

## HEDGING AS A LINGUISTIC STRATEGY USED BY PAKISTANI ACADEMIC WRITERS: A CORPUS-ASSISTED ACADEMIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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### Keywords

Hedging, Boosters, Hyland's Taxonomy, concordance, frequency, International and Pakistani authors, research articles, corpus-based study, Corpus tool AntConc 4.3.1, Academic Discourse Analysis.

### Article History

Received: 28 April 2026

Accepted: 12 June 2026

Published: 27 June 2026

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### Abstract

The following study examines the academic discourse practices of Pakistani academic writers through the lens of corpus linguistics. The aims of this study is to collect and analyze the corpus from journal articles produced by Pakistani academicians to identify the use of hedges and boosters in Pakistani academic writing and compare it with research articles published in International Journals, written by International authors, based on Critical Discourse Analysis. This Corpus Linguistics study explores the local and global influences of use of hedging on Pakistani academic writing. The data of this study is based on 30 research articles; 15 by Pakistani scholars, 15 by English scholars and the articles, based on Critical Discourse Analysis, were sourced from reputable academic journals. First, manual coding was done using Hyland's taxonomy (2005), then frequency and distribution analysis was made using AntConc 4.3.1. This study compares 15 Pakistani academic writing articles with 15 research articles from International Journals using AntConc 4.3.1 to identify who uses hedges and boosters more in academic writing and how does it impact their writing skills. The approximate corpus size is the sample of 100 words, and hedging is analyzed through concordance lines, with special focus on modal verbs, adverbs, and adjectives which show uncertainty. The theoretical framework of this study is based on Hyland's modal (2005) classification of hedging in academic discourse. Mixed method of research was used for this study, including quantitative comparison of hedges and boosters' raw frequency and normalized frequency per 10,000 with qualitative analysis of hedges and boosters' functions and their discourse roles in academic writing.

Key words:

### INTRODUCTION

In academic writing, hedging is used as an essential tool for creating a balance between making claims and acknowledging uncertainty. Hedges are employed to express thoughtfulness and doubtfulness and researchers direct the intricacies of making arguments while maintaining credibility, through hedges. Hedging is a type of meta discourse, used to express hesitation, uncertainty or vagueness, through the use of

modal verbs like may, could, might, epistemic verbs as suggest, recommend, adverbs like possibly, potentially, and other lexical and transitional devices. In Pakistani academic writing context, where global academic writing models often intersect with local linguistic and cultural practices, the use of hedging has a distinctive scope. Pakistani writers, who often write in English as a second or foreign language, draw on

social and cultural norms of communication that lay stress on politeness, courtesy, humility, or indirectness to avoid assertive or authoritative tone. In this part of the world, hedging is considered as a major part of scholarly writing spheres. On the contrary, in western academic writing, assurance and assertion in one's statements is considered as a hallmark of academic as well as research writing, and over-reliance on hedges is taken as a hindrance to establishing authority in academic arguments. This study uses a corpus-assisted academic discourse analysis to investigate how Pakistani academic writers use hedges and boosters as a rhetorical strategy.

This study explores the academic discourse practices of Pakistani academic writers through the lens of corpus linguistics. The method of this study includes the collection and analysis of the corpus from journal articles produced by Pakistani academicians and comparing it with research articles produced by International academicians, published in International Journals, to identify the use of hedges and boosters in Pakistani academic writing. It aims to explore the local and global influences of the use of hedging on Pakistani academic writing. The approximate corpus size is the sample of 100 words, and hedging is analyzed through comparison of raw frequency and normalized frequency per 10,000, specifically to modal verbs, auxiliaries, transitional devices, and adjectives which show uncertainty. The present study also connects hedges and boosters to the use of modality like modal verbs as can, could, may, illustrating how writers express uncertainty or conviction through linguistic devices. For example, epistemic modality is used to communicate speculation or deduction like 'may be true', while evidential modality conveys attitudes toward knowledge like 'it is reported that'.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Hyland's modal (1996) classification of hedging in academic discourse. Hedging is described by Hyland (1996) as "the articulation of tentativeness and prospects in academic writing, where the requirement to explain untested

assertions with caution and accuracy is vital" (Hyland, 1996, p. 115). Hedging is defined as any linguistic strategy employed by research writers to communicate "(1) an absence of commitment to the truthfulness of an underlying claim or (2) a wish not to articulate that commitment unequivocally". (Hyland, p.01). As a result, hedging words and phrases like possibly, appear, I assume, may be, kind of, and sort of are used in diverse ways.

### Research Question

The main question of this annotated study is:

- How do Pakistani academic writers employ hedging as a linguistic strategy in their academic writing?

### Problem Statement:

Although previous literature has examined move structures and a combination of move analysis with metadiscourse devices in research abstracts (e.g., Hadi et al., 2020; Li & Pramoolsook, 2015), research to date has not yet combined analysis of hedges and boosters in applied linguistics research articles. This gap is particularly notable for articles published in locally owned international journals in Pakistan so this study is made to fill this gap.

