Taking Out Insurance on Statements
Hedging in Women's and Men's Research Articles

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Abstract and Keywords

This thesis presents the view that women use hedges more often than men and for different reasons and seeks to determine to what extent and during what circumstances this phenomenon occurs. A quantitative and qualitative design was selected for this study. That is, quantitative in the sense that, hedges were counted in two articles by a male and female writer. The articles were about perceptions of lifestyle habits that put children of Mexican descent at risk for obesity. Qualitative in the sense that only a certain amount of hedges was accounted for. The findings are supported with additional material in the form of books and articles about gender, and hedging in academic writing. The results did not match the initial hypothesis and as a result men use hedges more often than women do. The most plausible explanation for this has to do with hedging in scientific writing as opposed to gender related issues. Perceptions about female and male language use may not correspond to preordained expectations. Larger studies are needed to confirm these preliminary findings.

Keywords: hedges, men, women, scientific research articles and academic writing.
1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in sexism encoded language has grown rapidly. Studies have focused on the portrayal of men and women in terms of grammatical, lexical and discourse aspects. Sociolinguistic research that concerns gender differences is as equally controversial as it is informative and fascinating. What features differentiate the sexes and on what basis these judgements have been made, are subject to intense debate: Lakoff (2004), Holmes (2008), and Coates (2004) have focused on gender differences in language, namely what features differentiate the sexes. As Coates (2004:3) suggests, it is essential to keep in mind that by saying that men and women talk differently or write differently a range of assumptions are made. First, it assumes that we can divide speakers into two groups called 'women' and 'men'. Secondly, the question assumes that we are interested in differences between women and men rather than similarities. This point was made because if we had asked a different question there would have been a different answer. Needless to say, this study has its primary focus on differences; however similarities between men and women are always kept in mind.

According to Holmes (2008:157), in order to fully understand what features differentiate or group women and men together, there is a need to establish what kind of connotations follows with the terms sex and gender. Whereby sex is often associated with biological characteristics and the term gender is used to describe socio-cultural behaviour e.g. speech. This definition is also mentioned by Coates (2004:4) where she states the same claims that Holmes (2008:157) does, and adds a further explanation. That is, most societies operate in terms of two genders, masculine and feminine. This treats gender as a binary opposition, and most research until recently did so. However, more recent research has challenged this binary thinking and gender is more thought of in plural terms where a range of femininities and masculinities are available to speakers at any point in time (Coates 2004:4).

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to examine the use of hedge forms in English using a sample of two research articles by a woman and man respectively, which is about perceptions on lifestyle habits that put children of Mexican descent at risk for obesity. In order to investigate whether women use hedge forms more often than men do. In other words, we may investigate whether women use hedge forms for different reasons and more often than men do. Presumably because women are perceived as more incline to use hedge forms than men to validate the importance of their utterance or statement as opposed to what men normally do.
2. Theoretical Background

As previously stated, the present study examines the use of hedge forms in English using a sample of two research articles, by a woman and man respectively, which is about perceptions of lifestyle habits that put children of Mexican descent at risk for obesity. Books and articles will be used to establish the role of hedge forms and gender in language. Evidence shows that differences in language and gender have been observed since the early grammarians (Coates 2004:10). For instance, there have been comments on gender differences in vocabulary by 18th century writers as shown by the following extract:

I must beg leave...to doubt the property of joining to the fixed and permanent standard of language a vocabulary of words which perish and are forgot within the compass of a year. That we are obliged to the ladies for most of these ornaments to our language, I readily acknowledge.

(Cambridge 1754, as quoted in Tucker 1961:93)

Note, several instances of the kind shown above exists and the main issue of focus is the fact that 18th century writers defined language in terms of male language which is seen as the norm while female language is deviant (Coates 2004:12). Another example of this division of male and female language can be seen in Johnson's Dictionary from 1755 where Johnson stigmatises different words e.g. flirtation as 'female cant' (Coates 2004:12).

According to previous scientific research in this field, linguistic forms used by men and women contrast in various degrees in all speech communities (Holmes 2008:157). A tremendous amount of research in the field of language and gender has been made over the past twenty years (Coates 2004:3). According to Coates (2004:4), this is due to certain reasons such as antecedents in dialectology and linguistics and changes in women's position in contemporary society.

