

HEDGES AS WRITER PROTECTIVE DEVICES IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND LITERARY CRITICISM RESEARCH ARTICLES

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that hedges form an indispensable part of academic writing in general and research articles (RAs) in particular. There has been a lot of research done attempting to describe and classify this language device, address its complex nature and understand its functions in different types of texts. This paper presents the results of a small-scale comparative study carried out on a corpus of research articles in two scientific fields – applied linguistics and literary criticism. The analysis was based on a revised classification of Hyland (1998) and Dontcheva-Navratilova (2009) and with special regard to the role they play in reader-writer interaction. The aim of the investigation was to determine which features in the text function as writer-protective, i.e. hedging writer commitment to the propositional content of the message, and to what extent these features differ in the examined texts. The results of the study show that there are significant differences in both the variety and frequency of use of hedges in applied linguistics and literary criticism research articles, which suggests that there is a connection between particular types of hedges and differences in the type of argumentation and interaction with the intended readership in the two respective communities.

Keywords

academic writing, applied linguistics, hedges, literary criticism, research articles

1 Introduction

There are some language phenomena that seem to be more tempting for linguists than others and anyone who attempts to review the amount of work dedicated to hedging will agree that hedges have certainly received a flattering scope of attention. The beginning of the research on hedging goes back to the early 1970s when Lakoff (1972) first utilized the term ‘hedge’ and defined their properties based on the philosophical notion of fuzzy categories. Many of the subsequent studies on hedging accepted to a certain extent Lakoff’s idea that the function of hedges is concerned with degrees of vagueness and precision. There have been copious attempts to examine hedges from numerous points of view – semantic (e.g. Channel 1980, Coates 1983), pragmatic (Myers 1989, Holmes 1990, Brown & Levinson 1978), gender and culture differences (e.g. Burrough-Boenish 2002) resulting in various classifications and definitions. In

her study of written scientific discourse, Salager-Meyer (1997: 106) described hedges as “interactive elements whose function is to bridge the gap between the propositional information in the text and the writer’s factual interpretation” and Hyland (2010: 177), in one of the most recent accounts of hedges, proposes that hedges are such features of language whose predominant role in discourse is to mark statements as provisional, enabling the writer to express his/her views and involving the readers in the ratification of the propositional content contained in those statements.

This rather brief survey of previous research in the field should suffice to illustrate the essence of hedging expressions, i.e. their ability to relate to both the propositional content of the message as well as to its recipient. This functional duality has been acknowledged to a varying degree among researchers, yet the concept is not unproblematic. While there is nearly unanimous agreement about in my opinion, the more important interpersonal character of hedges (e.g. Brown & Levinson 1978, Hübler 1983, Myers 1989, Hyland 2010 and others), the relationship between a hedge and the proposition remains somewhat disputed. Certain authors posit that if we admit hedges to be a part of metadiscourse (which will be dealt with in the following section), they cannot be treated as being part of the proposition (e.g. Crompton 1997), while others (e.g. Ifantidou 2005: 1337) hold that some types of metadiscourse markers, such as evidential adverbials, may affect the strength of the claim that is being made, thus contributing to the propositional content. I argue that whether or not hedges contribute to the propositional content of the message depends predominantly on their type. Thus in my classification there are some hedging expressions that are seen as contributing to the propositional content while others are not.

Despite the vast body of information collected on different aspects of hedging, there are still areas well worth exploring as well as some theoretical problems that deserve attention. One of those under-researched territories is the comparison of hedging devices used by writers in humanities and social sciences in their argumentation presenting the findings of their research. This paper focuses on a particular type of hedges and attempts to reveal how far the writers go in committing to the claims they make and which devices and strategies they employ to protect themselves from possible criticism.

2 Functional classification

Before proceeding to a more detailed account of the nature of hedges, it is important to stress that the qualitative analysis reported in the present paper draws on the functional point of view, i.e. it focuses primarily on what particular language features do in the text.

