



LEXICAL REALIZATIONS OF HEDGING IN THE ENGLISH ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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Hedging is considered a significant characteristic of academic writing, alongside other essential features, including complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy, and responsibility. The phenomenon of hedging is highly diverse and encompasses a range of linguistic tools. This article examines the lexical realization of hedging in English academic discourse, with a particular focus on research articles in the field of philology. Hedging is viewed as a lexical-pragmatic strategy that enables authors to mitigate categorical claims, express epistemic caution, and maintain an appropriate level of objectivity in academic communication. Our research aims to examine the lexical realizations of hedging in English academic discourse, with a focus on research articles. Despite extensive scholarly attention to hedging in academic writing, its quantitative distribution across lexical categories in philological research articles remains insufficiently explored, which determines the relevance of the present study. The research is based on a corpus of 82 research articles published in reputable international journals in the field of philology. The analysis confirms that hedging is an integral pragmatic strategy in academic writing, enabling authors to express epistemic caution, mitigate categorical claims, and maintain an appropriate level of objectivity. The quantitative findings demonstrate that modal auxiliary verbs represent the most frequent grammatical category of hedging devices in the corpus, followed by adverbs and adjectives, highlighting their central role in shaping authorial stance in philological research articles. The frequency of hedging devices in the corpus is 18 words per one thousand words in the compiled corpus. That is, 1.8 % of words in the whole corpus are hedges. This finding suggests that the total number of such devices remains relatively low in the field of philology. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of hedging as a lexical-pragmatic phenomenon. It may serve as a basis for further comparative research into hedging strategies across disciplines, genres, or languages.

ЛЕКСИЧНІ ЗАСОБИ ГЕДЖУВАННЯ В АНГЛІЙСЬКОМУ АКАДЕМІЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

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Ключові слова: академічний дискурс, корпус, стратегія геджування, лексичні засоби геджування, академічне письмо.

Явище геджування є невід'ємною рисою англійської наукової комунікації, аналізований феномен є багатовимірним і охоплює широкий спектр мовних засобів. Реалізацію геджування забезпечують різноманітні лінгвістичні засоби. У статті здійснено аналіз лексичних засобів геджування в англійському академічному дискурсі з особливим акцентом на наукові статті з філології. Для наукового дискурсу геджування є надзвичайно важливим явищем, оскільки він забезпечує автора від категоричності, розмежує факти і судження через прийоми сумніву або невизначеності, ухиляння тощо. Метою дослідження є дослідження лексичних засобів геджування в англійському академічному дискурсі на матеріалі філологічних наукових статей. Попри значну увагу науковців до проблеми геджування в академічному письмі, кількісний аналіз лексичних засобів геджування у філологічних розвідках залишається недостатньо вивченим, що зумовлює актуальність цієї наукової публікації. Емпіричну базу дослідження становить корпус із 82 наукових статей, опублікованих у провідних міжнародних фахових журналах з філології. Результати аналізу підтверджують, що геджування є невід'ємною прагматичною стратегією академічного письма, яка забезпечує м'який вплив на адресата з огляду на те, що менш категоричне висловлювання має більше шансів бути позитивно сприйняте адресатом. За нашими спостереженнями, в англійському науковому дискурсі найбільш поширеними лексичними засобами геджування є модальні дієслова, тоді як прислівники та прикметники виконують допоміжну роль. Це підкреслює їхню провідну роль у формуванні авторської позиції в наукових філологічних статтях. Частота використання геджів у корпусі становить 18 одиниць на тисячу слів, що відповідає 1,8 % від загального обсягу тексту і свідчить про відносно помірний рівень використання геджування в наукових розвідках з філології. Отримані результати поглиблюють розуміння геджування як лексико-прагматичного явища та можуть слугувати підґрунтям для подальших порівняльних досліджень стратегій геджування в різних наукових дисциплінах, жанрах і мовах.