That is, the informants that were selected were typically non-mobile, rural, old and male and when this informant selection was observed by sociolinguists it was rejected and initially non-rural and younger informants were selected. While many studies did consist of both sexes, the studies of male speakers were e.g. carried out on black adolescents in Harlem (Labov) and schoolboys in Edinburgh (Reid) in the 1970's. It was not until the late 1980's that studies concentrated on female speakers. Furthermore, as sociolinguistics became a more established discipline there was a change from studying more standard varieties to non-standard varieties so that all sorts of minority groups were studied (Coates 2004:4). Still, women were not perceived as a minority group and until relatively recently men were
automatically seen as the heart of society with women being insignificant or even invisible.

However, history shows that all important positions following the Second World War were held by men. The United Kingdom was under the rule of George VI, the Prime Minister was male and businesses were run by men. However, the major change that has occurred since then is in part due to the active political engagement of the Women's Movement. Women achieved the legal right to be treated as equals because of two acts that came into effect in 1975 in Britain, namely the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act (Coates 2004:5). Due to these acts, there have been changes in workplace environments, homes as well as changes in practice and attitudes.

One significant marker of this is the publication of Lakoff's (1975) book, which was highly criticised, even so, this was a starting point for further investigation in the language of women (Coates 2004:5). The book was highly criticised because as Lakoff (2004:40) suggests, her claims were based on introspection. That is to say, by examining her own speech and that of acquaintances, she drew conclusions based on intuition. For example, Lakoff (2004:78) summarizes the following forms as “women's language”:

1. Women have a large stock of words related to their specific interests, generally relegated to them as “woman's work”: magenta, shirr, dart (in sewing), and so on. If men use these words at all, it tends to be tongue-in-check.

2. “Empty” adjectives like divine, charming, cute....

3. Question intonation where we might expect declaratives for instance tag questions (“It's so hot, isn't it?) and rising intonation in statement contexts (“What's your name, dear?” “Mary Smith”).

Even so, Lakoff was aware of the situation and explained that the introspective method could be seen as a method that provided dubious results.

In comparison, markers of the linguistic research conducted on men's language can be seen in works such as the aforementioned study of black adolescents in Harlem by Labov (Johnson and Meinhof:1997) and by Johnson and Meinhof (1997) who focus on masculinity and language. The book provides a different representation of gender studies, where Johnson and Meinhof (1997:12) argue that despite all that has been written over the past twenty years on femininity and feminism, masculinity has stayed relatively concealed. Work on language and gender often portray women as the object of problematization and men are given a position characterized by normalization. They claim that as long as this perception of men and women goes unchallenged, any attempts to transform still existing gender orders
will remain a female prerogative (Johnson & Meinhof 1997:12).

As can be seen, there has been extensive research in differences between men and women's language and as Holmes suggests (2008:1), sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society. By examining and explaining why we speak or write differently in different social contexts, sociolinguists can identify the social functions of language and how language works as well as the way people signal aspects of social identity through their language. In addition (Holmes 2008:159), gender differences in language are often just one aspect of linguistic difference that reflects social status or power in a society. There are often more factors to consider that might contribute to the hierarchical differences that can be seen in different societies such as social class, a society's values, politeness and the context of the interaction. Thus, this brief overview of different researchers and their work in their field is by no means an account for all of the researchers and research that have been conducted or is being conducted in the field.

To summarize, this first section of the theoretical background has given an overview of the research that has been carried out on gender studies and the second part of the theoretical background will focus on the historical background of research carried out on hedging in scientific research articles. Hedging is the main focus of this investigation and the next section will provide some examples of different definitions.

2.1 What is hedging?

Even though the phenomenon of hedging was dealt with as early as 1966 by U. Weinreich whom labelled it as ‘metalinguistic operators’ (De Gruyter et al 1997:235). G. Lakoff is recognised as the linguist who introduced the term as:

[Words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy].