Exchange of information between participants in communication can be seen as an example of a discursive situation. Based on the social constructivist theory, as will be explained in Section 4, it is in the discursive situation that the negotiation of meaning in interaction takes place. In written discourse, the constituents of such interaction are conventionally termed the writer, the reader and the proposition. It is important to note that in writing, unlike in spoken language, this communication/negotiation does not happen directly, but by proxy. The writer is represented by author-in-the-text and by means of the text he or she communicates with reader-in-the-text (Thompson & Thetela 1995), who is the writer’s construct of an ideal reader (Coulthard 1994). In other words, the author persona is a reflection of the writer’s attitude towards the text and the reader persona is the writer’s reflection of his/her attitude towards the reader. The writer designs the text with his/her ideal readership in mind and the favourable reception of the text is crucially dependent on the writer’s ability to anticipate the readers’ reaction.

It has also been mentioned that hedges may have a dual function, enabling the authors to position themselves in relation to the proposition and the reader, and that they serve as bridges between the three individual components of the discursive situation. The following table presents three predominant functions of hedges in research articles; each function/type of hedges will now be discussed in detail. It is a classification based on that of Hyland (1998) and Šteflová (2005) with some alterations as suggested by Dontcheva-Navratilova (2009).

Content oriented		Participant oriented		
		Writer oriented	Reader oriented	
aim at greater accuracy (precision)	aim at the extent of applicability/generalizability	protect the writer by depersonalizing the information presented in the proposition	appeal to the reader by employing various strategies of reader involvement	diminish assertiveness by presenting the propositional information as the author’s own interpretation

Table 1: Functional classification of hedges according to Hyland (1998: 186) and Dontcheva-Navratilova (2009: 35)

As Table 1 shows, hedging expressions can be oriented predominantly either towards the content of the message or towards the participants of the discursive situation. Hedging expressions in the content category are mostly, although not exclusively, concerned with the propositional constituent of the discursive situation. The academic’s main obligation, given by the discourse community

practice, is to report the results of his/her research as accurately as possible. Content oriented hedges are employed in research articles to enable the writer to be as precise as possible while truthfully reflecting the state of the real world phenomena. Despite the fact that they operate mostly within the scope of the proposition, they can be said to contain a tinge of reader-writer interaction because the writer's attempt to comply with the rules of the discourse community shows he/she is aware of the expectations of the reader as a fellow member of the same community. Content oriented hedges are often associated with modality, such as modal verbs, adjectives, adverbs (1) and also nouns (2).

All the following examples were taken from the research corpus I investigated. The corpus is further described in Section 5. (L denotes applied linguistics, LC indicates literary criticism.)

- (1) *The effects of author prestige reported in the publication-based research, although small, are probably quite real.* (L)
- (2) *In general, the physical setting is mapped and controlled, by a fussy, neurotic, Crusoesque tendency in the narrative to counting, and to the measurement of distances and time.* (LC)

The second large functional category of hedges displays the writer's concern with himself/herself and the intended reader and can be thus further broken down into two subcategories. The writer, when presenting his/her findings and interpretations of those findings, must be aware of possible criticism that may appear on the side of the readers. Writer oriented hedges function as protection against this assumed criticism by adjusting the strength of the writer's commitment to what he/she claims in the proposition. This is achieved mostly by shifting responsibility for the claims to sources outside the writer persona. Among those sources belong abstract rhetors (3), reference to literature (4) and impersonal reference to models or methods utilized in research or the limitations of such models or methods (Hyland 1998: 172ff).

- (3) *These later, popular, place poems forcefully suggest that the common understanding of his later career as a decline into Toryism needs revision.* (LC)
- (4) *Hamp-Lyons (1996) has suggested that miscommunication between editors and authors is common for both native and non-native writers [...] (L)*

The ultimate goal of the whole discursive situation is to persuade the reader that what the writer researched and subsequently presented in the research article is plausible and credible, i.e. worth accepting. In doing so, it is necessary to be

aware of the fact that at least some of the claims may threaten the reader's negative face (Brown & Lewinson 1978), i.e. the need not to be imposed on. In order to make the reader align with the presented point(s) of view the writer utilizes different – mostly personal (6) – strategies of deference and reader involvement (5). By doing so the readership is given the impression of being treated as equal; they are invited into the negotiation of the meaning, which – as the writers hope – increases the possibility that they will accept what the writer proposes.

