

ACADEMIC LITERACY PRACTICES: THE LANGUAGE OF HEDGING IN INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' ESSAYS

**Rohmatul Fitriyah Dewi¹, Ruqoyyah Amilia Andania², Zuvyati Aryani
Tlonaen³**

*Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Ahmad Dahlan Lamongan¹, National Donghwa
University, Taiwan², Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana³*

rohmatulfitri@ahmaddahlan.ac.id¹, 811188119@gms.ndhu.edu.tw², zuvyatitlonaen@ukaw.ac.id³

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Abstract

Writing academically and reading are parts of literacy that it is embedded in higher education. Therefore, it is important to assess how students' ability can develop critical thinking regarding specific issues using hedging language. The purpose of this study was to evaluate students' critical thinking skills by looking at how effectively they hedgingly constructed their writings. Moreover, this study also explored the students' viewpoints about the use of hedging in their academic pursuits. This research employed a qualitative approach. The data was collected from students' essays from the English Department in Surabaya and the results of a semi-structured interview with three students. Hyland (1998) identified eight categories of hedging, which were used in the text analysis. The study's findings demonstrate that students employed the majority of hedging strategies when writing their essays. However, the most used is modal auxiliaries, which focus more on the specific subject being taught and utilize a variety of tools to communicate their ideas. Moreover, it is found that different students provided varied reasons for employing hedging, such as reducing criticism, avoiding precision methods, or maintaining a particular writing style. Overall, the research underscores the multifaceted role of hedging in shaping both the content and perception of students' academic essays.

Keywords: *Academic literacy, Essaying, Hedging, Writing*

Introduction

In the 21st century, literacy offers a variety of elaboration approaches to engage students' knowledge and abilities (Cu et al., 2017). Literacy practice is conceptualized through reading and writing activities (Kucer, 2014). Put differently, literacy practices can relate to the overall cultural ways that individuals use written language in their

daily lives (Barton, 2017). Additionally, the growth of linguistic proficiency is linked to literacy. (Byrnes, J. P. & Wasik, 2019), It is crucial to understand this. The definition of academic literacy may follow from this understanding of literacy. According to (Lillis, T. & Tuck, 2016), Academic literacy is linked to several facets of culture that include reading and interpreting text, writing discourse, and social and academic discourse. In other words, writing that demonstrates arguments and ideas is a part of academic literacy. In higher education, one of the fundamental literacy exercises involves composition writing, where students are encouraged to enhance their capacity for distilling the central thesis from their reading practices. (Bean, J. C. & Melzer, 2021) (Andrews, 2015). One of the most important things for a student in higher education to be more involved in thinking and debating via writing a critical essay is critical thinking. Thus, texts are an essential component of literacy events as the study of the creation and use of texts (Barton, 2017). As a result, text serves as a literacy medium, and a pair of skills—reading and writing—work together. They are connected.

Academic literacy refers to the ability to employ language effectively to meet the demands of postsecondary educational environments (Weideman, A. & Dyk, 2014). (Molle, D., Sato, E., Boals, T. & Hedgspeth, 2015) consider the strategy it promoted to advance the language as the construction's meaning. It relates, in essence, to the pupils' capacity to formulate concepts in both written and oral conversation. To improve the proficiency of the learner (Molle, D., Sato, E., Boals, T. & Hedgspeth, 2015) consider the strategy it promoted to advance the language as the construction's meaning. The growth of academic literacy requires its demonstration.

Academic literacy is a useful skill that helps pupils express their ideas and arguments based on prior schemata. (Wingate, 2018). Additionally, it satisfies their depiction of the arguments they make as fundamental abilities in writing activities (Lillis, T. & Tuck, 2016). In academic argumentation and discourse engagement, there is a heart upon which academic arguments can be constructed. (Weideman, A. & Dyk, 2014). Both of those attributes may be seen at the core of writing a critical essay, indicative of a university's higher education level. The essay serves as a written assignment evaluation for students, demonstrating the language utilized in the form

of words, chosen words, and supplementary material (Franek, R., O'Toole, K., & Aliperti, 2014). Consequently, there are three connected ties between academic writing, academic language, and academic literacy.

