review of the existing literature on the chosen topic, identifying gaps in knowledge that the research aims to address. The methodology section outlines the approach taken to gather and analyze data, ensuring the research is conducted with rigor and reliability. Results and findings are then presented, followed by a discussion that places the research in the broader context of the field.

Writing a thesis can be as it is one of the longest writing assignments that students usually complete, aside from a dissertation. This writing depends on the students' ideas to carry out research from the beginning to the end, including selecting an appropriate subject, drafting a proposal, planning the research, gathering data, conducting a thorough analysis, coming to a firm conclusion, and writing clearly.

The primary goal of this thesis is to provide the readers information in order to gain any insights that conveys factual information on a particular topic. To make a good writing, students must avoid repetition or digression, so that the sentences are not monotonous. A thesis has to be constructed in a consistent structure based on the idea provided. Irrelevant arguments must be eliminated and ideas should be arranged in the correct way. In writing academic research, a writer should use precise and accurate information, and appropriate lexical choices.

Academic discourse relies on precise, clear, and objective academic

writing. Hedging devices have become popular as a way for writers to express uncertainty, caution, and academic modesty which helps writers utilize academic discourse by identifying limitations and offering alternatives. Effective academic writing requires understanding hedging. Language is used to hedge claims and express ambiguity or tentativeness (Hyland, 1996). Modal verbs, adverbs, and cautious language (e.g., it is suggested that, it appears that) are examples. Hedging lets writers qualify claims, examine alternate interpretations, and show intellectual humility (Hyland, 1998).

Regarding the concept of academic writing, Mytekah (2013) explained that the characteristics of academic writing can be in the form of complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy, hedging and responsibility. She also suggested that in writing an academic text, the students should consider those characteristics. Besides, anyone who is willing to become an academic writer has to conform to those eight characteristics above and no exceptions should be made.

To write an academic research, hedging plays a crucial role Hinkel (2004), indicating how writers assess the validity of an argument. Hedging involves the utilization of linguistics strategies to express hesitancy or uncertainty, maintain politeness and directness, and acknowledge the reader's perspective. Hyland (1996), this perspective on the use of hedging in academic writing provides an opportunity to emphasize the diverse ways that postgraduate students employ it as a rhetorical device in their writing. Graduate students are expected to produce writing significantly higher quality compared to their quality of writing when they were still in undergraduate studies.

Since the significance of hedging in academic writing, the researcher examined how students at Hasanuddin University's Master of English Language Studies program used the hedging in their writing. The students write an academic writing as part of their studies. They are required to enroll in writing courses in order to sharpen their writing. As requirement for receiving a Master degree, students must create a research proposal before doing their thesis, publishing academic papers is one of the objectives of English language study. Based upon

the objective of academic writing fulfil the criteria of a good writing skills such as complexity, responsibility, hedging etc. in order to produce creative and new scientific papers. Moreover, one of the academic writing that students have to complete is theses as the requirement to finish their study.

Furthermore, the researcher did the preliminary study among students of the English Language Studies (ELS) program revealed a significant gap in their awareness and correct application of hedging techniques. Consequently, this study aims to delve into the degree to which ELS students at Hasanuddin University incorporate hedging in their writings, enhancing their comprehension of its significance, varieties, and practical uses. The aspiration is for students to achieve more effective writing capabilities, culminating in the production of superior scientific publications.

Some experts have several beliefs related to the meaning of hedging. According to Hyland (1995) hedging is a strategy of using ambiguous language to minimize the consequences of a statement's and a claim's assertions. Furthemore, Lakoff (1972) stated that using vague language to reduce the consequences of a statement and claim is called as "hedging‖.

The researcher's decision to focus on this specific problem was informed by a thorough review of theses available in the library, particularly noting the absence of hedging strategies within Chapter 4 of these documents, for academic years under 2021 and 2021. This observation highlighted a potential gap in the application or understanding of hedging techniques among students, especially in the critical section of the thesis where findings and discussions are presented. Hedging, being an essential component of academic writing for conveying uncertainty, politeness, and nuance, appeared underutilized or perhaps overlooked in the theses reviewed.

Recognizing this gap, the researcher was motivated to explore how students in more recent academic years, specifically 2022 and 2023, might be incorporating hedging into their theses. The aim was to determine if there has been any shift in the use of hedging strategies, possibly due to changes in

curriculum, increased awareness of academic writing standards, or shifts in pedagogical approaches. By selecting these later academic years for study, the researcher intended to provide a fresh perspective on the use and understanding of hedging among students, potentially offering insights into the effectiveness of current educational practices in teaching and applying academic writing techniques. This research did not only fill an identified gap in existing literature and academic practices but also contribute to enhancing the quality of academic writing instruction and support provided to students in their scholarly endeavors.

Knowing how researchers hedge has implications for writers and readers. To present ideas accurately and build credibility, writers must learn to use hedging strategies. However, readers must understand hedging to understand the writers' purpose. This study examines the incidence and patterns of hedging devices in a certain subject and their effects on reader perception to add to the knowledge on academic hedging. This research will clarify discipline-specific hedging and its effects on writer's communication.

In relation with the explanation above, the researcher conducted a study entitled ‾The Use of Hedging in Students' Thesis: A Case Study at English Language Studies Program, Hasanuddin University‖.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions that follow address the issues related to hedging employed by ELS students in crafting their theses. Drawing from the previously outlined background, the researcher formulated the problem.

1. What are the types of hedging markers used by ELS students?

2. What is the most dominant type of hedging markers used by ELS students?

3. How familiar are the ELS students with the use of hedging markers in their academic writing?

1.3 Research Objectives

In relation to the study's background indicated above, the research

objectives of the study are, as follows;

1. To explore the common types of hedging markers used by ELS students.
2. To disclose the dominant type of hedging markers used by ELS students.
3. To depict the ELS student's familiarity in the use of hedging markers in their theses.