- (5) *If we are to remove some of these difficulties, we must first have a clearer and more restrictive definition of the notion of idiom.* (LC)
- (6) *Both studies are concerned with mezzo institutional settings; and I suspect that 'culture' rather than 'discourse' is used in the latter only because there is a beginning of large culture difference, which ironically proves a red-herring.* (L)

What has been said about the three functions of hedges illustrates that the main function of hedging is pragmatic – in order to make fellow members of the scientific discourse community accept what he/she proposes in the research article, the writer must very carefully consider the ways in which the claims are presented. It was noted elsewhere (Hyland 2005: 179) that making categorical claims in presenting research results is a “risky business” because, of course, writers can (and will) be held responsible for the claims they make. The three aforementioned functions of hedges thus make the claim making somewhat less stressful because they enable writers to present their claims as accurately as possible while attending to their own safety and showing awareness of their readers.

However, as both previous and my own research into the field show, hedges can fulfill various pragmatic functions simultaneously, therefore in some cases a precise functional classification seems to be difficult.

3 Formal classification

Similarly to functional classification, formal attempts to precisely categorize formal and strategic means that can theoretically function as hedges often run into difficulties, especially with certain types of hedges. This is given by the fact that basically any language means can function as a hedge in a particular context, as observed by Markkanen and Schröder (1997), who claim that the hedging quality of an expression is actualized by its context. This finding is in consistence with Hyland (1998), who stresses the importance of context in the functional analysis

of hedging. Therefore rather than creating seemingly exhaustive lists of formal realizations of hedges, it is useful to let the (con)text lead us in determining the formal means of hedging in a given text. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that certain expressions, grammatical structures or strategies are frequently employed by writers of RAs to fulfill one or more hedging functions. The following table relates those formal means to their usual functions.

Content oriented primarily expressed by:	Participant oriented	
	Writer oriented primarily expressed by:	Reader oriented primarily expressed by:
precision adverbs epistemic lexical adjectives epistemic lexical nouns epistemic modal nouns limited knowledge	impersonal structures referring to model/method/theory/ experimental conditions speaking facts abstract rhetors epistemic lexical verbs attribution to literature	personal engagement structures (personal attribution, reference to methods/models, etc.) reader engagement structures (assumption of shared goals, conditionals, questions, reference to testability, etc.)

Table 2: Formal and strategic classification of hedges according to Hyland (1998: 103ff) and Šteflová (2005: 41)

4 Hedging in research articles

With the essential characteristics of hedges outlined, it is appropriate to reveal why hedges are found in written academic discourse so frequently. However, the reason why hedges are employed consciously and purposely in reporting new advancements in different research fields in scientific writing can be explained on the grounds of social constructivism. In the positivist epistemological tradition ‘truth’ (or state of matters in the real world) is absolute and the role of the scientist is to reveal it using precise scientific methods; in other words, ‘truth’ is independent of context and science, knowable and describable. In social constructivism, on the other hand, ‘truth’ is seen as context dependent, cannot be directly known and what is considered ‘true’ is negotiated and accepted by the members of the academic community (Hyland 2004: 5ff). This negotiation of meaning takes place in interaction within the discourse community (Swales 1990: 24) and this interaction is rendered through texts of various academic genres. One such genre that is typically utilized by the scientific community is the genre of research article. This genre serves predominantly as a vessel for dissemination of newly acquired knowledge in the field and as such it enjoys a highly prestigious status in the academic world (Zapletalová 2009: 9). In today’s “market-like” academic environment (ibid.), the RA can be seen as a self-promotional product which –

apart from the noble purpose of contributing to the global body of knowledge – serves to promote and sustain the writer’s academic career. Acceptance of one’s work by the fellow members of the discourse community is crucial for achieving this. Such acclaim contributes significantly to the academic’s credibility. It seems fit to reiterate that this process is possible only in successful interaction between the writer and the reader and appropriate rhetoric is crucial. The writer not only presents the reader with the claims, but also with more or less elaborate guidance on how the claims should be interpreted. Amongst other things, hedges are one type of language resource that writers use to enhance the possibility of acceptance of their work.

