A corpus-based comparison of use of hedges and boosters by Turkish ELT MA and PhD students

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Abstract

In the path of academic writing, authors accomplish certain interactions with their readers through the means of meta-discourse markers such as hedges and boosters. There have been many studies that dwell on the function of meta-discourse markers (Abdi, Rizi, & Tavakoli, 2010; Crismore, 1984; Hyland, 1999, 2000, 2001; Longo, 1994). However, the ones that focus solely on hedges and boosters and comparison of the level of students such as MA versus PhD in a specific field of study are not as many. Therefore, the present corpus-based study investigates the possible reasons for changes of frequencies of hedges and boosters from MA to PhD level Turkish EFL students who proceed on their academic journey in the field of English Language Teaching. The discussion parts of ten MA theses and ten PhD dissertations were selected, written by the same students to be able to compare the possible improvements between levels. The texts were analyzed with the concordance program AntConc 3.5.7.0. The investigation revealed that the frequency of the occurrences of boosters was higher in PhD than in MA level, whereas the students used more hedges in their MA theses than in PhD dissertations. These findings may imply an increase in students' self-confidence while conveying ideas and discussing their findings from MA to PhD level, based on a broader academic experience and expertise having been gained in time by PhD students, as well as a certain degree of unawareness by both levels of students as to the use of meta-discourse markers and academic writing styles.

Keywords: meta-discourse markers; hedges; boosters; academic writing; ELT

1. Introduction

Academic discourse and academic writing skills have been of crucial importance in all disciplines and fields of study due to its necessary presence in academic genres such as textbooks, research articles, essays, lectures, theses, etc. The centrality of academic discourse has its roots in factors ranging from the desire to be a successful student to meeting the requirements of carrying out an influential research and publishing it. In the arduous path of academic writing, authors accomplish certain interactions with

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readers, which appear as meta-discourse, a term originally introduced by the linguist Zelig Harris (1959). In today's understanding of the concept, Hyland (2017) states that meta-discourse incorporates how we use language taking into consideration our interactions with readers depending on how we help them understand what we are saying in the best way possible. These interactions are actualized through the systems called stance and engagement (Hyland, 2005), the former of which is on the focus in the present study. Hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention are meta-discourse markers that can be categorized as the stance taken by the writer towards the text's content or towards the reader (Hyland, 2004), while engagement has a function of alignment where writers connect to their readers concerning the positions developed in the text (Hyland, 2005). Hedges and boosters, which are interpersonal meta-discourse markers, are the subject of this paper. They both reflect a writer's answer to the possible points of view that may be brought by the reader (Hyland, 2009). Correct usage of these meta-discourse markers may imply a sort of awareness of the writers regarding their own academic literacy and academic writing skills. Therefore, investigation of the use of various meta-discourse markers across cultures, disciplines, different text types or student profiles is important, since it may have implications on the level of the confidence or awareness writers have on their academic discourse knowledge or their ability to defend their claims in the most appropriate way possible. The present research aims to compare MA theses and PhD dissertations written by the same students in ELT departments in Turkey in terms of the frequency of using hedges and boosters, two of the interpersonal meta-discourse markers.

1.1. Literature review

It bears great importance for academic writers to be able to convey what they desire to allege or imply in their writing to the readers. This is clearly no straightforward, since authors are in a continuous process of shaping and reshaping their claims, imply their uncertainty in the most appropriate way possible and managing at the same time to support their convictions. This point is where hedges and boosters come into play, as do other meta-discourse markers, which are the two devices that constitute the focus of the current research.

To start with, there have been different ideas pertaining to the definition of hedges. One reason for this may be that all the linguistic items that express a type of mitigation or indecision have the potential to be counted as hedges (Beyer, 2015). Lakoff (1973) describes hedges as "words whose job is to make things fuzzy or less fuzzy" (p. 471). In his study, on the other hand, Hyland (1998a) accepts hedging devices as linguistic items that are used by the writer to show a lack of absolute commitment to the truth value of a proposition, or an unwillingness to reflect that commitment in a precise manner. This allows information given by the writer to be presented as an opinion instead of fact (Hyland, 1998a). Brown and Levinson (1987) viewed hedging as a sign of politeness. Writers may hedge their expressions in order to refrain from sounding rude and rigid due to the use of expressions of certainty. Hinkel (2002) provided detailed characteristics of hedging devices as being ways of easing writer's burden of expressing the absolute accuracy of a proposition, demonstrating uncertainness or hesitation, and showing courtesy and indirectness.

On the account of the fact that hedges have attracted linguists' attention for a while now, various classifications of hedges have been and can be drawn within the scope of epistemic modality (Schmied, 2009). Clemen (1997) also states that hedges depend on the context, thus one cannot easily classify them, which brings us to the assumption that there are no certain linguistic items attributable to hedges. However, in order to be able to analyze the corpora in this study based on certain criteria, Hyland's (2005) classification of hedges and booster, as shown in Table 1, was used for this research.

Boosters, the other meta-discourse marker tackled in the study, are linguistic means that give opportunity for writers to show certainty in what they state and demonstrate involvement with the topic (Hyland,

2005). Therefore, they emphasize certainty in the truth value of a claim put forth or a position taken by a writer. Instead of showing uncertainty, mitigation or tentativeness as hedges, Holmes (1982) argues that boosters show strong conviction for the writers' or speakers' statements and indicate their confidence about the persuasiveness of their writings or speeches. It is one of the most important and common issues that authors take into consideration while they proceed in their academic writing to convince their readers or audience of the truth value of their statements and the information that they give. According to Vázquez and Giner (2009), this occurs especially when the writers are about to introduce issues with new knowledge. They also state that "the propositional information contained in a statement must be put under the spotlight so that a particular statement sounds convincing to the audience" (Vázquez & Giner, 2009, p. 223). Boosters provide an opportunity in terms of ensuring this kind of persuasion. According to Trajkova (2015), their usage in graduate papers is important due to the fact that they show the students are ready to make strong and confidents claims, which allows them to seem more confident and well-informed to the readers.