### Literature Review:

To succeed in university, academics should share their knowledge with their community members to educate them, re-inforce their professional links, and enhance partnership to kindle and forefront future advancement. Research Articles (RAs) are one shared way to distribute scientific knowledge. Swales (1990) quoted that RAs publication is a means by which investigators to secure endorsement as intellectual community members. In writing an RA, certain rhetorical structures and academic conventions must be followed. Among all levels in this written available type, the research article, or a small method of the article, is specifically critical as it establishes the most read part after the title which does "a promotional and persuasive function" of the newspaper (Samraj, 2016, p. 405). Not only does a well-written nonconcrete prove the readers that

the article is worth understanding, but it also makes the article more observable and gets quoted based on reading it on your own (Belcher, 2019). Because of the intense amount of value of RAs in publication, the author needs to slow their rhetorical structures and linguistic structures to effectually deliver the note. Extensive research has been accompanied on RA rhetorical pillars, particularly moves (e.g., Amnuai, 2019; Fauzan et al., 2020; Li & Pramoolsook, 2015) and metadiscursive features (e.g., Alghazo, Al Salem, Alrashdan, et al., 2021, Alghazo, Al Salem, & Alrashdan, 2021; Hadi et al., 2020; Khedri et al., 2013) to raise consciousness of RA organization and verbal choices to the community members. Research papers follow certain rhetorical conventions among which the objectivity of rights is a major one. Researchers should definitely use an objective language when they are writing about the findings of their research in the form of an academic research article, since they should coax their reader without making uncorroborated claims. Academic writers not only need to make the fallouts of their research public, but also persuasive, and their success in gaining acceptance for their work at least partly depends on

manipulating various rhetorical and interactive features (p. 99).

An important pillar of academic language is the use of hedging strategies to increase the authority of claims. A commonly used definition of hedging has been provided by Hyland (1998) as “how writers can present a proposition as an opinion rather than a fact”. This definition highlights the idea that proposals in research articles are to be loved and allowed as writers’ opinions rather than facts unless they have really been proven by experimental results. In social sciences, nevertheless, it is still hard to introduce a research finding as a fact since the variables used are not easily controllable. Also, all statements that express new ideas presented by research are usually hedged in research papers since they have not gained recognition (Myers, 1989). Academic lettering is not only informative and content-oriented but also targets to convince the reader. Hedging is an important approach in academic writing since, in essence, academic writing is a scientific activity which involves “cognition” and “discretion” (Hyland, 2000). The term was originally introduced by Lakoff (1972) as “words whose job is to make things more or less ambiguous”.

**Hyland’s Model of Hedges**

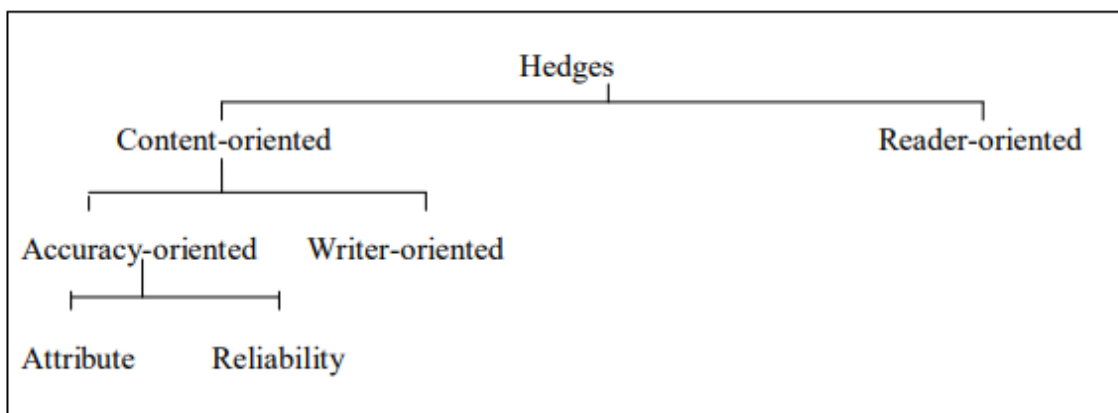


FIGURE 1: Types of Hedges (Hyland, 1996, p. 438)

From Hyland’s point of view (1996), the main classifications of hedges are content-oriented

hedges and reader-oriented hedges. Content-oriented hedges can be seen as an attitudinal facet

and include features that refer to the ways authors present themselves and express their judgments, opinions, and persuasions. These linguistic devices alleviate the relationship between propositional content and a representation of the real world (Hyland, 1996). This means that the linguistic devices hedge the communication between what the writer says about the world and what the world is thought to be like. As seen in

Figure 1, accuracy-oriented hedging and writer-oriented hedging are the different types of content-oriented hedges, while attribute hedges and reliability hedges are the kinds of accuracy-oriented hedging. Stance hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions are the methods for content-oriented hedges (Hyland, 2005).