5 Material and methods

The aim of the present paper is to compare hedging expressions used in linguistics (L) and literary criticism (LC) research articles. The research corpus consists of 20 RAs, ten in each of the examined fields. These articles were obtained from *Applied Linguistics* and from *Essays in Criticism*; one of the criteria for my choice was the prototypical character of the materials under investigation, therefore I opted for the aforementioned journals, which have world-wide circulation and are well-established within their discourse communities. The selected articles were published between the years 1998 and 2007. The length of the corpus was rounded to approximately 135,000 words; with 79,000 words in the applied linguistics subcorpus and 56,000 in the literary criticism ones. The sizes of the two subcorpora are not equal as the literary criticism articles tend to be considerably shorter. As for the topic, the articles were chosen randomly, but a much stricter criterion was applied in terms of the L1 background of the authors. Since it has been suggested by other authors (e.g. Nikula 1997, Burrough-Boenish 2002) that certain transfer from the writers’ mother tongue can take place, only native speakers were chosen for the purposes of the present study to avoid an L1 bias.

Much has been written about the typical structure of different types of RAs and it has been shown that there are inter generic differences between RAs in different fields (Bazerman 1988). It has also been shown that the differences in the structure of RAs and rhetorical strategies are dependent on the research field (Fahnenstock & Secor 1988) and although the present study did not attempt to identify those and does not deal with genre analysis as such in detail, certain observations related to hedging have been made.

The RAs in the applied linguistics subcorpus all follow the conventional I-M-R-D pattern (Swales 1990: 134), even though the sections are not always titled

explicitly. Thus it can be said that there is a regular fixed internal structure that is relatively easily recognizable. The authors properly place their research into the existing knowledge in the field, carefully expressing their opinions towards the work of their colleagues.

In the literary criticism subcorpus, on the other hand, no such indications are to be found. These texts seem to exhibit no fixed structure in terms of individual parts. The essay-like character does not require extensive anchoring in the field, one of the reasons being that the researchers deal with well-established literary works (Fahnenstock & Secor 1988). The overall impression of the texts is rather descriptive and the claims appear to be straightforward.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the texts under examination were carried out with special regard to elements that worked as writer-protective devices, i.e. writer oriented hedges (cf. Table 1), in the texts in both subcorpora. In the qualitative analysis, emphasis was put on the pragmatic function of each examined unit and since hedging expressions are often polypragmatic, the predominant function was used for the classification. After determining the function, attention was paid to the formal/strategic classification of the hedge. The final results were normalized per 10,000 words.

6 Findings

6.1 Applied linguistics subcorpus

The table below summarizes the results of the analysis of writer oriented hedges found in the applied linguistics corpus.

Type of device	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Total
passive voice (epist. lex. verb)	10	0	3	6	3	7	0	8	2	3	42
reference to literature	47	34	36	73	19	47	26	33	27	29	371
speaking facts	7	2	1	3	2	1	2	4	0	2	24
impersonal reference to method/model/theory	8	3	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	16
limitation of methods/ conditions/techniques	7	11	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	19
abstract rhetors	20	12	2	1	5	13	5	13	4	8	83
Number of occurrences	99	62	44	85	27	72	33	58	33	42	555
Normalized per 10,000											70.2

Table 3: Writer oriented hedges in applied linguistics

Altogether six different strategies were identified as functioning as writer oriented hedges in the examined material: detaching from the proposition using passive voice of certain types of epistemic lexical verbs (evidential, judgmental), frequently as a complement in extraposed constructions, reference to literature, speaking facts, impersonal reference to method/model/theory, admission to limitation of methods/conditions/techniques used in research and shifting responsibility to abstract rhetors.

Passive voice of epistemic and evidential verbs (7), (8) is used to remove the author from the propositional statement, thus decreasing his/her full responsibility. Such examples were found to be the third most frequent strategy in the research corpus. Although it is known that in fact the writer is responsible for the information in the text, employing structures such as the passive voice increases his/her invisibility and weakens the link between the writer and the propositional information.

