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## The Impact of Discipline and being Native/Non-native on the use of Hedging Devices

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### Abstract

Drawing upon Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy, the present study compared the frequency of use of hedging devices used in Discussion part of 140 research articles (70 RAs written by native English writers and 70 by their non-native Iranian counterparts) published since 2000 in the leading journals of the three disciplines of Geography, Chemistry, and Medicine. The results of Chi-square analyses indicated there were significant differences across various disciplines in terms of the frequency of use of hedging devices adopted in the Discussion part of RAs. Moreover, the findings revealed there were significant differences between non-native (Iranian) research writers and their native English counterparts regarding the frequency of use of hedging devices adopted in the Discussion part of RAs.

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*Keywords:*

### 1. Introduction

By the use of hedging devices, one can linguistically indicate his/her degree of commitment to his/her claims (Nivales, 2011). Using hedging devices to present information and new ideas is one of the conventions in academic writing. Rounds (1982) maintains that by using hedging devices in academic discourse, academic writers are easily able to show their certainty and doubt towards their claims, they are also able to show the amount of confidence they put on their claims, and they can start a dialogue with their readers. Some novice research writers, by neglecting the use of hedging devices, show their confidence and detachment to their suggested ideas. Hedges could be used in

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utterances to present the information ambiguously, uncertainly, or imprecisely. They are used to reduce the potential risk of a claim or prevent embarrassing situations in which one is found to be wrong (Varttala, 2001).

### *1.1. Previous research findings on hedging*

Salager-Meyer (1994) found shields, approximators and compound hedges were the most frequently used hedging devices in the different rhetorical parts of Medicine research papers. Salager-Meyer also found that the most heavily hedged part was the Discussion part, and the least hedged part was the Method part. Shields and compound hedges were the most frequently used hedging devices in the Discussion part. Regarding the Introduction part, Salager-Meyer found that shields were the most frequent hedging types and approximators stood at the second place. It was also revealed that approximators were the most frequently used hedging devices in the Result part. Salager-Meyer suggested that the issues involved in determining the expressions of tentativeness and flexibility in discourse included the general structure of the discourse, the purpose of the communication, the level of the claim, the writers' wishes to make, and the authors' pretension to universality and generalization. Nasiri (2012) revealed there was no statistically significant difference between native and non-native research writers in terms of use of hedging devices in the Discussion part of research articles. Falahati (2004) revealed that English research articles were more hedged than those of Iranians. He further found that the frequency of use of hedges in the Discussion part of research articles was higher than that used in the Introduction part. He concluded that the frequency of use of hedges is different across various languages and disciplines. Vassileva (2001) investigated the degree of expressing claims in Bulgarian English research articles in linguistics. He revealed that the three different parts of the articles, namely the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion had different distribution of hedges and boosters. By analyzing the collected data, he concluded that the variations in three different parts of the articles were related to the different rhetorical and educational traditions. It was further aimed at facilitating understanding and tolerating the specific cultural features. He added that these different rhetorical functions could preserve cultural identity when using English for academic purposes.

### *1.3. Research questions*

The following research questions were formulated for the present study:

1. Is there any significant difference between the frequency of hedging devices used in the Discussion part of Medicine articles written by native English and non-native (Iranian) research writers?
2. Is there any significant difference between the frequency of hedging devices used in the Discussion part of Chemistry articles written by native English and non-native (Iranian) research writers?
3. Is there any significant difference between the frequency of hedging devices used in the Discussion part of Geography articles written by native English and non-native (Iranian) research writers?
4. Is there any significant difference among Chemistry, Geography and Medicine articles written by Native English research writers in terms of frequency of hedging devices used in their Discussion part?
5. Is there any significant difference among Chemistry, Geography and Medicine articles written by Iranian researchers writing in English in terms of frequency of hedging devices used in their Discussion part?
6. What types of hedging devices are used the most and the least frequently by both native English research writers and their non-native (Iranian) counterparts?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Corpus*

The corpus of the study was taken from the research articles written by both native English research writers and their Iranian counterparts writing in English. The RAs were in the three different fields of Medicine, Chemistry, and Geography. The study examined 420 Discussion part of the RAs. The reason for selecting the Discussion part of the articles was the importance of the part and its heavily hedged-based nature. 140 RAs for each aforementioned discipline, 70 written by native English research writers and 70 by Iranian researchers writing in English, were randomly selected from leading journals in the field published since 2000.

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