

## **Constructing Gender through Metadiscourse: A Corpus-Based Inter-Disciplinary Study of Research Dissertations of Pakistani M. Phil Graduates**

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### **Abstract**

Viewed in the social context, academic writing is considered a site where both writers and readers are engaged in an interactive mode of presentation and evaluation of information. Male and female writers may differently exemplify the interactive mode of presenting and evaluating information through meta-discourse markers. The current research paper aims to explore the role of gender in the use of hedges and boosters in research dissertations of Pakistani M.Phil graduates particularly concerning disciplinary variation. For this purpose, the taxonomy Hyland's (2005) meta-discourse markers are used to identify the lists of hedges and boosters. A corpus consisting of one hundred research dissertations representing humanities, social sciences and sciences is developed, and further tagged with Antconc 3.3.4 to find out the frequencies and instances of hedges and boosters in male and female academic writing. The results reveal that overall hedges have been found as the more preferred meta-discourse markers than boosters in the academic discourse of Pakistani MPhil graduates. Females are more inclined towards the use of hedges, whereas, males are prone to the use of boosters in the presentation of academic discourse. The study has pedagogical implications for the writing practices of both students as well as supervisors.

**Keywords:** Gender Differences, Meta-discourse Markers, Hedges and Boosters, Corpus-based study, Pakistani Academic Writing

## Introduction

Language is an intrinsically social phenomenon. Numerous studies (e.g., Subon, 2013; Shirzad & Jamali, 2013; Waskita, 2008; Matei, 2011) have revealed that men and women tend to approach their social world differently in their use of language. The idea that men and women vary in their discourses has been of great interest for decades, though the early focus of investigation has been mainly the spoken discourse. Some of the earlier studies (e.g., Dovidio et al., 1988; Mulac et al., 1990; Mulac, Weimann, Widenmann & Gibson, 1988) mainly focused on gender differences in conversation. For example, Mulac et al. (1988) explored the frequency of using questions and directives in men and women dyadic interactions and concluded that women were more inclined to ask questions as compared to men who were found more likely to use directives in their conversations. Mulac et al., (1990) investigated the use of opinionative language in the discourse of school boys and girls and concluded that boys of all grades were more likely to give opinions as compared to school girls.

Since gender differences in language use attracted much of the attention of scholars and researchers, it gained considerable attention in the written academic discourses as well. One of the most explored areas remains the investigation of gender differences in the usage of interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers in academic discourse. Hedges and boosters are key features of the interactional element of metadiscourse. Hedges (e.g. might, possible, about, perhaps) function as metadiscourse markers to withhold committedness and open dialogue; whereas boosters (e.g. infact, it is clear, definitely) evince certainty and close dialogue. Hedges and boosters as metadiscourse markers perform the function of creating doubt and certainty respectively to the propositional content of the academic writing (Serholt, 2012). Multiple studies (e.g., Hyland & Tse, 2008; Yeganeh & Ghoreschi, 2015; Seyyedrezaie & Vahedi, 2017) have come up with different and opposing results. For example, Hyland and Tse (2008) concluded that gender is not an important factor in determining the linguistic choices of male and female writers in their academic discourse, whereas, Yeganeh and Ghoreschi (2015) revealed that gender plays an important role in the use of hedges and boosters in academic discourse and that women are more cautious than men in reporting their stance.

Most of the studies have revealed that women are uneager to impose their point of view on others or may be reluctant in the explicit expression of their stance. They tend to use uncertainty

expressions like hedges and empty adjectives; while men are prone to use boosters and expressions of certainty in their discourses. The more frequent uses of hedges and uncertainty expressions indicate the cautious attitude and subordinate position of women as compared to men. Women tend to use verb phrases which reveal their Corpus-based uncertainty particularly those combined with first-person singular pronouns (e.g., Mulac & Lundell, 1994; Hartmann, 1976; Poole, 1979) which reinforce their dominated and adjunct status. These studies reveal that the cautious attitude of writers towards their assertion leaves room open for discussion and that the stance may be withdrawn, if necessary, at a later stage. Lakoff (1975) was among the earliest to identify distinctive linguistic features of women's discourse at the phrase level. She revealed that women are more inclined to use extra-polite forms and tend to use linguistic features like hedges, intensifiers, avoidance of expletives, emphatic stress, empty adjectives and tag questions which highlight their subordinate position in their discourse. The acclaim that was endorsed by succeeding empirical researches (Holmes, 1995; Schiffrin, 2001; Shirzad & Jamali, 2013; Waskita, 2008; Matei, 2011) mainly concluded that women's language is the reflection of the subordinate position of women in society and that women use more polite forms and discourse markers in their communication as compared to men.

Some of the studies have associated the use of hedges and boosters with welcoming the opinions of others. Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015) explored the gender-specific use of hedges and boosters in abstract and discussion sections of research articles produced in English language by Persian natives using the model of Hyland (2005). The results show a higher frequency of hedges in female writing samples while a higher frequency of boosters is seen in male writings. Dousti and Rasekh (2016) attempted to analyse the use of hedges by male and female students of ELT in their interpersonal discourse by collecting conversation samples of 35 ELT students with equal representation of male and female participants who were all native speakers of Turkish and Kurdish and also, shared the same proficiency level of English. The results reveal the excessive use of hedges by female participants than the males although they belong to the same learning community. The findings reveal that the major causes for hedging by female included their tendency to welcome others' opinions, to achieve consensus and to exhibit a friendly interactive demeanor.