1.4 Research Significances

This researcher takes some significances related to this research, they are;

1. Theoretical benefit

It is expected that this writing can contribute to the understanding of students' writing development and their ability to meet the demands of academic writing. Secondly, it served as a resource for educators and curriculum developers by highlighting the areas where students may need additional support in understanding and effectively using hedging strategies in their writing. Finally, it may contribute to the existing literature on academic writing and language use, particularly in the context of student writing.

2. Practical benefit

The results of this study can also be used as a basis for reflection by researchers to strengthen their writing, particularly when presenting the findings from their own research. The study's results can also be a useful professional reference, since English practitioners indicated a desire to learn more about academic writing and hedging in order to improve their comprehension of content and emphasize the importance of using hedging in writing.

1.5 Scope of the research

This research focused on the hedging used by ELS students, cultural science faculty in Hasanuddin University. The researcher involved some theses in the university. Besides that, the researcher took some theses from some students who finish their studies in 2022 and 2023 as the subject of the research. There

are several features of academic writing, but the researcher focused on the hedging of the research thesis that published in 2022 and 2023. The researcher took ten theses as the subject of the research to be investigated in depth in term of the use of hedging.

The English language studies was the focus of this research. The primary goal of this study in this academic context is to determine how often graduated students use hedging in their academic writing. In this study, the body parts are primarily examined for findings and discussion. In this study, parts of theses describe finding and discussion are primarily examined. This is based on Hyland and Vartalla's (1998) analysis. They discovered that result or discussion section tend to use hedging more frequently, since these parts provide the basis for the argument.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This unit is organized into three primary sections; previous studies, theoretical background, and conceptual framework. The previous studies cover a range of earlier studies that are pertinent to the current topic. Similar to that, the theoretical background discusses the theories that are pertinent and helpful in supporting this particular investigation. Furthermore, the conceptual framework is a type of analytical instrument that directs the researcher in how to set up the concepts for this study.

2.1 Previous studies

A study entitled "Hedging in Academic Writing – A Pedagogically Motivated Qualitative Study" was conducted by Kim and Hwa Lim (2005). They explored the use of hedges in academic writing, guided by Hyland's pragmatic framework. According to their analysis, a diverse range of lexical signals and hedging strategies were employed to express various hedging orientations within the corpus. Informants suggested that factors such as socio-cultural influences, classroom instruction, disciplinary culture, and disciplinary appeals might contribute to the challenges faced by second language learners in utilizing hedges effectively in academic prose. The findings of the present investigation bear educational implications, highlighting the need for targeted pedagogical approaches to enhance the proficiency of second language learners in employing hedges within academic writing.

Another study by Ningtyas (2016) focused on hedging as observed in the academic writing of students at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang. The researcher employed a qualitative descriptive method, drawing on Hyland's (1996) theory of hedging in academic writing. The data for the research were taken from psycholinguistics papers authored by sixth-semester students in the English Language and Letter Department of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang. The study's findings revealed that students at BSI UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim articulated their ideas by incorporating hedges into

their writing.

On the contrary, Mahmudah (2018) conducted a study entitled "The Correlation Study Between Hedging and Education Level in Students' Academic Writing," which aimed to investigate the relationship between hedging and education level in students' academic writing. Despite identifying a weak correlation, the research underscored its significance in the academic context. The study observed various hedging devices, including modality, verb usage, adverb forms, among others, employed in students' academic writing. This study contributes to the ongoing development of the field of hedging research, suggesting the need for further exploration incorporating additional data and relevant factors. Convenience sampling was employed to randomly select participants, and the recommendations and conclusions were ranked using the Spearman rank correlation method (Mahmudah, 2018).

Furthermore, (Alonso, 2019) has research with titled "A Multi-Competence Perspective of Hedging in Second Language Academic Writing". adopted a multi-competence approach to examining the use of hedges in second language (L2) academic writing. The paper explored how hedges were employed in the L2 writing of 24 Spanish learners, comparing their overall system with two baseline control groups: 24 native English speakers and 24 native Spanish speakers. The study delved into cross-linguistic influence and convergence in the utilization of hedges. Additionally, distinctions in the use of adverbs and nouns were observed between the native Spanish-speaking control group and Spanish learners of L2 English in their native language (L1) Spanish. The similarity in the use of adverbs in the learners' group points to L1-L2 convergence, indicating cross-linguistic influence.

In addition, the title of this study was "Investigating Knowledge and the Use of Hedging by EFL Students in Iraq" written by Mukheef (2021), aimed to assess the knowledge and application of hedging by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Iraq. The paper examined the students' proficiency in recognizing and employing hedges in English. The analysis of hedging was conducted through the lens of pragmatics perception, utilizing a quantitative

method involving tests administered to the students. The results of the study indicate that a significant number of students encountered challenges in identifying hedge devices at the recognition level. This was substantiated by the notably low rate of correct responses observed throughout the test (22.1%), which is deemed unsatisfactory. Additionally, the findings pertaining to the students' performance in producing hedges reveal that EFL college students struggle with this aspect. Their performance on this level was characterized as very poor or weak, as evidenced by the high frequency and rate of incorrect responses (41%). This underscores that the proficiency level of EFL college students in producing hedges was below average.

Besides, the researchers have research entitled ¯Hedging Strategies in Research Articles: A Comparative Analysis of Indonesian Male and Female English Students‖, their study aimed to investigate hedging strategies in research articles through a comparative analysis of Indonesian male and female English students (Argina & Ijabah, 2022). The results of their study's statistical analysis revealed that there was no significant main effect of gender on the use of hedges in research articles authored by Indonesian English students when considering multiple variables. However, specific hedge types, including the Adverb of Frequency, Quantifiers, Epistemic Lexical Verbs, and Adjective & Adverb Informal, did show significant main effects. Additionally, the utilization of ambiguous references yielded rather unusual results. The study employed a quantitative descriptive design to statistically present the tendencies and preferences of Indonesian English students in applying hedging strategies. The research specifically focused on gender as a variable in analyzing the use of hedges.