Table 1. Hyland's (2005) classification of hedges and boosters

	HEDGES	**BOOSTERS**
Epistemic Modal Verbs	*May*	*Will*
	Might	*Must*
	Could	
	Would	
	Should	
Epistemic Lexical Verbs	*Suggest*	*Demonstrate*
	Assume	*Know*
	Believe	*Prove*
	Think	
	Guess	
	Estimate	
	Feel	
	Appear	
	Seem	
	Indicate	
	Imply	
Epistemic Adverbs	*Perhaps*	*Certainly*
	Possibly	*Obviously*
	Probably	*Clearly*
	Likely	*Undoubtedly*
Epistemic Adjectives	*Possible*	*Certain*
	Probable	*Obvious*
	Un/likely	*Clear*
Epistemic Nouns	*Assumption*	*The fact*
	Possibility	*Claim*
	Suggestion	

Both hedging and boosting in academic texts support writers in their epistemic stance taking. Both of the strategies help writers emphasize their attitude towards the statements and the readers (Hyland,

2009). In fact, not only are boosters responsible for providing persuasion of the reader, but hedges contribute to the persuasiveness of the writer, as well. Vázquez and Giner (2009) make an analogy between hedges/ boosters and sides of the same coin with regards to both of their contributions to the persuasiveness of the authors' claims.

A great number of studies have been carried out on the use of hedges and boosters in different kinds of genres with different comparison criteria. Some of them studied gender differences (Holmes, 1990; Serholt, 2012) based on their use of hedges and boosters, whereas others focused on the comparison of various academic disciplines by their use of meta-discourse markers (Rashidi & Alihosseini, 2012; Takimoto, 2015) and some were interested in differences in the use of hedges and boosters across cultures (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993).

In order to shed light on another factor that might be influential in the use of hedges and boosters, Hyland and Milton (1997) studied nativeness in relation to expressing certainty and doubt, comparing the writing styles in Chinese and British learners' exam papers written in English and concluded that expression of certainty was problematic for non-native students due to relying on a narrower range of devices. On the other hand, a more recent study by Akbas and Hardman (2018) found out that native speakers of English and Turkish speakers of English at postgraduate level writing in English displayed similar tendencies in that both groups sounded detached while claiming knowledge, as opposed to native speakers of Turkish writing in Turkish.

There have also been many studies that dwell on the function of meta-discourse markers (Abdi, Rizi, & Tavakoli, 2010; Crismore, 1984; Hyland, 1998b, 1999, 2000, 2001; Longo, 1994). However, the ones that focus solely on hedges and boosters and comparison of the level of students such as MA versus PhD in a specific field of study are not as many. Therefore, the present study aims to compare the discussion parts of English Language Teaching MA theses and PhD dissertations by the same Turkish EFL students in terms of using hedges and boosters.

1.2. Research questions

This corpus-based study aims to investigate the changes of frequencies of hedges and boosters from MA to PhD level students who proceed on their academic journey in the field of English Language Teaching, checking whether the same MA students changed their epistemic stance in thesis writing when they advanced to PhD level. In line with this purpose, the following research questions will be addressed and discussed in the study:

1. Are there any meaningful differences in the number of hedges and boosters between discussion sections of ELT MA theses and PHD dissertations which were written by the same author?

2. If there are differences in the number of hedges and boosters between discussion sections of ELT MA theses and PHD dissertations, what might the reasons be?

2. Method

This section presents methodological framework and research design followed by the researcher. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are adopted in the study. Frequency analyses of hedges and boosters found in the theses were conducted as quantitative method. Qualitative approach aimed to spot hedges and boosters in context and pinpoint their pragmatic usage, eliminating the non-epistemic occurrences.

2.1. Sample

Materials for the compilation of the corpus for the present analysis were ten selected PhD dissertations written in the English Language Teaching department between the years 2010 and 2018, as well as ten MA theses again written in English Language Teaching department, which date from 2006 to 2013. Selected theses were written in six different universities in Turkey.

The importance of the research hinges on the fact that the writers of ten PhD dissertations were the same EFL students who once wrote the MA theses used in this study. The main purpose of this is to be able to compare the possible changes in the use of hedging and boosting devices from MA to PhD level, analyzing the theses and dissertation of the same students. The data, which incorporate 20 theses and dissertations in total, were retrieved from the official website of Council of Higher Education, National Thesis Centre. It allows access to theses and dissertations written in Turkey whose authors gave full permission to access. Two corpora for MA and PhD levels were generated using only the discussion parts of 20 theses and dissertations. The reason for choosing the discussion part of a thesis as the main indicator of commitment and detachment in written communication is that it is generally the part where authors take their stances most obviously and their voice is supposed to be heard while interpreting the results of their study, linking those results critically to related literature and persuading their readers of the truth value of their assertions.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

Before the corpora were formed, each thesis from MA and PhD level was downloaded and analyzed separately, in terms of word counts and numbers of hedges and boosters used. Afterwards, two different corpora were constituted, the first of which was for MA level and the second was for PhD dissertations. They were taken and analyzed separately for the purpose of seeing the numbers for MA and PhD level and comparing the results later. The corpora were compiled by taking only the discussion sections of 20 theses and dissertations.

The texts were analyzed with the concordance program AntConc 3.5.7.0. The theses that were downloaded from National Thesis Centre were transformed into .txt files due to the fact that AntConc supports this format. The theses in the correct format were uploaded to the program. In the first place, detection of hedging and boosting occurrences were conducted manually in order to refrain from counting the non-epistemic uses of hedges and boosters. The criteria for specifying what exactly would be searched for in the corpus were determined using Hyland's (2005) classification of hedges and boosters. After in-context evaluation of hedging and boosting, word counts of discussion parts and numbers of instances of hedges and boosters were calculated separately for MA and PhD levels. The rate (per 1,000) of occurrences was also calculated. This was carried out thesis by thesis in order to take into account the individual differences and see the change of each writer's use of hedges and boosters from MA to PhD level. After this process, the frequencies of epistemic modal verbs (may, might etc.), epistemic lexical verbs (demonstrate, prove etc.), epistemic adverbs (certainly, obviously etc.), epistemic adjectives (possible, probable etc.) and epistemic nouns (assumption, possibility etc.) were analyzed to be made into tables and figures and discussed later in the next sections of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, results of the study are demonstrated in tables and discussed. First, an overall view of the distribution of hedges and boosters in the discussion parts of MA and PhD theses is represented, showing the word counts of discussion parts and instances of hedges and boosters for MA and PhD levels separately.