Keeping in view the importance of metadiscourse and social constraints on women in a Pakistani stereotypical patriarchal society, it is important to explore how Pakistani women and men project/negotiate their stance through hedges and boosters in their academic discourse in writing their research dissertations at Mphil level. Pakistani academic writing, so far is a least explored area. Few researchers, for example, Azher and Mahmood (2016); Azher et al., (2018); Azher, Jahangir and Faiz (2019) have focused on disciplinary variation in terms of certain linguistic features; these studies mainly focus on Pakistani academic writing as a register. For example, Azher et al., (2019) explored the use of attitudinal stances devices across social sciences, humanities and sciences as broader disciplinary groups. Their findings reveal a higher use of attitudinal stance devices in social sciences and humanities when compared with sciences because these disciplines use such markers to express opinion and attract the readers towards their stance on a particular perspective. A similar study on the frequency of stance adverbials in Pakistani M.Phil and Ph.D. dissertations reveal variation in the use of stance and opinion adverbials across disciplines (Azher & Mehmood, 2018). Another dimension in the study of academic writing in Pakistani research dissertations reveals disciplinary variation in the use of hedges concerning epistemic and deontic modality markers. There is an influence of disciplinary affiliation on the frequency of occurrence of epistemic and deontic modality markers (Azher et al., 2020).

Few have focused on gender differences in academic writing produced by second language learners (e.g., Javid, Farooq & Umer, 2013; Waskita, 2008). However, gender differences in terms of Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse markers usage in research dissertations of MPhil graduates in general and in the context of Pakistani academia, in particular, have scarcely received any considerable attention. Thus, this issue deserves to be explored more thoroughly and warrants extensive investigation. It is interesting to explore Pakistani academic writing from a different perspective and to see how men and women vary in the expression of their commitment and assurance to propositional information about different disciplines. For this reason, the present study tends to explore the overall frequency and usage of hedges and boosters in which Pakistani academic writers express their doubt (hedges) and certainty (boosters) and to see if differences exist about their gender. Relying on Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse markers consisting of the most common hedges and boosters found in academic discourse, the present study seeks to

answer the following research question: Do male and female authors vary in the use of hedges and boosters in Pakistani academic writing?

## **Theoretical Framework**

Metadiscourse can be defined as the linguistic devices used to communicate a writer's stance towards the contents and the readers. Metadiscourse markers explicitly refer to the ways a text is organized by the writer and directed towards the reader. Thus it embodies the interaction between the writer and the reader (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

Metadiscourse in academic writing is a linguistic material that indicates the social engagements of the writers and the way they signal their presence and attitude towards readers. Meta discourse, according to Hyland (2004) is a cover term that includes both interactive and interactional markers "as self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community" (Hyland, 2005, p. 37). Hyland views metadiscourse markers helpful in developing the relationship between writer and reader and as devices to understand the writer's perspective. He categorizes metadiscourse markers into interactive and interactional dimensions. The interactive dimension "concerns the writer's awareness of a participating audience and the ways he or she seeks to accommodate its probable knowledge, interest, rhetorical expectations and processing abilities" (p. 49) and includes five subcategories, namely: transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses. The interactional dimension concerns the ways writers intrude and comment on their messages. This dimension includes subcategories namely: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention, and engagement markers.

This study mainly adheres to hedges and boosters as interactional metadiscourse markers and explores how Pakistani men and women Mphil graduates engage with the readers in negotiating their stance.

**Table 1***Hyland's (2005) Model of Meta discourse Markers*

<b>Types of Markers</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Interactive Mark</b>		
Transitions	Developing relations with main and coordinating clauses	Therefore, and, but, thus...etc.
Frame markers	Framing suggestions or arguments	My purpose is, first,...etc
Endophoric markers	Moving the readers towards what comes in the next.	As noted earlier, see Figure 1,...etc.
Evidentials	To direct readers to information outside the text.	X (2005)states, According to,...etc.
Code glosses	To expand the propositional meaning.	In other words, such as is defined as,...etc.
<b>Interactional Markers</b>		
Hedges	Suggesting the writers to avoid or avert the propositions.	Might, perhaps, possible,...etc.
Boosters	To lay stress upon	....a fact that, surely, etc.
Attitude markers	To share the writer's inclinations	Fortunately, surprising...etc.
Self-mentions	Referring to the writer out and out	I, me, my,...etc.
Engagementmarkers	Engaging the reader	You see, you note that...etc.

