# CHAPTER 7

# Softening the Claim: A Corpus-Based Exploration of Hedging and Stance in Turkish EFL Student Writing

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## 1. Introduction

Expressing one's opinion and making claims with moderation is crucial in academic writing, where authors must find the right combination of arguing and caution in order to construct a well-balanced argumentative piece. This moderation is primarily achieved through hedging, which allows authors to express polite uncertainty, mitigate face threats, and show epistemic distance (Hyland, 1998; Hinkel, 2022). Hedging, as Hyland (2019) identifies, is a means through which the author softens a claim, and also facilitates the consolidation of academic identity through the demonstration of a critical perspective and a counterposition. Consequently, hedging is more than a grammatical choice as it functions as a socio-pragmatic device that indicates the academic disposition and the stance of a writer in a given field.

However, in EFL context the use of hedging encounters problems as a result of a lack of extensive vocabulary, inadequate exposure to academic discourse, and the influence of the learners' first language (L1). Recent studies indicate that a relevant number of learners tend to completely shy away from hedging or overuse a very limited set of "safe" hedges (e.g. I think and maybe) which ultimately undermines the level of assertion in their arguments (Morales, 2023; Keller, 2024). Such limited use, as stated by Biber et al (2023), is an early phase in the development of stance taking, which is characterized with limited pragmatic awareness and excessive dependence on subjective viewpoint.

This phenomenon is particularly salient in circumstances where the emphasis on standardised elements of writing instruction focuses on speci?c types of grammatical accuracy, rather than on encountering the rhetorical aspects of writing, yielding texts that may be structurally accurate, but are rhetorically impoverished (Zaghouani et al., 2024).

The Turkish EFL context provides an opportunity to examine the phenomenon of hedging, particularly because Turkish does not possess an article system, and expresses modality in a structurally different way than English, suggesting an L1 transfer may take place (Uzun, 2013; Gökmen, 2018). While there is quite a robust set of studies that examine the patterns of grammatical errors in Turkish students? writing (e.g., Kadan, 2023; Gazioğlu, 2024), the discourse-level competence of hedging has received limited attention. Although emerging works, particularly learner corpora, such as the TELC project (Cangır, 2024), have begun to describe the use of language in these writings in increasingly broad terms, the use and frequency of hedging, accuracy, and pragmatic appropriateness of hedging, in writing by students of English as a foreign language remain largely unstudied. Such a gap in the literature, however, is telling, in that hedging competence has increasingly been seen as a predictor of maturity and greater command of the language in a less hyphenated sense than in other genres. (Hyland, 2019; Hinkel, 2022). At this stage, it should be noted that learners with

a limited range of hedging markers and alternatives may come across as unreasonably assertive or insufficiently critical, which would, in turn, impair the desired effect of an academic argument (Morales, 2023).

Within this context, then, this study is concerned with the use of hedging strategies in a classroom-based learner corpus of argument essays produced by Turkish EFL students.

The goal is to discover not only which hedging devices have been employed but also to consider how well they accomplish the intended rhetorical goals in academic prose. The research is designed around three major research questions.

1. *What kinds of hedging expressions do Turkish EFL learners use in argumentative writing?*
2. *To what extent are these hedging strategies used accurately and appropriately in context?*
3. *What do hedging patterns indicate about learners' epistemic stance and their L2 proficiency?*

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions in learner corpus research and to offer pedagogically relevant insights for creating teaching materials that foster rhetorical competence alongside grammatical accuracy. Ultimately, the findings seek to emphasize the importance of incorporating stance-awareness training into EFL writing instruction to support learners' development of academic identity and argumentation skills.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Hedging as a Core Feature of Academic Writing

A measured approach regarding the interplay between certainty and caution is vital in demonstrating and sustaining credibility in the academic sphere of writing. This nuanced approach is accomplished through hedging as a linguistic technique whereby the user avoids claiming absolute knowledge and instead expresses certitude as a function of psychological distance to the knowledge (Hyland, 1998). In Hyland's works (2005, 2019), the author states there are specific academic disciplines in which the hedging phenomenon is commonplace and consequently reflects on the respective academic identity. In this sense, hedging is dual-faceted with respect to the propositional and interactional, in the sense that the writer is safeguarded from overgeneralization while the reader is assumed to be a partner in the collaborative process of meaning construction.