In their recent study, It explored the use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in academic journal articles, focusing specifically on works authored by Indonesians. The research concentrated on a carefully chosen collection of around 15 articles from the TEFLIN journal, a prominent publication in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (Harlinah Sahib & Kusmianti Rahayu MH, 2022). This selection was strategic, aiming to provide a

comprehensive overview of the linguistic features prevalent among Indonesian EFL scholars to conduct their analysis, the researchers employed corpus software, a powerful tool for linguistic analysis that allows for the examination of language use and patterns in large text collections. This methodological approach facilitated a detailed and systematic examination of the frequency and application of modal auxiliaries a key linguistic feature in EFL writing that can indicate various degrees of certainty, obligation, or possibility. The study's findings highlighted a significant linguistic pattern: an average occurrence rate of approximately 34.8 modal auxiliaries per ten thousand words across the analyzed EFL papers. This metric not only sheds light on the stylistic and grammatical choices of Indonesian EFL writers but also contributes to the broader understanding of modal auxiliary use in academic writing contexts. Such insights are invaluable for educators, linguists, and EFL writers alike, offering a deeper understanding of how modal auxiliaries can influence clarity, nuance, and persuasiveness in academic discourse.

Therefore, the differentiate this research with other researches through its specific focus on theses, the innovative use of the AntConc application for detailed linguistic analysis, its implications for teaching and learning, the opportunity for direct comparison with existing studies, and its methodological contributions to the field.

Furthermore, the data revealed that studies analyzing the use of hedging were still rare. This lack of availability caused the selection of analyzing the level of knowledge in using hedging as the research question in this study.

In this research, the researcher utilized the AntConc application to analyze the hedging of theses among English Language and Literature students at Hasanuddin University. Inspired by Kim and Hwa Lim's (2005) study titled "Hedging in Academic Writing – A Pedagogically Motivated Qualitative Study," the researcher explored the use of hedges in academic writing, guided by Hyland's framework. Kim and Hwa Lim's analysis revealed diverse lexical signals and hedging strategies employed to express various orientations within the corpus. The findings emphasize the need for targeted pedagogical approaches to

enhance the proficiency of second language learners in employing hedges in academic prose.

2.2 Theoretical Background

In this section, the researcher provides an overview of the literature concerning hedges in academic writing. Several components of this research will be explained in the following discussion.

2.2.1 Academic Writing

Academic writing is characterized by clarity, conciseness, focus, organization, and the provision of evidence-based support. The challenge lies in simplifying it for the reader's understanding.

Academic writing is a crucial aspect that demands attention in university. It is often covered by various terms such as papers, essays, and research papers. While these different names may be used interchangeably, they all share common goals and principles (Whitaker,2009).

The utilization of what is termed as academic language in academic writing is deemed essential (Mytekah, 2013). The language characteristics associated with academic writing are primarily linked to eight key features. These eight characteristics are explained in Mytekah (2016) as follows;

1. Complexity: Academic writing exhibits complexity through the use of longer words, increased grammatical complexity, noun-based phrases, subordinate clauses, and passive forms.

2. Objectivity (Nominalization or Grammatical Metaphor): The inclusion of noun-based phrases, often referred to as nominalization or grammatical metaphor, within a well-structured and generically detached framework enhances objectivity in academic writing.

3. Formality: Distinguishing itself through the use of formal language, academic writing employs appropriate language for the setting, avoiding abbreviated forms such as "doesn't."

4. Precision: In the context of academic writing, precision refers to the careful and exact use of language to convey information, ideas, or arguments with accuracy and clarity. It involves selecting and employing words, phrases, and expressions deliberately to communicate a specific meaning without ambiguity. Precise academic writing aims to eliminate vagueness, ambiguity, or unnecessary complexity, ensuring that the reader can grasp the intended message with a high level of clarity.

5. Explicitness; In academic writing and communication, explicitness is crucial for conveying ideas, arguments, or information with precision and clarity. It involves being overt and leaving no room for misinterpretation, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the presented content. Explicitness is often associated with providing detailed explanations, clearly stating assumptions, and avoiding vague or ambiguous language.

6. Accuracy: In academic writing, accuracy refers to the precision and correctness of information, language use, and documentation. It involves ensuring that the content presented is free from errors, both in terms of factual information and the mechanics of language.

7. Responsibility: In the context of academic writing, responsibility refers to the ethical and intellectual accountability that authors have toward their work, the scholarly community, and the broader audience.

8. Hedging: In academic writing, the use of cautious language, known as hedging or hedged language, serves to demonstrate the author's stance and the veracity of their claims regarding a particular topic.

2.2.2 Thesis

Thesis serves as platforms for graduate students to openly propose and disseminate new concepts that have the potential to either confirm or challenge the findings of others in their field. Therefore, the utilization of cautious language in the acceptance of graduate students' research contributions is reliant on the

way in which these contributions are presented to the academic community. Vassileva (2001) states in Mojica (2005) that employing cautious language involves reducing the impact of an idea by adjusting its illocutionary force through hedging and boosting strategies. In addition, Hyland (2000) argues that a crucial aspect of academic writing is the writers' attempt to clarify their claims by reducing uncertainty or potential risks, highlighting their beliefs, and effectively communicating respectful attitudes to readers.