(Hyland 1998:1)

Many different researchers give different definitions as to what constitutes hedging and there has been no clear definition or mutual understanding of the concept. For instance, Hyland (1998:1) claims that it is a linguistic device that is used to qualify a speaker's confidence in the truth of a proposition. He also agrees with a definition proposed by Zuck and Zuck in 1986 (ibid 1998:1), where they refer to hedging as the process whereby the author reduces the strength of a statement. In addition, Hyland (1998:1) suggests the following definitions of
Hedging:

[Saying no more than is warranted by available evidence].

Hedging refers to any linguistic means used to indicate either:

[A lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition].

[A desire not to express that commitment categorically].

Hyland (1998:2) continues to define hedging as the writer or speaker's judgements about statements and the possible effect it has on interlocutors with epistemic modality being at the centre of interest. Epistemic modality can be said to concern a speaker's assumptions or assessments of possibilities, it also indicates the speaker's confidence or lack thereof in the truth of a proposition that is being expressed (ibid 1998:2). That is, epistemic modality is a modality that connotes how much certainty or evidence a speaker has for the proposition expressed by his/her utterance. For example, Hyland (1998:3) suggests that writing in academic research makes use of the full range of epistemic lexical resources:

[It seems that this group plays a critical role in orienting the carboxyl function].

[It might be speculated that the lack of crDNA methylation in cv Platenese could result in enhanced amounts of mRNA in chloroplasts].

Moreover, Crompton (1997) reviews and evaluates some of the different ways in which the term *hedge* has been understood and defined. He provides some examples of the way it has been understood and defined e.g. as:

1. Markers of politeness.
2. Impersonal constructions.
3. The use of the passive.
4. Lexis-projecting emotions.
5. Epistemic modality.
Crompton further argues that his article examines and evaluates the propositions made by other researchers and provides a new definition of *hedge* which is closely related to previous definitions, together with an account of the hedges which would fit his definition so far identified in academic writing (ibid 1997:271). One example proposed by a previous researcher is (ibid 1997:272):

R. Lakoff (1972): Performative hedges.

Performative hedges modify the illocutionary force of the speech act they accompany. The illocutionary force of an utterance is the speaker's *intention* in producing that utterance. An illocutionary act is an instance of a culturally defined speech act type, characterised by a particular illocutionary force e.g.: *promising, advising, warning* etc.

Even so, there are several suggestions by different researchers and the definition that Crompton provides is in accordance with the implicit suggestions of the researchers mentioned in his article. He states that it only applies to hedges on propositions since that is the main speech act in academic writing and relates this to a definition of epistemic modality given by Lyon's in 1977:

A hedge is an item of language which a speaker uses to explicitly qualify his/her lack of commitment to the truth of a proposition he/she utters. (ibid 1997:281).

Crompton then proposes the following test for determining whether or not a proposition is hedged:

Can the proposition be restated in such a way that it is not changed but that the author's commitment to it is greater than at present? If “yes” then the proposition is hedged. (The hedges are any language items in the original which would need to be changed to increase commitment.) (ibid 1997:282)

However, Salager-Meyer (1998) claims that her article was a response to the claims Crompton made in his article about the work she and other researchers carried out on hedging. The main issue of the article was to explain propositions she and other researchers had made and also to give an analytical approach and perspective to the definitions Crompton proposed in his article. The discussion then continues with yet another response from Crompton (1998).
Furthermore, De Gruyter et al (1997) provide different views and approaches to hedge and hedging, in order to give the reader a scope of these concepts. The book is a collection of articles by authors who represent different languages and cultures as well as different perspectives to the topic at that time.

Moreover, as De Gruyter et al suggest (1997:236) authors focus on the problem of classifying hedges. That is to say, to make a “list of hedges” does not take into account that hedging typically depends on context and situation and is not determined by individual lexical units or phrases. It is therefore not possible to establish a “list of hedges” and this may also be the reason why an adequate and complete description of lexical units serving as hedges in dictionaries and books is lacking. For example, the following definition is given in the Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary (2010:723):

**Hedge /hedʒ/ noun, verb**
verb 1 [[|] to avoid giving a direct answer to a question or promising to support a particular idea, etc: Just answer 'yes' or 'no’ – and stop hedging.