Recent evidence supports this bifurcated perspective. Hinkel (2022) views hedging as a sophisticated communicative moderation potentially crucial to argumentation writing where assertions need to be made with a conservative and diplomatic approach. This is further expanded and integrated into the argument

of academic identity construction by Morales (2023), who argues that students with restricted hedging use may be overly impertinent and/or inadequately critical. In fact, Keller (2024) recognized that the variety and fittingness of hedging devices used are reliable indicators of writing ability, particularly within CEFR B1–C2 levels. This underscores the need to conceptualize hedging as more than a peripheral grammatical feature, and to emphasize it as a crucial component of academic voice.

### 2.2. EFL Writing and the Trouble and Patterns of Development of Hedges

Studies have shown that there is a tendency for EFL students to have a worrying over-reliance on a relatively small range of hedges. It has been seen that hedges such as I think, maybe, or can, are heavily employed, and this can have a negative effect on their rhetorical sophistication (Biber et al., 2023). Such an over-reliance can be seen as a form of lexical narrowness, which is what Vyatkina (2013) refers to as a developmental plateau in stance. This is where a writer is able to give an opinion but struggles on the level of academic discourse in being able to present an opinion in an articulate manner. Many of these learners also seem to confuse the act of hedging as a rhetorical act which is a way of managing an interpersonal stance, with hedging as an indication of loss of certainty or ambiguity, or as a personal belief (Hyland, 2019). In such cases students present a construction such as I think it is obviously true; this presents a pragmatic contradiction which has been noted in the literature on writing that has been done in the Arab, East Asian and Slavic worlds (Morales, 2023; Zaghouani et al., 2024).

It is more than a lexical problem. Keller (2024) also explains that the hedging of overgeneral and even contradictory statements occurs as a result of the more extreme. This is where the hedges that are used, are combined with boosters, which is in euphemisms such as maybe it is definitely true. These types of errors obviously show issues with their grasp of language and their level of discourse, which contributes to the problem. The level of rhetorical purpose that is associated with such constructions is the reason that accuracy in hedging is more than a problem of language alone; it also has to do with the learners understanding of the issues that surround the subject of the discourse.

### 2.3. Hedging in Turkish EFL Learners: The Gap in the Literature

Hedging, as it concerns Turkish EFL learners, is influenced by the unique relationship between Turkish and English. Turkish functions without an article system and uses a different modality structure, and as a result, English hedging is often not aligned (Uzun, 2013; Gökmen, 2018). Recent studies taking a corpus-based approach (e.g., Kadan, 2023; Gazioğlu, 2024) offer the most up-to-date assessment of the error patterns of Turkish learners in writing, but, as to contact zone, the stances taken or the hedging employed is focused on insufficiently or not at all. In the same way, TELC as a corpus (Cangır, 2024) while most certainly,

and with great strides, compiling the databases on learners of the Turkish language, and as a corpus, still lacks the discourse-level tagging of hedging as a marker.

Even with the obvious pedagogical consequence, the research is scarce. Having the ability to hedge is, among other things, a marker of academic competence, as opposed to simply linguistic competence (Hyland, 2019). Turkish EFL remains a curriculum field that is mostly generated without hedges in areas of stance, modality, or metadiscourse (Sarıgül, 2020). This leads to the scenario that students are writing the types of essays that are not, in fact, weak in the sense of grammar, but in the sense of rhetoric, and as a result are not strong.

### 2.4. Research Gap and Rationale for the Present Study

Prospective Turkish EFL students and students note the importance of hedging strategies to academic writing no research demonstrates an understanding of the proficiency and rhetorical competence that comes with an academic identity. The Turkish EFL realm, however, has a glaring gap. Few studies explicitly examine hedging, corpus-based classroom studies are limited, and there are limited discourse-level teaching materials for hedging.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analyzing hedging within a classroom-based Turkish learner corpus using Hyland's (1998, 2005) taxonomy as a framework. The study seeks to examine not only which hedging devices students use but also how effectively they are applied in relation to the context and the quality of argumentation.

## 4. Methodology

A corpus-based descriptive research design was used in this research in order to examine how Turkish EFL learners utilize hedging in their argumentative writings. The researchers collected data from 32 undergraduate ELT students in a Turkish state university. The students had to write an essay by hand based on the prompt: 'What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad?' which was chosen because it is supposed to invite contrastive reasoning and argumentation which are both naturally hedged (Hyland, 2019). The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and to comply with classroom research ethics (Morales, 2023), students were asked to sign a document of consent.