In reality, theses are scholarly articles that entail a systematic procedure wherein the writers, specifically graduate students, critically examine the academic contributions of experts pertaining to their subject matter and subsequently construct their own thesis along with the existing body of research. Furthermore, theses require not only the manner in which propositional material is presented, but also the manner in which writers establish a connection with readers in a manner that ensures the acceptability of their academic writings. In the context of writing theses, it is conceivable that the writer has effectively conveyed textual material, yet has encountered difficulties in establishing interpersonal connections, such as creating an emotional connection between the writer and the readers.

The increasing scientific interest towards hedges in academic writing is shown in numerous research investigations. One notable study conducted by Nivales (2011) expands upon the existing research on hedging in college research papers. This study focuses on the demonstration of commitment and detachment to ideas among students at the Institute of Arts and Sciences of Far Eastern University, as evidenced in the introduction and conclusion sections. Abdollahzadeh (2011) conducted a study that expanded on the concept of hedging in postgraduate students' theses. The study aimed to investigate how Iranian and British postgraduate students in applied linguistics employ hedging techniques in the discussion section of their dissertations. This study aims to investigate the utilization of hedges among graduate students at the State University of Semarang, with a specific focus on their thesis abstracts. In contrast to other components of theses, abstract writing has been somewhat neglected,

with a predominant emphasis on length, summary, and keywords.

There is a common belief that academic writing, especially scientific writing, is based on accurate information. One crucial aspect of academic writing is the utilization of cautious language, commonly referred to as "hedging". It is necessary to determine the writers' position on a specific topic or the validity of their claims. The effective utilization of strategies for hedging in academic argument is an essential tool for students and serves a crucial role in displaying competence in a specialized domain. According to Myers (1989), academic writers should use hedges to reduce the possible danger that new claims may provide to other researchers. This is done by seeking approval and criticism of their own writing. Similarly, participation in academic forums entails adherence to social standards that are supported by the penalties associated with a system of academic acknowledgment and incentives that depend on publishing (Hyland, 1997).

2.2.3   Hedges in Academic Writing

Evans and John (1998) asserted that writers have the ability to present a statement in a neutral position rather than taking a strong-claim stance in their writing. In some instances, writers express criticism using polite sentences to convey humility. The use of hedging devices is common in both writing and speaking activities.

Academic writing is distinguished by the objective presentation of knowledge. Writers employ interpersonal and conceptual resources to integrate their new scientific work into the broader body of research. Nevertheless, it is universally acknowledged that conveying new information to readers while meeting the requirements of a disciplinary discourse, as in a research article genre, is challenging.

The words like "I think," "perhaps," "might," and "maybe," which students often use to soften their categorical claims, have been labelled as "hedging" (Hyland, 1996). These are terms that are frequently used in academic writing to show ambiguity and assist writers in communicating their lack of certainty. This

technique helps to persuade the reader that the author is accountable for the statements made throughout the work. Therefore, using hedges to convey uncertainty is preferable to presenting ideas that lack factual support, which may turn out to be unreliable. As a result, a hedge is any language employed to convey a wish to avoid from making an unambiguous belief or a partial belief to the truthfulness of a claim.

Hedging plays a crucial role in academic writing, particularly in thesis abstracts, as it contributes to establishing an interpersonal relationship with readers and ensuring caution and accuracy in statements (Ghia,E., et al., 2022). The use of hedge words is a key aspect of academic writing skills, emphasizing pragmatic competence, which is typically acquired later in the learning process

The appropriate use of hedges in scientific discourse is crucial as they convey uncertainty and possibility in communication. Hedges play a crucial role because readers expect claims to be justified in terms of reliability assessments and appropriateness in social interactions. This significance highlights that writing rarely allows readers to challenge assumptions without hedging. Additionally, instances were noted where assertions were presented as mere ideas without the support of facts or reliable research data. As a result, hedging is considered one of the most crucial aspects influencing the interaction between the writer or researcher and the reader. It is frequently seen as a contribution to the complexity, adaptability, and persuasiveness of ideas in the text. Based on the explanations above, the research will present taxonomies of meta-discourse markers in academic writing from various researchers. These taxonomies will be detailed below;

Skelton's(1988)	Myer's (1989)	Salager-Meyer's (1994)	Salager-Meyer's (1997)	Hyland (1996)
Other than Lexical commenting verbs, all modal verbs contain copulas.	Othe than Lexical verbs, conditional verbs, probability adverbs, and subject complements,	Shields, Approximators, Expressions of personal doubt and direct involvement on the author's part, and emotionally	Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time,	Hedges based on attributes, reliability, writer orientation, and reader orientation

| | charged intensifiers | introductory phrases, if-clauses, and compound hedges are all examples of modal auxiliary verbs. |

Table 2. 1. Taxonomies hedges in academic writing

2.2.3.1 Hyland's Classification of Hedges

According to Hyland, persuasion in academic discourse is a significant argumentative approach that involves using empirical arguments to defend objective knowledge. Empirically verifiable information is typically derived from precise calculations, which serve as an analytical framework for the production of knowledge. However, due to ongoing reassessment and estimation influenced by human and social circumstances, scientific ideas are no longer regarded as absolute realities. Academic writings heavily depend on the communication between the writer and the reader, and they involve strategies such as persuasion, reasoning, and detachment to facilitate interactive engagement. According to Hyland's paradigm (Hyland, 1996:9), the identification of core cases of hedges can be determined by considering four fundamental characteristics: specification, verification, agentivity, and interaction with the reader.

Content-oriented hedges includes attribute hedges, reliability hedges, and writer-oriented hedges.

1) Attribute hedge refers to the degree to which a phrase appropriately reflects the observed phenomenon.

2) Reliability hedge refers to the writer's evaluation of the level of certainty regarding the truth of a statement.

3) Writer-oriented hedge is a linguistic device used to hide the writer's perspective and minimize personal accountability.