Table 2. Distribution of hedges in the discussion parts of MA and PHD Theses (per 1,000 words)

	MA			PHD		
	WORD COUNTS OF DISCUSSION PARTS	NUMBERS OF INSTANCES OF HEDGES	RATE (per 1,000 words)	WORD COUNTS OF DISCUSSION PARTS	NUMBERS OF INSTANCES OF HEDGES	RATE (per 1,000 words)
THESIS 1	1340	24	17.91	1095	6	5.48
THESIS 2	1125	13	11.56	2933	10	3.41
THESIS 3	1841	25	13.58	15764	187	11.86
THESIS 4	3606	37	20.00	3444	21	6.10
THESIS 5	689	8	11.61	2588	20	7.73
THESIS 6	2949	47	15.94	4152	43	10.36
THESIS 7	1503	9	5.99	9899	66	6.67
THESIS 8	1553	30	19.32	1670	9	5.9
THESIS 9	1453	14	9.64	7961	46	5.78
THESIS 10	2133	28	13.13	2545	16	6.29
TOTAL	18192	235	_12.92_	52051	424	_8.15_

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of words used in MA theses and PhD dissertations differ in that it is higher in PhD level. Besides, the rate of the frequency of using hedges declined from MA to PhD level, which means PhD students used less hedges in their dissertations. When checked also individually, most of the authors hedged less when in PhD level compared to the times they were MA students. This finding may produce several opposing inferences. On the one hand, toning down of assertions and being more cautious while ratifying what is put forth save a novice academician in the field from criticism, thus it seems more preferable by less experienced groups in the community. On the other hand, PhD students have been present and experienced more in the academic journey and they are expected to be more skilled in persuading their readers about the truth value of their assertions. Since hedging is a means in the way of conveying a writer's message thoroughly, as much as boosting is, a writer in PhD level would be expected to use them more, in comparison with a novice writer in the academic field.

Another MA and PhD comparison study in terms of the occurrences of hedging in Turkish context by Atmaca (2016) yielded contradicting results to hedging part of the present research, demonstrating that hedges used in PhDs were much more in number than in MA theses. However, contradiction with the results of the study by Atmaca (2016) might spring from the very focus of the present study, which is comparing the 10 PhDs with 10 MA theses that were written by the same authors instead of a random selection. This specification paves the way to detecting the improvement of each individual MA student in their process of academic acceptance, as well as the change in their perception of making claims. A reason that an individual student used more hedges when in MA level and reduced the number of the occurrences when in PhD level is that they may be of the opinion that they ought to support their points of view more strongly by making the stance they have taken towards a particular issue obvious and precise. They may be believing that displaying hesitation in speech is a kind of weakness and signs inability to defend themselves while communicating their findings in their theses or research articles.

At this point, linguistic knowledge of how and when to hedge falls short, since other socio-pragmatic factors come into play. The pragmatic competency is as important in using modality and mitigating claims (Kim & Lim, 2015). Algi (2012) suggests that teaching of meanings and functions of hedging devices in L1 and L2 might be beneficial in this regard.

Another possible reason of such a decline and PhD students using fewer hedging devices could be that students may not be fully aware of the necessity of using hedges and the importance of being tentative in asserting claims. However, not only strengthening claims but also being able to mitigate them show writers' willingness to present ideas and communicate with the readers. According to Hyland (1996), while presenting important claims and taking credit for them, scientists need to conform to the acceptable levels of willingness to debate, which can be enabled by hedging. Since hedging acts as a balancer of tone of a speech while putting forward or justifying a claim, it is important to make use of hedges correctly when necessary.

Table 3. Distribution of boosters in the discussion parts of MA and PHD Theses (per 1,000 words)

	MA			PHD		
	WORD COUNTS OF DISCUSSION PARTS	**NUMBERS OF INSTANCES OF BOOSTERS**	**RATE (per 1,000 words)**	**WORD COUNTS OF DISCUSSION PARTS**	**NUMBERS OF INSTANCES OF BOOSTERS**	**RATE (per 1,000 words)**
THESIS 1	1340	6	4.48	1095	5	4.57
THESIS 2	1125	6	5.33	2933	8	2.73
THESIS 3	1841	2	1.09	15764	84	5.33
THESIS 4	3606	9	2.50	3444	6	1.74
THESIS 5	689	0	0	2588	2	0.77
THESIS 6	2949	9	3.05	4152	4	0.96
THESIS 7	1503	1	0.67	9899	42	4.24
THESIS 8	1553	2	1.29	1670	9	5.39
THESIS 9	1453	1	0.69	7961	104	13.06
THESIS 10	2133	0	0	2545	3	1.18
TOTAL	18192	36	*1.98*	52051	267	*5.13*

When it comes to boosters, the rate of using meta-discourse markers inclined, which means PhD students used more boosters in their dissertations compared to the time when they were MA students. The reason for using more boosters could be an increase of self-confidence from MA to PhD level. Authors use boosters with a view to display their confidence in what they allege (Vázquez & Giner, 2009). PhD students are in the academic world for a longer period of time and they have experienced more challenges in general. They have been writing many pieces of academic work, getting published and receiving peer review. Therefore, they have a desire to support their findings and put forth their claims strongly. Accordingly, the fact that these students used less hedges when they were MA students may indicate that students feel less self-confident when in MA level. MA students may be refraining from using boosters in order not to sound assertive in their pieces of writing, thus toning down their speech.

Another result that could be drawn is that when evaluated within themselves, PhD students used more hedges than boosters in total. Although they favored commitment more than the times when they were in MA level, they still made use of much more hedging devices than boosting devices overall. This concurs with the results of the study carried out by Takimoto (2015), in which a corpus was formed with research articles from eight different disciplines and it was discovered that hedges exceeded boosters used by approximately 2 to 1.

