

AN EXAMINATION OF HEDGING AND BOOSTING DEVICES USED IN ACADEMIC
DISCOURSE: CASES OF 2014 AND 2015 MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH STUDIES
THESES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

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Abstract

Hedges and boosters play different roles in academic discourse. This thesis is an analysis of the application of hedges and boosters in all ten theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015. The primary aim of this study was to examine how research writers use hedges to distance themselves from their claims, and how they use boosters to show commitment towards their claims. The study used both the qualitative and quantitative methods in examining the ten theses. The significance of a mixed research approach was found in its ability to give an explanation of issues such as why research writers prefer some types of hedging and boosting devices over the others, and why some theses chapters have some types of hedges and boosters. The study only examined three chapters of the theses: the Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion. These chapters were selected to give a representation of academic practice. The study was informed by Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters. Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory was used to explain how researchers use hedges and boosters to express their uncertainties and certainties respectively. The study revealed that writers prefer Type 3 of hedges and boosters in all the three chapters. The study further revealed that there is an unequal distribution of hedges and boosters among writers. The study concluded that the preference of Type 3 may have been caused by the fact that since Type 3 does not have boosting devices writers find it less threatening to employ it in order to conform to the accepted academic writing style. The unequal distribution of hedges and boosters may have been caused by the type of data being analysed. The unequal distribution may also suggest that writers in academic discourse are not proficient in the English language. Hence, they ignore hedges and boosters that are less familiar to them. This research makes a contribution to the study of hedges and boosters, most particularly in

Namibia where, according to the researcher's observation, no similar studies have previously been conducted.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the following people: my late father, Hiskia Natangwe Haufiku, whose words of wisdom inspired me to complete this study; my mother, Laimi Haufiku, my son, Jasper Silvanus Haufiku, family and friends. I love you all!!!

DECLARATIONS

I, Naftal Kaume Tulimuwo Haufiku, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher learning.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
DECLARATIONS	v
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the study	1
1.3 What is a hedge?	4
1.4 What is a booster?	4
1.5 Statement of the problem	4
1.6 Research objectives	5
1.7 Significance of the study	5
1.8 Limitations of the study	6
1.9 Summary	6
CHAPTER 2	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Hedges and Boosters	7
2.3 Theoretical Framework	25
2.4. Summary	31
CHAPTER 3	32
METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 Introduction	32
3.2 Research Design	32
3.3 Population	33
3.4 Sample	34
3.5 Research Instruments	34
3.6 Procedure	34
3.7 Data Analysis	35
3.8 Research Ethics	36
3.9 Summary	37
CHAPTER 4	38

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS	38
4.1 Introduction	38
4.2 Analysis of Data	38
4.3 Introduction chapter	39
4.3.1 Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals	39
4.3.2 Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs	43
4.3.3 Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases	44
4.3.4 Type 4: Solidarity features	49
4.3.5 Type 5: Self-mention reference	51
4.4 Discussion chapter	54
4.4.1 Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals	54
4.4.2 Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs	57
4.4.3 Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases	59
4.4.4 Type 4: Solidarity features	62
4.4.5 Type 5: Self-mention reference	65
4.5 Conclusion chapter	68
4.5.1 Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals	68
4.5.2 Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs	71
4.5.3 Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed	72
4.5.5 Type 5: Self-mention reference	79
4.6. Summary	82
CHAPTER 5	84
DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS	84
5.1 Introduction	84
5.2 Literature theses	85
5.2.1 Introduction chapter	85
5.2.2 Discussion chapter	86
5.2.3 Conclusion chapter	87
5.3 Linguistics theses	88
5.3.1 Introduction chapter	88
5.3.2 Discussion chapter	89
5.3.3 Conclusion chapter	89
5.4 Rhetoric theses	90

5.4.1 Introduction chapter	90
5.4.2 Discussion chapter	91
5.4.3 Conclusion chapter	93
5.5 Summary	93
CHAPTER 6	95
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	95
6.1 Introduction	95
6.2 Summary	95
6.3 Findings	96
6.4 Recommendations	97
6.5 Conclusion	97
REFERENCES	98

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the orientation of the study, definitions of hedges and boosters, and the problem statement and research objectives. The chapter also provides the significance of the study, and the limitations faced by this study.

1.2 Background of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine how research writers apply hedges to distance themselves from their claims, and how they use boosters to show the full commitments of their claims. Research writers apply various hedging and boosting devices for various intentions.

Many studies have been conducted on hedges and boosters. For example, Hyland and Bondi (as cited in Alonso, Alonso, & Mariñas, 2012, p. 48) argue that hedges and boosting devices are important elements in academic discourse, most particularly in dissertations. This is because hedges and boosters pave a way for researchers to apply cautious language and show their degree of certainty. Hedges and boosters also create a pathway for scholars to be part of the global academic village. Hyland (2004) categorises hedges and boosters into five types: Type 1, Type 2, Type 3, Type 4, and Type 5. The following table summarises Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters:

Type	Hedges	Boosters
Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals	<i>may, might, could, seem, suggest, appear, seems to</i>	<i>should</i>
Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs	<i>possibly, likely, probably</i>	<i>certainly, definitely</i>

Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases.	<i>This study, The study, he/she, it, they, the researcher</i>	
Type 4: Solidarity features		<i>It is a fact that.., despite the fact that.., due to the fact that.., the fact that</i>
Type 5: Self-mention reference	<i>I, we</i>	<i>Writer, Researcher</i>

Table 1: Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters.

Hyland (2004, p. 37) argues that metadiscourse is “a cover term for 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's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters was used by various scholars to examine how hedges and boosters are employed by research writers in their thesis (Biook & Mohseni, 2014; Nivales, 2011). Nivales (2011) found that research writers prefer Type 3 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges. The preference of Type 3 was influenced by the need to conform to the general accepted academic writing style.

Although Hyland (2004) makes a distinction between interactive and interactional dimensions, Price (2008) found that Hyland's (2004) metadiscourse is biased. This is due to the fact that language analysts who are not native speakers of the language to be analysed find it challenging to carry out a thorough examination of words or expressions that reflect values, beliefs and practices.

On the contrary, Yousefi (2012) views Hyland's metadiscourse model as a model that considers the knowledge of its audience, especially their linguistic competence, and how they process received information. Hence, Yousefi (2012) concludes that Hyland's metadiscourse model brings about a new perception of all metadiscourse.

Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory was also used by various scholars to examine why and how often hedges and boosters are used in academic research theses (Musa, 2014; Rabab'ah, 2013). Musa (2014) found that hedging devices in Chemistry and English theses are employed in order to achieve three pragmatic functions; the desire of the research writers to make propositions accompanied by some level of uncertainty, the need to prevent future criticism which may have the potential of damaging the writers' image, and a tactical way of presenting facts which will be accepted by the readers.

However, Xinghua (2011) found some weaknesses in Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory. Xinghua (2011) concludes that Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory is biased since it only considers textual organisation. Furthermore, its explanation of the first language interference is generalised, and Kaplan (1997) assumes that writers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have indirect writing styles.

Despite these weaknesses, Xinghua (2011) concludes that research in Contrastive Rhetoric has improved because it is no longer limited to textual analysis but also considers interpersonal aspects that affect the writing of a Second Language. Given this background, this study used Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory to examine and explain the application of hedging and boosting devices used in the theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies scholars from the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015. Hedges and boosters were categorised according to Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters.

1.3 What is a hedge?

Holmes (as cited in Vazquez & Giner, 2009) uses the term '*downtoner*' to refer to a hedge. Hedges or *downtoners* are words and phrases used to indicate the writers' or speakers' tentativeness or uncertainties in their claims. Words and phrases such as *may*, *might*, *could* and *seems to suggest* are examples of hedging devices used in academic writing.

Yuksel and Kavanoz (2015) argue that the application of hedges is central to academic writing where writers are presented with a platform to differentiate facts from opinions. Hence, hedges are communicative tactics employed by writers in order to register their stances in an academic manner without the risk of receiving Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community. Hedges also grant readers the freedom to dispute claims made by writers or speakers.

1.4 What is a booster?

Holmes (as cited in Vazquez & Giner, 2009) defines a booster as a lexical item which a writer employs to show some level of commitment to his/her claims. Unlike hedges, which a writer employs to show some tentativeness towards his/her claims, boosters are employed to show the writer or speaker's confidence in the proposition. Hyland (2004) categorises the following words and phrases as examples of boosters: *certainly*, *definitely* and *due to the fact*.

1.5 Statement of the problem

According to Hyland (2000), the manner in which researchers avoid making uncertain and potentially risky claims is an important element of academic discourse. Researchers in academic discourse employ hedges such as *might*, *probably* and *seem* to express uncertainty in their writing. Boosters such as *clearly*, *obviously* and *of course* are employed to show certainty in the researchers claims (p. 1). In academic research articles, researchers use

different hedges and boosting devices. Depending on the choice of these devices, the intended meaning of texts might be lost, and in some instances, the texts produced might turn out to be ambiguous because of the wrong application of hedges and boosters (Hyland, 2000, p. 2).

During the course Academic Writing for Postgraduate Students offered at the University of Namibia, the researcher observed that there were inconsistencies in the manner students used hedges and boosters.

Given this background, this study examined all the theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015 in order to explain how hedges and boosting devices are used. The hedges and boosters were identified according Hyland's (2004) categorisation of hedges and boosters. Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory was employed to explain why various hedges and boosters were employed by the different authors.

1.6 Research objectives

This study sought:

- (a) To examine how the writers of the Master of Arts in English Studies (MAES) theses use hedging and boosting devices in their Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion chapters.
- (b) To analyse the frequency of hedges and boosters used in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of MAES theses.

1.7 Significance of the study

The researcher chose this research topic because it is of significance in linguistic inquiry. The findings and recommendations of this thesis might make contributions towards the usage of hedges and boosting devices in academic dissertations, especially for the Master of Arts in

English Studies at the University of Namibia and other related disciplines. The researcher made a critical analysis of how writers in academic discourse express their certainties through the application of boosters, and how they use hedges to show varying degrees of uncertainty. The researcher also found that, to date, no study on the use of hedges and boosters in theses has been conducted in Namibia. Finally, the researcher hopes that the findings of this study might be used to compile some guidelines on how hedges and boosters may be employed by students in their academic writing without distorting the intended meaning of their texts.

1.8 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study was that it only examined theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies (in the Department of Languages and Literature studies) submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015. Another limitation was that this study only examined three chapters of the theses; the Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be generalised. However, these limitations gave the researcher ample time to do an in-depth analysis of the theses.

1.9 Summary

This chapter looked at the introduction, background of the study as well as the statement of the problem. The chapter also presented the research objectives, the significance of the study as well as its limitations. The next chapter will present the literature review of hedges and boosters and other related topics.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review of hedges and boosters and other related topics. The first section focuses on hedges and boosters, reviewing how other authors define these two devices. After this, the chapter reviews similar studies conducted with a primary focus on hedges and boosters, followed by a review of literature related to the two theoretical frameworks that informed this study; the Contrastive Rhetoric Theory and Hyland's (2004) categorisation of hedges.

2.2 Hedges and Boosters

Different authors have used various phrases and opinions to define hedges and boosters. For example, Lakoff (as cited in Rabab'ah, 2013, p. 196) defines hedging as "words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy". Hyland (1998) defines hedges and boosters as communicative tactics used by writers to either minimise or maximise the force of their statements. Nikula (as cited in Bonyadi, Gholami & Nasiri, 2012, p. 1187) concludes that hedges are not merely communicative tactics used to soften writers' utterances, but also enable these utterances to be accepted in interpersonal relationships. These devices play a pivotal role in academic discourse, not only because they carry the author's degree of confidence, but also an attitude to the discourse community. Hyland (as cited in Hyland, 1998) argues that:

Boosters such as *clearly*, *obviously* and *of course*, allow writers to express conviction and assert a proposition with confidence, representing a strong claim about a state of affairs. Affectively they also mark involvement and solidarity with an audience, stressing shared

information, group membership, and direct engagement with readers. Hedges, like *possible*, *might* and *perhaps*, on the other hand, represent a weakening of a claim through an explicit qualification of the writer's commitment. This may be to show doubt and indicate that information is presented as opinion rather than accredited fact, or it may be to convey deference, humility, and respect for colleagues' views (p. 2).

Martin (2001) used the term "*epistemic modalities*" to refer to "*hedges*". Martin (2001) states that writers use epistemic modalities as a way of communicating their academic knowledge in a manner that will enable them to gain community acceptance of their academic contribution without the risk of Face Threatening Acts. Martin's (2001) definition seems to not have differentiated hedges from boosters. Instead, the term "*modal expressions*" is used to refer to both devices. While Martin (2001) used the term "*epistemic modalities*" to refer to hedges, Takimoto (2015) posits that although there is a close connection, there is a difference between *modality*, *hedges*, and *boosters*. Takimoto (2015) concurs with Hyland's (2000) definitions of hedges and boosters, but goes further to suggest that "*modality*" is "concerned with a speaker's/writer's attitude towards the truth-value or factual status of a proposition" (p. 95).

Authors such as Markkanen and Schroder (as cited in Takimoto, 2015, p. 95) argue that hedges can be used as a way of manipulating a text in the sense that the reader is left in the wild regarding the truth of the writer's claim. In some instances hedges and boosters can be found together in a text (Hyland, 1998). For example:

Although it is a fact that some cultures prefer the application of some hedges, the results of the present study indicate that the application of some hedges may be attributed to other factors such as the sex and the research topic (Hyland, 1998, p. 2).

Hyland (1996) posits that the existence of hedges and boosters in this cluster serves the purpose of creating a platform where the writer seeks to create different rhetorical effects. The

phrases “*it is a fact*” and “*indicate*” are used to show a degree of certainty from the writer. Whereas, the phrase “*may*” is used to show that the writer is not certain that the application of some hedges is indeed as a result of sex and research topics. Zuck and Zuck (as cited in Sedaghat, Biria & Amirabadi, 2015) define hedging as “the process whereby the author reduces the strength of what he is writing in case the reported news turns out not to be true” (p. 38).

Since hedges are used to reduce the risk of criticism, to create awareness in the readers that the writer’s claim is not a final word, to strengthen the reader-writer relationship, and to conform to a generally accepted academic writing style (Choi & Ko, 2005). Salager- Meyer (as cited in Choi & Ko, 2005, p. 4) argues that if research writers use rhetorical devices that are too strong or too weak, readers in academic discourse will have doubt on the validity of their propositions. Hence, writers must present their propositions with some level of caution by using appropriate linguistic devices, including appropriate hedges and boosters.

Different studies, with various approaches, were conducted to examine the manner in which different researchers use hedges and boosters in order to show their level of certainties and uncertainties in their theses. Musa (2014), for example, used a mixed approach to explore the use of hedges in the introduction and discussion sections of the English and Chemistry Master’s theses at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The study used Quirk *et al.*’s (1985) Functional Principle for establishing word class and Hyland’s (1998) model of grammatical and strategic hedges as its analytical frameworks. Musa (2014) concludes that the use of hedging in both disciplines is lexical and grammatical. However, theses from the English discipline use more hedges than those from the Chemistry disciplines. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Sedaghat, Biria and Amirabadi (2015) whose study was on cross-cultural analysis of hedges between Persian and English editorial columns. Sedaghat, Biria and Amirabadi (2015) argue that the presence of more hedges in English editorials

suggests that native speakers of English are naturally more considerate and polite to their readers.