2.2.3.1.1 Content-oriented Hedges

Content-oriented hedges play a role in lessening the connection between the expressed ideas and the depiction of reality. They introduce caution into the alignment between the authors' descriptions of the world and the perceived reality. The reasons behind employing such hedges can be broadly categorized into two areas that often intersect–those related to the writer's emphasis on ensuring accuracy in their statements and those linked to safeguarding oneself from the potential repercussions of flawed judgments. These categories are commonly referred to as accuracy-oriented hedges and writer-oriented hedges (Skelton,1988).

2.2.3.1.1.1 Accuracy-Oriented Hedges

These varieties of hedges reflect the writer's intention to articulate statements more precisely, particularly in domains prone to alterations. In this context, hedging serves as a crucial method for presenting uncertain assertions with due care, thereby minimizing the potential impact of uncertainty on factual accuracy. The primary purpose of accuracy-oriented hedges is to suggest that the proposition relies on plausible reasoning when knowledge is lacking. They empower readers to differentiate between what is factual and what is merely inferred (Myers,1989). For example:

1. Researchers *may* have found a cure for influenza. (Modal auxiliary)

2. Morphemes seems to be acquired. (Semi-auxiliary verbs)

3. Our analysis *suggests* that high doses of the drug can lead to a significant reduction in blood pressure (Palmer, 1990).

The use of 'may,' 'little,' and 'appear' in the aforementioned instances signals the writers' lack of confidence in their assertions. Deliberate tentativeness is employed to sidestep potential criticism from readers. Content-oriented hedges can be subdivided into attribute and reliability hedges.

2.2.3.1.1.1.1 Attribute-oriented hedges

Through a technique called attribute-oriented hedges, writers can more

accurately articulate their arguments by attached to the data in phrases of opinions and conclusions. Using this method, one can determine how well a phrase describes the phenomenon being reported. According to Channell (1994), attribute hedges may encompass downgrades, markers of deliberate ambiguity, and intensifiers. First, attribute-oriented hedges, which act as a self-defense mechanism for the writer or speaker, are commonly represented by downgrades, such as "just a few," "a little," and similar expressions. Second, writers can use terms like "more," "less," "sort of," and "somehow" in their expressions to reduce the explicitness of their writing and reduce the possibility of face-threatening behaviour. Third, using intensifiers to convince readers of the writers' emotional state–words like "particularly," "extremely interesting," and "important"–also serves as a politeness strategy (Al-Quraishy, 2011)

2.2.3.1.1.1.2   Reliability Hedges

Hedge strategies used to express a writer's belief in the truth of a proposition are referred to as reliability hedges. Epistemic modalities are frequently employed to convey reliability hedges. According to Hyland (1996), terms like modal auxiliaries, main verbs, modal verbs, modal adverbs, adjectives, and nouns are used as reliability hedges to convey an author's hesitation.

Epistemic modality is the prevalent means of articulating reliability hedges. Employing an epistemic modal expression as a hedge can be attributed to the desire to convey information with greater politeness, express matters indirectly, and allow for a more open reception of non-face-threatening interventions, such as potential disagreement, from the recipient.

According to Coates (1987), the primary lexical elements linked to the practice of hedging in English, particularly among authors who specifically associate hedging with the epistemic mode or the concepts of probability and possibility, are epistemic modality markers. Additionally, Vold (2006) demonstrates that these markers can be expressed through various means:
1. Modal auxiliary verbs indicating potentiality, such as 'may,' 'might,' 'can,' etc.

2. Semi-auxiliary verbs like 'to look,' 'to seem,' 'to appear,' etc.

3. Epistemic lexical verbs including 'suggest,' 'allow,' 'tend,' 'contribute,' 'intend,' 'aim,' 'propose,' 'speculate,' 'assume,' etc.

4. Modal adverbs such as 'perhaps,' 'possibly,' 'probably,' etc.

5. Modal nouns like 'possibility,' 'assumption,' 'suggestion,' 'tendency,' etc.

6. Modal adjectives such as 'probable,' 'likely,' 'possible,' etc.

   These examples can be applied in the described contexts:

1. There is a **tendency** to under-declare the amount of taxes to be paid.

2. Researchers **may** have found a cure for influenza.

3. The experiment on cloning **could** be dangerous to humanity.

4. Morphemes **seem** to be acquired first.

5. The new regulations **appear** to safeguard women, but they do not.

6. Septicemia is **likely to** result, which might threaten his life.

7. Our analyses suggest that high doses of the drug **can** lead to relevant blood pressure (Palmer, 1990)

2.2.3.1.1.1.3 Writer-oriented hedges

The relationship between a writer and a claim is emphasized by writer-oriented hedge, which overlooks the connection between the claim and its propositional components. According to Al-Quraishy (2011), the use of these hedging markers is associated with a writer's ability to reduce their own stance in writing, thereby reducing their responsibility for the accuracy of the claims made. Additionally, writer-oriented hedges, as noted by Price et al. (1982, cited in Hyland, 1996), center on the writer's anticipation of unfavorable consequences if the reader deems the writer's proposition (argumentation) incorrect. Passive sentences and impersonal subjects are often employed to illustrate writer-oriented hedges.

2.2.3.1.1.1.4 Reader-oriented hedges

Reader-oriented hedges refer to a writer's strategy for involving readers in a discussion, encouraging thoughtful responses, and assessing the proposition's trustworthiness. Lewin (1998) notes that reader-oriented hedges

engage readers by involving them in a conversation, treating them as reflective beings capable of evaluating the proposition's validity. This hedging approach highlights the speaker's subjective perspective on the conveyed message. The primary function of reader-oriented hedging is to acknowledge that by making sentences more subjective, it may diminish the writer's intended meaning. For illustrations (adapted from Al-Quraishy: 2011):

1. In my view, this medicine *could* help you recover quickly.
2. It *seems* to me that trying to live without friends is like milking a bear to get cream for your morning coffee.