Adopted from: Nawaz et al., 2021

## Research Methodology

### Corpus Design

The corpus for this study is designed following Hyland and Tse's (2004) model for compiling cross-disciplinary academic writing data to evaluate metadiscoursal features in this particular genre. The primary objective of the present research is to explore the use of metadiscourse markers in Pakistani academic writing with the special perspective of gender differences across three major disciplines, namely, sciences, humanities, and social sciences. These disciplines represent a wide range of subjects. We have, therefore, selected dissertations of two subjects from each discipline. In total, the corpus consists of 100 research dissertations produced by MPhil students, both male and female, from different Pakistani universities including the University of Sargodha, Government College University Faisalabad, Bahauddin Zakariya

University, Multan from 2008 to 2015. The dissertations were collected both in hard and soft form and were accordingly scanned and converted to machine-readable format. The size of the corpus developed for the present research is given in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Statistics of Corpus Composition of Pakistani Academic Writing*

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>No of words</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sciences	Biochemistry	756,789	1,169,356
	Earth sciences	412,567	
Humanities	English	689,567	1,257,457
	Communication studies	567,890	
Social Sciences	Psychology	634,567	1,158,134
	Sociology	523,567	
Total			3,584,947

In Table 3, we present a combined gendered-based distribution of our data from three disciplines.

**Table 3**

*Discipline-wise gendered-based distribution of corpus*

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sciences	559,333	610,023	1,169,356
Humanities	604,635	652,822	1,257,457
Social Sciences	580,879	577,255	1,158,134
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,744,847</b>	<b>1,840,100</b>	<b>3,584,947</b>

### Corpus Tool and Tests

Accordingly, Hyland's (2005) model of meta-discourse markers was used to identify the list of hedges and boosters. The data comprising of female students' theses is named female theses corpus (FTC henceforth) and that of male students as Male theses corpus (MTC henceforth). The frequencies of both hedges and boosters as used by male and female graduates were counted using AntConc 3.4.4 and were categorized according to gender and discipline. Then we ran chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) using SPSS to calculate any statistically significant differences in the use of hedges and boosters in the two corpora. For this purpose, we set the conventional threshold for statistical calculation of the chi-square, that is, at 0.05. Therefore, if the calculated value was less than 0.05,

we considered the difference between FTC and MTC use of hedges and boosters as insignificant; for the value equal to or greater than 0.05, we considered the difference between the two as significant.

## Results

The tables given below demonstrate the frequencies of hedges and boosters used by male and female authors of Pakistani academic writing in three major disciplines.

**Table 4**

*Gender and the Use of Hedges*

	<b>Sciences</b>		<b>Humanities</b>		<b>Social Sciences</b>		<b>Total</b>
	Bio-Chemistry	Earth Sciences	English	Communication Studies	Psychology	Sociology	
Male	948	715	3691	2201	204	946	8705
Female	1020	179	1633	1816	2750	1635	9033

Table 4 demonstrates the discipline-wise use of hedges in respect of gender and reveals that overall females are more inclined to the use of hedges as compared to males. However, the discipline-wise comparison reveals that the male from Sciences and humanities comparatively show a higher tendency to use hedges than their female counterparts. On the other hand, women from social sciences show a much greater tendency to use hedges than men.

**Table 5**

*Gender and the use of Boosters*

	<b>Sciences</b>		<b>Humanities</b>		<b>Social Sciences</b>		<b>Total</b>
	Bio-Chemistry	Earth Sciences	English	Communication Studies	Psychology	Sociology	
Male	303	157	2360	918	80	548	4366
Female	435	53	911	1073	978	839	4289

Table 5 exhibits the frequency of boosters about gender differences across disciplines. Comparison reveals that male graduates make greater use of boosters in presenting their stance in humanities, whereas, female graduates are more inclined to boost their opinion in the disciplines of sciences and with greater frequency in social sciences.



**Table 6***Gender and the Use of Hedges and Boosters*

	<b>Hedges</b>	<b>Boosters</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	8705	4366	13071
Female	9033	4289	13322
Total	17738	8655	

Table 6 exhibits gender differences in the overall frequency of both hedges and boosters. Interestingly both male and female MPhil graduates use hedges greater than boosters in presenting their academic stance in the production of propositional content. However, female writers have shown a lesser tendency to use boosters than their male counterparts.

**Table 7***Chi-Square on Gender Differences in the Use of Hedges across Disciplines*

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Social Science</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Humanities</b>	<b>Total</b>	$\chi^2$	<i>P</i>	<i>Phi</i>
MALE	Count	1150	1663	5892	8705	2599.72	.000	.383*
	Expected Count	2716.3	1404.5	4584.1	8705.0			
FEMALE	Count	4385	1199	3449	9033			
	Expected Count	2818.7	1457.5	4756.9	9033.0			
Total	Count	5535	2862	9341	17738			

The results are evident enough to suggest an association between gender and the use of hedges by students of different faculties. Based on the results, it can be stated that an association was found between gender and different faculties ( $\chi^2(2) > 2599.72$ ,  $p = .000$ ) on the use of hedges.