- (7) *It was assumed that such a task might be more meaningful and feasible.* (01L)
- (8) *It is argued here that students should learn DMs, in order to facilitate more successful overall language use [...]* (06L)

The primary source used to protect oneself in applied linguistics RAs seems to be reference to literature. As such I counted both integral and non-integral citation with which the authors align and subsequently use as a basis for their argumentation and reference to methods and terminology taken over from other authors (9 (c); (a) and (b) with speaking facts), (10). It has to be admitted that operationalization of this particular strategy is not without problems. For the purposes of this particular study I decided to count as one instance each reference to literature that relates to one new proposition. If there were several authors listed in parentheses as in (11), I took this as one instance.

- (9) [...] *word familiarity (a) is well established as a factor in word recognition in psycholinguistics, and word frequency (b) is known to be a factor affecting word familiarity (c) (Aitchison 1987).* (01L)
- (10) *In the large culture version of the centre-periphery paradigm a 'professionalized' mode of English language teaching (Phillipson 1992) is seen as part of a wider large Western culture at the centre of a global linguistic and cultural imperialism (Pennycook 1994).* (04L)
- (11) *European justification is well catalogued (Morawska and Spohn 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Asad 1973; Nizimiro 1979; Sarangi 1995).* (04L)

- (12) *Lexical words that have become DMs, as argued by Aijmer (2002), have often undergone a process of grammaticalization leading to a change of function from propositional meaning to a mainly textual or interpersonal function.* (06L)

In (13) the author seeks support for the results of her own research by aligning it with the results of another author.

- (13) *[...] the participants used considerably more conceptual CSs than linguistic CSs. This finding corresponds to that of Poulisse (1990: 143)*[...] (08L)

Similarly to passive voice and reference to literature, abstract rhetors (Hyland 1998) are very frequently employed to distance the author from the claim and lessen his/her commitment to such a proposition. By using abstract rhetors – a strategy that “implies that rhetorical acts can be accomplished without human volition” (ibid.: 128) – it is seemingly not the author who can be held responsible, but the inanimate subject in (14), (15), (16) to which the claim is ascribed. As Hyland (1998: 173) suggests, abstract rhetors usually occur with judgemental and speculative lexical verbs. As Table 3 demonstrates, this type of responsibility shifting device is the second most common in the subcorpus.

- (14) *A word frequency count showed that “I” was the second most frequent lexical item in the letters,*[...] (03L)
- (15) *The results indicate that there is a relationship between [...]* (02L)
- (16) *[...] the studies of pausing in native-speaker speech suggest that syntactic units are genuine units of planning [...]* (07L)

Another strategy that may help the writer to avert unwanted criticism on the part of the reader is to refer to the particular theory used in research (17). If the writer does not specify how he/she obtained the results, it is more likely he/she will be subject to criticism on the part of the reader. Therefore explicit impersonal reference to the experimental methods or conditions is desirable. The impersonal character of the reference is, at the same time, one of the distinctive features of writer oriented hedges. If the writer takes full responsibility for such a reference, he/she offers his/her method as only one of the possible points of view or alternatives.

- (17) *Therefore, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, which ranges from a macro-investigation by Wordsmith Tools (Scott 1996) to a micro-discourse analytic examination through observation, is used in the study.* (06L)

Likewise, possible criticism may be dissolved by explicitly (yet in an impersonal way) referring to the limitations of the methods used in research. The author shows that he/she is aware that the research methods are limited, as in (18) and (19).

- (18) *As with any metaphorical analogy, the mappings between tenor and vehicle are not unproblematic here.* (02L)
- (19) *Owing to the limitations of current computer software in discriminating the discursal role of individual words, the words cited may carry other grammatical functions than those of DMs [...]* (06L)

The last of the writer protective features detected in the researched material are the so called speaking facts, which is a term used by Šteflová (2005) who defined this term based on Salager-Meyer (2000, as quoted in Šteflová 2005). Šteflová (2005: 41) posits that speaking facts are “generally acknowledged facts used to support the truth-value of the claim”. The writer hedges commitment to the propositional information contained in the proposition by presenting it as something widely known and accepted as in (9 (a), (b)) above or (20) below.