Hyland (1996) proposed a taxonomy of hedges containing four primary categories that can be used to generalize their principal roles: First, it is known as an attribute hedge, as the goal of hedging devices is to determine how well a term describes a phenomenon that has been recorded. Second, it is referred to as a reliability hedge if the primary function of the hedging devices is to express the writer's judgment on the degree of certainty with which a proposition is true.

Thirdly, it is referred to as a writer-oriented hedge when the methods are used in a way that conceals the author's point of view and absolves them of personal responsibility for the truthfulness of the proposition. Fourth, when the writer accepts their own responsibility for the veracity of the propositional content or seeks reader participation, it is referred to as a reader-oriented hedge.

Drawing from the classifications of hedges outlined by various scholars, this research predominantly utilizes the theoretical framework introduced by Hyland (1996). This particular theory has been applied across diverse studies by different researchers, each examining various subjects. Additionally, the researcher finds Hyland's theory to be user-friendly, believing it to be readily comprehensible to the readers.

Meanwhile, there is some hedging markers that has the different meaning based on the context. The reason for this could be related to the definition and connotation of the term "seem," which is centered around the idea of creating an impression (Wang, 2024). Impression is a subjective matter that pertains to individuals' emotions and opinions. However, its relevance is not as significant in

the subjects of Mechanical Engineering and Physics compared to the study of English and Philosophy. After carefully analyzing these hedges in their specific context, it was noted that the two hedges were serving distinct hedging purposes within these fields. Below are four instances.

Example;

1. Second, the contact resistance of the setup did not *seem* to be consistent. [Mechanical Engineering]

2. Conflicts *seem* to occur most often when one religion does not allow the presence of its neighbor religion and so seeks to alter their presence or activities, even the religion itself. [Philosophy]

3. Empirical observations *suggest* that during the summer months, when dissimilar schedules meant less knowledge of others' decisions and thus less peer pressure. [Civil & Environmental Engineering]

4. Just as space can imply the idiosyncrasies of a generation, it can also *suggest* impressions of individual issues and emotions. [English]

While "seem" and "suggest" are used as cautious expressions in the papers of Mechanical Engineering and Civil and Environmental Engineering, they still indicate a considerable level of confidence from the authors regarding statements that are supported by concrete, objective evidence such as contact resistance and empirical observations. The writers employed these hedges to present the evidence cautiously, uphold objectivity, and convey epistemic meaning, albeit to a lesser extent for expressing uncertainty. However, authors in examples 2 and 4 utilized the verbs "seem" and "suggest" to assert statements derived from their personal experience and interpretation. The claims being put forward are not definite one, as there is no universally accepted response to the open-ended inquiries on the most frequent occurrences of conflicts and the potential implications of space. The authors employ the use of "seem" and "suggest" in order to sway the audience's opinion without appearing offensive, so granting readers the freedom to form their own judgments. writers in the fields of English and Philosophy often employ hedging as a strategic approach to engage in a negotiation with their audience, due to the inherent characteristics of these disciplines.

2.2.3.2 Functions of Hedges in Academic Writing

Previously mentioned, the primary purpose of hedging is to prepare writers for potential objections readers might have towards their arguments or claims. Similarly, the categorization of hedges and their functions can differ according to various experts. According to Hyland (1995), hedging typically serves three key roles in securing the readers' concurrence with the claims or arguments presented:

a. Hedges enable authors to articulate their ideas more precisely in fields known for reinterpretation and reformulation. Moreover, hedging provides a crucial way to express academic claims that are uncertain, with the necessary level of caution. Epistemic modality is commonly employed as a hedging device. For instance:

    Researcher *may* have found a cure for influenza. (Wudaa: 2011) (in this case the writer prefers to say researcher *may* have found a cure for influenza than directly state researcher has found a cure for influenza)

b. Hedges can serve to mitigate the adverse effects of having an author's argument or claims disproven. In academic discourse, authors typically present their most compelling claims to persuade readers of their viewpoints. However, there is also a need for authors to protect themselves from overstatement. Should inaccuracies in their arguments be identified, criticism from readers is likely. Therefore, the application of hedging devices is essential in safeguarding the authors' reputations by tempering their assertions.

In this case, the hedging devices which are usually used are passive, existential subjects, and abstract rhetors which attribute the judgement into the text or the finding. For examples (taken from Hyland: 1995):

    a. It **was assumed** that the phosphorylation of EF-2 may play...(passive, the un-existence of the subject)
    b. **The data** indicates that phytochrome a possesses the intrinsic... (the subject is replaced into non-human entity)

Hedges can play a significant role in fostering a relationship between the writer and the reader, emphasizing respect and collaboration in securing the

reader's endorsement of claims. By employing hedges, writers can engage readers as knowledgeable peers, capable of evaluating the matters presented in the discourse.

Crystal (1987) identified two primary functions of hedge words within communication:

1. They allow for the implicit expression of claims, catering to the common preference for avoiding precision in certain contexts.

2. The use of hedge words provides a form of safety for the writer, shielding them from potential further inquiries.

Furthermore, the utilization of hedging in both speech and writing stems from various motivations: Firstly, it minimizes the likelihood of encountering contradictory propositions to the statements or arguments presented. Secondly, it aids in enhancing the precision of reported study results. Thirdly, hedging facilitates the demonstration of both positive and negative forms of politeness. Lastly, it supports the writer's stance on particular claims and fosters a connection between the writer and reader concerning these claims.

The consensus among scholars regarding the functions of hedge words in academic discourse is that they primarily assist the writer in avoiding subsequent criticism and enable the conveying of claims or arguments in a polite manner. Nonetheless, for the analysis of this study, the researcher has chosen to adopt Hyland's (1995) theory on hedging. This decision is based on the researcher's perspective that Hyland's framework is more accessible and straightforward to comprehend.