**Table 8***Chi-Square on Gender Differences in the Use of Boosters across Disciplines*

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Social Science</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Humanities</b>	<b>Total</b>	$\chi^2$	<i>P</i>	<i>Phi</i>
Male	Count	628	460	3278	4366	896.64	.000	.322*
	Expected Count	1233.4	478.2	2654.4	4366.0			
Female	Count	1817	488	1984	4289			
	Expected Count	1211.6	469.8	2607.6	4289.0			
Total	Count	2445	948	5262	8655			

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and the use of boosters of different disciplines. The relation between these variables was

significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 8655) = 896.64$ ,  $p = .000$ . Phi value (.322) is significant and tells the strength of the relationship which is a moderate relationship.

**Table 9**

*Chi-Square Test on the Gender Differences in the Use of hedges and boosters*

Gender		Hedges	Boosters	Total	$\chi^2$	$p$	Phi
MALE	Count	8705	4366	13071	4.364	.037	.013*
	Expected Count	8784.7	4286.3	13071.0			
FEMALE	Count	9033	4289	13322			
	Expected Count	8953.3	4368.7	13322.0			
Total	Count	17738	8655	26393			

We analyzed whether gender (Male=1, Female=2) and use of hedges and boosters are independent of one another. The above table reveals that there is a significant relationship between gender and the use of hedges and boosters. It means that the use of hedges and boosters is dependent on gender  $\chi^2(1, N = 26393) = 4.364$ ,  $p = .037$  and that gender plays a significant role in making linguistic choices. Women have been found more inclined to the use of hedges than men while boosters are being used by men more often as compared to their female counterparts. It is also found that hedges (67%) are more preferred meta-discourse markers among both male and female graduates than boosters (33%). Phi value (.13) is significant but tells the strength of the relationship, which is a weak relationship.

## Discussion

### Gender Differences and the Use of Hedges

Table 4 exhibits the gender differences in the frequency of hedges across disciplines and reveals that females are more inclined to use hedges as compared to males. The figure below illustrates the differences.

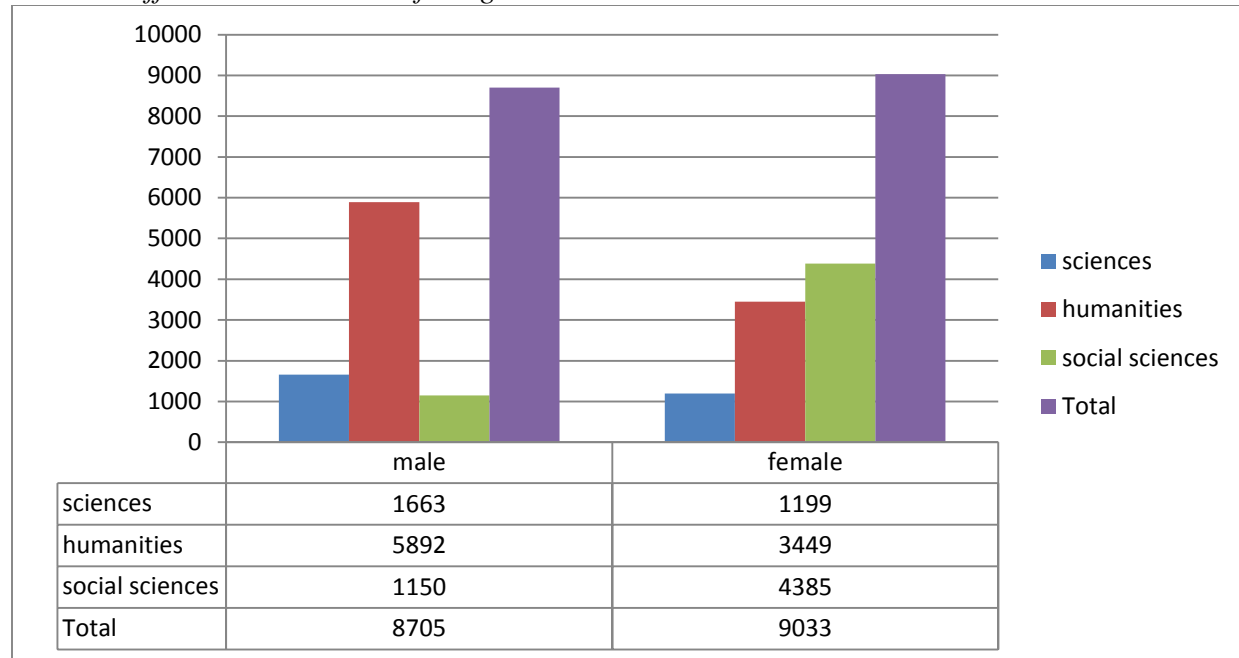
**Figure 1***Gender Differences in the use of hedges*

Figure 1 exhibits the comparison of hedges used by male and female M.phil graduates in sciences, humanities and social sciences. The figure reveals that, in the overall estimation of the use of hedges, female students make frequent use of hedges in the production of academic discourse as compared to male students. The more frequent use of hedges by female writers is the reflection of their cautious and open-ended interaction with the reader and is true to the nature of women's discourse as identified in Lakoff (1975) and Schiffrin (2001) and as an indicator of their subordinate position in society.