- (20) *Holistic conceptual strategies (HOCO) are said to be used when the speaker refers to the intended concept by using the word for a related concept.* (08L)

Although it cannot be claimed that the analysis discovered all possible writer protective hedging resources, it gives, in my opinion, a good indication that academics as authors of RAs in the field of applied linguistics do care to protect themselves. It also shows where the writers turn to seek shields for themselves and it also suggests that there is a variety of impersonal means that help to shift responsibility and gain backing for the claims that are presented to the fellow members of the discourse community as pending and awaiting acceptance.

6.2 Literary criticism

The situation seems to be considerably different in the field of literary criticism as is demonstrated by the results of the analysis based on the aforementioned classifications (cf. Table 1 and Table 2).

Type of device	01LC	02LC	03LC	04LC	05LC	06LC	07LC	08LC	09LC	10LC	Total
passive voice (epist. lex. verb)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	6
reference to literature	2	3	5	14	31	2	34	1	11	3	106
speaking facts	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
impersonal reference to method/model/ theory	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
limitation of methods/conditions/ techniques	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
abstract rhetors	9	4	2	2	3	16	2	10	9	1	58
Number of occurrences	11	7	8	15	34	19	36	12	22	5	171
Normalized per 10,000											30.5

Table 4: Writer oriented hedges in literary criticism research articles

Firstly, there is a striking difference to the applied linguistics RAs in terms of variability of the writer protective hedges used. Out of the six structures identified in the applied linguistics subcorpus, only three occur in literary criticism RAs in significant numbers – passive voice, reference to literature and abstract rhetors.

Similarly to applied linguistics, in literary criticism texts reference to literature is the most frequently employed means of writer protection. In (21) the author interprets the description of the relationship between two characters by comparing the description of hypnosis in the literary work to a certain scientific theory of hypnosis:

- (21) *According to Gregory, the sleeper gains ‘the power of perceiving every sensation, bodily and mental in reference to all with whom he is placed en rapport’* (pp. 113-14). (05LC)

As for the syntactic realizations of reference to literature, both integral and non-integral realizations (Swales 1990: 149) were found with the integral ones, e.g. (22), (23), being slightly more frequent.

- (22) *While, as Gerald Hammond has suggested, only the tone-deaf could mistake the deep affection of Johnson's tribute, deep affection does not exclude rivalry; Jonson is about diverse things here.* (05LC)
- (23) *Moreover, the claim of Latin on literature specifically was and remained (as R. F. Jones demonstrates) a special case, well into the eighteenth century.* (07LC)

The second most frequent strategy used to direct responsibility away from the writer is the use of abstract rhetors. The writer wishes to distance himself/herself from the proposition and unlike in applied linguistics, where the writers most frequently use nouns such as *results*, *data* or *frequency*, in literary criticism it is often *line*, *expression* (24), (26) or *title* (25) that the author charges with responsibility for the claim.

- (24) *The expression 'the man on top' ostensibly indicates Clara's superficial impression of Paul, the public persona, but it also suggests Paul is [...]* (06LC)
- (25) *As their titles suggest, both poems are set in candlelit interiors; [...]* (08LC)
- (26) *Line 14 reports a conversation, not a monologue, and 'you knew? you are not blind!' (l. 22) implies that he has at least made a sympathetic noise.* (02LC)

The least frequent impersonal structure found in the literary criticism RAs is that of passive voice. In (27) a cluster of hedges can be observed, with the prevalent function being that of hedging writer commitment. In the literary criticism research subcorpus the passive voice of epistemic lexical verbs was infrequent: only six instances were found. It was observed that the literary criticism RAs in the examined subcorpus are rather descriptive in nature and the characters, situations and places are described usually in the present tense and active voice.