The summary of the types and forms of content-oriented hedges is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Content-oriented Hedges- Stance (Hyland, 2005, p. 177)

Types	Forms	Examples
1. Accuracy-oriented hedges		
a. Attribute hedges	Boosters (adverbs or adverbial devices)	<i>clearly, obviously, demonstrate</i>
b. Reliability hedges	Stance hedges (modal auxiliaries, full verbs, modal adverbs, adjectives, and nouns)	<i>possible, might, perhaps</i>
2. Writer-oriented hedges	Attitude markers	<i>agree, prefer, unfortunately, hopefully, appropriate, logical, remarkable</i>
	Self-mention (first person pronoun)	<i>I</i>

Another pillar of hedging is reader-oriented hedges (Hyland, 2005). Hyland (2005) tells that reader-oriented hedges talk mostly about the relationship between writer and audience, confirm the care the writers give to the interactional effects of their text or quote, and solicit conspiracy by addressing the reader as a brainy colleague capable

of sharing in the discourse with an open mind. From Hyland's perspective (2005), there are many types of reader-oriented hedges, for example, reader pronouns, directives, and questions. They are believed to be the forms for reader-oriented hedges. The summary of the types and forms of reader-oriented hedges is shown in Table 2.

The summary of the types and forms of reader-oriented hedges is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Reader-oriented Hedges- Engagement (Hyland, 2005, p. 177)

Types	Forms	Examples
Reader-oriented hedges	Reader pronouns	<i>you, your, we</i>
	Directives	<i>consider, note, imagine, must, should, ought, it is important to understand</i>
	Questions	<i>Is it, in fact, necessary to choose between nurture and nature?</i>

The linguistic term booster is also known as certainty markers or emphatic markers. The role

of boosters plays a significant role not only in convincing writing, but also in real or meaningful

writing. The active use of boosters is thought of as an intended act of the writer. Boosters, as metadiscourse, are very vital in teaching English writing. The practical use of boosters is professed as a very useful source in not only developing effective writing but also showing the author's stance.

A study was conducted by Serholt (2012) on the use of hedges and boosters in academic writing. This study intended to look at modifiers in constructions and how they are used in their essay writing. In the conclusion of this study, she said that both males and females used more hedges and boosters, especially in the sections: Introduction and Discussion, than in the other sections of the academic essays. A lot of studies have been conducted in looking at the use of boosting devices in academic writings (Allison, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Milton, 1997). A broader study on metadiscourse was led in England by Oskouei (2011), focusing on the interactional variation in English and Persian. She looked on, talking about the 'certainty' and 'uncertainty' markers in Magazine editorials. She concluded that the use of interactional MFs by British and Persian editorialists reasonably varied because of diverse cultural backgrounds, while on the other hand, British editorialists preferred the use of uncertainty markers. On the contrary, Iranian editorialists seemed in favor of the use of certainty markers. The said study was unimaginably in support of the current study.

Another study by Laghari, T. Akhter, T., & Kakepoto, I. (2022) was conducted aiming to explore the appropriate employment of Hedging Strategies in Academic Writing, and it examines the use of hedging in the discussion or analysis part of American and Pakistani PhD dissertations in applied linguistics by American and Pakistani authors. The researchers have investigated a corpus of 50 discussion parts from dissertations finished between 2018 and 2020 by using Martin's (2008) taxonomy of hedging methods. This directed approach would be helpful for me in analyzing hedging in my study. I can utilize this study to contribute to my study as it authenticates how to collect a specialized corpus of academic

texts for analyzing specific linguistic features like hedging and this approach will be adopted by me in my research to build corpora to examine hedging in academic writing. In this study, computer concordance tool (AntConc 3.4) was used in order to analyze two corpora for quantitative analysis, which is further complemented with manual analysis. The method of data analysis of this study matches with this current study and gives guidance for using corpus tool as well as doing manual analysis. The analysis of this study is made in combination of concordance software and manual analysis, which offers a comprehensive examination of hedging devices. The findings of this research indicate that in comparison to Pakistani writers, American writers employ more hedging techniques. The study has consequences for teaching academic writing, particularly to writers who are non-native English speakers, like Pakistani writers, which is also the population of present research.

Another corpus-based study by Abbas, a., & Zahra, s. t. (2019) used Hyland's communication framework of metadiscourse, including hedges, to find out metadiscursive culture of rhetorical practices used in research articles of History, and investigated the use of meta-discourse in history research articles published in Pakistani journals to understand the way Pakistani writers use linguistic strategies to persuade, negotiate, and transmit information. It claims that metadiscourse is a culturally grounded phenomenon, and its effective use is crucial for academic writing, especially in English as a second language. The researchers have applied mixed-method approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze metadiscourse. The authors acknowledge the limitations of their context and aim to provide insights relevant to Pakistani academic writing. As it solely focuses on Pakistani journals and authors, so, it makes it more relevant to my area of study. This paper employs corpus linguistics techniques to be applied on the sample of 20 research articles from history published in recognized journals of Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. The study aims to analyze metadiscourse to address a gap in research by focusing on metadiscourse in

Pakistani academic writing, and giving culturally specific insights. The study uses a corpus of 87,000 words analyzed by Meta Pak. The study improves accuracy of the methodological approach with the use of Meta Pak, a specialized software tool developed for metadiscourse analysis. Meta Pak is a corpus tool based on theoretical linguistic markers of metadiscourse comprising of five rhetorical strategies, including Boosters (BST), Hedges (HDG), Attitude Markers (AM), Self-Mention (SM), and Engagement Markers (EM), proposed by Hyland developed for metadiscourse analysis, exclusively. In this study, authors have used corpus-assisted discourse analysis, which aligns with the current research and offers insights into data collection and analysis techniques of a corpus-based study. This study identifies a gap, which can be filled in my research that there is a need for improved metadiscoursal practices in Pakistani academic writing at a broader level, and on hedging as a specific metadiscoursal strategy. At the end of the study, the researchers have suggested an eclectic model of teaching academic writing to the postgraduate students to enrich the efficiency and communicativeness of their research.