Evaluating the results of the frequency analyses of hedges boosters together and allowing for the fact that the 10 MA students were the same as the 10 PhD students might be more enlightening. The two main findings that hedges were used more in MA level while boosters were utilized more in PhD level coincide with the results of a study carried out by Koutsantoni (2006), in which students were revealed to hedge more in their research articles than expert authors. Hedging more than writers with a higher level of status in the discourse community indicates that MA students are more hesitant to take responsibility for their assertions. According to Koutsantoni (2006), social forces are present behind the formation of genres, thus leading to the constitution of academic literacy and they determine the rhetorical strategies that writers adopt. Following a similar approach, boosting in PhD level more may be due to developing a certain kind of command over writing conventions through the years in academic discourse communities and a degree of confidence that comes along.

When Table 2 and Table 3 are evaluated together, another remark that can be derived for both MA and PhD levels is a lack of awareness of the importance of using devices that would enrich the way writers express themselves. The reason for this may be hidden in the fact that the emphasis put on the academic discourse and academic writing skills is not sufficient in higher educational settings. Kim and Lim (2015) suggest several procedures in order for L2 students to acquire a socio-pragmatic awareness as well as a linguistic knowledge on hedges, which include the introduction of different categories of hedges, followed by an exemplification of lexical signals that imply these categorizations and tasks such as contextualized role play activities equipped with authentic examples for the proper usage of hedging devices.

For a more detailed look into the use of the meta-discourse markers investigated in the study, figures are shown separately for hedges and boosters, giving place to the rates of usages of each separate hedging and boosting device.
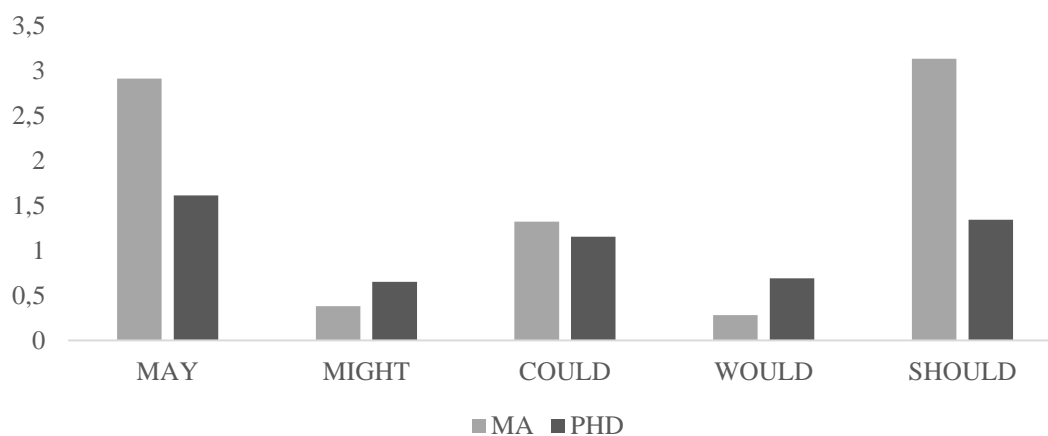
3.1. Hedges

Figure 1. Distribution of epistemic modal verbs (per 1,000 words)

Among epistemic modal verbs, the most frequently used one was *should* for MA level, whereas *may* was the most used modal verb by PhD level students. Results of the study carried out by Varttala (2001) also revealed that *may* was the most frequently utilized hedge as a modal auxiliary in a corpus constituted by research articles published in scholarly journals from various disciplines. When looked at the table overall, it can be seen that MA students used more epistemic modal verbs. Both groups of students preferred to use *might* and *would* the least for tentative probability.
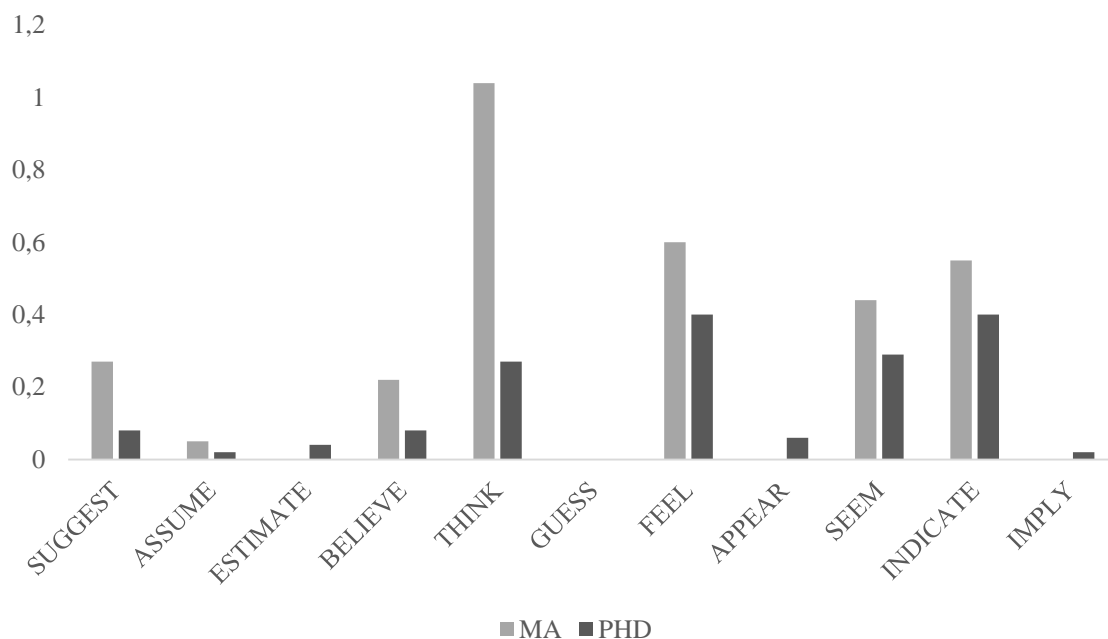
Figure 2. Distribution of epistemic lexical verbs (per 1,000)