However, since there exists no clear definition of what hedging is, this thesis will disregard that fact and make an attempt to “list hedges”. The following section will give an in depth description of the method and material for the analysis as well as give an account for all possible delimitations of the method, material and analysis.

### 3. Material/Method

The study will be conducted by looking at two research articles, one written by a female researcher and one by a male researcher. The articles are about perceptions of lifestyle habits that put children of Mexican descent at risk for obesity. Initially, a limitation can be found merely by looking at the material for the analysis. That is to say, only two articles will be analysed and consequently one can argue that two representatives of each gender and two articles cannot function as sufficient material for the analysis. However, due to the time consuming task of counting each hedge, there is no possible way of making a proper analysis given the time for this thesis.

The focus will be on statistical evidence that supports the claims as well as highlights in what context and for what reason male and female persons use hedge forms. The study is both quantitative and qualitative, quantitative because different hedge forms will be counted and the figures will be presented in tables, and qualitative because it will include a more in
depth discussion of the context where the male and female writer use hedges.

The list of hedges is a compilation of hedging devices found in textbooks, however primarily from a list found on a website (Gillet [www]). Since the origins of the list found on the website is unclear, efforts were made to contact the administrator of the website with no results. Even so, the list seems to be one of considerable validity based on previous discussions of hedging devices in textbooks.¹

Admittedly, this list does not give a full account for all of the hedging devices that exists and hedges also have a tendency to overlap into different categories so that they fall under several definitions. In addition, the list given in this thesis only has three words/sentences in each category, which undoubtedly is not satisfactory for a more accurate account of the results, given the amount of words/sentences that are overlooked in the articles. Even so, in order to be able to conduct the analysis the following list will be serving as the basis:

### Table 1. List of Hedging Devices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introductory Verbs:</th>
<th>e.g. seem, appear to be, indicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certain Lexical Verbs:</td>
<td>e.g. believe, assume, suggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Certain Modal Verbs:</td>
<td>e.g. would, might, could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adverbs of Frequency:</td>
<td>e.g. often, sometimes, usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Modal Adverbs:</td>
<td>e.g. probably, clearly, perhaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Modal Adjectives:</td>
<td>e.g. certain, definite, possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Modal Nouns:</td>
<td>e.g. assumption, possibility, probability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8 | ThatClauses: | e.g. It could be the case that.  
|   |                     | e.g. It might be suggested that.  
|   |                     | e.g. There is every hope that. |
| 9 | To-Clause + Adjective: | e.g. It may be possible to obtain.  
|   |                     | e.g. It is important to develop.  
|   |                     | e.g. It is useful to study. |
| 10 | Approximation: | e.g. most, about, more than |
| 11 | Tentativeness: | e.g. more or less, as much as, may |

Moreover, both articles have an academic basis as opposed to popular journals/articles, because this will provide a more solid basis for the analysis since academic articles use hedges differently than popular articles/journals. Academic writing is interactive, writers try to influence their readers by persuading them of the correctness of their claims. Arguments

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¹ The link to Gillet (2011) is provided in the list of references.
have to be expressed in ways that are acceptable, meaningful and plausible to colleagues and
by using hedges, claims are presented with caution, precision and humility, they e.g. express

Furthermore, both articles are about obesity which is a subject that is of great interest
to readers in today's society. However, the articles were chosen so that they would represent a
subject that did not reflect a binary opposition. That is, if the article written by a female was
about nursing and the article written by a male writer was about engineering, naturally, other
factors would have to be accounted for such as stereotypical gender roles. A female writer
that is writing about a presumably female occupation would influence the result of the
analysis and vice versa for the male article.

In addition, the article written by the male writer is seven pages long and the article
written by the female writer is eight and a half pages. Consequently, this affects the results
where women can be thought of as using more hedges than men do, merely because the
material for the analysis provides more to analyse. Even so, the structure of the articles and
the different editors of the articles have to be accounted for since they pose possible
limitations of the study. The articles are structured differently and there is the possibility that
writers choose to emphasize different parts of their texts which in turn leads to more and less
hedging.