Introduction. In recent years, scholars have conducted a substantial number of studies devoted to the phenomenon of hedging and the use of hedging devices. Scientists suggest that hedging is a communicative strategy, purposefully used to weaken the illocutionary force of an expression, as it may sound rude, overly emotional, or even aggressive [Crompton, 1997; Lewin, 2005; Leyla, Atai, 2008; Lysanets, Bieliaieva, Purdenko, Ostrovska, Morokhovets, 2020]. "In modern text theory, hedging is viewed as a communicative and pragmatic strategy,

based on which the speaker denies responsibility for the reliability and effectiveness of the judgment made, expresses a certain degree of uncertainty and indeterminacy, fixing the distance between the individual "I" and the communicated information" [Ivanytska, Paslavskaya, p. 107]. The term "hedging" was introduced by G. Lakoff, a famous American cognitive linguist, who argued that linguistic concepts can have "vague boundaries and fuzzy edges", described hedges as fuzzy words, analyzed their usage and tried to prove their theoretical significance [Lakoff, 1972].

Many other researchers later used his definition as a starting point. For example, P. Brown and S. Levinson defined hedges as “elements that modify the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set” and are employed to achieve linguistic vagueness [Brown, Levinson, 1987, p. 145]. A. Crismore and W. Vande Kopple view hedges as elements that “signal a tentative or cautious assessment of the truth of referential information” and allow the author to reduce their responsibility toward the information presented [Crismore, Vande Kopple, 1988, p. 185]. K. Hyland claimed that hedges allow writers to convey their attitude to the statements, thus softening categorical assertions [Hyland, 1996].

Many scientists have researched the peculiarities of using the hedging strategy in academic discourse [Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016; Hyland, 1996; Ilchenko, 2002; Ivanytska, Paslavska, 2024; Venhryniuk, Melnyk, 2015; Wallwork, 2016]. For example, Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova researched cross-cultural variation in the use of lexical hedges and boosters in the academic discourse of non-native (Czech) writers [Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016]. Ukrainian scholars Natalia Ivanytska and Inha Paslavska have compared and contrasted the actualization of the approximation tactic of linguistic hedging in academic discourse in English and Ukrainian, focusing on paper abstracts [Ivanytska, Paslavska, 2024]. According to Ilchenko, writers can maintain a balanced and cautious position by using hedges, while also remaining open to possible alternative explanations and approaches [Ilchenko, 2002, p. 134].

While these scientific works are valuable, a thorough literature review on the use of hedging in academic discourse reveals several gaps and limitations. This enhances the relevance of our publication. Our research **aims** to examine the lexical realizations of hedging in English academic discourse, with a focus on research articles. To achieve our goal, we completed the following tasks: identified lexical hedging devices in English philological research articles; established their frequency distribution within the compiled corpus; and analyzed their pragmatic functions in academic discourse.

The **object** of the research is hedging in English academic discourse. The **subject** of the study comprises the lexical categories and frequency

patterns of hedging devices in research articles in the field of philology.

Research material. The study created a corpus comprising 82 research articles published in reputable academic journals in the field of philology: Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology (<https://phil.duan.edu.ua/index.php/en/>), Applied Linguistics (<https://academic.oup.com/applij/>), Linguistica Pragensia (<https://linguisticapragensia.ff.cuni.cz/en/about-journal/>), and Psycholinguistics (<https://psycholing-journal.com/index.php/journal>). We carried out the quantitative counting using the technical capabilities of Microsoft Word 2020.