As for epistemic lexical verbs, it is notable that *guess* was almost never used by either group, while *think* is mostly frequently used by MA students. On the other hand, *feel* and *indicate* are two verbs mostly used by PhD students. *Assume*, *estimate*, *appear* and *imply* were used very little by both levels of students. Still, they were used more by the PhD students.
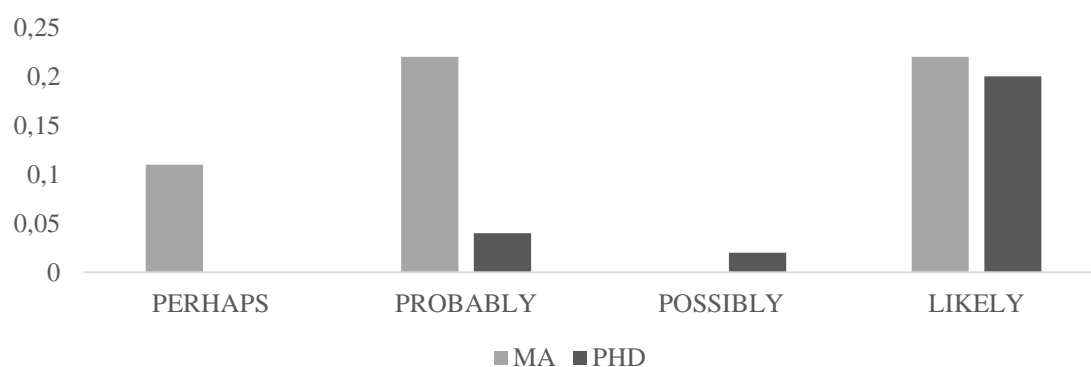

Figure 3. Distribution of epistemic adverbs (per 1,000 words)

While *perhaps* was almost never used by PhD students, *possibly* was not an instant among MA students. *Likely* was frequently used both by MA and PhD level students. Likewise, *probably* was used much among MA students.
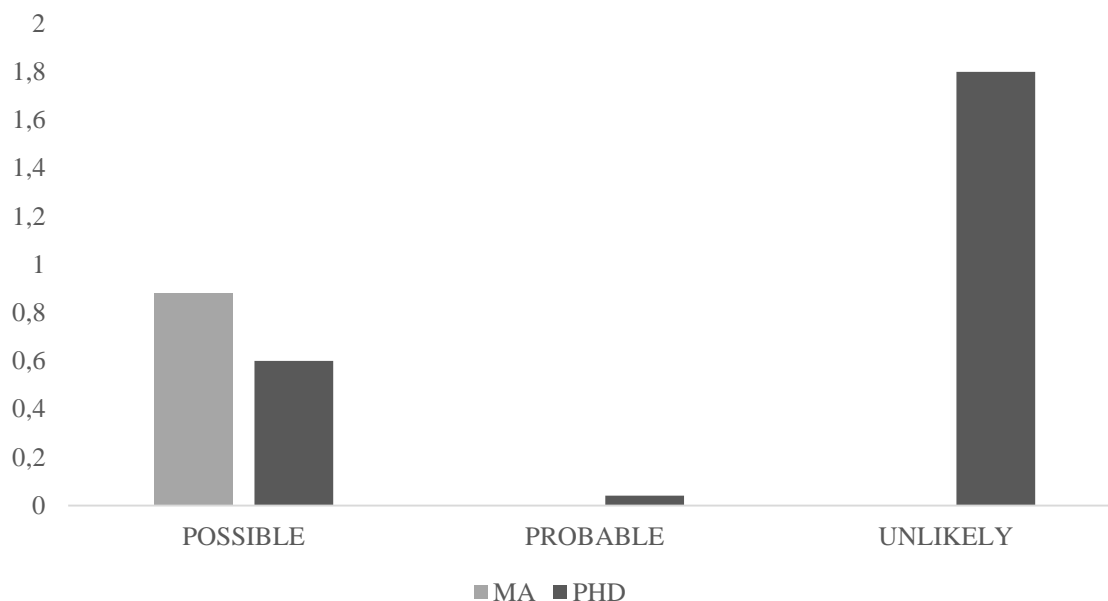

Figure 4. Distribution of epistemic adjectives (per 1,000 words)

Probable was almost never used by either group of students in their thesis, with a slight difference of PhD students. Likewise, there was no instance of *unlikely* for MA students, while it was used frequently by PhD students.
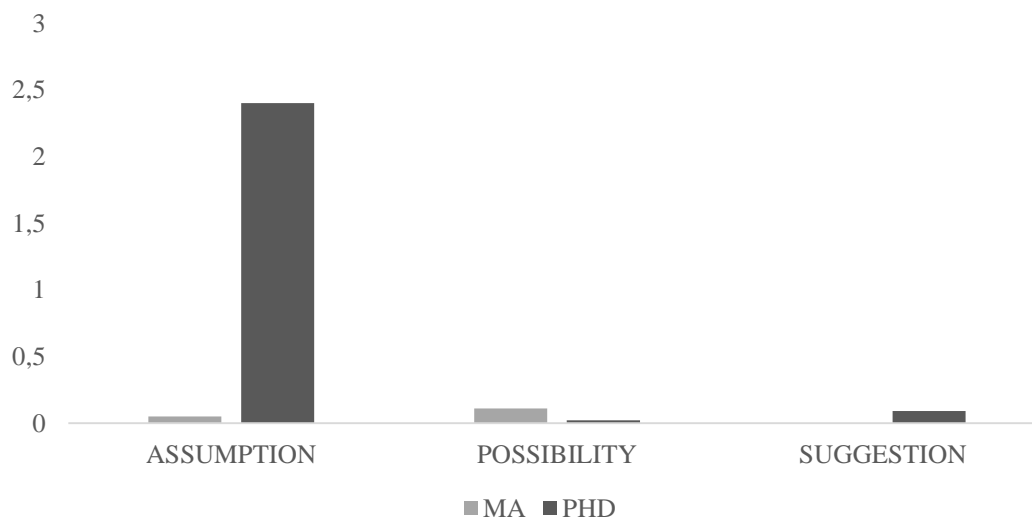

Figure 5. Distribution of epistemic nouns (per 1,000 words)

Epistemic noun group included the hedging devices that were least made use of by both MA and PhD level students, with the exception of *assumption*, which was used in remarkable amounts by PhD students.