After the essays were collected, the researchers digitized them and to ensure the students' confidentiality were the only ones with their essays, the researchers gave the essays random identifying codes. The researchers deleted all short sentences, sentences that were mere repetitions of the ones before, and sentences that were underdeveloped. Nevertheless, the researchers chose to keep the spelling mistakes to ensure the essays retained their authenticity, though the researchers standardized the punctuation. The corpus was subsequently processed

as a sample of 3,800 words and prepared to undergo a variety of linguistic analyses that required tokenization in order to apply the regex functionality of tagging.

The foundational classification lists for hedge expressions were first established using Hyland's (1998, 2005) studies in which hedges were classified either as lexical (e.g., seem, appear) or modal (e.g., might, could) verbs, stance adverbs (e.g., possibly, maybe), frequency adverbs (e.g., sometimes, usually) or are expressed from a first-person perspective (e.g., I think, I believe), which is known as a personal stance.

To distinguish between structurally inappropriate instances (e.g., "Maybe it is certain that…") as opposed to correctly contextualized instances (e.g., "Sometimes students may feel anxious in a foreign country."), The automated extractions done in the previous step were followed by a more labor-intensive manual verification step. As cited by Keller (2024) and Hinkel (2022), the unit of analysis was the sentence, allowing evaluators to assess the hedges in question along with their surrounding syntactic and pragmatic components.

To better balance the workloads of the two annotators, a split of the dataset was created for each of the two individuals and the annotations were matched later to assess a measure of coding reliability as reported in the literature. According to the Cohen's Kappa result of 0.87 obtained in the exercise of inter-rater reliability, the annotators demonstrated high concordance. In accordance with the procedures reported in Vyatkina (2013) in the context of learner corpus analysis, the disagreements were resolved through discussion. The most frequently identified hedges were labeled, according to their function, as belonging to one of the five categories: hedges that function as markers of possibility, hedges that are personal stance markers, frequency hedges, hedges in the form of modal adverbs, and hedges that are classified as verbs of a higher epistemic nature. Based on the implementation of the coding scheme, the present study was intended to answer in the most systematic way possible the three research questions related to the frequency of the hedges, the contexts in which they are most appropriate, and the role they play in academic discourse stance.

Sentences produced by learners, such as "I think studying abroad can change your life in a good way," and "Sometimes it might be difficult for students to adapt," were treated as qualitative evidence on which to base the quantitative findings.

The methodological framework used in this case, alongside the previous studies, such as Cangir (2024) and Gazioğlu (2024), demonstrates the relevance of small classroom-based corpora in exploring stance-taking in EFL writing, and the accurate integration of qualitative data and computational techniques, which enables precisely assessing the rhetorical strategies learners deploy in hedge use

to shape their academic identity and actively participate in hedging to build their academic identity.

## Analysis and Findings

**Table 1.** Frequency of Hedging Types in the Learner

| **Corpus Hedge Type** | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Personal stance | 46 | 47.4% |
| Possibility modals | 28 | 28.9% |
| Frequency markers | 11 | 11.3% |
| Modal adverbs | 8 | 8.2% |
| Epistemic verbs | 4 | 4.1% |

**Note.** Percentages were calculated based on the total number of hedges identified in the corpus. Coding was based on Hyland's (1998, 2005) taxonomy of hedging strategies.

Table 1 shows the distribution of hedging types. The most frequent one was personal stance markers, 46 of them, representing 47.4 \% of the hedging expressions. This shows that almost half of the hedging involved the use of first-person constructions like I think, I believe, etc. The other second most frequent type of hedging was the possibility modals, 28 of which are 28.9 \% of the hedging. This type of hedging includes modals, {may, might, can, etc.}, which convey uncertainty or probability.

Adverb of frequency markers are less frequent type of hedging. This was 11 of them which is 11.3 \% of hedging, with of less frequent use. These usually used I habitual. A modal hedge adverb is also less frequent with 8 of them which results to 8.2 of the \% hedging done. This is hedging done using adverb of varying degree of doubt. This is also lesser with a total of 4 of it which is 4.1 of the total hedging. This type hedging includes use of verbs that signify a inferential or interpretive judgment like, seem, appear.