**Research Methodology**

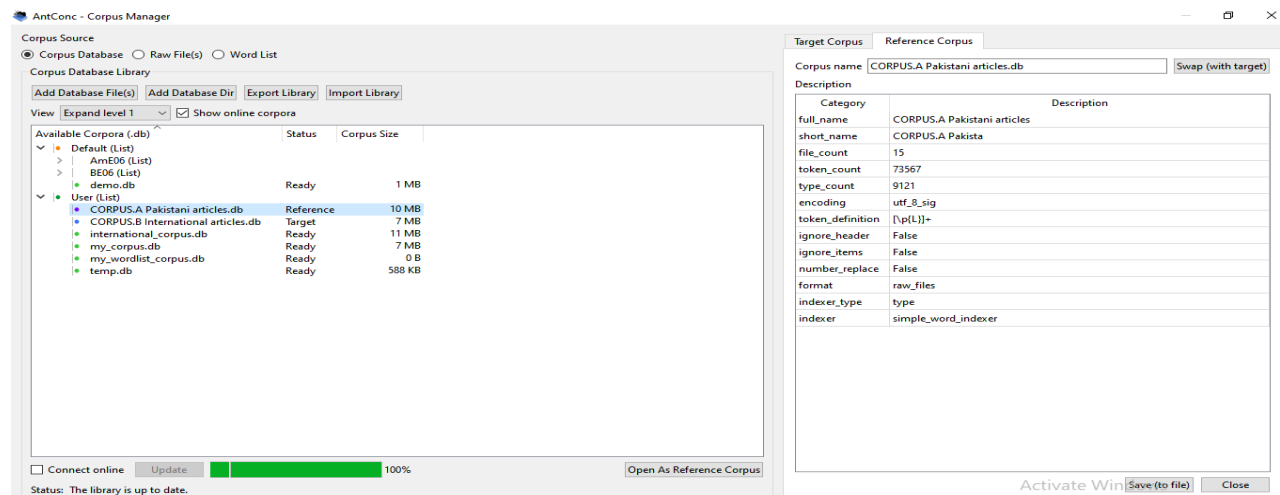
This research paper used 30 research articles, including 15 research articles from Pakistani journals and 15 research articles from

International journals, based on Critical Discourse Analysis. The researcher has done manual coding of hedges and boosters using Hyland’s taxonomy (2005); to compare raw frequency and normalized frequency per 10,000 of hedges and boosters in both corpora using AntConc 4.3.1. The sample of hundred (100) edging words was chosen for this study. The study applies mixed method approach, by making a Quantitative comparison of hedges and booster’s raw frequency and normalized frequency per 10,000 using AntConc 4.3.1 and doing a Qualitative analysis of hedges and boosters’ functions and roles in academic writing through Academic Discourse analysis.

**Analysis:**

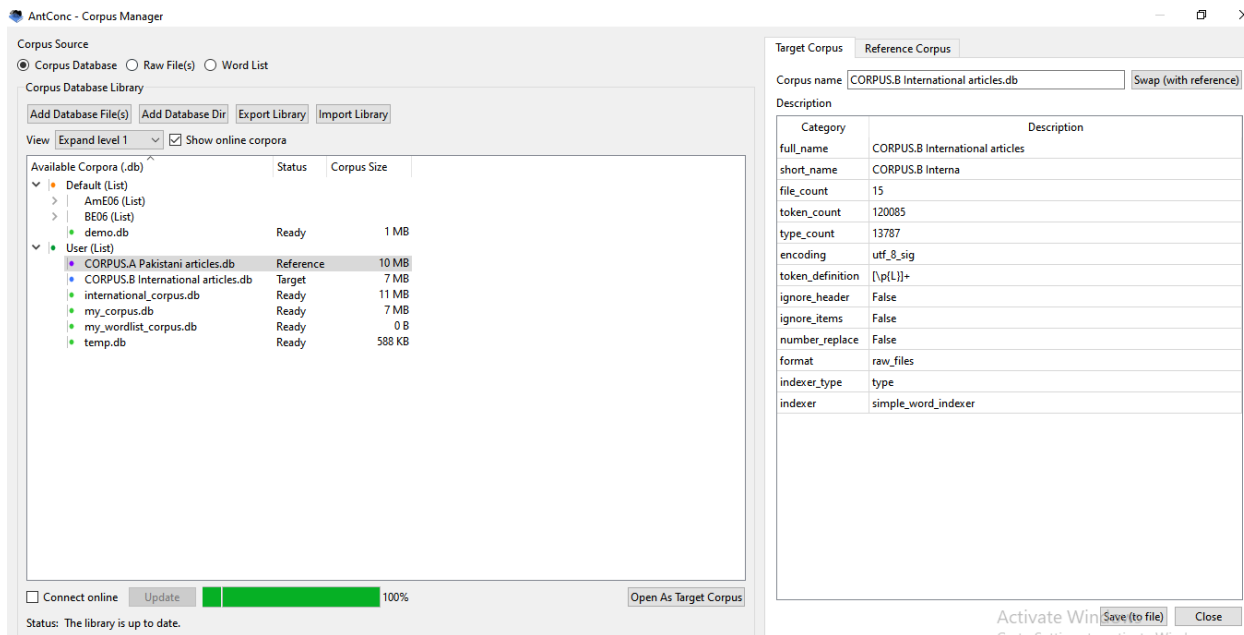
The analysis was carried out using mixed method approach. The qualitative analysis was conducted first, using a top-down approach. A hedging markers’ and boosters’ list of 100 words was developed for the analysis in this study, based on Hyland’s (2005) list of metadiscourse markers. To begin with corpus analysis, the number of words in each corpora was counted using AntConc 4.3.1. The Pakistani corpus set as ‘Reference Corpus’ contained 73567 token\_count and 9121 type\_count, while the International corpus set as ‘Target Corpus’ contained 120085 token\_count and 13787 type\_count.