As can be concluded, both MA and PhD students opted for using epistemic modal verbs much more than other types of hedges. This might be due to the fact that hedging can be actualized in the most straightforward way through the use of epistemic modality. The least frequently used type of hedging device was epistemic adverbs for both MA and PhD students.
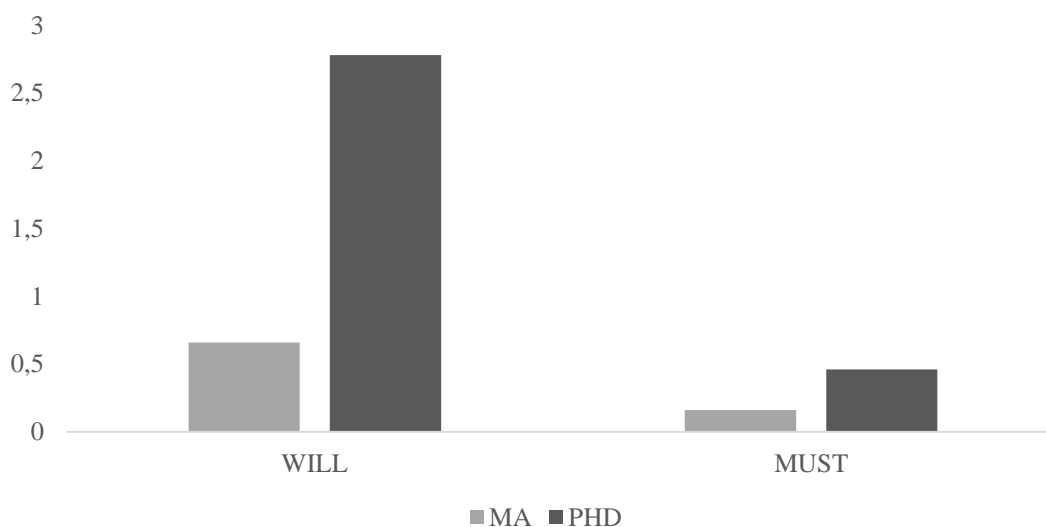
3.2. Boosters

Figure 6. Distribution of epistemic modal verbs (per 1,000 words)

When the epistemic modal verbs are checked overall, it can be seen that PhD level students used them more often. *Will* was more frequently used than *must* in general. It is also obvious from the figure that *will* was used a lot more by PhD students than MA students.
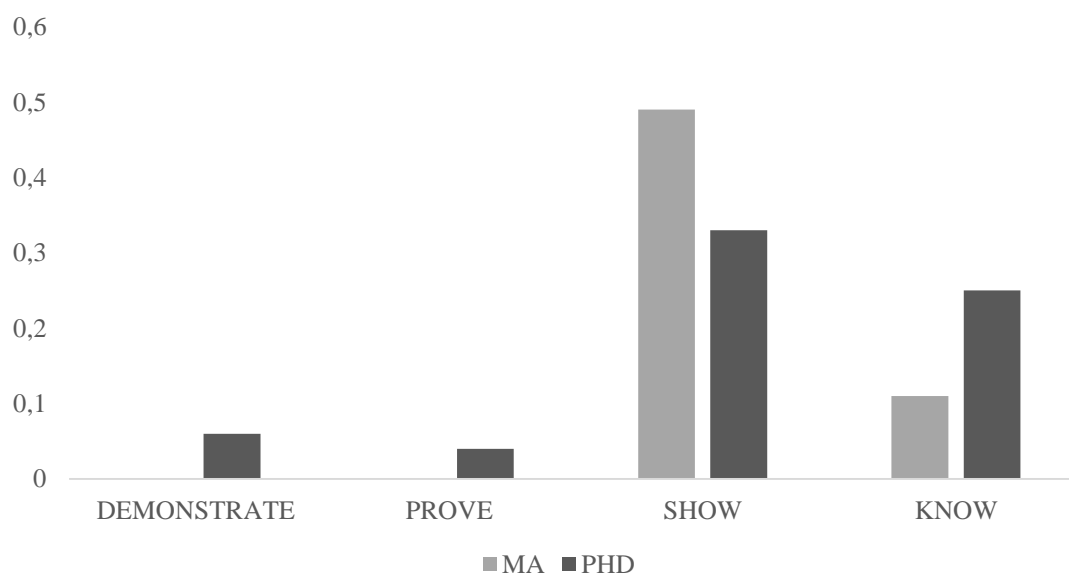
Figure 7. Distribution of epistemic lexical verbs (per 1,000 words)

When *demonstrate* and *show* are compared, it can be observed that the former was never used by MA students, while the latter was most frequently used by both groups of students, MA students using it a little bit more. This indicates that both groups preferred using a more common synonym of a word.
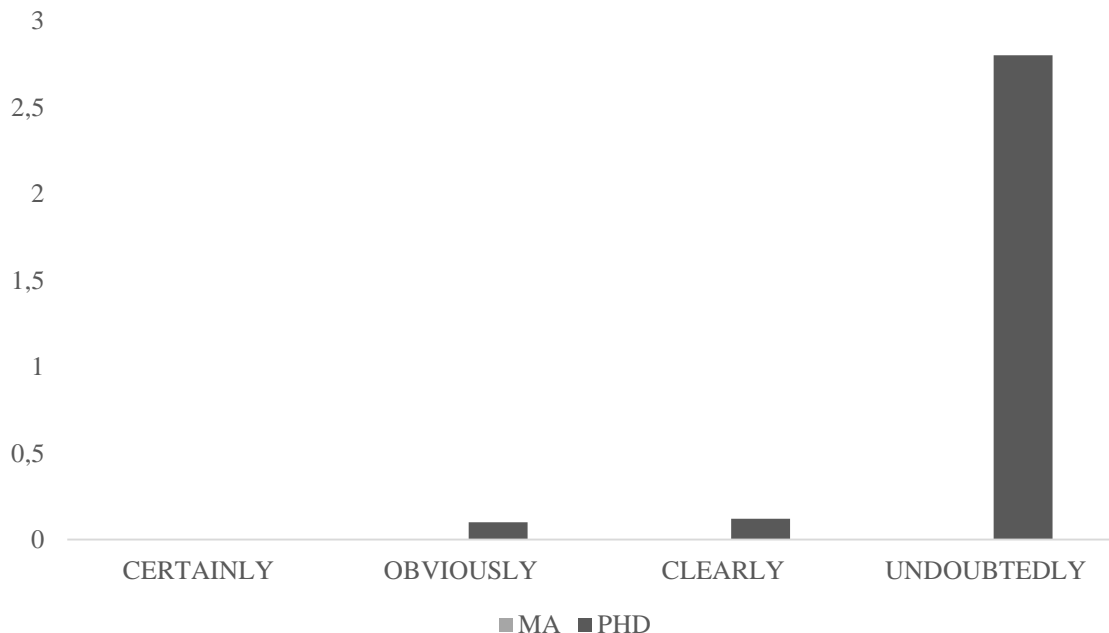