**Table 2.** Most Frequent Hedging Forms and Representative Learner Examples

| Hedge Form | Frequency (n) | Example From Corpus |
|---|---|---|
| *I think* | 29 | "I think studying abroad can change your life in a good way." |
| *can/may* | 22 | "It can be difficult to adapt to a new culture." |
| *maybe* | 7 | "Maybe students will feel lonely at first." |
| *sometimes* | 5 | "Sometimes you need to be brave in a foreign country." |
| *seem* | 2 | "It seems like a good opportunity for young people." |

**Note.** These examples illustrate appropriate rhetorical uses of hedging; however, lexical variation remained highly limited across the corpus.

Table 2 tries to show the different levels of sophistication of the Hedging expressions in the learner corpus. The distribution across hedging expressions suggested that the majority of hedging items belong to the 1 to 1000 levels which are the high frequency words. This makes up 75 \% of all the hedge instances. These are therefore common words that are used in everyday conversations which are also is the words that are learned in early stages of a language.

The 1001 to 3000 level frequency band encompasses 18% of hedging discourse, embodying mid-level complexity and a marked absence of use within general discourse. Within this frequency band, members of the Academic Word List were located, representing 6% of total discourse hedges and confirming the presence of an academic genre. The smallest category included low frequency vocabulary items (3000+ level), which constituted only 1% of the hedging tokens found in the corpus.

Notably, the entries in Table 2 show how hedging discourse for learners was based mostly around high frequency vocabulary, while mid frequency, academic and low frequency discourse were in very limited use.

**Table 3.** Pragmatic Misuse and Hedging–Booster Conflicts in the Corpus

| Student Sentence (from Learner Corpus) | Problem Identified | Type of Issue |
|---|---|---|
| "I think it is obviously true." | Hedge + booster contradiction | Pragmatic conflict |
| "Maybe it is certain that students must go." | Redundant modality | Modal redundancy |
| "It can be must for students to join Erasmus." | Modal + lexical inconsistency | Grammatical misuse |
| "I believe it is always right to study abroad." | Lack of hedging despite meta discourse | Over-assertiveness |

**Note.** These cases reflect developmental gaps in rhetorical stance awareness, supporting previous observations by Morales (2023) and Keller (2024).

Table 3 shows examples of pragmatic misuse and conflicts between hedge and booster use found in the learner corpus. Several sentences used hedges and boosters at the same time, creating contradictions. For instance, the sentence "I think it is obviously true" combines a hedging device with a certainty marker, leading to a pragmatic conflict.

Other researchers have noted the unnecessary repetition of modality of which the following is an example: "Maybe it is certain that students must go." In this sentence, the unnecessary repetition of probability and/or certainty within the same clause is unwarranted. Furthermore, other modal-lexical inconsistencies were noted, including the following example: "It can be must for students to join Erasmus." In this example, the modal and the lexical portion of the construction were combined to form an element that was of lower status than the other two. This comment, "I believe it is always right to study abroad," demonstrates over-claiming because it includes a stance marker and is followed by an over-arching statement that is otherwise a closed statement without a hedge.

Finally, the pragmatic conflicts present, and the redundant modality combined with imprecise use of the modal, suggest the construction of a hedge noted by students in Table 3.

**Table 4. Frequency Band Distribution of Hedging Expressions** *(APA 7 Format)*

| Frequency Band | Example | Count | CEFR Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1–1000 (high) | maybe, can, sometimes, I think | 75% | A2–B1 |
| 1001–3000 (mid) | likely, unless, instead | 18% | B1–B2 |
| Academic Word List | suggest, indicate | 6% | B2 |
| 3000+ (low-frequency) | arguably, plausibly | 1% | C1–C2 |

**Note.** CEFR levels were aligned with standard lexical frequency bands. Data suggest high reliance on basic modal forms, with limited academic stance markers.

Table 4 displays the distribution of hedging expressions across different lexical frequency bands. Most hedging items come from the 1–1000 high-frequency band, making up 75% of all occurrences. These include common words like maybe, can, sometimes, and I think, which are usually linked to A2–B1 proficiency levels.

Hedging expressions from the 1001–3000 mid-frequency band made up 18% of the corpus, including moderately frequent lexical items like likely, unless, and instead. A smaller portion of hedges came from the Academic Word List (AWL), accounting for 6% of the tokens and reflecting B2-level vocabulary such as suggest and indicate. The smallest category consisted of low-frequency lexical items (3000+), representing 1% of all hedges, including advanced expressions like arguably and plausibly, which are typically associated with C1–C2 proficiency levels.