The Pakistani corpus set as ‘Reference Corpus’



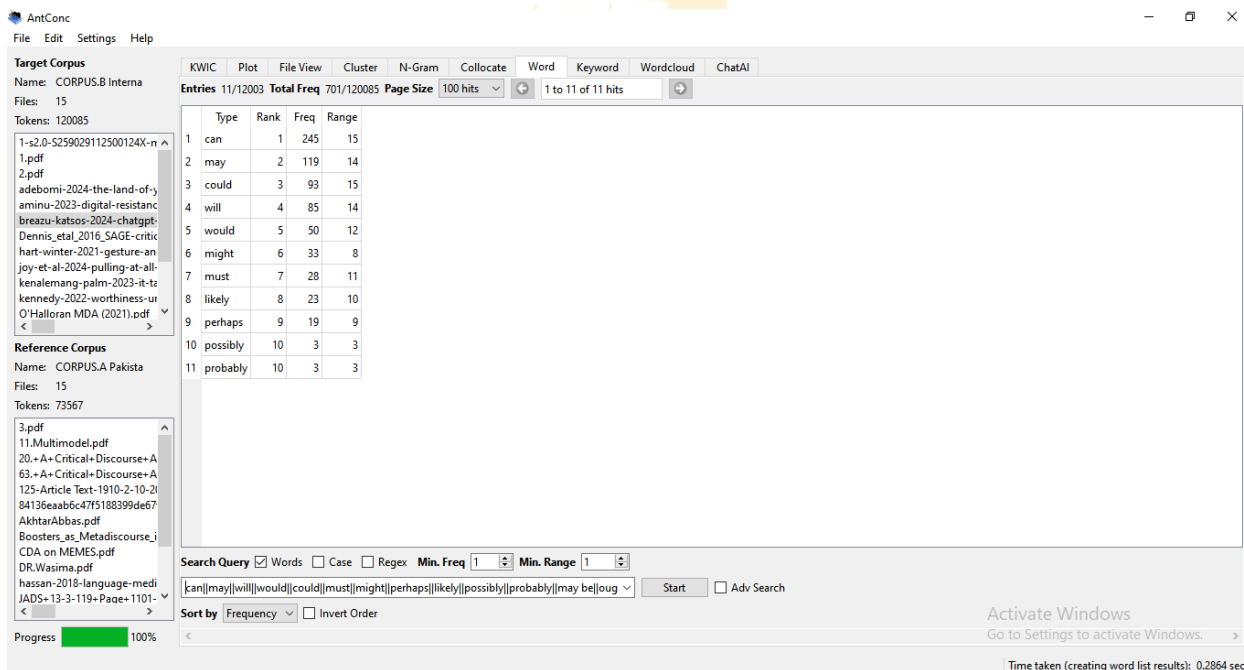
The International corpus set as ‘Target Corpus’

The International corpus set as 'Target Corpus'