Figure 8. Distribution of epistemic adverbs (per 1,000 words)

It is remarkable to note down that MA level students did not use any of the epistemic adverbs with the function of boosters. PhD students cannot be said to use them frequently, either, except for the adverb *undoubtedly*, which has a high rate of use. *Certainly* was not preferred by either group.
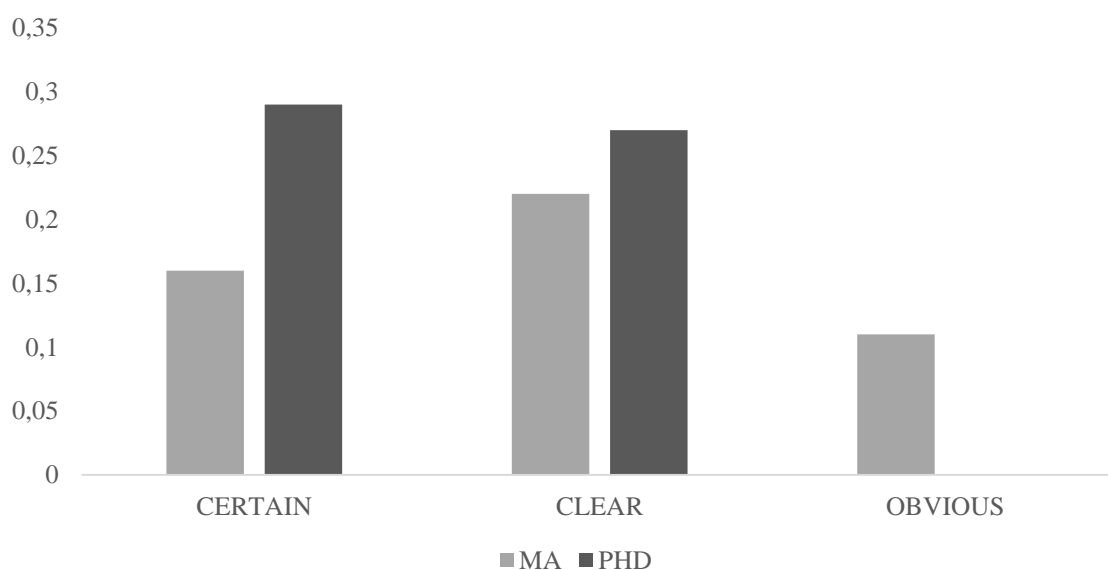

Figure 9. Distribution of epistemic adjectives (per 1,000)

When it comes to epistemic adjectives, *certain* and *clear* were frequently used by MA and PhD students. However, *obvious* was never used by PhD students. *Obviously* as an epistemic adverb was used by PhD students, although still in very limited amounts. MA students preferred to use it more, though less than other options of epistemic adjectives.
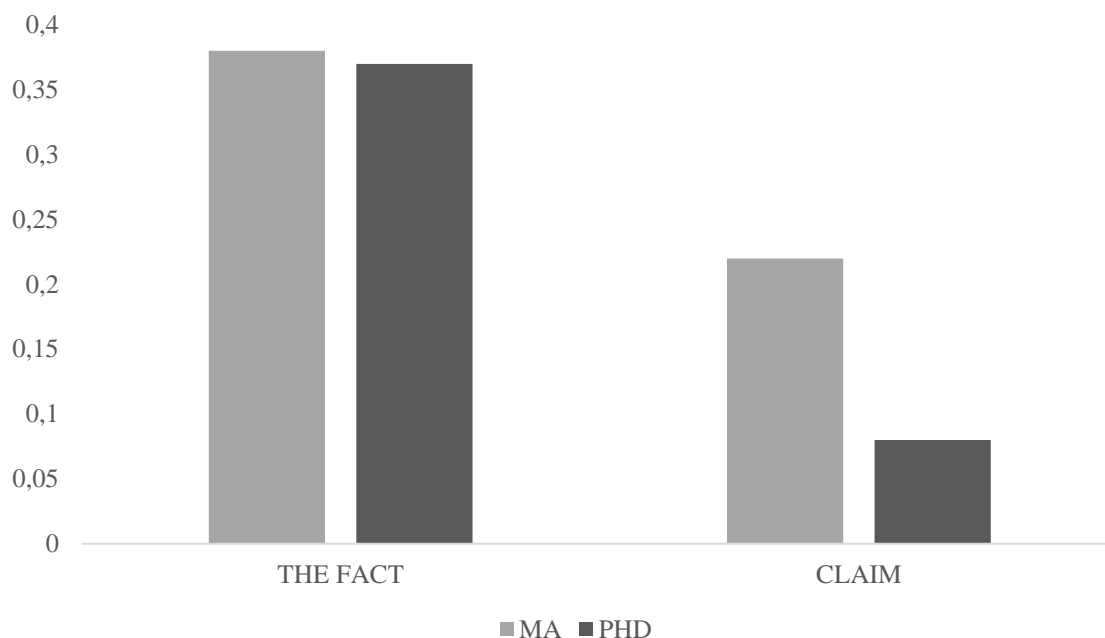

Figure 10. Distribution of epistemic nouns (per 1,000 words)

The fact was almost equally used by two groups, while *claim* was not used that much as an epistemic noun.