Hedging can be defined as the linguistic strategy employed to express ambiguity and possibility, thereby introducing a degree of cautiousness or non-commitment into language use (Hyland, 1998). When assertions or phrases are constructed without any subjective truth. Authors employ hedging language as a means to differentiate among speculative opinions, claims, or purported facts, thus enabling them to present their work with an appropriate level of certitude. The provision of hedging language facilitates the articulation of the conceptual linkages in their reasoning. Hedging elements help writers keep their composure in the face of criticism by restricting their opinions and making them appear timid and cautious (Musa, 2014). Not only is it possible for students to generate compositions in writing where judgments or assertions are not refuted, indicating that their interpretations and arguments are based on particular occurrences, but their writing also demonstrates competency (Lestari & Nurhamdah, 2019); (Anggerani, A., Mujahidah, M., Hidayat, W., & Asni, 2022).

Hedging is only an academic style and does not always include complex phrases which is a tactic that applies to students' practice of academic reasoning. When analyzing hedging language, (Hyland, 1998) separates eight hedging types. These are nouns, clausal elements, adverbs, adjectives, modal lexical verbs, agentless passive, and passive infinitives. Students frequently employ all forms of hedging in their critical essay outputs. Thus, even though academic writing frequently uses epistemic hedging strategies to indicate uncertainty assertions (Hyland, 1998).

Regardless of the study of hedging, the investigation of hedging devices not only focuses on EFL learners (Min, S., Paek, J. K., & Kang, 2019); (Petchkij, 2019); (Firoozjahanigh, M., Ebrahim, E. F., & Marzban, 2021) but also on L1 students (Alonso, 2019). Most studies analyzed the students' writing components, while others showed the students' performances. Using hedging classification by (Hyland, 1998), this study develop students' critical thinking using the language employed in hedging

as shown in EFL students' essays, this study closes a gap in the practices. Moreover, this study explores the students' viewpoints of hedging in their academic pursuits. The objective of this research is to authenticate students' perceptions of hedging within their scholarly essay composition. Based on those considerations, the formulation of research questions is:

1. What hedging strategies do Indonesian EFL students employ while writing critical essays?
2. How are the students' perceptions in using the language of hedging in their critical essays' production?

Method

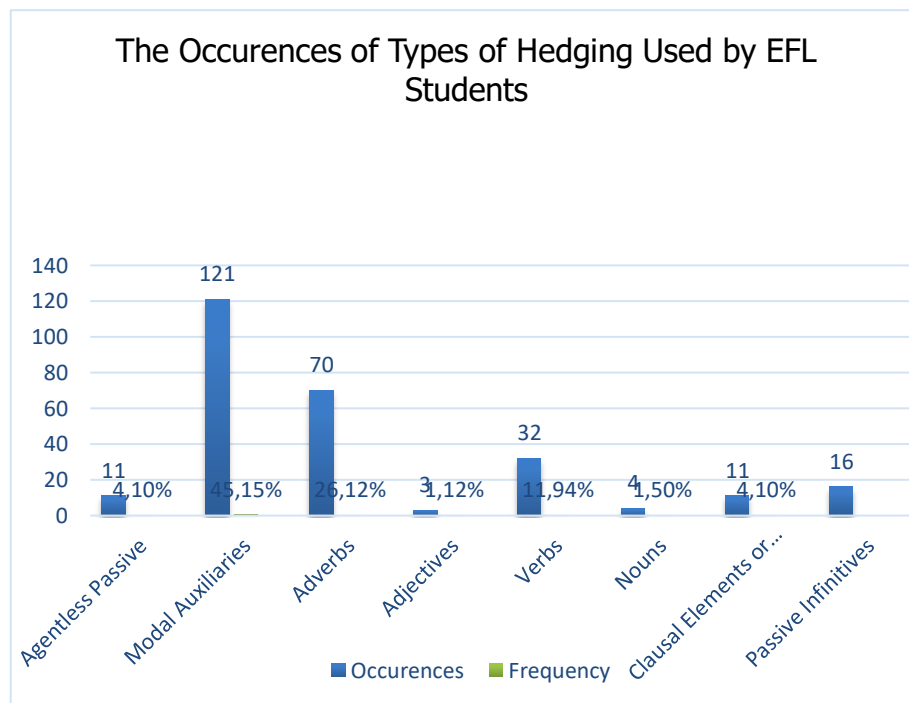
The goal of this study, which used a qualitative methodology, was to pinpoint the material's specific qualities (Creswell, 2012). Twenty essays written by those postgraduate students in English Department in Surabaya during the first semester were used to establish the scene for the study in this session. It was chosen since the lecturer for a course called English as an International Language required critical essays from the students in order for them to pass the assignment.