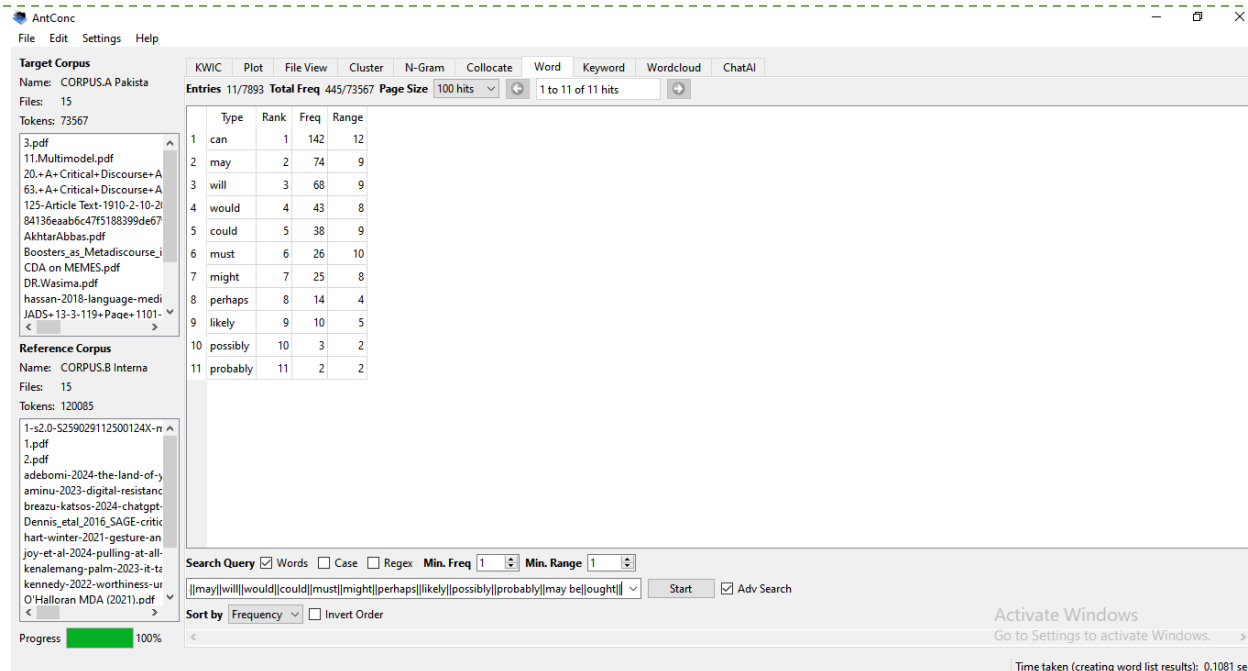


The frequency rates of hedges and boosters were counted in International and Pakistani research articles to obtain the occurrence percentages of their use in both corpora.

Frequency in International Corpora



Frequency in Pakistani Corpora



The frequency shows that both Pakistani and Worldwide corpora show a high occurrence of modal verbs, with “can” being the most common hedge in both datasets. The little bit larger regularity of “can” in international articles tells a shared group on this modal to tell possibility and oversimplification, but with a little bit more cautious tone in transnational discourse. Pakistani articles also feature “may,” “will,” and “could.” These modals serve distinct rhetorical determinations: “May” signals possibility, line up with conventional hedging. “Will” and “must,” while sometimes hedges, often show a stronger certainty or obligation, working as boosters or quasi-boosters. Their again and again use in Pakistani writing shows a propensity toward more assertive, even commanding, academic beliefs.

1. Lexical Variety and Nuance

Research articles of both demonstrate a wide-ranging and more nuanced list of hedging devices. Words like “can”, “could”, “may”, “often”, are used more regularly in both corporas and words like and phrases like “to some extent”, “probably” and “may be” are used less frequently. This vocabulary diversity looks at a rhetorical preference for stating uncertainty, restriction, and shade, and main features of epistemological

humility in global academic message. Pakistani articles, by difference, depend on more heavily on a shallower set of modal verbs. The use of “will,” “must,” and booster “likely” suggests a stylishness that projects confidence and consultant, but may risk exaggeration in contexts where cautious enclosure is expected.