The editors of the texts might also have chosen to edit some parts and keep others,
which contributes to the differences seen in the results. The male article has tables and graphs,
which the female article does not, therefore, it could be said that there is less opportunities for
hedging in the male article than in the female article. On the other hand, the female article is
structured so that it includes quotes from interviewees, which are not accounted for in the
analysis, merely because the interviewees are not the point of interest. However, if the same
publishing house did not publish both articles in 2010 it could have been a limitation. That is
to say, one publishing house might favour one model of scientific writing whereas another
publishing house might favour another. As a result, the structure of the articles might have
been different with more and less hedging in each one and as a consequence the results of this
analysis might have had a different outcome.

In addition, the hypothesis is based on introspection, that is, that women use hedges
more often and for different reasons than men do. This in turn can be interpreted as a
limitation, since the hypothesis relies on preordained expectations of the result. Consequently,
a null hypothesis would have been preferable to eradicate possible limitations. However, this
study will remain with the intended hypothesis and all possible related results.
Furthermore, the articles by Crompton (1998) (1997) and Salager-Meyer (1998) provide a perspective on what discussions on hedging that was in focus more than a decade ago. The articles are also a valuable perspective to more recent studies such as Holmes (2008) sociolinguistic study of both gender and hedging.

As mentioned before, the material and theoretical background do by no means account for all of the studies and research that has been conducted or is being conducted in the field and given the time and scope for the thesis there was no way of retrieving all information. Especially books written on gender and hedging over twenty years ago, that would seem necessary to give a more precise account of the theoretical background.

Even so, information written over twenty years ago is depicted by more recent researchers in combination with an assessment of previous researchers' claims. Therefore, more recent material on the subject provides a valid enough basis for the arguments that are proposed in this thesis. The next section will give a brief introduction to the analysis and present the results of the analysis in tables.

4. Results
The following section will provide the results for the analysis of the article written by the male writer and then the female writer. Some alterations have been made to the list of hedging devices found on the website, where three examples of each category listed will be used instead of a different number for each category. In addition, two more categories, approximation and tentativeness were added to the list. These two categories are a compilation from different textbooks and their definition of the devices.

The examples that are used in the definition To-Clause + Adjective might not be the exact examples that will be found and counted in the articles, these might alternate according to the definitions used in the articles. This applies for that-clauses as well, which will alternate according to the examples found in the articles. The remaining definitions given in the list will be followed exactly according to what the list proposes. In addition, words/sentences in tables and graphs will not be accounted for as well as quotes from interviewees in the articles.
### 4.1 Table 2. Results for Hedging Devices in Male Article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hedging Devices</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Verbs</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain Lexical Verbs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain Modal Verbs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Frequency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Adverbs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Adjectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Nouns</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Clauses</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To-Clause + Adjective</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tentativeness</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 102

### 4.2 Table 3. Results for Hedging Devices in Female Article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hedging Devices</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Verbs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain Lexical Verbs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain Modal Verbs</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs of Frequency</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Adverbs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Adjectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Nouns</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Clauses</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To-Clause + Adjective</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tentativeness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 89

* Numbers marked with bold type are the most frequent hedging devices.

Table 2 shows the frequency with which different hedging devices occur in the article written by the male writer, which has a total of 102 hedging devices. However, there is a total of 28,839 words in the male article and divided with the total amount of hedging devices (102) provides a frequency of approximately 1 hedging device per 282,7 words. Even so, if we only
count the number of times hedging devices occur, the most frequent hedging devices in the male article are:

1. That-Clauses – 19 times.
2. Tentativeness Markers – 19 times.
4. To-Clause + Adjective – 15 times.

In addition, the least frequent hedging devices are:

1. Adverbs of Frequency – 1 time.
2. Modal Adverbs – 1 time.
3. Modal Nouns – 1 time.
4. Modal adjectives – 3 times.

For example, Certain Modal Verbs and To-Clause + Adjective are distributed in different sections of the article. To-Clause + Adjective devices are distributed evenly in the article whereas Certain Modal Verbs occur most in the discussion section. According to De Gruyter et al (1997:7), modal forms convey speaker-external meanings that are often given interpersonal significance by the particular context in which they appear, usually as part of a tentativeness strategy.