The choice of hedges and boosters by research writers is a vital component in a text because when boosters and hedges are used incorrectly, the meaning of a text might be lost. For example, the following sentences have different meanings: *The use of cell phones causes brain cancer. The use of cell phones may cause brain cancer.* The first sentence shows a degree of certainty and, the latter shows a degree of uncertainty. In their research on readers' reactions to hedges, Vande Kloppe and Crismore (as cited in Sedaghat, Biria & Amirabadi, 2015, p. 38) made an interesting discovery that readers read hedged texts critically and with keen interest compared to texts that are not hedged.

Another study conducted by Yazdani, Sharifi and Elyassi (2014) used a mixed approach to explore the application of hedges and boosters in the 9/11 (the date of the terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11 September, 2001) English front page newspaper articles. Their study was informed by Hyland's (2005) classification of interpersonal metadiscourse markers and it revealed that there was a high frequency of hedges over boosters in the English front page newspapers. This finding suggests that journalists were cautious about the 9/11 topic as it was both political and controversial. Yazdani, Sharifi and Elyassi (2014) argue that the dominance of hedges in the selected newspaper articles was due to the "conservatism policy to express their perspectives indirectly and tentatively to reduce the level of their commitment toward a proposition to avoid the unwanted consequences" (p. 310). For this reason, journalists tend to avoid the application of boosters in their writings. Although boosters were used the least in the 9/11 scenario, Yazdani, Sharifi and Elyassi (2014) reveal that journalists prefer verbs among three other subcategories of boosters. Unfortunately, Yazdani, Sharifi and Elyassi (2014) could not justify the application of more verbs over the

other subcategories of boosters. Perhaps future studies could attempt to investigate and justify the frequency of verbs as subcategories of boosters.

Some studies found that writers in academic settings use hedges, not only as a way of presenting their findings in a cautious manner, but also as a tactic of minimising the effects of Face Threatening Acts (Bonyadi, Gholami & Nasiri, 2012; Fraser, 2010; Namsaraev, as cited in Rabab'ah, 2013, p. 197). However, Myers (as cited in Rabab'ah, 2013, p. 199) argues that any claim made in academic discourse is a Face Threatening Act for other researchers in a similar field of interest. This is because a writer's claim will have an effect on their "freedom of act".

Fraser (2010) posits that for pragmatic competence (the possibility of successful communication to take place in any given context and for perfect interpretation of the message by the interlocutors) to be achieved, writers, especially the second language speakers, need to be well versed in the rhetorical strategy called hedges. Fraser (2010) concludes that "when non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate" (p.15). Fraser (2010) further argues that sometimes interlocutors are impressed by someone who speaks their language well on a grammatical level. As a result, interlocutors take it for granted that since a speaker is competent at a pragmatic level, it is anticipated that the same speaker will also be competent at a grammatical level. It is against this perception Fraser (2010) suggests that hedging must be viewed as a rhetorical strategy which provides a platform for a speaker or writer to use linguistic devices as a tactic of indicating a lack of commitment to his/her statements (propositional hedging), for example: "*John's house is almost 100 meters wide*" or to signal full commitment to his/her statement (speech act hedging), for example: "*John's house is 100 meters wide*". Fraser (2010) therefore concludes that hedging might have some ripple effects on other discourses. Effects such as *vagueness*, (the assumption that there is a shared

knowledge between the speaker and the interlocutors), *evasion* (the communication breakdown between the speaker and the interlocutor or reader), *equivocation* (when the speaker or writer uses a word that has more than one word, with the aim of misleading the interlocutor or reader), and *politeness* (the redressive action towards the interlocutor or reader's positive or negative face). This is probably the reason Geng-han Lu and Chen-xu Fu (2015) acknowledge that it is a challenge for speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and speakers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to acquire the skill of using appropriate hedges.

Šeškauskien (2008) suggests that for the successful expression of the intended ideas of the writer's proposition, there is a need for the acquisition of the right language at all levels; pragmatic, cognitive, and rhetorical. Šeškauskien's (2008) suggestion implies that the right language, which includes the ability to use hedges and boosters as linguistic devices, is not only employed for academic and research purposes but also for non-academic and research purposes. To this effect, Vazquez and Giner (2009) suggest that for persuasive academic communication to take place, writers in academic discourse need to know the value of rhetorical devices, especially boosters, because boosters will enable the audience in the academic community to interpret the writers' points of arguments.

The fact that research writers need to know the differences between the two main categories of metadiscourse; Textual and Interpersonal Metadiscourse (Bonyadi, Gholami & Nasiri, 2012) could also pose a challenge to both ESL and EFL speakers. While Textual Metadiscourse assists writers to include their ideas in a given text, for a particular situation and for a specific audience, Interpersonal Metadiscourse, on the contrary, helps research writers use their opinions and judgments of texts also shows how writers hope their readers will react to their opinions and judgments (Bonyadi, Gholami & Nasiri, 2012, p. 1186). Hence, hedges or hedging strategy is a subcategory of Interpersonal Metadiscourse. Hyland

(as cited in Navidi & Ghafoori, 2015, p. 2) argues that in order for an effective textual interaction to exist between the writer and the reader, writers need to know the norms of the community they are writing for and these norms are called the Interactional Metadiscourse markers. Hyland (as cited in Navidi & Ghafoori, 2015) identifies “Stance” and “Engagement” as two types of Interactional Metadiscourse markers that are significant in reader-writer response in academic discourse. Hyland (as cited in Navidi & Ghafoori, 2015) suggests that while “Stance devices” are devices that allow the writer to indicate his/her opinions, commitments, and disguise involvement, “Engagement devices” are devices that open avenues for writers to have their presence acknowledged by the readers. “Stance” devices include hedges, boosters, and attitude markers and self-mention. “Engagement” features include reader pronouns, directives, questions, shared knowledge, and personal asides; these features are used to engage the readers. Navidi and Ghafoori (2015) argue that academics from different cultures find it a challenge to employ appropriate Stance and Engagement tools as rhetoric devices in English research articles. Due to this challenge, academic papers become voiceless as they no longer interact with readers.

A study conducted by Fraser (2010) seems to criticise Lakoff’s (1972) study on hedges. Fraser (2010) claims that Lakoff (1972) was merely interested in hedges and not hedging. Hence, Fraser (2010) concludes that Lakoff’s (1972) definition of hedges has a mere effect at a pragmatic level and not at a semantic level. Although Hidiyati, Muhammad and Dallyono (2008) found that writers in academic discourse use hedges simply because it is an accepted way of behaving in this discourse and not because they want to hide the meaning of their statements, Kangira (2015) concludes that there is a variety of hedges and boosters and, in order to retain the meaning of a text, writers in academic discourse must choose the appropriate hedges and boosters that reflect the strength of the supporting evidence. In their study, Dahme and Sastre (2015) conclude that research writers have not mastered writing

proficiency, either in academic register or in reader-writer register. This finding could probably justify the suggestion that there is a need to improve the quality of academic writing, most particularly in the areas of reading and writing (Biook & Mohseni, 2014; Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015; Hidiyati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008). The present study used hedges in an attempt to explain why and how researchers of Master of Arts in English Studies use hedges and boosters.

Other studies on hedges and boosters were used to investigate different topics in master's degree theses. Rabab'ah (2013) used Jalilifar's (2007) taxonomy of hedges to investigate why and how often hedges are used in nursing and education academic articles. A total of 50 academic articles were used to represent both disciplines. Rabab'ah's (2013) study reveals that education academic articles use more hedges compared to nursing academic articles (p. 195). Rabab'ah (2013) further concludes that hedging devices are used to express probabilities, to save writers' from being labelled negatively, to convince readers, and to avoid any possible rejection of the writer's statements (p. 195).

In their corpus study of boosting in academic texts written by Anglophonic, Japanese, and Turkish authors, Yagiz and Demir (2015) concluded that overall, Japanese writers use more boosters compared to the other groups and the Turkish writers use boosters the least. This finding contradicts the general belief that eastern communities, including Japan, avoid assertive statements. The study by Yagiz and Demir (2015) also reveals that regarding the categorical boosters, research article writers favour adverbial boosters the most. Unfortunately, these scholars (Yagiz & Demir, 2015) could not suggest any possible reason of this preference.

A study carried out by Ebadi and Khaskar (2015) used Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy to investigate the types and frequency of hedges Persian and English native speakers use in the conclusion chapters of their academic research articles. Their finding is in accordance with

Nasiri, (2012) who deduced that there is no difference in the manner Iranian and American writers use type 1 shields in their Civil Engineering articles. Ebadi and Khaskar (2015) confirm the findings by Geng-han Lu and Chen-xu Fu (2015) who conclude that in academic discourse, it is the disciplinary background that is significant and not the nationality and/or cultural background.

Although Šeškauskien (2008) did not do a comparative study, it was found that English, as a *lingua franca*, is set apart by the flexibility in the adoption of various features such as coining new terms and exploring various ways of expressing the writer/speaker's intended meaning. Šeškauskien's (2008) findings are confirmed by the study conducted by Yagiz and Demir (2015) who concluded that indeed, nationality can play a role in the choice of words, including hedges and boosters. In their study, Yagiz and Demir (2015) concluded that:

A nation may have a more considerable inclination over a certain word in expressing the thoughts while another nation focuses on a different specific word, which all the selected words convey similar meanings. Therefore, the way the same information is disposed may be transmitted through different words based on the nationality of the author (p. 19).

Hassani and Farahani (2014) argue that the frequency of hedges in research articles is not only influenced by disciplinary background (Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015; Geng-han Lu & Chen-xu Fu, 2015; Nasiri, 2012), or nationality (Yagiz & Demir, 2015), but by a combination of many factors such as language, discipline, culture, and language proficiency. Ebadi and Khaskar (2015) reveal that there is no difference in the frequency of using hedges between native and non-native speakers. Furthermore, their study found that researchers prefer type 1 of Salager-Meyer's taxonomy over the other types and; this finding matches the conclusions by other scholars (Abdi & Behnam, 2014; Sedaghat, Biria & Amirabadi, 2015). Unfortunately, none of the scholars could suggest any explanation regarding the preference of this type (shields).

Rabab'ah and Rumman (2015) reveal that in political discourse, the modal auxiliary of Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy is frequently favoured over the others. This modal auxiliary was used 372 times (53.37 %) in 25 selected speeches of King Abdullah II. Their study also reveals that among the subcategories of modal auxiliaries, "*can*" is highly favoured, with 163 occurrences. Rabab'ah and Rumman (2015) suggest that the high frequency of "*can*" was necessary for King Abdullah II's speeches because the audience were European countries and the topic of discussion was Middle East affairs, including the conflict in Palestine. This subcategory, "*can*", was necessary because it indicates the 'possibility' of a solution. The dominance of this subcategory, "*can*", could support the view of Alonso, Alonso and Mariñas (2012) that some hedges can be used as rhetorical tools to connect people of different social classes. This dominance could also support the view that among other causes, discipline indeed determines the application of hedges and boosters (Yagiz & Demir, 2015). Therefore, Rabab'ah and Rumman (2015) conclude that since politicians apply a variety of hedging devices as a tactic of avoiding commitment to their statements and to express vagueness, political analysts require knowledge about the background of the speaker because in political settings aspects such as a speaker's intentions, and directions play a pivotal role in the examination of the pragmatic functions of hedges.

Regarding the writer's propositions of a claim, Ebadi and Khaskar (2015) conclude that research writers do not employ personal doubts and direct involvement in the conclusion chapters. This is because in academic writing writers are expected to base their conclusions on academic findings and not merely on their personal ideas (Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015, p. 301). With reference to the frequency of hedges and boosters, the irregular distribution and appearance of these rhetorical devices can be attributed to many aspects. Šeškauskien (2008) for example, found that the frequency of modal verbs such as *can*, *may*, *seem*, and *appear* in the research articles of Lithuanian learners could be attributed to the fairly easy acquisition of

these verbs by non-native speakers. Another reason of this irregularity can be attributed to the grammatical pattern between languages. For example, Lithuanian and English have a similar grammatical pattern of *can/may* (Šeškauskien, 2008). Šeškauskien (2008) argues that these modal verbs are always followed by an infinitive. Hence, Lithuanian learners are likely to use these modal verbs when they write their theses in English.

Another interesting discovery is that learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) find it challenging to differentiate between *can/may* and *try/attempt* (Šeškauskien, 2008). According to Procter (2008), *can* is a modal verb which bears multiple meanings such as “ability”, “permission”, “request”, “possibility”, or “offer”. The same word can also act as a noun to mean “container”, “prison”, or “toilet”. *May*, on the contrary, is a modal verb which means “possibility”, “permission”, or “wish”. It can also act as a noun to mean the fifth month of the year. As a result, Šeškauskien (2008) argues that writers of ESL end up giving preference to the easiest choice, *can*. Although Procter (2008) does not seem to differentiate the meanings of *try* and *attempt*, Šeškauskien (2008) does. Šeškauskien (2008) argues that “these two words come rather close in meaning and subsequently in usage. However, the first is rather neutral whereas the second is more formal” (p. 74). For this reason, (Šeškauskien, 2008) argues that writers of English as a Second Language find it easier to acquire the former. Additionally, Šeškauskien (2008) argues that since “*try*” is mainly used as a verb and “*attempt*” can be used as both a verb and a noun, writers of ESL find it much easier to use the former than the latter.

Hidiyati, Muhammad and Dallyono (2008) used a qualitative approach to investigate the frequency and meaning of particular hedges and boosters found in academic papers. Their study only focused on the introduction chapter; not only because these scholars wanted to have enough time to analyse the introduction chapter thoroughly, but also because it was also discovered by other scholars that the Introduction chapter of a thesis is heavily hedged

because it creates a platform for readers to analyse the background of the study which includes aspects such as the contexts, reasons, and purpose of the study. (Hyland, as cited in Hidiyati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008, p. 28; Šeškauskien, 2008). Using Hyland's (1998) categorisation of hedges, the study by Hidiyati, Muhammad and Dallyono (2008) revealed that the introduction section has eight types of hedges; Agentless Passive, Modal Auxiliaries, Adverbs, Adjectives, Full Verbs, Nouns, Clausal Elements/Conditional Sentences, and Passive Infinitives. Out of these hedges, it was discovered that the Introduction section uses Agentless Passive more often than the other types and Passive Infinitives the least (Hidiyati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008). Sometimes writers use sentences without having any knowledge that such sentences contain hedges and boosters (Hidiyati, Muhammad and Dallyono, 2008). Such sentences might completely distort the intended meaning of texts, thus maximising the effects of Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) towards the writers.

According to Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman (as cited in Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015, p. 156), in order to construct and communicate their academic knowledge, students have to master the academic register through learning the linguistic register and the rhetorical conventions that are considered convincing by the discourse community. This means that since English is the international language for dissemination of research articles (Swales, 2004) students, especially the non-native speakers of English, need to express their findings in a manner that is acceptable in an academic register. This register includes the correct application of hedges and boosters which will enable their research articles to be accepted by the discourse community. However, unlike the colloquial language, the academic written language is syntactically more complex (Chafe & Danielewicz, as cited in Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015, p. 157). Flowerdew (as cited in Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015, p. 159) states that in research articles, writers present their arguments in a dialogical manner. For this reason, the research writers have to be well versed in the academic medium of communication in order to present

their arguments and persuade the discourse community of their claims. Serholt (2012) suggests that since professional academic writing is both objective and impersonal due to its linguistic discourse, writers should avoid the use of *I* to express an opinion or belief. For example instead of writing “*I think the findings of this study mean that...*”, Serholt (2012) suggests that writers should write in an objective and impersonal manner such as “*The findings of this study suggest that...*”. Serholt (2012) further argues that in professional academic writing, the author’s writing style is guided by the audience. Hence, authors require certain writing skills that will enable the audience to interpret the findings.