However, discipline-wise comparison indicates that males from humanities and sciences make more frequent use of hedges in academic writing, whereas, females demonstrate a greater tendency towards hedges in social sciences. Male academic writers have shown the least tendency to use hedges in social sciences even less than in sciences which are marked by more authentic and factual information. This reveals that male students in humanities and sciences tend to be more cautious in giving their judgments, remain open-ended, flexible and withhold commitment.

It is also clear that the differences in the frequency of hedges between males and females are not drastically high which presents men and women on the same note of cautious expression.

This tendency can be explored through some diachronic studies, to see whether men and women have experienced some change in their expression. The results are by Lakoff (1975), and Schiffrin (2001), and endorse the idea that women are slightly more open and flexible in their dialogue as compared to males who are marked by definiteness and closeness in making propositions in academic discourse. The results may also be associated with the more cautious attitude of women in their writings and the fact they always give space for an open-ended discourse. The small differences in the frequency of hedges and boosters indicate that though male and female writers vary in their linguistic choices, they move on a similar track in making propositions in academic discourse with slight differences in the level of certainty and doubt. The figure given below illustrates the frequency of the most commonly used hedges by male and female students.

### Gender Differences and the Most Commonly Used Hedges

The figure below illustrates the differences across genders on the most frequently used hedges by male and female writers in the production of academic discourse.

**Figure 2**

*Gender differences in the frequency of most commonly used hedges*

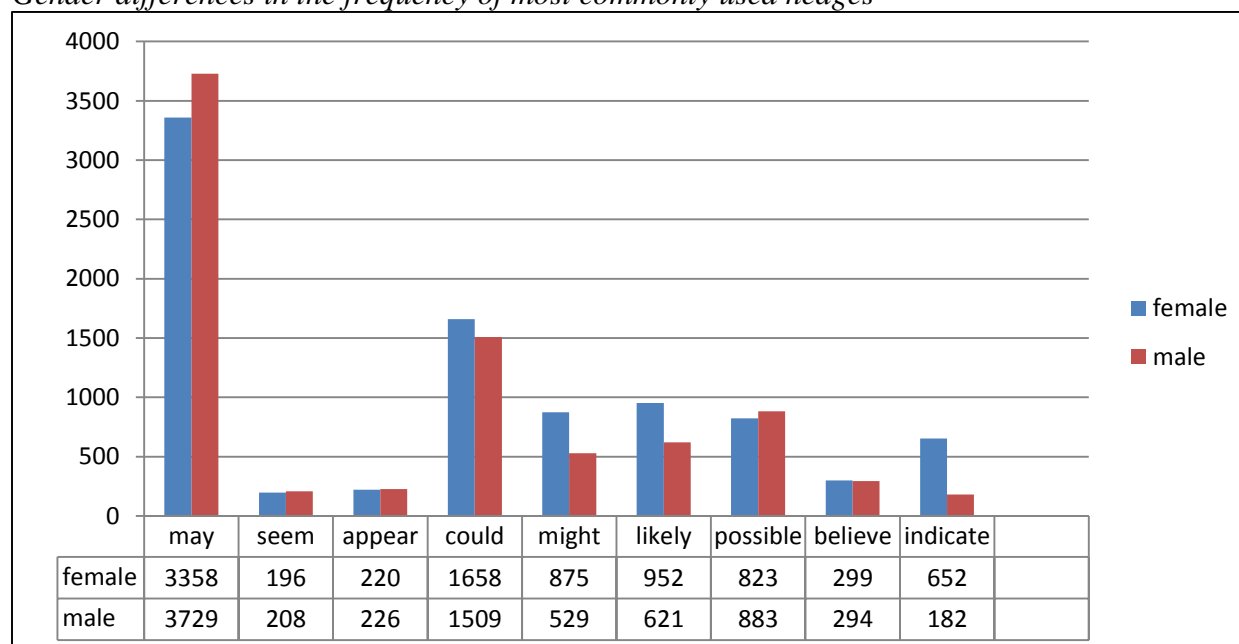


Figure 2 exhibits gender differences in the frequency of most common hedges used by male and female academic writers and reveals an almost similar tendency towards different hedges. 'May' is the most frequently used meta-discourse marker among both male and female Pakistani

academic writers, though comparatively lesser used by female writers. The more frequent use of 'may' in comparison with 'might' indicates a lesser degree of doubt and uncertainty in Pakistani academic discourse.

Female writers seem to prefer 'might', 'likely', and 'indicate' as their favourite metadiscourse markers and try to remain at a cautious distance in the course of making propositional statements. May and might are used as indicators of subjective, epistemic *possibility* (Lewis, 1986, p. 126), and to express the speaker's volitional involvement "in the creation of a possibility" (Lewis, 1986, p. 113); overall, *might* express a higher degree of uncertainty. 'Might' is used when there are lesser chances of happening something, and expresses a higher degree of uncertainty. The frequent use of *might* by female writers endorses the fact of their subservient position in society. The following examples from male and female graduates exhibit their way of expressing their stance.