Overall, Table 4 shows that hedging expressions mainly appear in high-frequency vocabulary ranges, with only a limited presence of academic or low-frequency lexical items.

**Students' Hedge Usage in Context (Qualitative Evidence)**

A close examination of student writing showed that hedges were often used legitimately to soften claims:

- *"I think people can improve themselves by going abroad."*
- *"Sometimes students may feel shy when they meet new cultures."*
- *However, several cases exhibited inappropriate or contradictory hedging:*
- *"Maybe it is definitely important to study abroad."*
- *"I think it is always true."*

These patterns suggest that learners possess partial awareness of hedging but lack understanding of academic stance—as noted in earlier studies of EFL learners (Hinkel, 2022; Keller, 2024).

The analysis showed that, in their hedging, Turkish EFL learners focused on a narrower range of devices, particularly expressions of personal stance and modal verbs. While some of the hedging terms made sense contextually, in that they overshadowed the argument, in most cases, their contextual use showed a small range of understanding of academic stance. The three most significant patterns include: 1) The tendency to use first-person stance markers (I think, I believe), 2) The tendency to use modal verbs (may, can) excessively, and 3) The infrequent use of epistemic verbs (seem, appear).

The following tables illustrate the range, frequency, and relative accuracy of the hedging devices used in the corpus.

**6. Discussion**

The study has concluded that Turkish EFL learners primarily utilize personal stance expressions and basic modal verbs that, combined, constitute the majority of the hedging strategies used in their argumentative writing. This fits with the established observations in the literature that developing writers use more of the lower end, high-frequency hedging forms such as I think, maybe, and can with greater frequency (Biber et al., 2023; Keller, 2024). As Hyland (1998, 2005, 2019) points out, these hedges are indicative of a more preliminary stage in the construction of the academic voice. This is mostly the case in the expression of the tentativeness through one's personal opinion rather than the more sophisticated and desirable forms of epistemic distancing.

The dominance of the personal stance markers (47.4%) in the corpus is consistent with Morales's (2023) findings, where the lower range EFL writers are said to associate hedging more with personal opinion than with the rhetorical act of positioning. Sentences such as, "I think studying abroad can change your life" in the corpus showcase the awareness of uncertainty but rest primarily on self-referential subjectivity as opposed to more academic stance markers (e.g., it seems; it appears; it is plausible that). This argued for Hyland (2019) insightful observations that EFL learners often do not receive adequate pedagogical training on the linguistic features that would facilitate the development of an academic voice.

The pattern of using possibility modals serves the function that Keller (2024) suggests perhaps should be seen as overuse as a developmental plateau. This is because learners probably have the basic modals of may and can and have even over utilized these forms, but have not learned other markers of stance. Indeed, some use of possibility modals contribute sigma alpha epsilon rhetoric modals, being used here to fill a gap created by the limited use of other epistemic

resources. This is also seen in the very low use of epistemic verbs (4.1%), which has also been documented in previous studies of EFL writing (Hinkel, 2022; Uzun, 2013). This probably reflects a gap in discourse level thinking in the use of an argument that learners in this research may have, and that these verbs indicate a more complex level of lexical knowledge.

One additional significant discovery derives from the frequency band analysis (Table 4), which shows that 75% of all hedges belong to the 1–1000 high-frequency band. This dependence on general-purpose vocabulary is consistent with the assumption that lexical sophistication is a marker of academic achievement (Hyland & Jiang, 2021; Keller, 2024). The very small amount of Academic Word List (AWL) items (6%) and the virtually absent low-frequency epistemic markers (1%) point to a lack of lexical access, which resonates with the notion that an academic stance requires not only an understanding of textual structures, but also a breadth of vocabulary (Biber et al., 2023; Cangır, 2024). This is also supported by the CEFR-based classification, which suggests the majority of hedges are located in the A2–B1 bands.