Although boosters and hedges are equally interesting research topics, studies on boosters are relatively few compared to studies on hedges (Vazquez & Giner, 2009; Yagiz & Demir, 2015). Vazquez and Giner (2009) argue that the significance of boosters in research articles is found when a writer introduces new knowledge because it is at this point the writer employs boosters to convince the audience of his/her proposition. In brief, the argument of Vazquez and Giner (2009) suggests that research writers should employ more boosters than hedges in Chapter 4, Data Presentation and Analysis, because it is in this chapter that writers analyse their data and discuss their findings. However, Vazquez and Giner (2009) suggest that during the application of boosters in this particular chapter, writers ought to be cautious so that their propositions are not misinterpreted by the discourse community. For this reason, the present study attempts to examine how hedges and boosters, as rhetorical devices, are used in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of the Master of Arts in English Studies theses. Alonso, Alonso and Mariñas (2012) concluded that Spanish scholars do not regard the application of hedges as an academic style of writing because hedges are used as rhetorical strategies to connect people at pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatic levels. These levels are dependent upon the linguistic knowledge the writer possesses of the target language (p. 49).

Odlin (as cited in Alonso, Alonso & Mariñas, 2012, p. 50) suggests that the level of politeness and discourse differ in many languages. Hence, the choice of words considered polite in one language might be impolite in another language. Although Alonso, Alonso and Mariñas (2012) argue that Spanish and English writers have similar communication tactics with regards to the usage of hedges, some scholars conclude that English writers are more cautious when they make their claims (Choi & Ko (2005; Martin, as cited in Alonso, Alonso & Mariñas, 2012, p. 50). Spanish writers, on the contrary, are less willing to use hedges (Alonso, Alonso & Mariñas, 2012). Martin (as cited in Alonso, Alonso & Mariñas, 2012) concludes that some cultures disregard the application of hedges in their writing. Hence, the degree of hedges in a text can be affected by a writer's cultural background, and by the taxonomy used in the analysis of hedges in the study (Choi & Ko, 2005). Serholt (2012) concludes that hedges and boosters are important academic rhetorical tools whose aims are to minimise the degree of a writer's certainty, avoid being threatened and judged, and show some degree of politeness. Serholt (2012) also found that hedges create a platform for the writer to withdraw his/her statement at a later stage. Serholt (2012) further argues that the incorrect application of hedges or boosters could cause severe damage to the text such as the potential lack of objectivity behind the statement. Therefore, a wrong hedge or booster could have vast devastating effects on the entire text. Serholt (2012, p. 12) used the following statements to compare the effects a wrong hedge could have on the entire text:

“The spelling itself suggests a rushed and frantic response” (original hedge).

“The spelling itself obviously shows a rushed and frantic response” (booster).

“The spelling itself is due to/is the result of a rushed and frantic response” (neutral).

According to Serholt (2012), the first sentence is hedged with the word ‘*suggests*’ to signal to the readers that the writer is not certain that the spelling of a word is as a result of a rushed

and frantic response. Hence, an educated guess was used. The second sentence is boosted with the phrase '*obviously shows*' to signal to the reader that the author is certain about the cause of the spelling. Serholt (2012) argues that this sentence can have devastating effects because the phrase '*obviously shows*' leaves the readers (audience) with the impression that there is no room for further investigation of this assumption. On the contrary, the third sentence is neutral because it basically only shows that one event can cause another. In this case, a rushed and frantic response caused a wrong spelling. For this third sentence, Serholt (2012) argues that:

The impression may be given that the author was either physically present at the scene where these events took place; or perhaps that these observations were made based on some sort of tangible records of the events, such as video recordings. This wording would therefore require an appropriate background explanation to avoid sounding arbitrary (p. 12).

The examples above do not imply that boosters always have negative impacts on the entire text. Serholt (2012) argues that in some instances boosters function as rhetorical devices needed to register a generally accepted idea or concept in a statement. Serholt (2012) concludes that boosters are employed more often in the discussion chapter, with the phrase '*show that*' to be the most favoured. The study conducted by Serholt (2012) found that the discussion chapter of the examined theses did not have the phrase '*obviously show*'. The absence of this phrase in this chapter in all the analysed theses suggests that writers were showing their certainties to a certain level. Hence, the dominance of boosters in this chapter (discussion) could be attributed to the fact that in the particular chapter, writers are presented with the platform to interpret and further argue their findings, unlike in the methodology chapter where writers are expected to replicate the descriptive procedure (Serholt, 2012).

Equated to the high frequency of hedges in some disciplines (Rabab'ah, 2013; Alonso, Alonso, & Mariñas, 2012), Vaguez and Giner (2009) found that between Marketing, Mechanical Engineering, and Biology, the presence of boosters per 1000 words in Marketing was about two times more compared to the other disciplines. Vaguez and Giner (2009) suggest that the presence of more boosters in the Marketing disciplines could be attributed to the nature of the data being analysed; the analyses of data in some disciplines require the writers to show a full commitment to their propositions, while some disciplines require writers to soften their propositions.

Sanjaya (2013) used Hyland's (2005a) taxonomy of hedges and boosters to conduct a quantitative study on hedging and boosting in a combined 104 English and Indonesian research articles with 52 research articles from each discipline. The study revealed that English articles were more hedged compared to Indonesian articles. This finding is in accordance with other scholars who found that between hedges and boosters, the presence of hedges is more in both research and newspaper articles (Takimoto, 2015; Yazdani, Sharifi & Elyassi, 2014). Sanjaya (2013) investigated the Introduction, Literature Review, Results, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of research articles. In the Literature Review, Sanjaya (2013) investigated how writers used interpersonal devices to present arguments about how previous research could not solve the problem being discussed in their articles. During the process of using a corpus linguistic software to identify English hedges and boosters in the 52 Indonesian research articles, Sanjaya (2013) experienced some challenges caused by the fact that Indonesian belongs to a family of non-Germanic languages to which English belongs. Due to this fact, searching for translated hedges and boosters in the research articles under study led to inaccurate results. Furthermore, using a pure manual system in an attempt to identify hedges and boosters was time consuming and it gave incorrect results. For this reason, a combination of manual and computer-based searches was used to identify hedges

and boosters in the Indonesian research articles. The present study only investigated research articles written in English, Hence, the challenges Sanjaya (2013) endured were not experienced.

In a text and corpus analysis study on how tutors use modal verbs to deliver academic feedback, Lee (2013) argues that tutors prefer the application of some modal verbs over others; modal verbs such as *might*, *could*, and *would* were preferred the most. Hyland (as cited in Lee, 2013, p. 35) reveals that an individual's choice of language is determined by the speech community. Hence, it is imperative to analyse the contexts in which different texts are produced. Additionally, it was concluded that the unequal distribution of hedges and boosters across disciplines could be attributed to the discourse norms and rhetorical styles of each discipline (Nash, as cited in Safdari, 2015, p. 137; Takimoto, 2015). For this reason, it was found that disciplines such as Natural Science (Takimoto, 2015), Nursing (Rabab'ah, 2013) and Chemistry (Musa, 2014) use few hedges.

Takimoto (2015) used Hyland's (1998) taxonomy of hedges to investigate the frequencies and functions of hedges and boosters in eight disciplines: Linguistics, Philosophy, Marketing, Sociology, Physics, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Chemistry. The study found that although Philosophy uses more hedges and boosters, all eight disciplines employ more hedges than boosters. The findings of this quantitative study by (Takimoto, 2015) could imply that research writers in academic discourse are becoming aware of the effects of Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community as a result of being more objective than subjective in their writing.

Compared to other disciplines, Nivales (2011) concludes that writers in the Psychology discipline apply more hedges. Additionally, the same study concludes that none of the selected disciplines apply type 3 boosters of Mojica and Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of

hedges. Instead, these disciplines use type 3 hedges (Biook & Mohseni, 2014; Nivales, 2011). The application of many type 3 hedges could be attributed to the fact that students in academic discourse are strongly encouraged to avoid partaking in academic dishonesty by always ensuring that their sources of information are cited (Biook & Mohseni, 2014; Plata, et.al., as cited in Nivales, 2011, p. 40).

A study conducted by Hidayati, Muhammad and Dallyono (2008) concludes that about 28% of theses employ hedges, with the Introduction section of the theses reported to contain the highest frequency of hedges (Biook & Mohseni, 2014, p. 476; Hidayati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008, p. 31). Biook and Mohseni (2014) suggest that the presence of more hedges in the Introduction chapters could be caused by the writer's need to motivate readers to continue reading their texts. It was also revealed that students use hedges as a way of being cautious and to signal uncertainties in their claims (Biook & Mohseni, 2014; Hidayati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008). Although Lakoff and Preisler (as cited in Hidayati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008, p. 32) conclude that women apply more hedges than men, some scholars discovered that men apply more hedges than women, and factors such as the genre of discourse, the nature of the message, and the topic determine the distribution and the frequency of hedges (Hassani & Farahani, 2014; Hidayati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008; Serholt, 2012). Despite the differences in the application of hedges and boosters between males and females, Serholt (2012) argues that the representation of hedges and boosters in the Introduction and Discussion sections is equal. Tannen (as cited in Hassani & Farahani, 2014, p. 60) argues that the difference in the application of hedges between men and women is attributed to how these genders speak and hear a language. While women hear and speak a language of connection and intimacy, men, on the other hand, hear and speak a language of status and independence. Hidayati, Muhammad and Dallyono (2008) also revealed that an individual's level of education assists in the development of his/her cognitive and intellectual

abilities, including the awareness of hedges (pp. 32-33). Farrel and Van Baalen (as cited in Hidayati, Muhammad & Dallyono, 2008, p. 32) suggest that the application of more hedges by women is attributed to the male-dominant environments in which women are raised and educated.

Nasiri (2012) used Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy of hedges to examine the frequency of hedging devices used in the field of Civil Engineering among two national researchers; Americans and Iranians. Unlike other studies who examined the frequency of hedging devices used in the Introduction and Discussion chapters (Biok & Mohseni, 2014; Musa, 2014), Nasiri (2014) only examined the Discussion chapters of the research articles. Nasiri (2012) found that both the American and Iranian researchers prefer to use type 1 of Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy of hedges. Nasiri (2012) concludes that hedges are important academic elements because they allow writers to be cautious in making statements and claims without the possibility of losing their academic dignity from the discourse community.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the application of hedges and boosting devices in the Master of Arts in English Studies theses at the University of Namibia, the present study used Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory and Hyland's (2004) categorisation of hedges and boosters.

Hyland (2004) categorises five types of hedges and boosters. Type 1, also called Tentative Verbs and Modals, includes hedges such as *may*, *might*, *could*, *seem*, *suggest*, *appear*, and phrases that contain hedges such as "*seems to suggest*". *Should* is treated as a type 1 booster. Type 2, also called Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs, includes hedges such as, *possibly*, *likely*, and *probably*. *Certainly* and *definitely* are treated as Type 2 boosters. Hyland (2004) also suggests that nominalised verbs be categorised under Type 2. Distancing phrases, the use of impersonal third person, and the Unnamed are categorised under Type 3. *Solidarity*

features such as *it is a fact* and *it is well known* are categorised under Type 4. Also, Hyland (2004) suggests that rhetorical questions signified by words such as *can*, *may*, *would* fall under Type 4. Under Type 5 of hedges and boosters, Hyland (2004) suggests *Self-mention reference*. This category includes pronouns and nouns such as *I*, *we*, *researcher*, *writer* or *author*. The following table summarises Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters:

Type	Hedges	Boosters
Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals	<i>may, might, could, seem, suggest, appear, seems to</i>	<i>should</i>
Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs	<i>possibly, likely, probably</i>	<i>certainly, definitely</i>
Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases	<i>This study, The study, he/she, it, they, the researcher</i>	
Type 4: Solidarity features		<i>It is a fact that..., despite the fact that..., due to the fact that..., the fact that</i>
Type 5: Self-mention reference	<i>I, We</i>	<i>Writer, Researcher</i>

Table 1: Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters.

Hyland (2000) argues that the level of importance of rhetorical devices (hedges and boosters) in a text between the writer and the reader is the same. This is because if readers fail to comprehend the meanings of rhetorical devices in a text, there are high chances that the writers' propositions will be decoded wrongly. Similarly, if writers of a second language fail to employ the correct rhetorical devices, their propositions might be decoded incorrectly. Second language learners find it easy to understand a text that contains boosters than a text that contains hedges (Hyland, 2000). According to Hyland (2000), this finding suggests that due to the complexity of hedges in academic texts, writers' propositions are likely to go unnoticed by second language learners. Therefore, Grabbe, Lynch and Hudson (as cited in

Hyland, 2000) posit that the reading skill is a priority for second language learners in an academic setting. However, Hyland (2000) found that this skill is the most challenging one to acquire for second language learners. One main reason for this challenge is the limited access to specific lexical items used in specific domains.

Connor (1996) defines Contrastive Rhetoric as “an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language attempts to explain them” (p. 5). The theory of Contrastive Rhetoric was first introduced by Kaplan (1966) as a solution to the challenges learners experience in the organisational structures of a second language, also known as L2 (Matsuda, 1997). Kubota and Lehner (2004) argue that the theory of Contrastive Rhetoric was introduced by Kaplan in the 1960’s as a response to the challenges American universities faced in catering for immigrant students who needed to be taught in English in order to acquire the academic conventions. This theory (Contrastive Rhetoric) was introduced after it was found that the audio-lingual method of teaching immigrant students only focused on oral language and sentence grammar, while extensive reading and writing at a text level was neglected.

Connor (1996) posits that the theory of Contrastive Rhetoric came from a combination of other theories, namely, the Theory of Applied Linguistics, Theory of Linguistic Relativity, Theory of Rhetoric, Theory of Text Linguistics, Theory of Discourse Types and Genres, Theory of Literacy, and Theory of Translation. Contrastive Rhetoric seeks to identify the differences found in texts written in the same language by speakers of different languages. The texts to be analysed must be written with similar intention and in a similar setting and context (Kaplan, as cited in Connor, 1996 p. 61).

Gunnarsson (as cited in Barton, Dickson & Kinloch, 1999, p. 379) argues that in the 17th to the 18th Centuries, the Uppsala model was popular in investigating the use of English in academic publications and the importance of valuing national traditions within the boundaries of the international academic community. The Uppsala model was used to examine the language construction through three main spectra; the cognitive spectrum, the societal spectrum, and the social spectrum. While the cognitive spectrum focuses on the acceptable professional's way of viewing reality, the societal spectrum focuses on the relationship between the profession and other professions in the society. The social spectrum was used to investigate the interactions of individuals within a professional community. From this model (Uppsala model), Contrastive Rhetoric was introduced (Barton, Dickson & Kinloch, 1999). Kaplan (as cited in Xinghua, 2011) identifies four important types of knowledge a writer needs to be taught through formal education in order to compose through writing. These are: knowledge of the language, knowledge of the subject, knowledge of writing conventions, and knowledge of the readers.