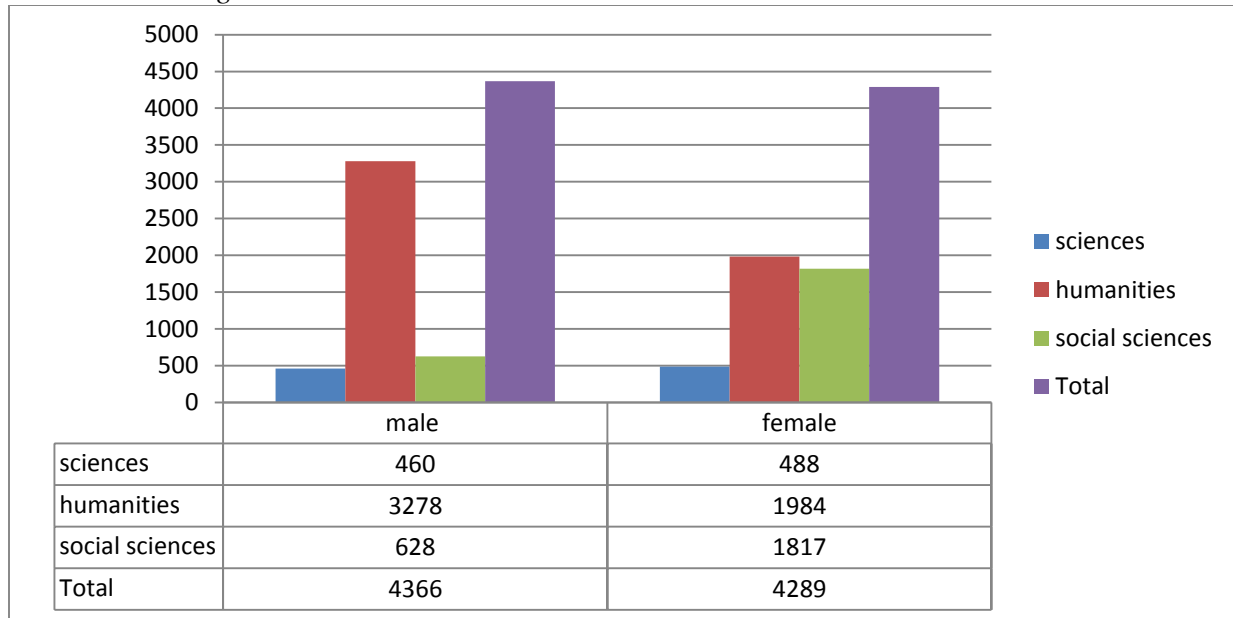
1. "The pre-existing chronic conditions might influence the outcome of acute critical illness". (F, Txt.47, GS)
2. "It might be one of the reasons that English newspapers are considered more popular among elites and opinion leaders and they can understand the policies and complexities in their structures more easily". ( F, Txt.69, CS)

In the examples above, the use of 'might' exhibits a lesser degree of certainty in the expression of propositional stance by female writers, that they suspect the influence of chronic conditions on the outcomes of acute critical illness and the reasons for English newspapers being considered more popular among elites respectively.

3. "Advertiser wants the consumer to buy the advertised product, use it, throw it away and buy another product, which may replace it, in a cycle of continuous consumption". (M, Txt.34, CS)

### **Boosters and Gender**

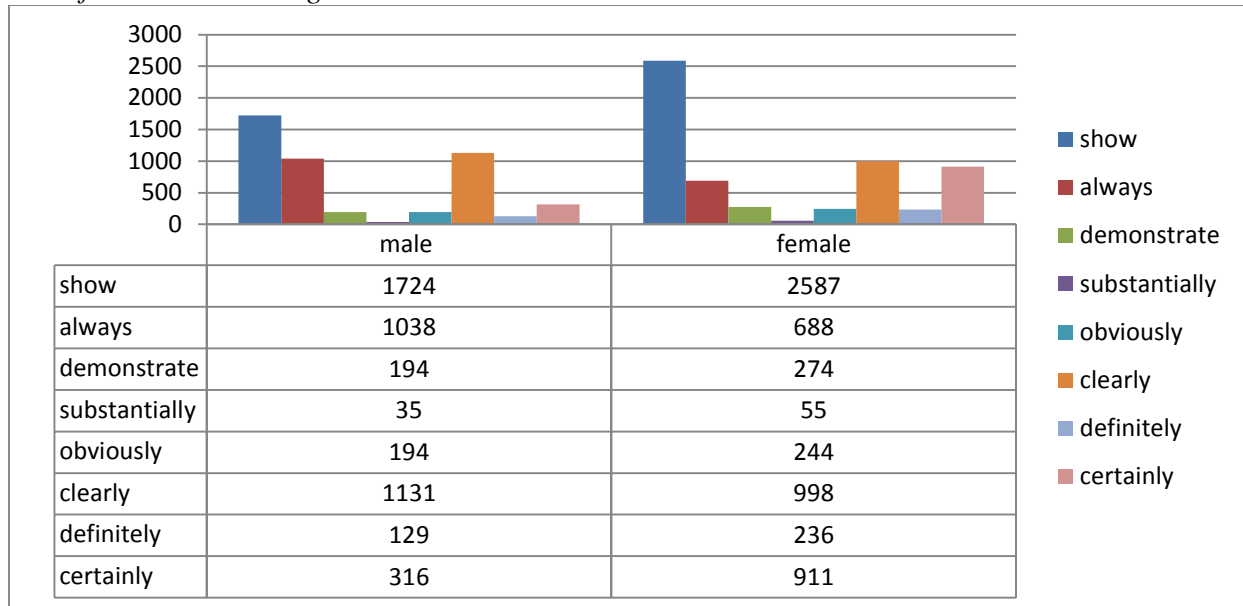
The figure below represents the disciplinewise use of boosters across genders.