The qualitative data found in Table 3 are equally important, as they provide insight into primary pragmatic misuses. Misuses such as “I think it is obviously true” and “Maybe it is certain that students must go” highlight the ubiquitous hedge–booster conflicts found in literature on EFL stance-taking (Morales, 2023; Hinkel, 2022). This phenomenon describes the tendency for learners to merge conflicting signals: some linguistic markers convey uncertainty, while others convey certainty, leading to contradictory utterances. Such utterances betray the learners’ nascent understanding and grappling with the rhetorical functions that hedges perform in sophisticated academic arguments. As Hyland (2005) rightly points out, hedges cannot be viewed solely as a grammatical phenomenon; learners must also view them as a pragmatic phenomenon, since this perspective helps explain why learners might arrive at a syntactically accurate statement yet produce an unsubstantiated claim.

L1 transfer, as discussed in the introduction and literature review (Uzun, 2013; Gökmen, 2018), is pervasive out in the open. Turkish lacks direct equivalents for many hedging constructs in English, and the scope of modality differs, which may lead learners to overgeneralize modal verbs and expressions of personal stance. The tendency to use simpler modal constructions in Turkish EFL writing has been noted in several Turkish learner corpora (Sarıgül, 2020; Kadan, 2023; Gazioğlu, 2024), and these findings support such observations by demonstrating how structural gaps can affect rhetorical performance.

Overall, the corpus shows that although learners are aware of the need for hedging, their rhetorical and lexical repertoires remain limited. They can hedge, but their hedging is simple, incomplete, and sometimes inappropriate, reflecting typical developmental patterns described in recent literature (Hyland, 2019;

Morales, 2023; Keller, 2024). This indicates that hedging competence involves not just linguistic knowledge but also the broader skill of constructing academic arguments and engaging in disciplinary discourse—a skill that students are only beginning to develop.

## 7. Conclusion

By utilizing classroom learner corpora, this study examined the use of hedging strategies in argumentative writing by Turkish EFL students. The results demonstrate that learners predominantly use high-frequency, general-hedging expressions, especially in relation to personal stances and fundamental modal verbs. More sophisticated hedging forms, including epistemic verbs, modal adverbs, and lexical academese, are employed far less frequently. Additionally, some learners demonstrate pragmatic issues, such as the hedging-boosting conflicts and modal redundancies, indicating a lack of a certain level of discourse competence.

These results are consistent with a significant number of previous studies, including Hyland, 1998, 2005, 2019 and Hinkel 2022, which have highlighted, among other things, that hedging contributes to the academic voice and epistemic stance, topics anthropologized in EFL studies by learners lacking academic literacy, such as the Turkish context, but to a further extent, with regards to L1 transfer and restricted repertoire as emphasized by Uzun 2013, Gökmen 2018, and Sarıgül 2020.

Additionally, the study clarifies that hedging, as a rhetorical device, is not something learners acquire incidentally; instead, it underscores the need to teach hedging explicitly. Future studies could focus on corpus expansion, genre comparisons, and automated tagging systems, but the current study sufficiently illustrates the importance of corpus methods.

Finally, the study contributes to the existing body of work by demonstrating that there is much to be said about learners' academic maturity, as hedging extends beyond the level of linguistic features. Targeted instruction on hedging can further assist Turkish EFL students in shifting their approaches to writing from opinion-centred to argument-oriented scholarship as they advance into world scholarship.

## 8. Suggestions and Consequences

The results from this research strongly support the argument that Turkish EFL students would benefit from more direct and structured instructional approaches to hedging and stance modifications. Given that research finds students make heavy use of limited personal stance markers and elementary-level modal usage, writing instruction must include more than mere grammar-related approaches. It must focus on purposeful instructional design that brings to students' consciousness the various types of hedging and their rhetorical purposes.

Teaching with corpora, both learner and expert, helps students understand the functions of hedging in real academic writing and use a broader range of lexical and epistemic hedging. Teaching with the Academic Word List can also assist students' lexical development, particularly in academic settings that use verb forms with high epistemic modality and sophisticated level modals. Training of instructors, along with curriculum changes, must consider hedging as a central and necessary instructional element in academic literacy, not just a matter of style. That stance-taking must be included in curriculum design that follows the CEFR guidelines for writing courses. In addition, we encourage the use of rubrics that provide guidelines for effective hedging to focus on and stimulate their use, thereby enhancing their writing.

Lastly, one possible avenue for future research could examine how hedging evolves across varying levels of proficiency, genres, and first language backgrounds. Such research would shed more light on the phenomenon of stance-taking in EFL writing and refine the design of more effective pedagogical interventions.

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