Results and Discussion. Hedging is considered a significant characteristic of academic writing, alongside other essential features, including complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy, and responsibility [Prasithrathsint, 2015, p. 3]. The phenomenon of hedging is highly diverse and encompasses a range of linguistic tools, including discursive words, word-forming elements, quotation marks, and entire sentences [Lysanets, Bieliaieva, Purdenko, Ostrovska, Morokhovets, 2020, p. 30]. K. Hyland suggested standard hedging constructions in English academic discourse, including modal verbs, modal auxiliary verbs, epistemic verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns expressing probability, as well as approximators of quantity, frequency, and time, and impersonal and passive constructions [Hyland, 1996]. According to G. Myers, hedging can be realized through the use of personal pronouns, emotionally charged adjectives and adverbs, epistemic nouns, assertive nouns serving the function of impersonal agency, modal verbs, epistemic verbs used as personal attributions, and probability adjectives acting as modifiers [Myers, 1989].

Varttala proposed a framework for identifying hedging devices by selecting and examining typical epistemic lexical items [Varttala, 2001]. This framework comprises five central word classes, including modal auxiliaries (e.g., may), main verbs (e.g., argue, believe), adverbs (e.g., possibly, perhaps), adjectives (e.g., potential, probable), and nouns (e.g., hypothesis, idea, notion), as illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of hedging devices across various categories within the corpus of research articles. Raw frequency (F1) indicates the

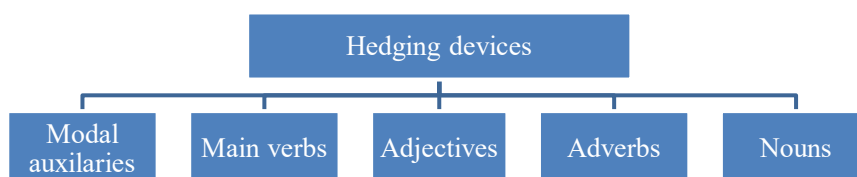


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework for identifying hedging devices (Source: [Varttala, 2001])

total number of instances for each category, whereas normalized frequency (F2) denotes occurrences per 1,000 words. Modal auxiliary verbs are identified as the predominant hedging category, constituting 48.9% of all recognized hedges.

Table 1

Distribution of hedging devices

Hedging device	F1	F2	%
Modal auxiliary verbs	5,218	8.81	48.9
Adverbs	3,360	5.67	31.5
Adjectives	981	1.65	9.2
Main verbs	885	1.49	8.3
Nouns	224	0.38	2.1
Total	10,668	18.0	100

Since modal auxiliary verbs, adverbs, and adjectives are the most frequently used categories for hedging, this study focuses on their quantitative analysis. Less frequent parts of speech are not presented in separate tables. Modal auxiliary verbs are widely recognized for their semantic diversity. Modality is classified into two principal types, namely root and epistemic. The present study focuses on epistemic modality, as both epistemic modality and hedging serve to indicate the degree of confidence the speaker or writer has in the proposition.

Table 2 presents a comparative overview of the percentage distribution of modal auxiliaries in the corpus under investigation. According to the research data, 'can' is the most frequent modal auxiliary verb in the corpus, accounting for 32.7% followed by 'may' (20.2 %).

Table 2

Distribution of modal auxiliary verbs functioning as hedges in the corpus

Modal auxiliary verbs	F1	F2	%
can	1,706	2.88	32.7
may	1,054	1.78	20.2
would/wouldn't	699	1.18	13.4
should/shouldn't	673	1.14	12.9
could/couldn't	579	0.98	11.1
might	506	0.85	9.7
Total	5,218	8.81	100

Our findings indicate that adverbs are the second most common grammatical category after modal verbs across the corpus of research articles in the field of philology. Table 3 shows the distribution of adverbs potentially used as hedges.

To illustrate, let us examine example (1).

(1) *Hence, social advertising messages are **mostly** creolized and supported by contemporary visual images* [Medvid, Vashyst, 2025, p. 425].