2.2.4 Corpus

Corpus software is a type of specialist software that is specifically built for the purpose of analyzing and managing text corpora. These tools are crucial for doing linguistic research, as they enable the systematic investigation of large text collections. AntConc is a prominent example of the different corpus software options available (Stepanov, 2022). AntConc, created by Laurence Anthony, has

several features such as concordance, collocation, and word list generation. These functionalities are essential for studying the frequency and contextual usage of words in a corpus.

Corpus software often includes certain essential characteristics to guarantee the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data. The features involve electronic formatting, annotation, and software processing capabilities. Advanced functions offered by tools like AntConc include the capability to search for units based on cases, inflections, or lexeme limitations, and the ability to order results by left-side or right-side valence.

Corpus software has utility beyond academic research, as it can be advantageous in professional contexts that necessitate text analysis. The software's flexibility and wide range of features make it appropriate for many different kinds of linguistic research, including discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and language instruction.

AntConc is a powerful and adaptable software for analyzing corpora since text corpora analysis is a common practice in linguistic study. AntConc provides several essential characteristics and capabilities:

1. Concordance Tool: This functionality enables users to produce a comprehensive list of every instance of a search term in the corpus, including its surrounding context. This tool is valuable for analyzing the usage of words in various settings.

2. The Collocation Tool assists in identifying words that commonly appear together with the search query. Studying word associations and analyzing the typical settings in which a term is used is beneficial.

3. The AntConc tool can provide a comprehensive list of all the words in the corpus, including their respective frequencies. This aids in the identification of the most prevalent words and comprehension of the general distribution of vocabulary in the corpus.

4. The Keyword List Tool enables users to compare the occurrence rate of

words in one corpus with another, aiding in the identification of words that are either exceptionally common or uncommon in a particular corpus.

5. The File View Tool allows users to directly access and examine the original text files in AntConc, enabling them to have a better understanding of the wider context of their search results.

6. Compatibility: AntConc is interoperable with Windows, Linux, and Macintosh operating systems, so ensuring accessibility to a diverse user base.

7. Search Flexibility: Users have the ability to search for units based on cases, inflections, or lexeme bounds. The results can be organized based on the valence on the left or right side, and the data can be sent to a separate dialog box for comparison with neighboring search results.

8. AntConc also incorporates the notion of virtual corpora, which are only digital collections of texts. This enables the examination of texts found on the internet and other digital materials.

AntConc's extensive range of characteristics makes it well-suited for a wide array of linguistic investigations, such as discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and language instruction.
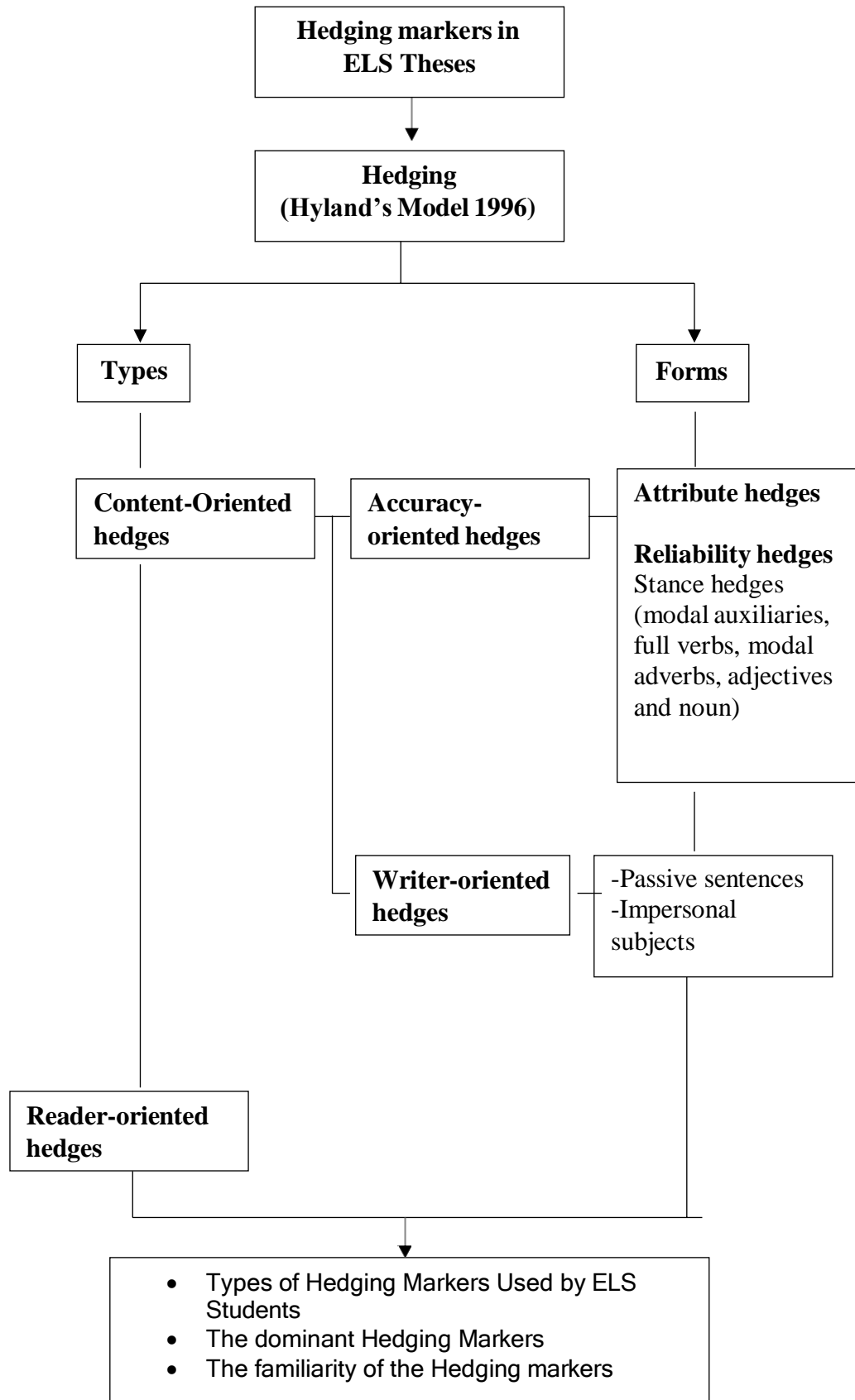
2.3 Conceptual Framework