Furthermore, the interview is used to obtain further data on the students' perspectives on the use of hedging in their academic writings in developing their argumentation skills in academic literacy. Three students were selected to be interviewed in the form of a semi-structured relying on three questions as follows: (1) In what aspects do the hedging devices improve your essay? (2) How does the technique of hedging influence your essay? And (3) What are the reasons you implement the hedging devices in your essay? At this stage, the researchers noted and recorded the interview session.

Based on the necessary data, those were determined using (Hyland, 1998) forms of hedging based on essays written by EFL students. The writer used the three steps of techniques by (Creswell, 2012): First, familiarizing and organizing; second coding and reducing; and third, interpreting and representing.

Result

The data analysis revealed that 20 students' writings contained 268 hedging terms. The chart bar below displays the overall number of occurrences and the specifics of each form of hedging.



The result of the data analysis showed the frequencies of types of hedging that were listed in an orderly. They included modal auxiliaries, adverbs, verbs, passive infinitives, agentless passive, clausal elements, nouns, and adjectives.

Hedging Types in Essays Written by EFL Students

Using Agentless Passive

A sentence without a by-phrase or agent is known as an agentless passive. It was regarded as a passive clause as well. Among the passages discovered were:

- a. The appearance of the English teacher who is shown an image as an ideal model in mastering both knowledge and morality
- b. Code-mixing behavior is not interpreted as a lack of language skill

The writers gave the object or noun rather than the agent in cases (a) and (b). Since the agency wanted to be unambiguous and demonstrate a direct noun, there was no

need to write anything down. It also provided other details, such as the statement "lack of language skill" in example (b).

Using Modal Auxiliaries

A modal verb is one that expresses mood when used with another verb. 'May', 'might', 'can', 'could', 'would', and 'should' were examples of modal verbs. The following passages from the students' composition demonstrate how frequently this kind of hedging was used:

- a. Teachers should also become moral guides instead of only emphasizing students' academic development.
- b. Yet, it must be accompanied by constructing students' proper behavior and good morality
- c. Through the existence of the internet which can access it anytime and anywhere

Using Adverbs

The pattern of adverb was established by appending *-ly* to adjectives. Students also often used adverbs, as seen in the following excerpts:

- a. We are *constantly* building and negotiating throughout our lives through our interaction with others.
- b. It is because the world of English is *globally* applied to the aspects of cultural legacy.

When looking back at the essays, the use of manner adverbs was prevalent in describing how things happened. It was clear from examples (a) and (b) that students made an effort to impart what they had learned throughout the lesson, such as how English spread and how negotiation developed in terms of interaction (a).

Using Adjectives

Adjectives function as "modifying nouns" or descriptions of the parts of nouns. The adjectives employed in this section were mostly probability adjectives. The extracts discovered are as follows:

- a. It makes it possible for anyone to get access to knowledge.
- b. Perhaps their approach might not always be the best way.
- c. Providing a story using English and the local language by the local educated people are possible.

A few pupils employed probability adjectives like maybe and perhaps. These adjectives might serve as a way to sidestep a certain assertion. As a result, it was also relevant to students who wished to express their opinions on certain matters.

Using Full verbs

Verbs often describe an activity. However, writing a critical essay needed the use of particular verbs known as modal lexical verbs. The passages that followed were deemed to have modal lexical verbs:

- a. They switch or mix English code because they think it to be better than their language.
- b. In education, people tend to include their own culture in learning the English language.

In both cases, the use of the verbs "think" and "tend" indicated a doubt or perhaps an assessment. Despite the latitude granted to students to articulate their thoughts, there remains a possibility that the clarity of their arguments was not fully discernible.

Using Nouns

The specified items were called nouns. In a critical article, the way nouns were used reflected the use of adjectives. These are the excerpts:

- a. It means, the *perception* of English is that learning English means learning Western cultures.
- b. There is a great *possibility* that their communication would fail.
- c. It may present the *argument* in a way that may sound fluent and elegant.

It was discovered that additional words, such as perception and argument, were used in their written work. It meant that they continued to make estimates about what would be said.