**Figure 3***boosters across gender*

The figure reveals that overall both men and women tend to use boosters in their academic writing, though male students are found more inclined to the use of boosters as compared to their female counterparts. Statistically significant variations have been found across disciplines. Humanities, among all disciplines, show the greater tendency of men to use boosters, which indicates an expression of certainty and confidence. In Sciences, both males and females do seem to rely much on boosters true to the nature of the subject, which relies more on factual data and information. Males are more interactive in humanities as compared to the other two disciplines. They tend to use both hedges and boosters more frequently in this discipline. The following figure shows the use of different boosters by male and female writers.

### Use of Boosters Across Gender

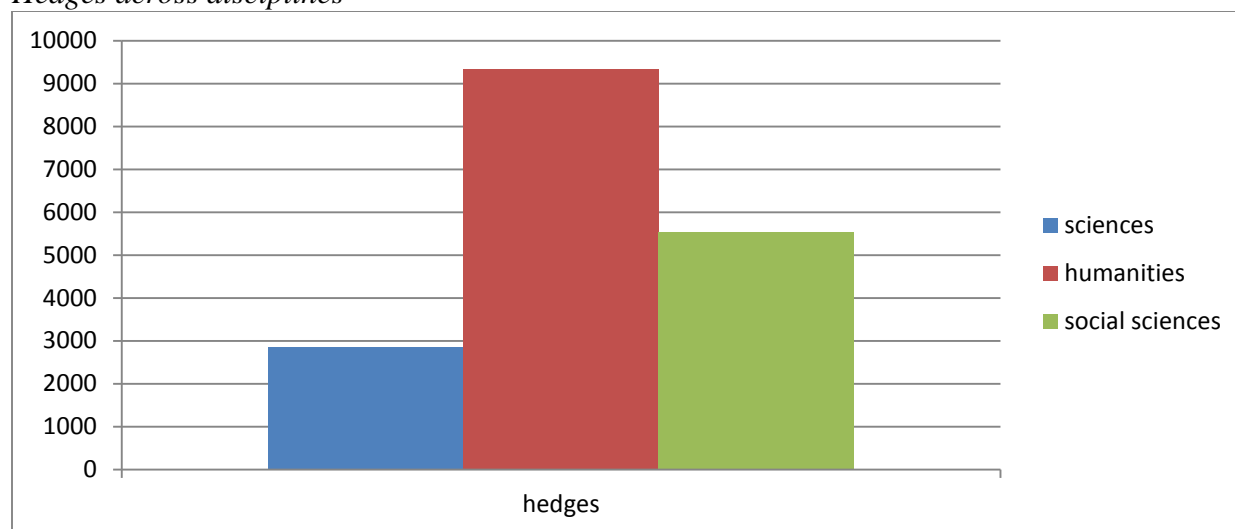
The figure below demonstrates the frequency of different boosters used by male and female MPhil graduates.

**Figure 4***Use of boosters across gender*

The figure reveals that 'show' is the favourite booster amongst both male and female academic writers as an indicator of their confidence and conveys the author's interpretation as self-evident or as a generally accepted idea or fact. The excessive use of 'show' indicates the writers' tendency to make claims about something. The other most preferred boosters among both male and female academic writers are 'always' and 'clearly'. The comparison reveals that these two boosters are more popular among male academic writers than female writers, which indicates a greater level of confidence and certainty among male writers in the expression of Pakistani academic discourse. Female academic writers tend to use 'certainly' as an epistemic property of belief more frequently and endorse their stance with confidence, thus the claims made are undoubted and unchallenged. The lesser use of 'obviously', 'definitely' and 'demonstrate' is an indication that authors tend to boost their claim to a certain degree and not to use them confidently. Though females tend to use this booster more excessively 'Substantially' on the other hand is the least used booster among both male and female authors.