Although Kaplan's (1966) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory stems from a weaker version of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which argues that "one's native language influences thought" (Kaplan, 1980 as cited in Kaplan, 1997, p. 52), Kaplan's (1966) theory is considered important because it opposes the analysis of a sentence (Xinghua, 2011). Due to cultural differences, there is a disparity in the teaching of reading and composition between foreign students and American students (Kaplan, 1966). Panetta (2001) posits that with Contrastive Rhetoric, teachers are given an opportunity to assist learners to benchmark their rhetorical expectations with the rhetorical expectations of their English reading audience by comparing the learned rhetoric against the rhetoric they are learning. However, Corbett (as cited in Panetta, 2001) argues that the rhetorical differences between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) might lead to conflict in rhetorical expectations, which will, in the end, lead to resistant writers.

Corbett (as cited in Panetta, 2001) defines *resistant writers* as writers whose thoughts are silenced due to rhetorical differences. This resistance emerges from the second language writers' inability to control how they want to express their thoughts.

Kaplan (1966) argues that although both the prescriptive and descriptive approaches of teaching English have recognised the role of cultural differences in learning a language, this role is only recognised at a sentence level; which entails analysis of grammar, vocabulary, and the sentence structure. It is also argued by sociologists and anthropologists that *logic* is a cultural phenomenon (Kaplan, 1966). This is probably the reason Kaplan (1966) suggests that:

Logic (in the popular, rather than the logician's sense of the word) which is the basis of rhetoric, is evolved out of a culture; it is not universal. Rhetoric, then is not universal either, but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture. It is affected by canons of taste within a given culture at a given time (p. 12).

Kaplan (1966) finds it fallacious to take it for granted that if a student can write a well coherent essay in his/her native language, then that same student can also write a well coherent essay in a second language. If this was the case, then foreign students who are proficient in their first languages would not have composed theses, essays, and term papers that are disorganised, incoherent, and fuzzy (Kaplan, 1966). "The foreign paper is out of focus because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader" (Kaplan, 1966, p. 13).

Kaplan's (1966) argument that cultural differences are only recognised at a sentence level is probably the reason Kaplan (1997) posits that since writers express their thoughts in a text (and not in a sentence), the analysis of their thoughts must be done at a text level, and not at a sentence level.

Kaplan (as cited in Connor, 1996) maintains that culture is an important aspect in writing a language. For this reason, each language has unique rhetorical devices and whenever second language speakers express their propositions in a text, their first language rhetoric devices interfere with their writing (p. 5). For example, in general, texts written by American and British native speakers are perceived to be the writer's monologue and not a dialogue with the reader. The Czech texts, on the contrary, are perceived as a dialogue between the writer and the reader (Barton, Dickson & Kinloch, 1999, p. 377).

Hinds (as cited in Kubota & Lehner, 2004) argues that between the English and the Japanese expository discourse patterns, English writing style is direct (linear) whereas the Japanese writing style is indirect. This means that compared to Asian languages, texts written by English native speakers are expected to contain a few reader interpretations. The present study, however, did not expand its focus to the discourse patterns of different languages. Rather, it only focused on the linguistic analysis of academic texts written by students at university level.

Kubota and Lehner (2004) argue that despite the differences in the discourse patterns between English and other languages, Contrastive Rhetoric should be viewed as a unique effort meant to assist the learning of a second language, and not as a means of foregrounding the superiority of English rhetoric against learners who transfer their first language patterns into second language writing. Hence, in order to achieve this effort of learning a second language, Kubota and Lehner (2004) suggest an integrated rhetoric termed '*Critical contrastive rhetoric*'. Kubota and Lehner (2004) argue that:

critical contrastive rhetoric encourages teachers and students to critically reflect on classroom practices such as comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 rhetorical patterns and

teaching/learning “preferred” discourse patterns of the target language and to re-evaluate how these practices might reinforce cultural binaries and assimilation (p. 9).

Although the criticism of Contrastive Rhetoric Theory dates as far back as the early 2000’s (see Xinghua, 2001; Kubota & Lehner, 2004), this theory is still used in academic discourse such as in teacher training workshops and in various studies to demonstrate and analyse how communication is passed among different cultures (Kubota & Lehner, 2004). Spack (as cited in Kubota & Lehner, 2004), for example, argues that the theory of Contrastive Rhetoric does not give a true reflection of reality because it views students as members of a generalised cultural group and not as individuals from one cultural group, and hence, it gives biased information about intercultural communication.

2.4. Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on hedges and boosters and other related topics. Additionally, the chapter also explained Kaplan’s (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory and Hyland’s (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters which were used in the present research. The next chapter will present the methodology and design used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology and design that were employed to study the application of hedging and boosting devices used in the 2014 and 2015 Master of Arts in English Studies theses at the University of Namibia. This chapter also presents a detailed description of the research design of the present study. The chapter further gives a detailed description of the population and sample that was used, along with describing the research instruments and procedures and presenting the ethical issues that were considered in the present study.

3.2 Research Design

The present study is a mixed methods research approach, and a desktop study in nature, which made use of primary data to critically examine and analyse existing written and published theses. Creswell (2009) argues that mixed methods research approach uses the strengths from qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to adequately address the complexity of a social phenomenon when the complexity of this social phenomenon could not be addressed by employing either a qualitative or a quantitative approach alone. Hence, in this case, the mixed approach was necessary.

Based on Creswell's (2009) description of what a mixed methods research approach entails, the present study can be defined as a mixed methods research and not qualitative or quantitative. O'Leary (2010) argues that "quantitative research is often characterised as an objective positivist search for singular truths that relies on hypotheses, variables, and

statistics, is generally large scale but without much depth”, (p. 105). Creswell (2013) argues that:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (p. 44).

The present study was characterised by its aims to give insight into a phenomenon. The significance of the mixed research approach in this study was found in its ability to give an explanation of issues such as why research writers prefer some types of hedging and boosting devices over others, and why some theses chapters have some types of hedges and boosters. Additionally, the present study found it necessary to employ a mixed methods approach because the preference of certain types of hedges and boosters was justified by the frequencies of the subcategories of hedges and boosters. Since the present study was a desktop one in nature, no fieldwork was conducted.

3.3 Population

The population of this study was all theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015.

3.4 Sample

Ten theses were examined. This study did not use any sampling technique because it examined all the theses (10) submitted during the stipulated time frame.

3.5 Research Instruments

Since this study used primary data in the form of submitted and examined theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies, no research instruments were used.

3.6 Procedure

The study was based on all ten theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies that were submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015. The study only examined three chapters of the theses: Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion. These chapters were selected to give a representation of academic practice. Each thesis was between 25 000 and 35 000 words in length. The Master of Arts in English Studies theses were downloaded from www.unam.edu.na/library/ In order to identify the hedging and boosting devices, a corpus analysis software, *AntCon*, was used. However, this software only analyses texts that are in Text Document format, and not in PDF format. Hence, the need for the conversion of the downloaded theses was necessary before the *AntCon* software could be used to carry out a corpus linguistics analysis as the examined theses were in PDF format.

Due to the University of Namibia's ethical considerations, there was a need to protect the identities of all ten authors whose theses were part of the present study. For this reason, pseudonyms were used. The researcher used alphabetical letters, A to J, to represent the ten theses. In order to match these theses to the authors, a systematic naming system of "Author 1" to "Author 10" was used. This means that Thesis A was written by Author 1 and Thesis J was written by Author 10. The researcher found it necessary to carry out a separate analysis of

hedging and boosting devices found in each of the three selected chapters of the ten theses. The significance of this separate analysis was that it ensured that all the hedging and boosting devices used in each chapter were analysed according to Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters.

Since English is a second language for most Namibians, Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory was used to explain how researchers at the University of Namibia express their certainties through the application of boosters, and how they use hedges to show degrees of uncertainty in the three chapters: Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion.

3.7 Data Analysis

Firstly, the researcher used Adobe Acrobat Reader DC software to convert the targeted three chapters of the theses from their original PDF format to Text Document format. Secondly, the researcher used a corpus analysis software to identify hedges and boosters used in the theses. In order to ensure that all the hedging and boosting devices used in each chapter were analysed according to Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters, each of the three chapters was analysed separately; the introduction chapter was analysed first, followed by the discussion chapter and then the conclusion chapter. The researcher analysed these chapters by looking at how each of the five types of hedges and boosters were used by the authors.

Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters was used to categorise and discuss hedges and boosters. Then, in order to explain how hedging and boosting devices were used by authors whose theses were part of the present study, the researcher used Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory. Connor (1996) argues that Contrastive Rhetoric is "an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language attempts to explain them" (p. 5). In light of Connor's (1996) arguments about Contrastive

Rhetoric, this theory was significant for the present study because English is a second language to most Namibians. Since the present study used Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory to explain how hedges and boosters are used in the ten theses, the researcher found it significant to categorise these theses in three genres; Literature, Linguistics, and Rhetoric. Finally, the researcher discussed how each type of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters was used in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of the theses. Since there was a need to protect the identities of the authors whose theses were part of the present study, pseudonyms were used during the discussion of the research findings.

3.8 Research Ethics

Schnell and Heinritz (as cited in Flick, 2011) posit that in research of any kind, research ethics are important because they are concerned with the necessary steps that are taken to protect all the participants in a research. Furthermore, ethical considerations in any research play a pivotal role because if no precautionary measures are put in place to protect the participants, the research might have a negative impact on the participants or the research. For this reason, Murphy and Dingwall (as cited in Flick, 2011) developed an ethical theory that is based on four principles:

Non-maleficence – researchers should avoid harming participants.

Beneficence – research on human subjects should produce some positive and identifiable benefit rather than simply be carried out for its own sake.

Autonomy or self-determination – research participants' values and decisions should be respected.

Justice – all people should be treated equally (p. 216).

In light of the above arguments and suggestions, the identities of the authors whose research theses were examined in the present study were protected through the use of pseudonyms. This concept was also applied on the theses titles. Prior to the collection of data, the researcher sought permission from the Pro Vice Chancellor of Academic and Research in terms of section 7.7 of the UNAM research policy. In addition, the data collected were treated with a high level of confidentiality, and were only used for the purpose of the study.

3.9 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to describe the research methodology of this study. This chapter also explained the sample selection, the method used in the process of data collection, and provided an explanation of the procedures used to analyse the data that were collected during the study. Finally, this section also looked at the ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from all theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015. The primary aim is to illustrate how authors employed hedging and boosting devices in the Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion chapters of their particular thesis. The chapters were analysed and discussed separately.

4.2 Analysis of Data

In an attempt to examine how writers use hedging devices to show their degree of uncertainty, and how they use boosting devices to show their commitment towards their claims, the analysis of data focused on three chapters of the ten theses: Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion. The collected data were analysed, presented, and interpreted according to the research objectives of the study:

- (a) To examine how the writers of Master of Arts in English Studies (MAES) theses use hedging and boosting devices in their Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion chapters.
- (b) To analyse the frequency of hedges and boosters used in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of MAES theses.

The ten theses that were examined in this study focused on the following areas: Author 1 analysed the use of superstition in some selected works of Shakespeare. Author 2 analysed the role of code switching in conversations in a public domain. Author 3 analysed how

Shakespeare used rhetorical devices and their purposes in the selected king's speeches. Author 4 compared how women are depicted by Nyathi and Shakespeare in their selected plays. Author 5 explored the application of rhetoric and humour in selected cartoons of Dudley. Author 6 examined how the former President, Dr Sam Nujoma employed the Aristotelian proofs of ethos, pathos and logos and the canons of classical rhetoric in his selected speeches. Author 7 investigated the English language of persuasion used in selected advertisements. Author 8 analysed the rhetorical devices used in selected car advertisements in selected national newspaper. Author 9 explored the representation of Afropolitanism in two selected African novels. Finally, Author 10 explored how characters are depicted by African authors.

The researcher found it necessary to carry out a separate analysis of hedging, and boosting devices found in each chapter of the ten theses. The purpose of this separate analysis was to ensure that all the hedging and boosting devices used in each chapter were analysed according to Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters. Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory was used to present the data analysis.

4.3 Introduction chapter

4.3.1 Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals

Some authors under investigation used hedges in their theses as a way of showing their level of uncertainty in their claims. The writers seek to be as objective as possible, yet accurate. The following excerpts were taken from the Introduction chapter to illustrate how these authors used Tentative Verbs and Modals such as *may*, *might*, *could*, *seem*, *suggest*, *appear*, and phrases such as *seems to suggest*, and *to a certain extent/level* to show their uncertainty towards claims:

“They **may** involve animals, graveyards, ghosts, inanimate...”, (Author 1).

“In some cases, speakers **may** manipulate languages by switching”, (Author 2).

“...culture will determine how men or women **may** be perceived by...”, (Author 4).

“..practice of code switching were vital and **might** change the...”, (Author 2).

“Conversely, it **could** be said that only after specific meaning...”, (Author 4).

“...the research **could** be helpful to potential buyers who **could**...”, (Author 8).

“The feminist reader **might** ask, among other questions, how the text...”, (Author 4).

“Moreover, this study **might** provide the basis for future research”, (Author 7).

“Namibia and Sanlam’s print advertisements **seem** to use various...”, (Author 7).

Table 1 below presents statistics of how the authors under investigation used Tentative Verbs and Modals in the Introduction chapter of their theses.

Author’s name	Hedges (Frequency)							Booster (Frequency)	
	May	Might	Could	Seem	Suggest	Appear	Seems to suggest	Should	Total
Author 1	02	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	02
Author 2	05	02	03	0	0	0	0	0	10
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0	02	0	0	02
Author 4	07	01	05	0	0	0	0	10	23
Author 5	0	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	01
Author 6	02	01	01	0	0	0	0	(33)	04
Author 7	04	03	02	01	0	0	0	0	10
Author 8	09	0	02	0	0	0	0	0	11
Author 9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 10	0	0	0	01	0	01	0	0	02
Total	29	07	14	02	0	03	0	10	65

Table 1: Concordance plot of Tentative Verbs and Modals

In each of the examples above, a hedge is used to show a degree of uncertainty in the researcher's claim. In total, *may* is used 29 times by authors 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8. While, *might* was only used 7 times by authors 2, 4, 6, and 7. The fact that *may* is preferred more than *might* could suggest that researchers find it easier, and probably less threatening, to hedge by using *may* than *might*. The preference of this hedge is, to a certain extent, in accordance with Šeškauskien's (2008) argument that when writers of English as a second language are faced with a choice between two similar words, with different meanings, the preference is given to the easiest one. This preference can be attributed to the multiple meanings of a word.

According to Procter (2008), *may*, is a modal verb which means "possibility", "permission", or "wish". It can also act as a noun to mean the fifth month of the year. *Might* bears multiple meanings; it can be a past simple tense of the verb *may* which is normally used in reported speech. The same verb can also be used to mean the possibility of a cause, permission, or suggestion. *Might* is used in disapproval questions. It can also be employed as a noun such as "*she fought with all her might*". Finally, the same word can be employed as a synonym of the word *should*. In the excerpts above, the frequency of the word *may* seems to suggest that the quoted authors find it easier, and probably less threatening, to use *may* than *might* in their claims.

Although hedges such as *seem*, *suggest*, *appear*, and phrases such as *seems to suggest*, and *to a certain extent/level* fall under Tentative Verbs and Modals, researchers under investigation showed little interest in utilising them. The hedge *seem* was only used twice by Author 7 and Author 10. Apart from Author 10, all authors under investigation showed a zero interest in utilising hedges such as *suggest* and *appear*, and phrases such as *seems to suggest* and *to a certain extent*. This preference could be attributed to the writers' limited knowledge of synonyms. For example, *might* can be a synonym of *could*. This is clear in the following

examples where the writers had a choice to choose between the two words without distorting the intended meaning of their stance:

“Moreover, this study **might** provide the basis for future research”, (Author 7).