Using Clausal Elements

To determine if the word "if" was a defining characteristic of conditional sentences. The following was the identification of the excerpt:

However, if the plumber changes the way he speaks, he has declared himself out of the language communities. As previously mentioned, students were frequently required to practice using conditional phrases. An implication is another term used to describe a conditional phrase in the discipline of logic. It dealt with the hints that the student used to convey the concepts in their written essay.

Using Passive Infinitives

The agent comes after the verb in a prepositional phrase when using the passive infinitive form of the verb. To + be + a past participle is the form. A few quotes are shown above:

- a. A person or group will maintain its existence not *to be confused* with other individuals or groups.
- b. The process of ELT will help much for the students *to be more globalized* and *modernized*.

This kind of hedging was used by very few pupils. When writing an essay, students typically communicate their thoughts using modern English. A proper form of the passive infinitive was also necessary when the notion was emphasized as evident.

Students' Perception of Using Hedging

Grasping the perspectives of students regarding the employment of hedging has become increasingly vital, given its escalating significance in scholarly discourse. Based on the results of interviews, one of the students said that:

"To build a critical essay in the framework of written discourse, I must use hedging as a bridge to discuss and convey my thoughts. Moreover, as a

postgraduate student, I have to link the idea of hedging to the concept of academic literacy implementation, such as writing many essays. This is why hedging is so important."

On top of the academic literacy concept, the concern of specific techniques in utilizing hedging takes into account students' writing production, as yielded briefly in this following statement:

"I put an effort into inputting the hedging devices in my essays. Uhm... the academician has to be aware in conveying doubt or caution in the contexts of accuracy and subtlety while coming up to critical contents of my writing."

Under the question about the reason for hedging, three students responded differently about the way they needed to do that. The first student confirmed that

"My primary goal of hedging is to lessen the possibility of criticism by having myself try to soften the arguments, phrases, or even declarations."

However, the second student confirmed that

"Hedging to avoid methods of greater precision is the specific justification that probably I could not control my idea of writing".

Uniquely, as said by the third student,

"Hedges might turn into a tactful or impolite strategy so that I am still on my path in writing."

Discussion

The initial research question was designed to investigate how the utilization of cautious language in students' essays influences practices in academic literacy. The findings showed that Indonesian EFL students produced a total of 268 hedges based on eight classifications of hedges. Modal auxiliaries ranked highly among those hedging in the pupils' composition. A similar result was found by (Sahib, H. & Rahayu, 2022) who examined the hedging system on modal auxiliary in journal papers. They attributed corpus analysis on modal auxiliary as proof that EFL writers tend to adjust the claims. Besides, this present finding is that the students use various aids to convey their thoughts or opinions by focusing more on them with the particular subject being

covered, which was in line with the studies by (Min, S., Paek, J. K., & Kang, 2019); (Petchkij, 2019); (Firoozjahantigh, M., Ebrahim, E. F., & Marzban, 2021).

The second research inquiry sought to ascertain students' perspectives on the use of cautious language to convey uncertainty and mitigate assertions in their scholarly essay composition. The results of the interviews demonstrated that students are aware of the importance of conveying doubt or caution in the context of accuracy and subtlety. Three students responded differently to the reason for hedging: to lessen criticism, to avoid precision methods, or to maintain their writing path, as was confirmed by the theory (Hyland, 1998). Understanding students' opinions on hedging is crucial for academic literacy implementation and enhancing critical writing skills. This is supported by the findings (Radojicic, S., & Novakov, 2022) that hedging can enhance students' understanding of scientific discourse and also help students integrate that strategy of hedging into future academic and professional writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has investigated the impact of hedging in students' essays on academic literacy practices. The analysis revealed that Indonesian EFL students utilized various types of hedging, with modal auxiliaries prominently featured in their compositions. Students primarily concentrate on the particular subject matter being instructed and employ an array of instruments to articulate their concepts.

Moreover, when considering the students' perspectives, there is a recognized importance of exercising skepticism and precision for the sake of nuance and accuracy within their written work. Different students provided varied reasons for hedging, such as reducing criticism, avoiding precision methods, or maintaining a particular writing style. Overall, the research underscores the multifaceted role of hedging in shaping both the content and perception of students' academic essays.

This research still needs further areas to be explored. As a recommendation, the researchers suggested conducting research on more exploration in the specific area of academic literacy practices instead of writing, as well as input the teachers' practices in assessing the results of students' writing.

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