Hence, the male writer use tentativeness strategies to be able to convince and influence his audience in order for the research to be accepted by the discourse community. Seemingly as the devices occur most frequently in the discussion section, the male writer might be trying to 'save face' in fear of being proved wrong. By mitigating the commitment to the claim, the researcher makes it possible, if proved wrong, to say that the claim was only tentative or an approximation (De Gruyter et al 1997:8).

[This could [my emphasis] indicate that choosing an “ideal” weight […]].
(Bayles 2010:325)

[An effort was made to recruit [my emphasis] children representing […]].
(Bayles 2010:321)

Furthermore, the less frequent categories such as Adverbs of Frequency and Modal Adverbs only appear in the result section. According to De Gruyter et al (1997:7) downtoners that are
marked as *Modal Adverbs* in this investigation, are used to modulate the impact an utterance is likely to have. As the second example shows, the male writer is trying to modulate the force with which he expresses they way mothers chose to place children in different weight categories in the article.

[[…] appropriate body size for their age, women *often* [my emphasis] selected […]].
(Bayles 2010:324)

[[…] , even though the task was *clearly* [my emphasis] defined as selecting the child with the weight […]].
(Bayles 2010:324)

Table 3 shows the frequency with which different hedging devices occur in the article written by the female writer, which has a total of 89 hedging devices. However, there is a total of 45595 words in the female article and divided with the total amount of hedging devices (89) provides a frequency of approximately 1 hedging device per 512, 3 words. Even so, if we only count the number of times hedging devices occur, the most frequent hedging devices in the female article are:

2. Certain Lexical Verbs – 17 times.
3. Approximation – 9 times.
4. Modal Adjectives – 7 times.

*Certain Modal Verbs* are hedging devices that are used in both articles, however, it occurs 17 times in the male article and 36 times in the female article and are the most frequent hedging devices in the female article. The hedging devices that occur least frequently are:

1. Introductory Verbs – 0 times.
2. Adverbs of Frequency – 0 times.
3. Modal Nouns – 0 times.
4. Modal Adverbs – 2 times.

As the tables show, *Adverbs of Frequency*, *Modal Adverbs* and *Modal Nouns* are three categories that are used the least in both articles. However, in the article written by the female writer, *Adverbs of Frequency* and *Modal Nouns* have a frequency of 0 whereas in the article written by the male writer these two categories have a frequency of 1 each.
Furthermore, *Approximation* devices are evenly distributed throughout the female article. However, there is a slight increase in the result/discussion section whereas *Modal Adjectives* occur mostly in the result section of the article.

According to De Gruyter et al (1997:7), *vagueness* is another concept close to hedging as it refers to the use of expressions like *about* and *sort of* which denote the impreciseness of quantity, quality or identity. *Vagueness* devices are referred to as *Approximation* devices in this investigation and as De Gruyter et al (1997:7) suggest, there is a false assumption that language in scientific texts is exact. The female writer uses *Approximation* devices to state that there is no certainty or exact calculations, only approximations as the following example show:

[Most [my emphasis] of the mothers were able to give details […]].
(Gallagher 2010:19)

On the other hand, categories such as *Introductory Verbs*, which unfortunately occur 0 times and *Modal Adverbs* which occur 2 times can be found in the discussion section. As stated before, according to De Gruyter et al (1997:7), these devices were referred to as *downtoners* and were used to modulate the impact an utterance was likely to have.

The example below shows how the female writer is trying to modulate her personal opinions about the amount of television parents of obese children allow their children to watch. This is done by using the modal adverb *perhaps* which weakens the impact a personal opinion might have that concerns other individual's problems.

[Perhaps [my emphasis] they could choose one or two favourite television shows […]].
(Gallagher 2010:24)

The next section will discuss the findings and relate them to a wider context.

### 5. Discussion

This thesis examines the view that women use hedges more often and for different reasons than men do and explores this issue by examining two articles about perceptions of lifestyle habits that put children of Mexican descent at risk of obesity. As stated before, a female and male writer wrote these articles, and as can be seen, the results are not in accordance with the
hypothesis. That is, that women use hedges more often and for different reasons than men do. Thus, as can be seen in table 2 and 3, the female writer uses hedges 89 times compared to the male writer who uses hedges 102 times. The tables in the result section only show the frequency with which different hedging devices occur. Hence, the initial part of the hypothesis has to some extent already been answered. However, this section will discuss the frequency numbers and provide examples from the articles on how hedges are used and how that can be related to the issue of whether women and men use hedges for different reasons.