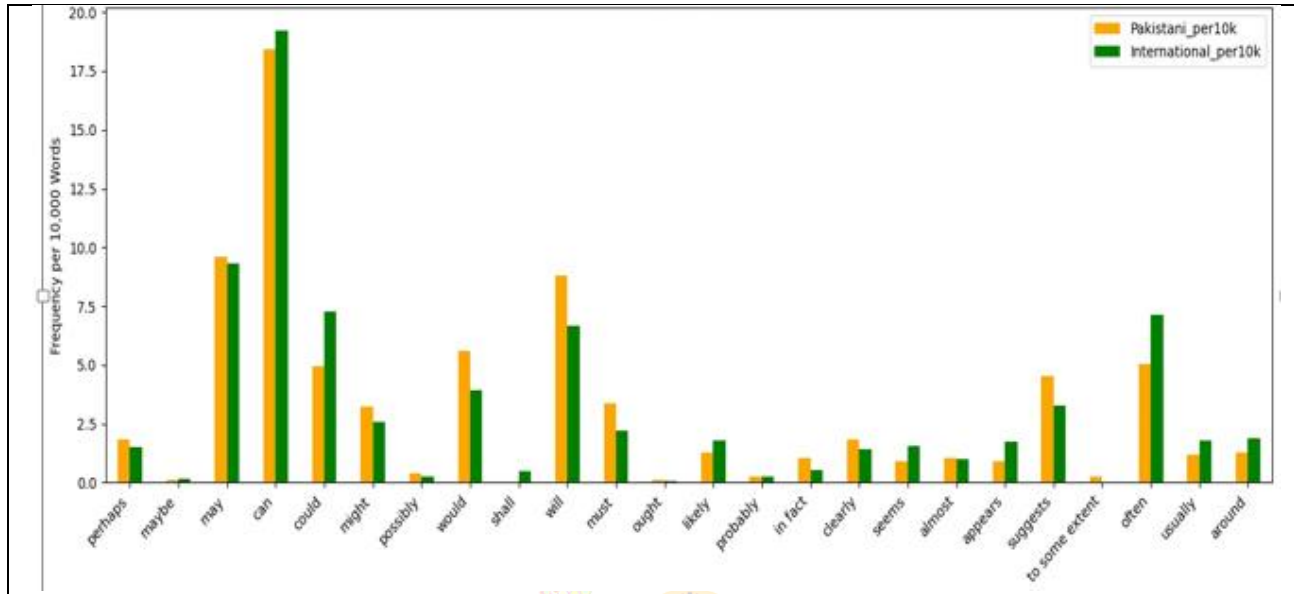
2. Boosters and Certainty Markers

Boosters—words that strengthen certainty—are also seen in research papers of both the journals’ academic writing. Expressions like “will,” “must,” and “likely” are used to declare the truth of propositions and show authorial confidence. While this can strengthen the author’s stance, it may also create a dint of stubbornness or lack of critical aloofness, particularly in disciplines or journals where uncertain claims are valued. Intercontinental writers, on the other hand, balance confidence with hedges such as “appears,” “seems,” “suggests,” “to some extent,” and “usually.” These assortments allow for a softer, more dialogic performance of findings, which is favored in many peer-reviewed academic backgrounds.

**Results and Findings**

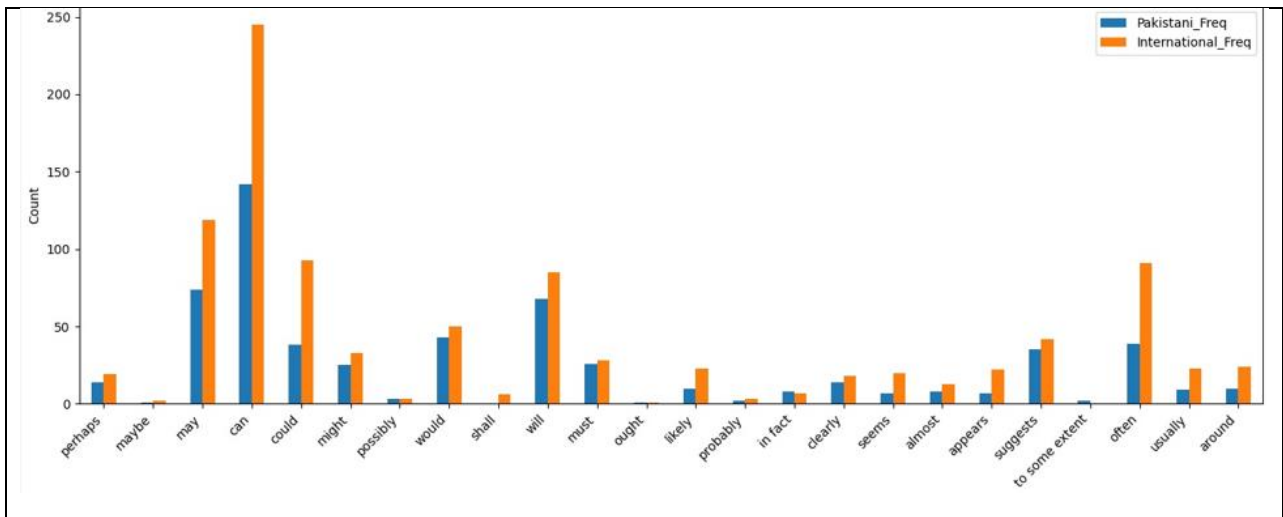
While doing comparative analysis of hedges' and boosters' frequency per 10,000 words, the researcher has found out that "can" is the most

common hedge in both datasets, and "may", "will" and "often" are also most common hedges used in both corpora (as shown in the chart).



If we do comparative analysis of hedges' and boosters' frequency in count, we can see that in International Corpora, hedges and boosters are more frequently used as compared to Pakistani corpora. "Can" is used more in international corpora with 245 frequency count, and used lesser in Pakistani corpora with 142 frequency count. Also there is a distinguishable difference in

frequency count of other hedges and booster like "may" and "will" in both corpora. "May" is used more in International corpora with 119 frequency count, and less in Pakistani Corpora with 74", frequency count. If the frequency count of "will" is 85 which is more in International corpora than Pakistani Corpora as it "68" Pakistani Corpora (as shown in the chart).



The table below gives a comparison of hedges' and booster's raw frequency and normalized frequency per 10,000.

Hedges/Boosters	Pakistani_Freq	International_Freq	Pakistani_per10k	International_per10k
perhaps	14	19	1.816578	1.490266
maybe	1	2	0.129756	0.15687
may	74	119	9.60191	9.333773
Can	142	245	18.42529	19.21659
could	38	93	4.930711	7.294461
might	25	33	3.243889	2.588357
possibly	3	3	0.389267	0.235305
would	43	50	5.579488	3.921753
shall	0	6	0	0.47061
Will	68	85	8.823377	6.66698
Must	26	28	3.373644	2.196182
ought	1	1	0.129756	0.078435
Likely	10	23	1.297555	1.804006
probably	2	3	0.259511	0.235305
in fact	8	7	1.038044	0.549045
clearly	14	18	1.816578	1.411831
seems	7	20	0.908289	1.568701
almost	8	13	1.038044	1.019656
appears	7	22	0.908289	1.725571
suggests	35	42	4.541444	3.294273
to some extent	2	0	0.259511	0
Often	39	91	5.060466	7.137591
Usually	9	23	1.1678	1.804006
Around	10	24	1.297555	1.882442