Table 3

Distribution of adverbs functioning as hedges in the corpus

Adverbs	F1	F2	%
About	1,434	2.42	42.7
Often	556	0.94	16.5
Rather	392	0.66	11.7
Probably	238	0.4	7.1
Generally	208	0.35	6.2
Approximately	182	0.31	5.4
Frequently	98	0.17	2.9
Around	88	0.15	2.6
Mostly	86	0.15	2.6
Relatively	78	0.13	2.3
Total	3,360	5.67	100

The adverb 'mostly' serves as a hedging device, mitigating the categorical nature of the claim. It enables the author to generalize about the predominant multimodal nature of social advertising messages, while also acknowledging potential exceptions to this pattern. Thus, the statement reflects a tendency rather than an absolute rule, maintaining analytical caution and interpretive flexibility. In other words, it conveys that in most situations, advertising messages are creolized and supported by contemporary visual images. However, it also acknowledges the likelihood of situations where alternative communicative strategies may be employed.

The following sentences are also examples of adverbs as hedges in the corpus:

(2) *The emergence of multiple negation strategies observed in our corpus **likely** indexes the maturation of critical thinking skills and burgeoning self-awareness* [Al-Hababeh, Jarrah, Altakhaineh, 2025, p.69].

(3) *The primary material consists of video recordings and transcripts of 72 Anglican sermons, **approximately** 540 pages in A4 size with 14-point Times New Roman font* [Rudik, Ter-Grygorian, 2025, p. 398].

(4) *What is **probably** relevant is that, first, Fiction shows an increase of 17% in the 2000s gathering over 80% of the occurrences for the latter period and that the genres that did not gather occurrences in the 1990s show no differences in the 2000s (Web, Blog and TV/Movies)* [Jiménez-Pareja, Díaz-Negrillo, 2025, p. 83]

According to Varttala, the epistemic adjectives characterize the information presented as uncertain, tentative, or not quite precise [Varttala, 2001]. Our study revealed that the overall number of epistemic adjectives (n = 981) is less than the number of adverbs (n = 3,360) in the corpus under investigation. Table 4 presents a comparative analysis of the percentage distribution of adjectives functioning as hedging devices within the study corpus.

Table 4
Distribution of adjectives functioning
as hedges in the corpus

Adjectives	F1	F2	%
Potential	362	0.61	36.9
Possible	127	0.21	12.9
Probable	102	0.17	10.4
Common	87	0.15	8.9
Usual	73	0.12	7.4
Typical	62	0.10	6.3
Significant	61	0.10	6.1
Considerable	57	0.10	5.8
Approximate	44	0.07	4.5
Questionable	6	0.01	0.6
Total	981	1.65	100

As can be seen, the three most frequent adjectives in the compiled corpus are potential, possible, and probable. This distribution reflects the genre-specific requirements of academic philological writing, which necessitate substantiating claims and presenting findings.

According to Natalia Ivanytska and Inha Paslavska, the uncertain number technique frees the author from specifying precise data, allowing them to discuss quantitative indicators in general [Ivanytska & Paslavska, 2024, p. 109]. To illustrate, let us examine example (4).

(4) *Several significant patterns and challenges emerged from the analysis, which carry theoretical, methodological, and applied implications* [Shymko, 2025, p.182].

In this example, the uncertain number technique is realized through the use of the adjective 'several', which functions as a lexical hedge. Pragmatically, it reduces the author's responsibility for numerical accuracy, enabling broader interpretive generalizations. This is particularly appropriate in contexts where qualitative significance is emphasized over exact numerical measurement.

Conclusions. The analysis confirms that hedging is an integral pragmatic strategy in academic writing, enabling authors to express epistemic caution, mitigate categorical claims, and maintain an appropriate level of objectivity. The quantitative findings demonstrate that modal auxiliary verbs represent the most frequent grammatical category of hedging devices in the corpus, followed by adverbs and adjectives, highlighting their central role in shaping authorial stance in philological research articles. The frequency of hedging devices in the corpus is 18 words per one thousand words in the compiled corpus. That is, 1.8 % of words in the whole corpus are hedges. This finding suggests that the total number of such devices remains relatively low in the field of philology. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of hedging as a lexical-

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