“...the research **could** be helpful to potential buyers who **could**...”, (Author 8).

The excerpts above show that the authors had a choice between *might* and *could*, but probably due to a limited knowledge of synonyms, and the lack of exposure to synonyms, some words with similar meanings were preferred over the others. This is probably the reason *might* was only used 7 times and *could* occurred 14 times in the Introduction chapter. Hence, this imbalance between *could* and *might* has the possibility of leaving the readers with the impression that research writers are not sufficiently proficient in the English language.

One author under investigation also used *should* in his/her thesis as a way of showing the level of certainty in the claims. The following excerpt was taken from the Introduction chapter to illustrate how this Author used *should*, a booster which falls under Tentative Verbs and Modals.

“From the above, it **should** therefore be understood in the context of...”, (Author 4)

The excerpt above shows that Author 4 is, to a certain extent, making a conclusion based on some arguments that were probably presented in the previous paragraphs. The fact that Author 4 used *should* and not *must* could suggest that the author was cautious of his/her stance. Although this booster (*should*) was used 43 times by authors 4 and 6, it is worthy of notice that only Author 4 used it to register his/her level of certainty. Author 6 used this booster only as part of a direct quotation. Hence, the frequency of this booster by Author 6 was placed in brackets to signal that it was not part of the data analysis.

4.3.2 Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs

Table 2 below shows the number of times Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs were used by the authors under investigation.

Author's name	Hedges (Frequency)			Boosters (Frequency)		Total
	Possibly	Likely	Probably	Certainly	Definitely	
Author 1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 4	0	0	0	01	0	01
Author 5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 7	0	2	0	0	0	2
Author 8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	02	0	01	0	03

Table 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs.

Table 2 above clearly shows that none of the authors under investigation preferred the application of *possibly*, *probably*, and *definitely* in their Introduction chapters. Although the overall frequency of *Tentative Adjectives* and *Adverbs* is relatively low compared to *Tentative Verbs* and *Modals*, Author 7 used two hedges. The imbalance in the application of hedges and boosters seems to support Vazquez and Giner's (2009) argument that sometimes the application of more boosters could be attributed to the nature of the data being analysed because some data require the writers to show full commitment to their claims, while other data require writers to shy away from their claims. This might be the reason Author 7 found the necessity to apply more hedges than boosters in the Introduction chapter.

According to Hyland (2004), it is understood that writers who wish to present claims for which they lack adequate grounds use hedges such as *possibly*, *likely*, and *probably*. Where writers want to confirm their claims, boosters such as *certainly*, and *definitely* are used; these hedges and boosters are termed Tentative Adjectives and Boosters. The following excerpts are examples of how the authors under investigation used Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs to either signal distance from their propositions, or to signal the accuracy of their claims:

“...those who best persuade are those most *likely* to win”, (Author 7).

“Peter (2010) claims that it is *certainly* clear that many male writers...”, (Author 4).

From the excerpts above, it is clear that Author 7 used a tentative adjective, *likely*, to indicate to the readers that people who persuade best have the likelihood of winning. The choice of this adjective is likely to protect Author 7 because he/she used this tentative adjective to indicate that the statement lacks adequate grounds. Although Author 4’s statement comes from a secondary source, it can be observed that the application of the tentative adverb, *clearly*, reveals that the claim being made is confirmed and that the author probably has enough evidence to support the said claim.

4.3.3 Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases

Hyland (2004) categorises phrases such as “*the study*” and “*this study*” as Distancing phrases. They are called as such because they create room for the writer to distance him/herself from the truth and hence, avoid the consequences of being direct. In most cases, writers change pronouns as a way of avoiding being direct. Hence, *my*, which is perceived to be a direct pronoun, changes to *the*, which is perceived to be a distancing pronoun.

Table 3 below shows the concordance plot of the Distancing phrases of “*this study*” and “*the study*” by various authors under investigation.

Author’s name	This study	The study	Total
Author 1	07	10	17
Author 2	09	18	27
Author 3	09	09	18
Author 4	13	21	34
Author 5	10	06	16
Author 6	05	10	15
Author 7	06	05	11
Author 8	08	11	19
Author 9	03	14	17
Author 10	05	14	19
Total	75	118	193

Table 3: Concordance plot of distancing phrases.

Table 3 above shows that Distancing phrases (*the study* and *this study*) are used 193 times by all the authors under investigation. However, Author 4 used many distancing phrases (34 times) compared to the other authors. Author 7 used Distancing phrases the least (11 times). Based on these figures, it can be suggested that the authors under investigation know the significance and the consequences of employing distancing phrases in their theses. The following excerpts were taken from authors’ works:

“...suitable to the community of Outapi where **the study** was conducted”, (Author 2).

“Moreover, **the study** seeks to reflect on how language...”, (Author 3).

“The purpose of **this study** was to analyse how...”, (Author 1).

“This study consists of five chapters”, (Author 4)

In all the examples above, the authors appeared to be very cautious with the choice of the Distancing phrases. By choosing these phrases, it can be assumed that the authors are trying to distance themselves from their own work. The significance of such Distancing phrases in these excerpts is found in the event that their work is criticised by the discourse community. In this case, authors are likely to have less Face Threatening Acts, unlike if they did not use Distancing phrases.

The choice of Distancing phrases, as found in these excerpts, confirms the argument that writers in academic settings use hedges, not only as a way of presenting their findings in a cautious manner, but also as a tactic of minimising the effects of Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) from the discourse community (Bonyadi, Gholami & Nasiri, 2012; Fraser, 2010; Namsaraev, as cited in Rabab'ah, 2013, p. 197).

Hyland (2004) further suggests that the subcategory “Impersonal Third Person” falls under type 3 of his taxonomy of hedges and boosters. A writer who uses the Impersonal Third Person writes from a third personal point of view where he/she avoids using *I* or *We*. The following words and phrases are Impersonal Third Persons: *he/she*, *it*, *they*, and *the researcher*.

Table 4 shows the concordance plot of the Impersonal Third Persons used by the various authors under investigation.

Author's name	He/She	It	They	The researcher	Total
Author 1	0	06	03	06	15
Author 2	0	17	15	02	34
Author 3	0	01	02	03	06
Author 4	0	28	07	02	37
Author 5	0	06	04	01	11
Author 6	0	09	0	07	16
Author 7	0	05	05	01	11
Author 8	0	05	01	03	09
Author 9	0	03	0	04	07
Author 10	0	05	10	02	17
Total	0	85	47	31	163

Table 4: Concordance plot of Impersonal Third Persons.

Table 4 above shows that compared to all the authors under investigation, Author 4 used the Impersonal Third Person the most (37 appearances). Authors 3, 8, and 9 all used Impersonal Third Person less than 10 times. With regards to the subcategories of the Impersonal Third Person, none of the authors employed *He/She* to present their propositions. The following excerpts were taken from the authors' works to illustrate how the authors attempted to impersonate their stances:

*"...are steeped in lore or tradition, and **it** is usually difficult to pinpoint..",* (Author 1).

*"Moreover, **it** is believed that findings of this...",* (Author 2).

*"These restrictions, however, gave **the researcher** enough time...",* (Author 1).

These examples suggest that authors of these excerpts use the Impersonal Third Person as a tactical way of avoiding being direct in their propositions. The fact that the Impersonal Third Person was used 163 times could suggest that authors in academic discourse are aware of the impacts of being too direct and personal in their writing.

Hyland (2004) suggests that the Unnamed phrases fall under his Type 3 taxonomy of hedges and boosters. The Unnamed phrases are used as another tactical way for writers to gain some distance from their claims rather than being precise about their claim (Musa, 2014). Writers employ the Unnamed phrases to avoid being held responsible for their claims. According to Musa (2014), the most used method of reducing the writer's responsibility is by using passive constructions. The following quotes show how the authors under investigation used passive constructions to distance themselves from their propositions:

“Various studies have been done on superstition...”, (Author 1).

“Language is seen as a vehicle of communication”, (Author 2).

Both authors have omitted the subjects in their claims. Author 1, for example, distanced him/herself from their claim by not indicating the “*by whom*” part of the proposition. The omission of the subjects by these authors could probably mean that authors in an academic setting try, by all possible means, to be cautious of their propositions. The following examples are quotes taken from the authors under investigation to show how authors attempt to show accuracy in their claim:

“Sol Plaatje (as cited in Mhudi, 1978, p. 25) depicts women as ever busy serving their male”, (Author 4)

“Lister (2010, p. 68) says that Dudley had a keen interest in politics since the 1970s”, (Author 5).

In the extracts above, both authors are committed to their claims. Author 4 and Author 5 did not use the passive construction tactic to distance themselves from their claims. Instead, they cited the sources of their claims. The excerpts from Author 1 and Author 2 show a degree of tentativeness bestowed on their claims. The purpose of this tentativeness is probably to indicate to the readers that the authors have little commitment towards their claims.

4.3.4 Type 4: Solidarity features

Hyland (2004) suggests that phrases that are used by the writer to signal that he/she supports an existing proposition fall under Solidarity features. The present study explored how the authors under investigation used the following solidarity phrases: “*it is a fact that*”, “*despite the fact that*”, “*due to the fact that*”, and “*the fact that*”.

Table 5 presents statistics of how the authors under investigation used these Solidarity features in the Introduction chapter of their theses.

Author's name	It is a fact that	Despite the fact that	Due to the fact that	The fact that	Total
Author 1	0	0	0	0	0
Author 2	0	01	01	01	03
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0
Author 4	0	0	0	0	0
Author 5	0	0	0	0	0
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0
Author 7	0	0	0	0	0
Author 8	0	0	0	0	0

Author 9	0	0	0	0	0
Author 10	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	01	01	01	03

Table 5: Concordance plot of Solidarity features

The table above shows that only Author 4 employed the Solidarity features (3 times) in his/her Introduction chapter. This figure could suggest that writers in academic writing distance themselves from making precise claims with confidence. Instead, they attempt to employ words and phrases that will weaken a claim. This low representation of Solidarity features in the Introduction chapter could support the argument by Salager- Meyer (as cited in Choi & Ko, 2005, p. 4) who state that if research writers use rhetoric devices that are too strong or too weak, readers in academic discourse will doubt the validity of their propositions. The following quotations show how Author 4 used the Solidarity features in his/her Introduction chapter:

“Despite the fact that Outapi became an administrative centre...”

*“...proficiency creates communication barriers **due to the fact that** English is used as Language”*.

*“What one would consider as baffling is **the fact that** the girls’ parents were...”*

In all these examples, Author 4 seems to have used these Solidarity features to indicate to the readers that he/she supports existing claims. In order to win the readers’ trust on these claims, Author 4 was expected to show authority by providing the sources of his/her claims. It is anticipated that by providing the sources of these claims, the writer prevents the possible Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community.

4.3.5 Type 5: Self-mention reference

Another purpose of the present study was to investigate the desire of the authors under investigation to express their propositions through the employment of the Self-mention reference. Hyland (2004) suggests that Self-mention reference includes pronouns and nouns such as *I*, *We*, *writer*, *researcher*, and *author*.

Table 5 below presents the frequency of these features in the Introduction chapter:

Author's name	I	We	Writer	Researcher	Author	Total
Author 1	0	0	0	06	0	06
Author 2	0	0	0	02	0	02
Author 3	0	0	0	03	0	03
Author 4	0	0	0	02	0	02
Author 5	02	0	0	01	0	03
Author 6	0	0	0	09	02	11
Author 7	0	02	0	01	0	03
Author 8	0	03	0	03	0	06
Author 9	0	0	0	05	0	05
Author 10	02	0	0	02	0	04
Total	04	05	0	34	02	45

Table 5: Self-mention reference

Table 5 above shows that *researcher*, a subcategory of Self-mention reference, is favoured the most. None of the authors under investigation preferred *writer* to refer to themselves. It can also be noted that *I* and *We* were only used 9 times, while *researcher* and *author* were used 36

times by all the authors under investigation. This large difference in these preferences could suggest that authors in an academic setting apply some level of caution by using appropriate linguistic devices that will have less Face Threatening Acts against them. In this case, the authors under investigation applied a level of caution. Hence, they chose “*researcher*” over “*I*” and “*We*” as a tentative method of self-reference. The following excerpts show how the authors under investigation employed the Self-mention features as boosting devices to show accuracy to their claims:

“*Looking at the history of car advertising, we learn that...*”, (Author 7).

“*...findings and background that I have decided to conduct a study...*”, (Author 10).

The examples above show that the two authors did not use passive construction to distance themselves from their claims. The decision to rather use an active voice could mean that these authors wanted to show the accuracy of their claims. According to Bonyadi, Gholami and Nasiri (2012), Interpersonal Metadiscourse helps research writers to use their opinions and judgments of texts, and shows how writers hope their readers will react to their opinions and judgments. Hence, the decision to employ these boosters (*we* and *I*) as shown in the examples above could support Bonyadi, Gholami and Nasiri’s (2012) arguments.

As previously stated, authors in academic writing can choose to distance themselves from their claims. This sometimes happens when the authors want to hide their identities to avoid Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community. The following excerpts demonstrate how the authors under investigation distanced themselves from their claims by using the Self-mention reference:

“*The Researcher used a comparative analysis of the...*”, (Author 4).

“*...Dr Nujoma’s rule is because the researcher assumes that these are the most*

important...”, (Author 6).

From the excerpts above, it can be observed that the authors attempted to distance themselves from their claims. By comparing the two examples above, Author 10’s claim shows that the used the personal pronoun *I* to show the level of his/her confidence in the claim. While Author 4 tried to weaken his/her relationship to the claim by using the phrase “*the researcher*” instead of “*I*”. The choice of the phrase “*the researcher*”, as used in the above examples, seems to suggest that although writers in academic settings might have a choice two words of similar meaning, sometimes they choose the one that will have less potential to cause Face Threatening Acts.

The following chart gives a summary of the preferences of Hyland’s (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the Introduction chapter:

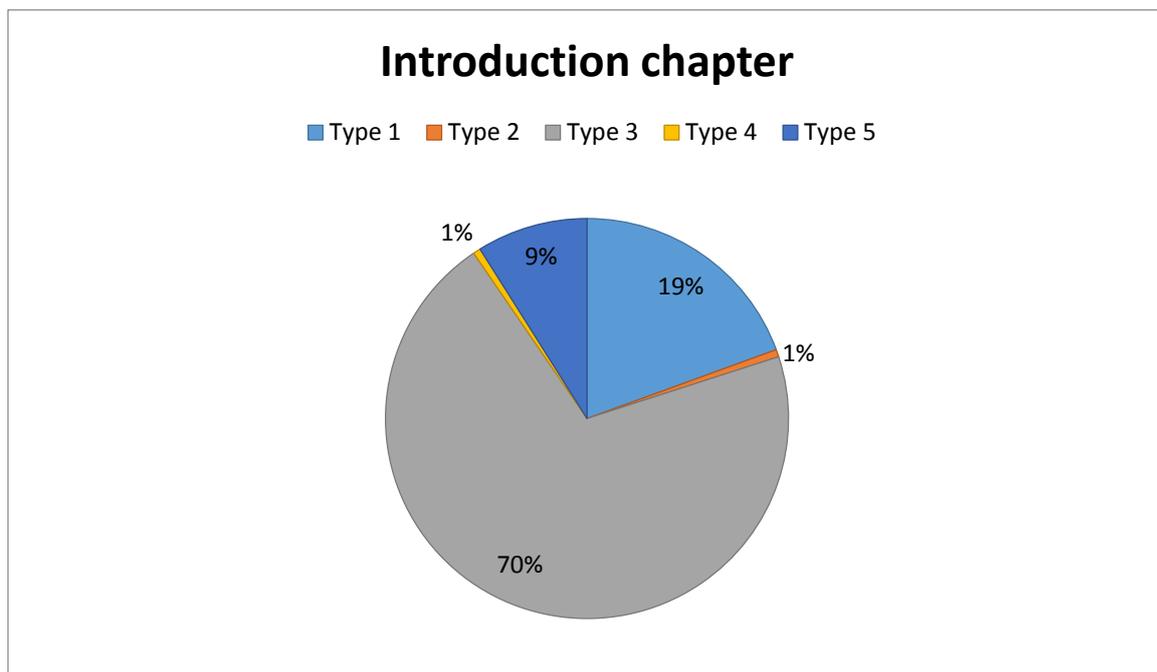


Figure 1: Overall preferences of Hyland’s (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the Introduction chapter.