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┌─────────────────────┐
│  Hedging markers in │
│     ELS Theses      │
└─────────────────────┘
           │
           ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│      Hedging        │
│ (Hyland's Model 1996)│
└─────────────────────┘
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Types   **Forms**

Content-Oriented hedges   **Accuracy-oriented hedges**   **Attribute hedges**

Reliability hedges
Stance hedges
(modal auxiliaries,
full verbs, modal
adverbs, adjectives
and noun)

Writer-oriented hedges   -Passive sentences
-Impersonal
subjects

Reader-oriented hedges

- Types of Hedging Markers Used by ELS Students
- The dominant Hedging Markers
- The familiarity of the Hedging markers

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

27

The conceptual framework is designed to provide a structured approach for investigating the use of hedging in students' theses. By considering independent variables that influence hedging, mediating variables that moderate these influences, and the dependent variable representing the actual use of hedging, researchers can gain insights into the multifaceted nature of this writing strategy.

The conceptual framework of this research focused around the theses of English Language Studies (ELS) students, specifically exploring the use of hedging in their academic writing. The research focuses on two main aspects related to hedging: the types of hedging employed by ELS students in their theses and the level of knowledge these students possess regarding the use of hedging.

2.3.1   Types of Hedges Analysis:

The study focuses on investigating the types of hedging employed by English Language and Literature (ELS) students in their theses. Hedging, in academic writing, involves the use of linguistic devices to express caution, uncertainty, or qualification in statements. Analyzing the hedging strategies used by students provides insights into their approach to presenting arguments, acknowledging limitations, and engaging with scholarly discourse.

To conduct this analysis, the researchers utilized the AntConc application, a concordance software tool specifically designed for linguistic analysis. The application facilitates the examination of textual data, allowing researchers to identify and categorize specific words or phrases associated with hedging within the theses.

The process involved input the theses written by ELS students into the AntConc application. The software then generated concordance lines and statistical data, revealing the frequency, distribution, and context of words linked to hedging. The identified linguistic elements may include modal verbs (e.g., could, might, may), adverbs expressing uncertainty (e.g., perhaps, possibly), or other markers that convey a nuanced level of certainty or confidence in the presented ideas.

By employing AntConc, the study aimed to go beyond a qualitative assessment and quantitatively analyze the prevalence of hedging in the students' writing. This approach allows for a systematic exploration of linguistic patterns, shedding light on the dominant hedging strategies used by ELS students in their academic research.

The findings of this analysis can have several implications. It may provide educators with insights into common linguistic challenges faced by ELS students and inform targeted pedagogical approaches. Additionally, understanding the prevalent hedging markers can contribute to the broader conversation on academic writing conventions within the field of English Language and Literature.

In summary, the study involves a detailed examination of the hedging strategies employed by ELS students in their theses, utilizing the AntConc application to systematically analyze and categorize linguistic elements associated with hedging within the students' writing.

2.3.2 The dominant hedges used by ELS students:

The phrase "The dominant hedging used by ELS students" indicates an intention to examine and identify the most prevalent or prominent hedging markers employed by English Language and Literature (ELS) students. In this context, "hedging" refers to the linguistic strategy of mitigating the certainty or strength of a statement, often used in academic writing to express caution, modesty, or to acknowledge potential limitations.

To analyze the dominant hedging markers, the AntConc application is employed. AntConc is a concordance software tool that allows for the systematic analysis of linguistic patterns within a given text or corpus. In the context of this research, the software is likely used to process and identify the frequency and distribution of specific linguistic features associated with hedging in the written work of ELS students.

The process involves inputting a corpus of texts, likely academic papers or essays produced by ELS students, into AntConc. The software then generates

concordance lines and statistical data, revealing the occurrence of different words or phrases that function as hedging markers. These markers may include modal verbs (e.g., could, might, may), cautious adverbs (e.g., perhaps, possibly), or other linguistic devices that introduce a level of uncertainty or qualification to the statements made in the text.

The analysis aims to identify which hedging markers are most frequently used by ELS students, shedding light on the linguistic patterns and preferences within this specific group. Understanding the dominant hedging strategies employed by ELS students can contribute to a nuanced exploration of how these students navigate academic writing conventions, express uncertainty, and engage with the expectations of scholarly discourse.

In summary, the research involves employing the AntConc application to analyze the most dominant hedging markers in the written study of English Language and Literature students, providing insights into their linguistic choices and approaches to expressing uncertainty in academic writing.

2.3.3   Interview about the familiarity in using hedges:

The research assessed the familiarity that ELS students have regarding the use of hedging in academic writing.

An interview related to hedging was administered to the students, aiming to know their understanding of hedging concepts, types, and applications. The interview was designed to gauge the students' familiarity and proficiency with hedging in the context of academic writing.

In summary, the conceptual framework revolved around exploring how ELS students employ different types of hedging in their theses, utilizing the AntConc application for analysis. Simultaneously, the research aimed to understand the students' familiarity about hedging through an interview specifically tailored to know their comprehension of hedging concepts and practices.