### Hedges and Disciplines

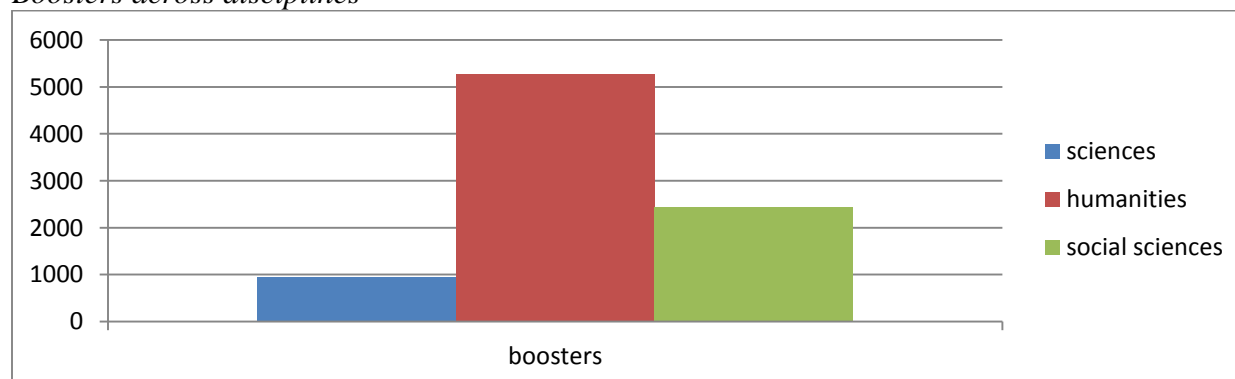
The figure given below reveals the disciplinary variation in terms of the frequency of hedges in the research dissertations of MPhil graduates.

**Figure 5***Hedges across disciplines*

The figure shows disciplinary variation in the use of hedges in Pakistani academic discourse. Humanities are shown as the most prone discipline to the use of hedges and are revealed to be more cautious and evasive in making their statements or for other rhetorical reasons when compared with the other two disciplines. Sciences are shown least inclined to the employment of hedges due to the nature of discipline as they rely more on information and tend to be direct, clear and confident.

**Boosters and Disciplines**

The figure given below reveals the disciplinary variation in terms of the frequency of boosters in the research dissertations of MPhil graduates.

**Figure 6***Boosters across disciplines*



The figure shows a comparison among disciplines on the use of boosters and reveals that humanities in comparison with the other two disciplines rely more on boosters and tend to claim with certainty and confidence. The comparison between the frequency of hedges and boosters in humanities indicates that hedges are more frequent and excessively used in this discipline. The more frequent use of hedges characterizes humanities with cautious and open-ended discourse, thus leaving room for discussion. However, it is also revealed that both hedges and boosters are more frequent in humanities than the other two disciplines. This exposes the point that humanities tend to use metadiscourse markers more frequently as compared to sciences and social sciences and are more interactively connected with the reader and convey their potential stance. Sciences on the contrary are less interactive and show the least inclination to the use of boosters.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes with the findings that overall hedges have been found as the more preferred meta-discourse markers than boosters in the academic discourse of Pakistani university students. The propensity to use hedges more frequently is an indication of a more cautious and flexible attitude on the part of Pakistani academic writers. However, it also indicates that Pakistani MPhil graduates are less assured and shy in the development and expression of their argument, which is unfortunate and suggests more research exposure and trainings in Universities.

The results reveal that the use of meta-discourse markers reflects the gender of the writer because of their choices and preferences in the expression of academic stance. The results on gender differences are in agreement with Lakoff, 1973; Holmes, 1995; Schiffrin, 2001; Shirzad & Jamali 2013; Waskita, 2008; Matei, 2011; Yeganeh & Ghoreyshi, 2015) in the frequent use of hedges that female writers tend to be more cautious and polite and prefer open dialogue by using more hedges than boosters. This shows female preferences for avoiding certainty and mitigating the statements and that they generate a type of discourse that is open-ended and leaves room for further discussion. The lesser preferences for boosters also reflect the subordinate position of female academic writers.

Male academic writers have been found more inclined to the use of boosters, which indicate their confidence and definiteness in generating propositional content. The distinctive preferences

for boosters among male writers secure them an assertive position in the expression of academic stance and male writers tend to be more definite and firm in their opinion and generate a lesser room for open dialogue.

It is also revealed that male and female writers tend to favour certain hedges and boosters in the presentation of academic discourse. Among hedges, both make an excessive use of 'may', though women are slightly less inclined to the use of 'may' in presenting academic stance. 'Might' is more popular with female writers, thus indicating a lesser degree of certainty and confidence on their part. As regards disciplinary variation, humanities are more interactive with greater frequency of both hedges and boosters. However, hedges are more frequent than boosters, which indicates the uncertainty of the claim.

### **Further Research and Suggestions**

Future research may be conducted on investigating some other types of hedges as passive voice, or conditionals, which remained out of consideration in the present research due to the limitations of time and scope. Moreover, the present study is restricted only to the corpus compiled on Pakistani academic writing. However, it would be interesting to explore hedging in other registers such as media and political discourses and may also be explored in advertisements to find out how interactional markers are crucial to these discourses and impact their respective rhetorical style. It would also be of great interest to explore whether there exist any gender differences in making use of hedges and boosters or other interactive and interactional linguistic choices, or whether the females may use more probationary, mediate, and vague language when seen in comparison with their male counterparts. Another stipulation is the multiple uses of hedge varying across cultures and ethnography. Although there exist some studies which have exclusively focused on the culture-specific differences of metadiscourse markers, they are generally focused on the sphere of academic discourse. There is a dearth of data in exploring culture-specific hedge usage in discourses. Therefore, this article on academic writing may open up vast opportunities for research in the relevant areas.

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