Figure 1 above shows that the authors under investigation preferred Type 3 over the other types. The preference of distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases seems to be in accordance with Rabab'ah's (2013) argument that authors try to conform to the accepted academic writing style where hedging devices are used to express probabilities, save writers from being labelled negatively, convince readers, and avoid any possible rejection of their statements.

4.4 Discussion chapter

4.4.1 Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals

The present study examined how the authors under investigation employed Tentative Verbs and Modals in their Discussion chapters. The following excerpts were taken from the Discussion chapters to illustrate how various authors used Hyland's (2004) Type 1 of Hedges and Boosters to distance themselves from their claims, and to show their levels of certainty in their propositions:

*“One **may** say that Shakespeare is the Romans...”*, (Author 1).

*“There **might** be those who were happy with his visit”*, (Author 5).

*“Henry IV's haste reproach of his son **could** also mean his...”*, (Author 3)

*“It may **seem** an exaggeration, but the author **seems** to...”*, (Author 4).

*“In light of this, one can **suggest** that...”*, (Author 2).

*“...tight schedule therefore does not **appear** to permit the cultural...,”*(Author 10).

*“Namibian people **should** not allow themselves to be defined...,”* (Author 6)

From the excerpts above, it is clear that various authors under investigation employed different hedges to distance themselves from their claims. For example, the application of the word *seem* by Author 4, twice in one sentence may have been triggered by the necessity to show that all the claims made in that sentence are open for criticism, and hence, leaving room for Author 4 to withdraw these claims at a later stage. Overall, the application of these hedges seems to support the view of Serholt (2012) who states that hedges and boosters are important academic rhetorical tools whose aims are to minimise the degree of a writer's certainty, avoid being threatened and judged, and show some degree of politeness.

Table 6 below shows the frequency of Tentative Verbs and Modals used by the various authors under investigation.

Author's name	Hedges (Frequency)							Booster (Freq)	
	May	Might	Could	Seem	Suggest	Appear	Seems to suggest	Should	Total
Author 1	07	02	07	0	0	06	0	0	22
Author 2	01	02	06	01	01	0	0	(12) 09	20
Author 3	04	09	08	04	0	02	0	(16) 3	30
Author 4	23	0	17	03	05	02	0	(25) 23	73
Author 5	22	04	0	02	0	0	0	03	31
Author 6	0	0	0	01	0	0	0	(02) 01	02
Author 7	0	0	01	0	0	0	0	01	02
Author 8	01	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	02
Author 9	01	02	17	01	0	0	0	01	22

Author 10	04	0	06	0	01	01	0	0	12
Total	63	19	63	12	07	11	0	41	216

Table 6: Concordance plot of Tentative Verbs and Modals

Table 6 above shows that authors in this chapter employed *Tentative Verbs and Modals* 216 times in total. The appearance of Hyland's (2004) Type 1 of hedges and boosters could suggest that authors find it necessary to be as tentative as possible in this chapter because the analysis of data can be interpreted differently by different readers. The tentativeness, and therefore, assure the discourse community that the author's propositions are not final, but can be challenged. Another notable discovery is that none of the authors under investigation employed the phrase "*seem to suggest*" in the Discussion chapter.

The lack of interest in the phrase "*seem to suggest*" might imply that authors are not familiar with this phrase, and hence, are reluctant to employ it in the Discussion chapter. In addition, the zero occurrence of the phrase "*seems to suggest*" could support the view of Serholt (2012) who said that the incorrect application of hedges or boosters could cause severe damage to the text. It can, therefore, be concluded that the fear of damaging the entire text could be the reason authors did not use this phrase in their discussion chapter.

Although Authors 2, 3, 4, and 6 used the word '*should*' 12, 16, 25, and 2 times respectively, it is worthy of notice that in some instances, this word was used either as a direct quotation or an indirect quotation, and not necessarily to show the author's full commitment towards a claim. Hence, the appearance of this word was put in brackets to signal that it was not part of the data analysis.

4.4.2 Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs

The following excerpts were taken from the Discussion chapters to demonstrate how various authors used Hyland's (2004) Type 2 of Hedges and Boosters to distance themselves from their claims, and to show different levels of certainty in their propositions:

*"The potential customer is **likely** to feel that..."*, (Author 8)

*"...the depictions in both plays differ significantly **probably** due to..."*, (Author 4)

*"**Most certainly** the king's anguish revolves around..."*, (Author 3)

*"The reader will **definitely** want to know why..."*, (Author 5)

In the excerpts above, the authors employed various Type 2 hedges and boosters to either distance themselves from their claims or to show the accuracy of their claims. Author 4, for example, used the word '*probably*' to indicate the possibility of a cause. In this particular case, the author used this word in an attempt to distance him/herself from the said claim.

Author 5, on the contrary, used the booster '*definitely*' to show accuracy in his/her stance. Unless Author 5 has enough evidence to support his/her claim, this author stands a high chance of experiencing the Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community.

The following table presents the frequency of Type 2 as employed by the various authors under investigation:

Author's name	Hedges (Frequency)			Boosters (Frequency)		Total
	Possibly	Likely	Probably	Certainly	Definitely	
Author 1	0	05	01	0	0	06
Author 2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 3	0	03	0	01	0	04
Author 4	0	01	05	0	0	06
Author 5	0	0	0	0	02	02
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 7	0	01	0	0	0	01
Author 8	0	03	0	0	0	03
Author 9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 10	0	01	0	0	0	01
Total	0	14	06	01	02	23

Table 7: Concordance plot of Type 2

As indicated in the table above, the occurrence of Type 2 in all ten theses is 8 times higher compared to the number of occurrences in the Introduction chapter. This significant difference could suggest that authors try to distance themselves from their claims, especially when they do not have enough evidence to support those claims. Authors 2, 6, and 9 did not employ any of Hyland's (2004) Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs. The zero preference of these adjectives and adverbs could suggest that in an academic setting, some writers are not well versed with the application of Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs to show their full commitments or

distance themselves from their claims. Hence, for the fear of distorting the intended meanings of their claims some writers avoid using Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs.

4.4.3 Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases

Table 8 and Table 9 show the number of times Distancing phrases, and Impersonal Third Person were used by the authors under investigation.

Author's name	This study	The study	Total
Author 1	03	01	04
Author 2	15	13	28
Author 3	07	01	08
Author 4	06	20	26
Author 5	04	01	05
Author 6	09	08	17
Author 7	05	0	05
Author 8	0	0	0
Author 9	01	0	01
Author 10	04	02	06
Total	54	46	100

Table 8: Concordance plot of distancing phrases

Author's name	He/She	It	They	The researcher	Total
Author 1	0	40	53	05	98
Author 2	0	31	45	04	80
Author 3	0	97	29	0	126
Author 4	0	99	57	05	161
Author 5	0	57	56	0	113
Author 6	0	07	06	06	19
Author 7	0	03	0	0	03
Author 8	0	03	09	0	12
Author 9	0	63	75	05	143
Author 10	0	14	13	0	27
Total	0	414	343	25	782

Table 9: Concordance plot of Impersonal third person

As can be seen in Table 8, only Authors 2, 4, and 6 employed Distancing phrases more than ten times. All the other authors used these phrases between 0 and 8 times. The phrase *this study* is preferred the most.

On the contrary, Table 9 shows that the Impersonal Third Person is preferred the most in the discussion chapter compared to the introduction chapter. The Impersonal Third Person occurs 782 times, with Authors 3, 4, 5, and 9 employing it more than 100 times. The increased occurrence of the Impersonal Third Person might be attributed to the fact that the authors under investigation were trying to conform to the academic writing style in their discussion chapters. Kangira (2015) suggests that in order to achieve coherence in a text, writers could

employ a combination of cohesive devices such as, reference, repetition, and synonyms to tie ideas and details that fit together. The following excerpts demonstrate how the authors under investigation attempted to achieve coherence in their texts by employing the Impersonal Third Person:

*“...not say a single word to him but **it** instead keeps looking at him. This ghost...”*,

(Author 1)

*“When irony is used, **it** seems to be less serious to act on”*, (Author 5).

*“This gave **the researcher** an impression that...”*, (Author 6).

In the excerpts above, Author 1 and 5 used Impersonal Third Person, *it*, probably as a reference method to achieve coherence in the sentence. For example, Author 1 used cataphoric reference to refer to a ghost. Another possible explanation of the many occurrences of the Impersonal Third Person could be that the authors employed it as a tactical way of distancing themselves from their claims and hence, minimising the effects of Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community. Author 6 for example, used the phrase ‘*the researcher*’, and not ‘*I*’ probably as a way of distancing him/herself from the claim.

The fewer occurrences of distancing phrases could suggest that authors did not find the need to employ distancing phrases when they discussed their findings. The concordance plot suggests that authors could have employed boosters as rhetorical devices in an attempt to convince readers of their findings.

Apart from the Distancing Phrases and The Impersonal Third Person, the present study also examined how authors under investigation employed the Unnamed phrases to distance themselves from their claims. Authors in academic settings use passive constructions as a

tactical way of shying away from their claims. The significance of the *modus operandi* is believed to minimise the effects of Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community, (Musa, 2014). The following excerpts illustrate how the authors under investigation employed the Unnamed phrases to distance themselves from their claims:

“With reference to the findings, it can be concluded that...”, (Author 7).

“..would have responded to an elderly by looking at the adult. This can be interpreted as the influence of the American culture”, (Author 10).

In the excerpts above, the authors did not mention the subject; Author 7 did not specify who concluded the claim, and Author 10 did not specify the person who gave the interpretation. The choice to not specify the *“by whom”* part of these phrases may have been a way of preventing the authors from being criticised by the discourse community. Since the authors are presenting and analysing their data, the application of the Unnamed phrases could suggest that they are registering their claims in a cautious manner. The application of the Unnamed phrases in this chapter could support the view of Fraser (2010) who stated that “when non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate”, (p. 15). Thus, the authors under investigation employed the Unnamed phrases in this chapter to probably serve as hedges in their claims.

4.4.4 Type 4: Solidarity features

Table 5 presents the statistics of how the authors under investigation used the Solidarity features in the Discussion chapters of their theses.

Author's name	It is a fact that	Despite the fact that	Due to the fact that	The fact that	Total
Author 1	0	0	0	0	0
Author 2	0	0	01	0	01
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0
Author 4	0	0	0	0	0
Author 5	0	0	0	0	0
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0
Author 7	0	0	0	0	0
Author 8	0	01	0	0	01
Author 9	0	0	0	0	0
Author 10	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	01	01	0	02

Table 10: Solidarity features

The occurrences of these features show that authors had close to zero interest in employing Solidarity features, even when they were presenting and analysing their data. These figures could suggest that the authors under investigation were reluctant about applying boosters for the fear of receiving negative criticism from the discourse community. The following excerpts show how Author 2 and Author 8 employed Solidarity features to show the accuracy of their claim:

*“This is **despite the fact that** the word awesome is an exaggerated adjective with no tangible meaning”, (Author 8).*

*“This occurs **due to the fact that** most of the terminologies used in the sampled institutions are medical...”, (Author 2).*

The application of the solidarity feature, *despite the fact that*, by Author 8 to register a proposition might have detrimental impacts on his/her claim. Since Author 8 failed to provide evidence of his/her stance, the discourse community might view this claim as exaggerated, yet misleading. Providing evidence in the form of the source of information could have served as a hedge in Author 8’s claim. The following example suggests how Author 8 could have used a source of information as a hedge in his claim:

*“This is **despite the fact that** the word awesome is an exaggerated adjective with no tangible meaning, (Job, 2016)”.*

Applying authority by providing the source of a claim could save Author 8 from negative criticism as this source would serve as a hedge. Suppose the discourse community deems it necessary to criticise this claim, it would critique Job, and not Author 8. Another possible way of using evidence to serve as a hedge in a claim is the use of figures, charts, tables, and diagrams. The following excerpts illustrate how authors used *figures* to serve as hedges in their claims:

“Figure 12 criticises the NUNW leaders for their selfish deals”, (Author 5).

“Unlike in Figure 12, Figure 13 introduces the advertisement through the use of a repeated word”, (Author 8).

In the excerpts above, the authors based their arguments on the Figures. Author 5, for example, is just interpreting the Figure, and not criticising the leaders. This means that when

the discourse community deems it necessary to challenge the criticism directed to the NUNW, Author 5 is less likely to be threatened.

4.4.5 Type 5: Self-mention reference

Table 11 below shows the frequency of Self-mention reference in the Discussion chapter.

Author's name	I	We	Writer	Researcher	Author	Total
Author 1	0	02	0	05	0	07
Author 2	0	0	0	05	0	05
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 4	0	04	0	05	0	09
Author 5	0	04	0	06	0	10
Author 6	01	0	0	0	0	01
Author 7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 8	0	01	0	0	0	01
Author 9	0	03	0	05	0	08
Author 10	01	0	0	0	0	01
Total	02	14	0	26	0	42

Table 11: Self-mention reference

Although the concordance software presented a concordance plot of all instances where Self-mention reference features were used, it is worthy to note that only features that were used by the writers to refer to themselves were counted and analysed. Table 11 above shows that the authors under investigation showed little interest in the application of *the researcher*, a

subcategory of Self-mention reference. Authors 3, 6, 7, 8, and 10 showed zero interest in using this subcategory. Also, some authors under investigation used *we*, a subcategory of Self-mention reference, 14 times in total. According to Hyland (2004), Type 5 of Hedges and Booster, *I* and *we* are categorised as boosters, and *writer*, *researcher* and *author* are hedges. In comparison, hedges were used less (16 times) than boosters (26 times). This finding is contradictory to that of Serholt (2012) who concluded that the Discussion chapter has more boosters than hedges.

One can conclude that the difference in frequency may suggest that in the Discussion chapter, authors attempt to engage the readers as they discuss their findings. The following excerpts show how the authors used Self-mention reference:

*“These tools that **I** refer to here are the canons of classical rhetoric”*, (Author 6).

*“Using powerful metaphors, **we** should understand that the author used”*, (Author 4).

*“**The researcher** would say that the two ghosts in the plays...”*, (Author 1).