For example, Lakoff (2004:77) claims that women and men use language differently and that people speak differently of women than of men. Forms such as empty adjectives, tag questions and rising intonation are features that comprise women's language (ibid 2004:78). Words that convey the sense that the speaker is uncertain about what he/she is saying and cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement (ibid 2004:79). Lakoff (2004:79) argues that women use hedges even if there is no need to mitigate the statement. The speaker is certain of the truth of their assertion and there is no apparent possibility of offending anyone, even so, the hedge appears as an apology for making an assertion at all.

On the other hand, Lakoff (2004:77) claims that men supposedly have coarseness to their language. The argument is that even though men use hedges it is more frequent among women.

Furthermore, as Holmes (2008: 300) suggests, research results are often contradictory given the range of methods used to collect and analyse different data. As a result, women are reported to use more hedges than men in some studies while in others, men use more hedges than women. In addition, Johnson and Meinhof (1997:8) claim that despite extensive investigation into the speech of women since the 1970's there have been no explicit references to men and masculinity. Furthermore, as Holmes (1995:74) suggests, hedging devices such as; fall-rise intonation, tag questions, modal verbs and paralinguistic signals such as pauses and vocal hesitations are all devices that are relevant in considering whether men and women use language differently.

Speakers may use a variety of forms in different contexts as hedging devices to mitigate face-threatening acts or to avoid imposing on their addressees (ibid 1995:75). However, it is important to keep in mind that forms such as these express other meanings too, e.g. positive reinforcement instead of mitigating the statement (ibid 1995:78). Holmes (1995:78) illustrates the importance of how researchers must also consider the fact that in comparing the language of women and men, many researchers simply count linguistic forms
regardless of their particular meaning and effect in a specific context. The researcher must consider the illocutionary force or intention of the acts being modified.

Although, the general consensus seems to be favouring women more than men when it comes to using hedging devices, the results clearly show that men are the ones that use hedging devices more in this particular context. Perhaps it could be said that men use hedging devices equally as frequent as women and for the same reasons. However, considering the context with which hedging devices occurred in this investigation, a more plausible explanation would be to relate the results to a preference of style in academic writing.

Seemingly, as neither of the articles have a topic that could be said to be stereotypical, instead they are about a relatively non-gender related topic i.e. obesity. The possibility that the researchers are using hedges because of their gender does not seem as plausible in this situation. As stated before, a more plausible explanation would be that the nature of what they are writing about causes them to hedge regardless whether they are male or female. Thus, the male researcher seems to have a more analytic approach whereas the female writer seems to have a more descriptive approach.

For instance, in the female researcher's article the initial parts such as: method, setting, sample and data collection have a more descriptive approach where the female writer focus more on describing the participants and their origins. This in turn does not seem to cause a frequent use of hedging devices because the female writer only accounts for facts. Whereas the male researcher does not account for the participants origins in the same manner and have a primary focus on explaining method and measures by exemplifying them with statistics. As a result, the analytic approach seems to generate more hedging devices because statistics seem to evoke more uncertainty and needs more hedges to convince readers of the accuracy of numbers and figures.

By examining the structure of the articles it is apparent that hedging devices are used most frequently in the discussion section of the male and female articles. However, hedging devices are distributed more evenly in the article written by the female. As De Gruyter et al (1997:3) suggest, hedging is a form of communicative strategy and by looking at the distribution of hedges within these articles, one could say that the articles are clearly structured according to some kind of communicative strategy.

Furthermore, as Hyland suggests (1998:17), the research article usually follows a conventional IMRD model with sections such as: introduction, method, results and discussion. An article's proposed conclusions are made to appear as if they followed unproblematically from empirical evidence, however, rhetorical decisions also intervene. For
example, significant alterations can be made to the structure of an article so that claims become more cautious and speculations and proposals more restricted etc.