- (27) *It might be argued that rather than cheapening the immensity of extermination camps, Plath's achievement is to fix and immortalize their suffering as the ultimate measure by which all other pain must be compared.* (08LC)

- (28) *This is not the whole story of course, and indeed the magic circle is supposed to be a denial of the possibility of story.* (10LC)
- (29) *When disappointment presents itself in one area, the interactive self, it is implied, finds interests and rewards elsewhere [...]* (09LC)

The results of the analysis can be concluded with a single occurrence of speaking facts found in the corpus (30).

- (30) *Emily's presentation of the most celebrated of the Picturesque Yorkshire Dales echoes the widespread knowledge that picturesque settings had been tainted by slavery.* (04LC)

Unlike in applied linguistics, there are literally no instances of impersonal reference to methods/models/theories or their limitations. This can be plausibly explained by the fact that although literary critics work with some theoretical frameworks, there are no experiments carried out in this particular field of research, at least not in those that were under investigation in the present study. Unlike in applied linguistics, where the authors have to ground their work in the existing framework of knowledge and exploit methods and theories that their colleagues developed (albeit with their own modifications), authors in literary criticism RAs depart from the assumption that what they work with are texts that are notoriously well established on the scene. What the writers are left with are their own interpretations of different aspects of those texts. Authors presenting such literary interpretations must convey a great degree of persuasiveness committing fully to their claims, therefore the number of protective strategies is relatively low.

7 Conclusion

Hedges are considered to be an inherent feature of research articles and an enormous amount of research has been done into this complex polypragmatic phenomenon. The paper presents the results of a small scale contrastive study that focuses on writer oriented hedges (Hyland 1998) as writer protective devices present in applied linguistics and literary criticism research articles. For the purposes of the quantitative and qualitative analysis I utilized a functional model based on one of the most influential accounts of hedges up to date (Hyland 1998) with some changes based on the work of Dontcheva-Navratilova (2009) and Šteflová (2005). This model focuses on the primary function of a hedge in its context. The aim of the study was to determine what strategies the authors use in

the two scientific fields in order to protect themselves and how frequently they deploy those strategies.

The results demonstrated that authors in both applied linguistics and literary criticism use certain language means to protect themselves from possible criticism on the part of the reader. However, there are significant differences not only in the variety of such means, but also in their frequency in the analyzed texts. There were six types of hedging strategies detected in RAs written by applied linguists (in order of frequency) – reference to literature, abstract rhetors, passivization of epistemic lexical verbs, impersonal reference to methods/models/theories, impersonal reference to such methods/models/theories and the use of speaking facts (Šteflová 2005). Frequent use of those means with over 70 occurrences per 10,000 words and the average number of 55.5 instances per article suggests that being driven by the pragmatic need to protect themselves, applied linguists as writers of research articles frequently seek and actively employ writer protective devices. Frequent use of reference to literature shows not only the need to protect oneself, but also points to the fact that the writers are active members of their discourse community and exploit the commonly shared knowledge that is made available to them. The tendency to employ impersonal structures that seemingly take responsibility for the claims away from the writers clearly shows that they feel the need to protect themselves because they are fully aware of the writer-reader interaction and the fact that their work and careers are crucially dependent on the acceptance of their claims by their readers.

Literary criticism articles, on the other hand, display a relatively low frequency of writer oriented hedges (slightly over 30 instances per 10,000 words and 17.1 instances per article) and there is also less variability in the types of language means functioning as hedges. The interesting point is that the three most frequent types of writer oriented hedges are identical with those identified in applied linguistics RAs – reference to literature, abstract rhetors and passive structures. Two types of structures found in applied linguistics – impersonal reference to methods/models/theories, impersonal reference to such methods/models/theories – are altogether missing in the text and the remaining type manifested only in one instance. This might indicate that authors of literary criticism research articles do not rely on methods and models used by others because it is the originality of their interpretation of notoriously famous texts that is appreciated in their discourse community. It seems that they personally commit to such new interpretations presented in their claims in order to persuade their readership.

It has to be stated that the present study focused only on one particular type of hedges and it will be necessary to carry out further analysis focusing on all

types of hedging expressions in order to see what their interplay in texts in both fields can reveal about their writers and their ways of communicating with their intended readership.

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