From the excerpts above, it seems that the authors employed Self-mention reference, not only to refer to themselves, but also as a tactical method of showing the accuracy of their claims; to distance themselves from said claims, or as a rhetorical tactic of convincing the readers to believe the claims. On close analysis of Author 6’s statement, one may conclude that this author used *I* not only as a Self-mention reference, but also as a rhetorical technique to convince the readers to believe his claim. Author 6 chose the Self-mention reference in the above example probably to mean that he/she is not afraid to reveal his/her identity thus convincing the readers to believe the claim.

By comparing Author 6's with Author 1's statement, it is clear that apart from referring to him/herself as "*The researcher*", Author 1 employed "*would*", to hedge his/her claim, and hence, maintain some from the claim. On close analysis of Author 1's sentence, it seems that this author chose this Self-mention reference feature to save his/her from being criticised negatively by the discourse community.

The following chart gives a summary of the preferences of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the Discussion chapter:

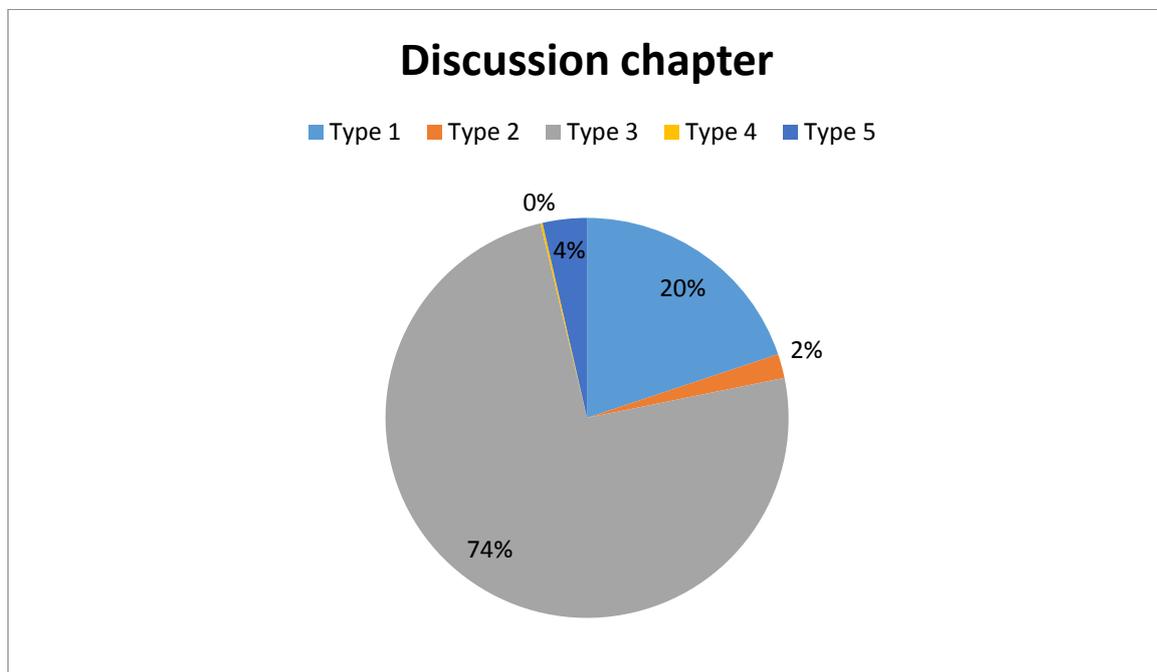


Figure 2: Overall preferences of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the Discussion chapter.

Figure 2 above shows that Type 3 is preferred the most preferred category (74%). Furthermore, the chart tells us that the authors under investigation showed zero interest in applying Type 4 of hedges and boosters. The preference of Type 3 among other types might suggest that in academic discourse, authors discuss their findings cautiously by applying more hedges than boosters. This discovery seems to dispute Serholt's (2012) argument that writers

use more boosters than hedges in the discussion chapter. Hyland (2004) categorises distancing phrases, The Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases under Type 3. Hence by virtue of this category, Type 3 does not have boosters.

4.5 Conclusion chapter

4.5.1 Type 1: Tentative Verbs and Modals

The following excerpts were taken from the Conclusion chapters to illustrate how the authors under investigation employed Hyland's (2004) Tentative Verbs and Modals to either show accuracy in their claims or to distance themselves from their claims:

*"The target audience **may** belong to different age groups and..."*, (Author 7).

*"...therefore speakers **might** be identified with their first languages"*, (Author 2).

*"..metaphors that carry strong connotations **could** be understood as demeaning"*,
(Author 4).

*"These descriptive characteristics **seem** to be reflected in Henry V's rhetorical speeches"*, (Author 3).

*"In the light of this, one can **suggest** that code switching could be used at any time.."*,
(Author 2).

*"Furthermore, more research **should** be done to measure the effectiveness..."*,
(Author 8).

The excerpts above show how the authors under investigation employed various words to distance themselves from their claims. The application of these hedges seems to suggest that these authors are subjective in their claims, indicating that their claims are not final but can be reviewed. Author 3, for example, employed the hedge 'seem' to probably suggest that the claim being made is a mere probable one, and not a definite one. The choice of this hedge was

perhaps necessitated by the fact that this author did not personally interview Henry V to get the primary information. Hence, the Author 3 made this claim based on the analysis of secondary data. Finally, the application of *'seem'* is likely to save Author 3's face because he/she is being subjective and not objective.

The preference of *'should'* over *'must'* might suggest that although authors show full commitment toward their claims, they are cautious and create a platform for the discourse community to review these claims. The following excerpt illustrates how the application of *must*, a booster, could leave the discourse community without a platform to review the proposition:

*"Finally, further research **must** be carried out on the English language of advertisement among insurance companies in Namibia ...", (Author 7).*

In the excerpt above, the application of the booster, *must*, by Author 7 may create the impression that the author is autocratic because the sentence seems to suggest that the author's claim is final and thus cannot be reviewed. The choice of *'must'* over *'should'* may also distort the intended meaning of the author's claim because this sentence seems to no longer suggest a solution, but rather giving an order. As a result, Author 7 is likely to encounter Face Threatening Acts by the discourse community.

Table 12 presents the concordance plot of Tentative Verbs and Modals as categorised by Hyland (2004):

Author's name	Hedges (Frequency)							Booster (Freq)	
	May	Might	Could	Seem	Suggest	Appear	Seems to suggest	Should	Total
Author 1	01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	01
Author 2	01	02	06	01	01	0	0	12	23
Author 3	01	0	0	03	0	0	0	0	04
Author 4	01	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	02
Author 5	01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	01
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	01	01
Author 7	03	0	0	0	0	0	0	03	06
Author 8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	03	03
Author 9	0	02	0	0	0	0	0	0	02
Author 10	01	01	0	0	0	0	0	0	02
Total	09	05	07	04	01	0	0	19	45

Table 12: Tentative Verbs and Modals

Table 12 above shows that, in total, *should* was used 18 times by more than one author to show the accuracy of their claims. Only Author 6 used this booster (*should*) in a reported speech format. The occurrences of this booster could suggest that authors find it necessary to use the booster in their conclusion chapters. The application of this booster may suggest that the authors under investigation used it in a rhetorical manner as a way of convincing the readers to believe the writers' conclusions.

4.5.2 Type 2: Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs

Table 13 below presents the frequency of Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs as employed by the authors under investigation.

Author's name	Hedges (Frequency)			Boosters (Frequency)		Total
	Possibly	Likely	Probably	Certainly	Definitely	
Author 1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 8	0	0	01	0	0	01
Author 9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	01	0	0	01

Table 13: the concordance plot of Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs

As shown in Table 13 above, Hyland's (2004) Type 2 of hedges and boosters only appeared once. Additionally, the table shows that none of the authors under investigation attempted to employ Type 2 boosters. The zero interest in the application of Type 2 boosters in this chapter

could suggest that authors in academic settings are sceptical about their claims because they are aware of what might happen if they show full commitment towards those claims. The following excerpt shows how Author 8 used a hedge to show uncertainty in his/her claim:

*“...car advertisers are **probably** using this staggering figure to persuade potential buyers to buy the cars”.*

In the excerpt above, the choice to employ the hedge, *probably*, could mean that the author wants to register an uncertain reason something happened. In this case, Author 8 suggests that the application of a staggering figure by car advertisers is for a probable reason, which is to persuade potential buyers to buy cars. Hence, there is little likelihood that Author 8 will face negative criticism from the discourse community because his/her stance is protected by a hedge. The following example illustrates what the same claim would be if Author 8 had not employed a hedge in his/her claim:

“...car advertisers are using this staggering figure to persuade potential buyers to buy the cars”.

The sentence above shows that the author is certain about the reason something happened. In this particular case, this claim will leave the readers with the impression that the writer is certain that the reason staggering figure was used was to persuade potential buyers to buy cars. Unless, there is substantial evidence to support this claim, there is likelihood that this writer will receive negative criticism from the academic discourse community.

4.5.3 Type 3: Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed

Table 14 presents a concordance plot of how the authors under investigation used Distancing Phrases (*This study, the study*) in the Conclusion chapter.

Author's name	This study	The study	Total
Author 1	04	08	12
Author 2	15	13	28
Author 3	09	03	12
Author 4	01	13	14
Author 5	0	0	0
Author 6	01	01	02
Author 7	01	03	04
Author 8	01	01	02
Author 9	08	04	12
Author 10	0	02	02
Total	40	48	88

Table 14: Frequency of distancing phrases

As indicated in Table 14 above, Distancing phrases occur 88 times. The table also shows that Author 2 applied more distancing phrases than any other author under investigation. Author 5 did not employ any distancing phrases in his/her Conclusion chapter. Finally, the table shows that writers prefer using the phrase ‘The study’ more than ‘This study’. The preference of the distancing phrase, ‘*The study*’ could probably suggest that writers in academia try by all possible means to distance themselves from their claims. Although the phrase “*This study*” is a distancing phrase, it seems that it implies closer distance between the writer and his/her claims than the phrase “*The study*”. The following excerpts illustrate how the authors under

investigation employed the two phrases to show full commitment towards their claims or to distance themselves from their claims:

*“The findings of **this study** revealed that the majority of the respondents..”, (Author 2)*

*“Using the two plays as sources of data, **the study** investigated the following research questions..”, (Author 3).*

In the above excerpts, the application of the phrase “*this study*” by Author 2 seems to indicate that the author is showing some level of commitment to what his/her study revealed. Additionally, the choice of the phrase “*this study*” over the phrase “*the study*” may have been caused by the writer’s limited proficiency in the English language. This suggestion could support the findings of Hassani and Farahani (2014) who stated that the frequency of hedges in research articles is not only influenced by disciplinary background but also by a combination of many factors such as language, discipline, culture, and language proficiency. The following examples show how Author 2 could have changed the same statement to distance him/herself from the claim:

*“**The study** found that the majority of the respondents..”.*

*“**The study** revealed that the majority of the respondents...”.*

In these examples, it seems that the author’s use of the phrase “*the study*” was necessitated by the need to indicate to the readers that the author does not have full commitment to the claim in the study. Unless the writer knows the meaning of the two phrases (*the study*, *this study*) the intended meaning of the claims may be distorted.

Table 15 below presents the concordance plot of how the authors under investigation employed the Impersonal Third Person, a subcategory of Type 3 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters, to show full commitment toward their claims or to distance themselves from their claims:

Author's name	He/She	It	They	The researcher	Total
Author 1	0	04	05	03	12
Author 2	0	31	45	04	80
Author 3	0	06	04	0	10
Author 4	0	03	03	0	06
Author 5	0	01	05	0	06
Author 6	0	01	0	03	04
Author 7	0	04	01	0	05
Author 8	0	05	01	0	06
Author 9	0	05	10	13	28
Author 10	0	0	05	0	05
Total	0	60	79	23	162

Table 15: Frequency of Impersonal third person

As can be seen in Table 15 above, there is an irregular distribution of the Impersonal Third Person among the authors under investigation. The occurrence of the Impersonal Third Person in Author 2's conclusion chapter outnumbered the appearance in the rest of all conclusion chapters assessed. Furthermore, only 3 out of 10 authors applied the Impersonal Third Person more than ten times. Overall, with regards to the subcategories of the Impersonal Third

Persons, none of the authors employed *He/She* to impersonate their propositions. The following excerpts were taken from the authors' works to expound how the authors attempted to represent their stances:

“The researcher recommends the following areas for further investigation:”,

(Author 9).

“The researcher concludes that President Nujoma used the Aristotelian rhetorical proofs”, (Author 6).

“...although English serves as an official language in Namibia, it is still a challenge to many people”, (Author 2).

In the examples above, the application of the phrase *“The researcher”* by Authors 9 and 6 may have been necessitated by the need to distance themselves from their claims. The fact that both authors (6 and 9) did not choose *I* over the phrase *the researcher* could support the notion that these authors were indeed distancing themselves from their claims, hence, minimising the possibility of Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community.

Another possible explanation in the application of the Impersonal Third Person is that it may have been necessitated by the need to achieve coherence in the authors' writing. In this case, the writers employ either cataphora or anaphora to avoid repetition of similar words. In the above excerpts, Author 2 employed an anaphoric reference to avoid repeating the word *English*. The application of this cohesive device in order to conform to the academic writing standards seems to confirm Kangira's (2015) claim about the significance of cohesive devices in academic writing.

Apart from distancing phrases and impersonal third person, the present study also examined how authors under investigation employed the Unnamed phrases in their Conclusion chapters to distance themselves from their claims. The following excerpts show how the authors employed these phrases to distance themselves from their claims:

“Additionally, it can be deduced from this study the king’s speeches are not merely absurd utterances but..”, (Author 3).

“The use of scare tactics is particularly noticeable in expensive cars, where it is claimed that safety is guaranteed”, (Author 8).

In the excerpts above, the application of the passive construction tactic by both Author 3 and Author 8 may have been necessitated by the need to hide the identity of the subject. Hence, the *the Unnamed* is used to serve as a hedge in their claims. The use of passive construction in this case may have been caused by the authors’ fear of receiving Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community. The decision to omit the subject in these claims could also suggest that the authors under investigation were attempting to conform to the academic writing style.

4.5.4 Type 4: Solidarity features

Table 16 presents the frequency of Solidarity features in the Conclusion chapters of the theses under investigation:

Author's name	It is a fact that	Despite the fact that	Due to the fact that	The fact that	Total
Author 1	0	0	0	02	02
Author 2	0	0	01	01	02
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0
Author 4	0	0	0	0	0
Author 5	0	0	0	0	0
Author 6	0	0	0	0	0
Author 7	0	0	0	0	0
Author 8	0	0	0	01	01
Author 9	0	0	0	01	01
Author 10	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	01	05	06

Table 16: Solidarity features in the Conclusion chapter

Table 16 above clearly shows that Solidarity features appear less times in the Conclusion chapter than in the other chapters assessed during this study. In total, only authors 1, 2, 8, and 9 employed these features. The poor representation of Solidarity features may have been caused by the fear of negative criticism from the discourse community which may have caused the authors under investigation to be cautious when they were drawing their conclusions. The following quotations were taken from the Conclusion chapters to illustrate how the authors employed Solidarity features to show full commitments to their claims:

*“This occurs **due to the fact that** the terminologies used in the sampled institutions are medical and commercial terms”, (Author 2).*

*“The study was necessitated by **the fact that** Afropolitanism is a new concept that has not been broadly explored”, (Author 9).*

In the excerpts above, both Author 2 and Author 9 seem to have employed the Solidarity features to indicate the high level of certainty of their claims. In cases such as the ones presented in the excerpts above, readers are likely to be left with the impression that since the writers of these claims are certain of their claims, there is a need to support the claims with substantial evidence such as a source of information. Hence, it is important to note that it is not wrong for writers in academic settings to use Solidarity features as long as there is evidence to substantiate their claims.