For example, the most frequent category that was used in the female article was *Certain Modal Verbs*, which consisted of words such as: *would, might* and *could*. The number of times with which *would* occurred within the result section exceeded that of the discussion section. As Hyland (1998:4) suggests, scientific statements can be weakened by using a variety of strategies that limit the confidence invested in the claims. This can be done by drawing attention to the limitations of results by commenting on difficulties encountered or of alternative interpretations as shown by the following extract from the female article:

[However, all the participants agreed that they *would* [my emphasis] follow a diet if it was ordered by doctors because the doctors where the experts […]].

(Gallagher 2010:19)

In addition, the male article has *Certain Modal Verbs* listed as one of the most frequent hedging devices as well. However, it occurred more often within the discussion section than the results section and included the other most frequently occurring devices: *That-Clauses, Tentativeness Markers* and *To-Clause +Adjective*. For example:

[It is possible *that* [my emphasis] perceptions of obesity may […]].

[This *could* [my emphasis] have important implications for how future […]].

(Bayles 2010:325)

Hyland (1998:25) claims that forms that indicate greater writer intrusion occur in the introduction and discussion sections, which are points in the discourse where arguments are emphasised and where decisions, claims and justifications most commonly occur. Thus, that-nominals, adverbs, adjectives and modals qualifying assertions tend to be very common here. The results show that the male writer seems more inclined to hedge statements in the discussion section than the female writer, presumably because the writer feels a need to justify the arguments thus making them more plausible to readers.

Furthermore, tentativeness markers such as: *may* occur 6 times in the female article whereas it occurs 19 times in the male article. For example:

[Thus, average scores *may* [my emphasis] not adequately reflect such diversity […]].
According to De Gruyter et al (1997:37), *may* signals probability whereas e.g. *can* refers to a real possibility. Consequently, one could argue that the male writer uses tentativeness markers more so than the female writer because he is more uncertain of the truth of his propositions. Even so, there is no way of knowing for certain that that is the case. The writer may use illocutionary forces that according to De Gruyter (1997:38) are inherently weak e.g. *suggest* and *suspect* which reduces the commitment to the truth of the proposition. For instance, *Certain Lexical Verbs* such as: *believe, assume* and *suggest* are used 17 times in the female article and 5 times in the male article e.g.:

[Research findings *suggest* [my emphasis] that […]].

(Gallagher 2010:16)

[[…], our data *suggest* [my emphasis] that […]].

(Bayles 2010:325)

Thus, according to these frequencies the female writer is more inclined to reduce the commitment to the truth of her propositions. Despite the fact that both writers use various hedging devices to modify statements, there is no way of making an accurate assessment of whether or not the writers use of hedging devices has to do with masculine and feminine language features or features of hedging in scientific research articles. However, the more plausible explanation would have to be that the writers use different amounts of hedging devices due to the hedging that occurs in scientific research articles, and as such the male writer seems to have more reasons to hedge his statements. The reason for this could be that the discourse community which he is writing for might have to be persuaded more so than the audience of the female writer or it might only be a personal preference. The possibilities are endless and one can only speculate about the reasons why. The next section will conclude what has been found in this investigation and suggest some possible areas of further research.
6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this thesis was to investigate whether women use hedges more often and for different reasons than men do. However, as the results show, men use hedges more often than women do in this particular context. Previous research shows that the language of women was not the point of interest until recently. However, it seems as though women have gained ground and men and masculinity have become an area that little research has been conducted in. In addition, hedging in academic writing with a gender perspective is an area that has not been extensively explored.

This was an exploratory pilot study with a small convenience sample and as such is limited in its generalizability. As a result of time and resource constraints the ability to provide sufficient material for the investigation in the form of several articles to analyse was limited. The initial hypothesis might have been accurate if the investigation would have had more articles to analyse. Therefore, one cannot make accurate assessments about the language of men and women.

More information on men and masculinity is needed to make accurate assumptions about their language use as well as more extensive research into the functions of hedging devices in scientific research articles. Future researchers may focus on defining the different functions of hedging devices so that a more clear definition is available. In addition, more extensive research on men and masculinity is needed to widen the perspective of how women and men use language.
References

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