The parts of speech used with the function of hedges or boosters vary greatly between two levels and also the frequency of the usage of certain words in the same category outnumber others. However, the most frequently used boosting device belonged to the category of epistemic modal verbs by both groups, which was the case for hedging, as well. A comparable result came from a study with a similar classification of lexical devices; namely, modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives and nouns, Farrokhi and Emami (2008) worked on a corpus of 20 research articles and examined the uses of hedges and boosters, in which they found out that electrical engineering research articles made use of mostly modal verbs and adverbs as hedging devices among other categories, and applied linguistics students used lexical verbs, modal verbs and adverbs. In the current study, it can be concluded that for both hedging their expressions and boosting their statements, both levels of students preferred to make the most use of epistemic modality.

Using no single one of these two markers is more important than making use of the other. Appropriate usage of different sorts of hedging and boosting devices is highly critical not only due to the desire to be persuasive or impressive in one's speech and the endeavor to be satisfactory while writing a piece of academic work, but it is also because of the necessity of disseminating correct messages in texts and other sources of information. Hedges and boosters demonstrate that writers are ready to negotiate their ideas and discuss their findings. According to the results of the study, students of higher education in a Turkish context may not be fully aware how to apply certain meta-discourse markers, thus of their own academic style. This unawareness may, in the long run, lead to problems not only about the inability to

transmit their messages as a result of the failure to mitigate claims or boost assertions, but also about gaining credibility in the academic communities.

4. Conclusions

The main aim of this research was to compare MA and PhD level students' theses and dissertations based on their uses of hedging and boosting devices. Using these devices shows a certain level of competency in academic writing. 10 MA theses and 10 PhD dissertations were selected from the same writers, in order to be able to compare the levels better.

The results of the research indicated that PhD level students used more boosting devices than MA students. Interestingly enough, hedging devices were used more frequently by MA students. Therefore, they tend to hedge their expressions more. Considering the years of experience in the academic community, PhD students were expected to use more of both hedging and boosting devices. Types of hedges and boosters used by the two levels also differed. Both MA and PhD students seem to need assistance in order to progress further in their academic writing competency. Raising awareness regarding meta-discourse markers and equipping students with the necessary knowledge as to the use of these devices are important steps to be taken in order for them to gain credibility in academic discourse communities.

4.1. Implications for Teaching

This study aimed to make a small contribution to the knowledge we have about the meta-discourse markers used by different levels of students. There is no single united curriculum that higher education programs commonly use in Turkey. Therefore, there are differences in their teaching style as to the content or the decision to include or not to include academic discourse courses. It can be concluded from the present study that students could be more aware of their academic writing styles and more successful in conveying their messages in their written works. In order to ensure this important point, higher educational institutions and universities can open courses specifically designed with the aim of raising awareness about meta-discourse markers and particular usages such as hedges and boosters. Further research can be carried out in order to examine whether an explicit instruction on the use of meta-discourse markers designed for students receiving higher education would have a significant positive effect on correct usage of hedges and boosters.

5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: January 19, 2021).

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Türkiye'de İngiliz Dili Öğretimi programlarındaki yüksek lisans ve doktora öğrencilerinin kaçınma sözcükleri (hedges) ve vurgulama sözcükleri (boosters) kullanımlarının bütünce temelli olarak karşılaştırılması

Öz

Akademik yazma yolculuğunda yazarlar okuyucularıyla, kaçınma sözcükleri (hedges) ve vurgulama sözcükleri (boosters) gibi üstsöylem belirleyicileri (meta-discourse markers) aracılığıyla belirli etkileşimlerde bulunurlar. Üstsöylem belirleyicinin işlevi ile ilgili birçok çalışma yürütülmüştür (Crismore, 1984; Longo, 1994; Hyland, 1999, 2000, 2001; Abdi, Rizi, & Tavakoli, 2010). Fakat, yalnızca kaçınma sözcükleri (hedges) ve vurgulama sözcüklerine (boosters) ve belirli bir çalışma alanındaki yüksek lisans ve doktora gibi farklı seviyelerdeki öğrencilerin karşılaştırılmasına dayanan çalışmaların sayısı fazla değildir. Bu yüzden, bu bütünce temelli çalışma, akademik yolculuklarına Türkiye'de İngiliz Dili Öğretimi programında devam eden yabancı dil olarak İngilizce dersleri alan yüksek lisans ve doktora öğrencilerinin, kaçınma sözcükleri (hedges) ve vurgulama sözcükleri (boosters) kullanım sıklıklarındaki farklılıkların olası nedenlerini araştırmaktadır. 10 Adet yüksek lisans ve 10 adet doktora tezinin tartışma bölümleri seçilmiştir. Seviyeler arasındaki muhtemel gelişmeyi karşılaştırabilmek adına, tezlerin aynı yazarlar tarafından yazılmış olması dikkat çekmektedir. Metinler AntConc 3.5.7.0. programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma, vurgulama sözcüklerinin bulunma sıklığının doktora düzeyinde yüksek lisans düzeyinden daha fazla olduğunu, kaçınma sözcüklerinin ise yüksek lisans tezlerinde doktora tezlerinde olduğundan daha fazla kullanıldığını açığa çıkarmıştır. Bu bulgular, yüksek lisanstan doktora düzeyine geçişte, daha geniş bir akademik deneyime ve zaman içinde kazanılmış olan uzmanlığa bağlı olarak, öğrencilerin fikirlerini aktarırken ve bulgularını paylaşırken kendilerine güven seviyesinde meydana gelen bir artışın yanı sıra, üstsöylem belirleyicilerinin kullanımı ve akademik yazma stilleri ile alakalı olarak iki öğrenci grubunun da belirli bir düzeyde farkında olmama durumunun içinde olduklarını gösteriyor olabilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: üstsöylem belirleyicileri; kaçınma sözcükleri; vurgulama sözcükleri

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