High-Frequency Hedges in both corpora are "can" and "may", "will", "often" and "could" whose frequency is slightly higher in the International corpus. In distinctive Pattern, "shall" appears only in the International corpus, suggesting a stylistic or regional preference, while "to some extent" is only found in the Pakistani corpus, though at a low frequency. Hedges like "could," "might," "appears," "seems" show uncertainty and tentativeness, which are in higher frequency in the International corpus. On the other hand, certainty and emphasis hedges like "in fact," "clearly" are higher in the Pakistani corpus. The differences in hedges show stylistic variation and reflects cultural, educational, or disciplinary norms in academic writing.

Socio-Cultural and Ideological Underpinnings

The observed outlines are not only verbal but are deeply ingrained in academic culture and ideology. International authors' confident use of boosters and strong modals mirrors local enlightening norms, where expertise and certainty are often related with scholarly competence. This may also stem from a craving to establish reliability in a context where English is a second or foreign language like Pakistan, because less use of hedges and boosters in Pakistani Corpora depicts where academic lettering is shaped by both local and global outlooks. International writers' preference for nuanced hedging aligns with Western academic traditions that value critical engagement, directness to alternative interpretations, and greeting of research limitations. This stance is not only a rhetorical choice but also an image of formal norms that reward epistemological

meeckness and dialogic reading, which is found less in Pakistani Academic writing.

**Power Dynamics and Academic Gatekeeping**

Less use of boosters and strong modals in Pakistani writing may unintentionally delay its acceptance in worldwide forums, where extreme certainty can be seen as over-claiming or missing critical steadiness. On the contrary, the nuanced hedging in overseas writing is a stopping mechanism, showing compliance to the agreements of global academia and helping peer recognition. There are significant differences observed in academic writing and rhetorical style by comparing the use of hedges and boosters in Pakistani and international academic writing. It is evident that the use of modal verbs, especially "can," is found in both corpora, however, its frequency is slightly higher in foreign publications, representing a prevalent, extended but slightly more careful preference in international academic writing. Moreover, the Pakistani corpus validates a noteworthy use of modal verbs like "may", "will," and "can," which commonly carry a higher sense of declaration or obligation, demonstrating a firmer tone in Pakistani writing.

The results show that both groups depend on similar types of hedges, such as modal verbs like may, can, could, lexical verbs as appears, almost, seems, and adverbs like often, probably. The results indicate that adverbs of frequency and modal verbs as hedges and boosters are mostly used by either group, on the other hand, hedges and boosters like may be, ought, probably, and possibly are less frequently used in both groups. In comparison, Pakistani Academicians use fewer hedges due to cultural influences but could benefit from applying more nuanced hedging strategies to enhance their academic writing.

**Discussion**

These results suggest that Pakistani academic writers could take an advantage from explicit instruction in the tactical use of hedges and boosters. By accepting a more stable approach—declaring claims where necessary but also gesturing openness and restriction—Pakistani scholars can improve the influence and global reception of

their work. At the end Hyland's model and corpus-assisted CDA expose that while both Pakistani and worldwide writers use hedges, their rhetorical placement differs by a thunderous margin which affects their similarity. Pakistani study writing leans toward forcefulness and certainty, with everyday usage of strong modals and boosters, on the other hand intercontinental writing highlights caution, nuance, and dialogic engagement. These variances are formed by cultural, educational, and institutional factors, and have actual penalties for scholarly communication and publication success. Strategic hedging, as experienced in international academia, can help as a model for Pakistani writers aiming to intensify their global impact.

The findings recommend that Pakistani academic writers use hedging more frequently and with a little unlike circulation of hedge types compared to English scholars. This may be credited to differing academic agreements, cultural boldness towards authority, and potentials regarding the presentation of information. Hyland's model makes available a nuanced framework for considerate these alterations, while CDA contextualizes them within wide-ranging communal and institutional practices. Hyland's taxonomy distinguishes from content-oriented, writer-oriented and reader-oriented hedges, as well as boosters (certainty markers). By using this basis to the corpus, data reveals noticeable differences in rhetorical style and stance among Pakistani and global academic writing.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that although both groups employ similar types of hedging strategies but international and global writers hedge more frequently than Pakistani academicians as both a rhetorical and social practice. The results and findings indicate a greater use of hedges and boosters in international corpora and less frequent use of hedges and boosters in academic writing among non-native English writers, particularly in Pakistan, reflecting global academic customs of epistemic unpretentiousness and dialogic arrangement. Pakistani academic writers tend to

use hedges in a way that reflects their cultural and linguistic background, emphasizing commitment and persuasion. The study highlights cross-cultural differences of Pakistani and Native English Writers in academic writing and proposes that Pakistani writers may get benefit from greater awareness of hedging practices to improve their pragmatic competence and negotiation strategies. So, it is suggested that by applying more hedging strategies, Pakistani writers and academicians can increase their writing credibility and recognition in global academic settings, guaranteeing their research reverberates with international audiences and meeting the requirements of international journals.

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