4.5.5 Type 5: Self-mention reference

Table 17 below presents the concordance plot of Self-mention reference by various authors under investigation.

Author’s name	I	We	Writer	Researcher	Author	Total
Author 1	0	0	0	03	0	03
Author 2	0	0	0	05	0	05
Author 3	0	0	0	0	0	02
Author 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 6	0	0	0	03	0	03

Author 7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Author 9	0	0	0	13	0	13
Author 10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	24	0	23

Table 17: Self-mention reference

Although the concordance software presented a concordance plot of all instances where Self-mention reference features were used, it is important to note that only features that were used by the writers to refer to themselves were counted and analysed. Table 17 above shows that *researcher*, a subcategory of Self-mention reference is the only subcategory preferred by the writers in the Conclusion chapter. The same table shows that Author 9 is the only writer who used Self-mention reference more than 10 times. It is also evident that Authors 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10 did not employ any subcategories of Self-mention reference in their conclusion chapters.

The fact that subcategories *I*, *we*, *writer*, and *author* were not used by any author at all, and only *researcher*, a subcategory of Self-mention reference was used 23 times in total could suggest that in academic settings, writers draw their conclusions in a cautious manner by employing words or phrases that will cause less Face Threatening Acts. The following excerpts illustrate how the writers employed Self-mention reference to distance themselves from their claims:

*“On the basis of the findings of this study, the **researcher** recommends that...”*,

(Author 6).

*“The **researcher** has concluded that both Adichie and Selasi are Afropolitans..”*,

(Author 9).

In the excerpts above, this study discovered that it seems the word *researcher* is probably used to act as a hedge on the writers' claims. Author 6, for example, used this hedge to suggest a recommendation based on the research findings. In all the excerpts above, and with reference to Table 17, the fact that none of the authors under investigation employed *I*, a subcategory of Self-mention reference, to refer to themselves supports this discovery.

The writers' lack of sufficient English language proficiency, as argued by Hassani and Farahani (2014), could be another possible reason the word *researcher* is the preferred one. The fact that none of the authors employed either *writer* or *author*, a Self-mention reference (see Table 17 above), could support Hassani and Farahani's (2004) argument. The following examples demonstrate how the writers under investigation could have used *writer* or *author* as Self-mention references without distorting the intended meaning of their claims:

*““On the basis of the findings of this study, the **writer** recommends that...”*,

(Author 6).

*“The **author** has concluded that both Adichie and Selasi are Afropolitans..”*,

(Author 9).

The excerpts above show that the words *author* and *writer* are actually synonyms of the word *researcher*. Despite this fact, none of the writers under investigation employed either one. Based on this finding, the present study suggests that the zero occurrences of the words *author* and *writer* may have been caused by the writers' lack of adequate English language proficiency.

The following chart summarises the preferences of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the Conclusion chapter:

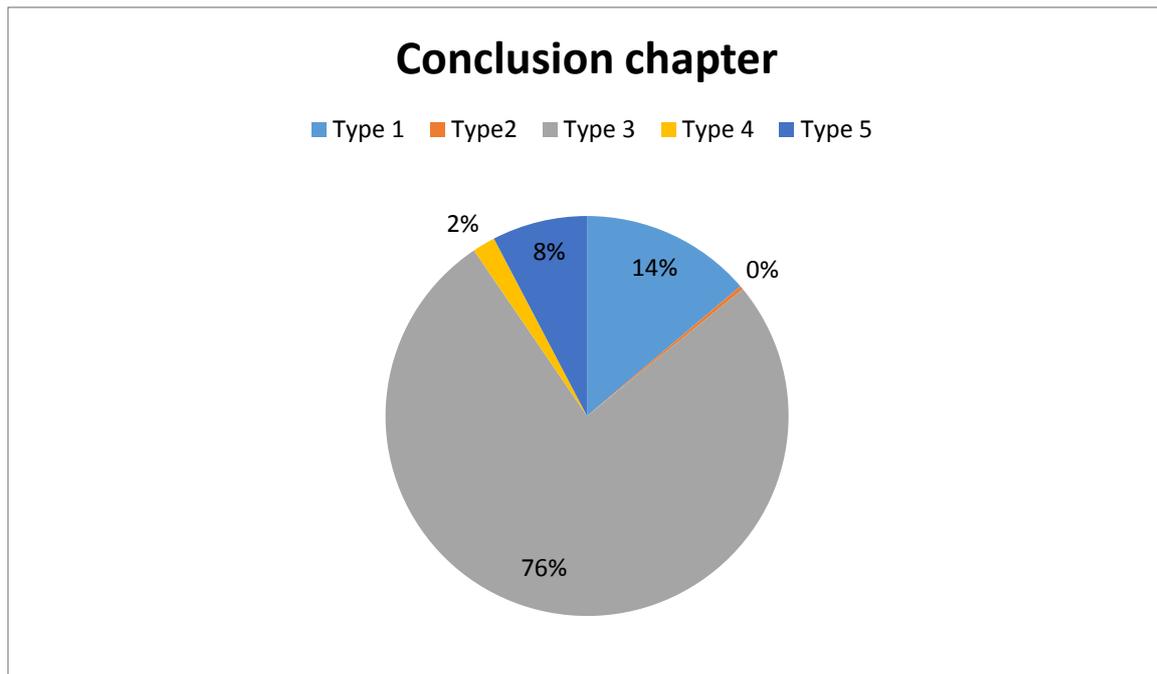


Fig 3: Overall preferences of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the Conclusion chapter.

Figure 3 above shows that writers prefer Hyland's (2004) Type 3 (Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed) over the other Types of hedges and boosters. The figure also shows that there is a 0% preference of Type 2 (Tentative Adjectives and Adverbs) in the Conclusion chapter. The dominance of Type 3 in the Conclusion chapter could suggest that writers in academic setting are aware of the significance of registering their claims in a cautious manner. Since Type 3 is the only category of hedges and boosters that does not have boosters, writers may have found it easier and less detrimental to employ these features to conclude their theses.

4.6. Summary

This chapter looked at the analysis of the collected data based on the research objectives. It also looked at the theoretical framework which focused on how the writers in academic

settings employ hedges to distance themselves from their claims and how they use boosters to show full commitments to their claims.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine how writers use hedging devices to show the degree of their uncertainty in their claims, and also examine how they use boosting devices to show their commitments towards their claims. This chapter discusses the analysis of all theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015 in relation to the following research objectives:

- (c) Examine how the writers of Master of Arts in English Studies (MAES) theses use hedging and boosting devices in their Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion chapters.
- (d) Analyse the frequency of hedges and boosters used in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of MAES theses.

This chapter discusses the analysis of the data presented in Chapter 4. The discussion is based on the similarities and differences of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters used in three theses genres: Literature, Linguistics, and Rhetoric. Out of the 10 theses, 4 are Literature, 1 is Linguistics, and 5 are Rhetoric. The discussion is based on Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory. Contrastive Rhetoric seeks to identify the differences found in texts written in the same language by speakers of different languages. The texts to be analysed must be written for a similar intention and in a similar setting and context (Kaplan, as cited in Connor, 1996 p. 61).

5.2 Literature theses

5.2.1 Introduction chapter

The findings of this study revealed that the authors whose theses are based on Literature prefer the application of Type 3 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters. This Type 3 appeared 163 times in all 4 Literature theses. According to Hyland (2004), Distancing phrases, Impersonal Third Person, and the Unnamed phrases are categorised under Type 3 of hedges and boosters. The findings of the study further revealed that none of the authors whose thesis was based on Literature employed Type 4 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters. Hyland (2004) suggests that Solidarity features such as the phrases "*it is a fact that*", "*despite the fact that*", "*due to the fact that*", and "*the fact that*" are categorised under Type 4. This type does not contain hedges; it only has boosters.

These similarities suggest that authors found it necessary to be as cautious as possible in the introduction of their Literature based theses. The absence of Solidarity features (Type 4) suggests that authors are aware of the implications of employing boosters in claims for which they lack substantial supporting evidence.

Although Type 3 was preferred the most in the introduction chapters of the Literature based theses, it is worthy to note that Author 4 used this type more than the other authors (71 times). Author 9 used this type the least, with 24 appearances. The difference in the appearance of the same type of hedges and boosters in this chapter may have been caused by the authors' different capabilities to fully comprehend the meaning of the subcategories of the hedges and boosters.

5.2.2 Discussion chapter

The findings of the study revealed that Literature theses have a dominant appearance of Type 3 by 52.8%. While the Linguistics based thesis accounts for 12.2%, and Rhetoric based theses only account for 34.9% of the Discussion chapter. Just like in the Introduction Chapter, Author 4 employed Type 3 the most. Additionally, none of the 4 authors showed any interest in employing Type 4 of Hyland (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters.

The dominance of Type 3 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in the discussion chapter of the Literature based theses suggests that authors in this genre discuss their findings in a manner that will leave the readers with the impression that their discussions are mere educated guesses, and not necessarily based on any substantial evidence. The findings of this study are in accordance with Serholt's (2012) who argues that statements that are not properly hedged could have devastating effects because they leave readers with the impression that there is no room for further investigations. Since these Literature theses were all desktop studies and none of the authors used primary data to analyse and discuss the findings of their studies, this present study found it befitting for the Literature based theses to contain more distancing phrases, impersonal third person, and the Unnamed phrases (Type 3) than the Linguistics, and Rhetoric based theses.

The fact that there is a discrepancy with regards to the appearance of Type 3 between Author 4 and other authors could prove the argument by Hassani and Farahani (2014) who state that language proficiency could be another factor influencing the frequency of hedges in research articles. Type 3 appears 187 times in Author 4's discussion chapter, while it appears 102 times (Author 1), 144 times (Author 9), and 33 times (Author 10).

5.2.3 Conclusion chapter

The findings of this study revealed that '*researcher*', a subcategory of Type 5 Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters is the only one preferred by the writers, with the appearance that amounts to 69.5%. This finding differs from what the study revealed in the previous chapters. In both the introduction chapter and the discussion chapters, authors whose researches were based on Literature showed a preference of Type 3. The study's findings also revealed that only Authors 9 and 1 used Hyland's (2004) Type 5 of hedges and boosters. Author 9 used it 13 times, and Author 1 used it 3 times.

Although Type 3 received the second preference in Conclusion chapters of the Literature theses, the fact that its appearance is less than that of Type 5 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters could suggest that authors found it less significant to employ Type 3 as rhetorical tactics to persuade the readers to believe their propositions. Instead, authors found it necessary to conceal their identities in the conclusion chapter. The application of Type 5 may have been necessitated by the need to avoid provoking Face Threatening Acts from the discourse community.

However, the findings of this study also revealed that the opposite may be true. Authors might have employed Type 5 in this chapter to create a platform for various rhetorical effects. In this case, the authors opted to employ the Self-mention reference, *researcher*, as a rhetorical tactic to indicate their level of education to the readers and hence, convince them to believe their claims. Readers are likely to be convinced by authors who apply the word '*researcher*' instead of the word '*I*'.

Therefore, the dominance of Type 5 in this chapter confirms the claim of Hyland (1996) who said that existence of hedges and boosters in a text creates a platform where writers seek to generate different rhetorical effects. The findings of this study also revealed that the existence

of Hyland's (2004) Type 5 of hedges and boosters is in accordance with the claims of Choi and Ko (2005) who claim that in order to conform to a generally accepted academic writing style, there is a need for writers to use hedges in their propositions.

5.3 Linguistics theses

5.3.1 Introduction chapter

The findings of the study revealed that Linguistics theses prefer the application of Hyland's (2004) Type 3 of hedges and boosters. This type of hedges appeared 61 times (6 times more than the other types). The findings of this study also revealed that Type 2, Type 4, and Type 5 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters are preferred the least, with a 0% interest in Type 2.

The similarities in the preference of Type 3, as found in this chapter, confirm Choi and Ko's (2005) argument that the presence of hedges in a text serve multiple functions: to reduce the risk of criticism, create awareness in the readers that the writer's claim is not the final word, strengthen the reader-writer relationship, and to conform to a generally accepted academic writing style.

The findings of this study further revealed that the 0% preference of Type 2, *tentative adjectives and adverbs*, in the Introduction chapter of the Linguistics based theses suggests that authors are not fully proficient in the English language. Hence, the application of some hedges and boosters is a challenge. However, readers might not attribute this 0% preference to the writer's insufficient English language proficiency. Instead, they are likely to assume that Linguistics does not require the authors to be tentative in their claims because their claims are supported by substantial evidence.

5.3.2 Discussion chapter

The findings of this study revealed that writers prefer Type 3 more than the other types in the discussion chapter of the Linguistics based theses. The study also revealed that there is a 0% preference of Type 2. The study further revealed that Type 1, Tentative Verbs and Modals was the second preferred type.

The dominance of Type 3 in the Discussion chapter suggests that although arguments in Linguistics are based on facts, and not on assumptions, the authors still find it necessary to be cautious in their claims.

The application of Type 3 of hedges in this chapter is likely to leave the readers with the impression that the writers are attempting to be cautious in their claims, and hence, inviting the readers to carry out further investigations. The dominance of Type 3 in the Discussion chapter of the Linguistics theses confirms the claims that writers in academic settings use hedges, not only as a way of presenting their findings in a cautious manner, but also as a tactical way of minimising the effects of Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) from the discourse community (Bonyadi, Gholami & Nasiri, 2012; Fraser, 2010; Namsaraev, as cited in Rabab'ah, 2013, p. 197).

5.3.3 Conclusion chapter

This study revealed that Type 1 is preferred the most in this chapter; out of 45 occurrences from the 10 theses, 23 occurrences (51%) were from the Linguistics theses. The findings of this study also revealed that there is a 0 % preference of Type 2, and a 43.2% preference of Type 3 in the conclusion chapter.

The preference of Type 1, Tentative Verbs and Modals, in the Conclusion chapters of the Linguistics based theses suggests that writers deemed it necessary to employ Type 1 as a

tactical way of distancing themselves from their claims. The application of Tentative Verbs and Modals in the Conclusion chapter is likely to give the readers some assurance that although there is evidence to support the writers' claims, there is still a platform for the reader to investigate further. Furthermore, this study revealed that the dominance of Type 1 in the conclusion chapter leaves the readers with the impression that the writers are making mere assumptions because they (the writers) did not base their arguments on primary data.

5.4 Rhetoric theses

5.4.1 Introduction chapter

The study established that similar to Literature and Linguistics based theses, authors prefer the application of Type 3 (132 occurrences) in the Introduction chapter of the Rhetoric theses. The study also revealed that none of the authors showed any interest in the application of Type 2 and Type 4 of Hyland's (2004) categorisation of hedges and boosters. Although the frequency of Type 3 in all 5 authors' theses in this category is above 20, Author 6 (who is in this group) employed it the most, with 31 occurrences. Finally, this study found that Type 1 is the second most preferred in this chapter (28 occurrences); Author 8 employed it the most.

The similarities in the preference of the Type 3 and Type 1 suggest that authors try to be as cautious as possible in their claims. An example of a tactical method authors employ in an attempt to be cautious is avoiding the application of words and phrases which they are not normally exposed to and hence, have little knowledge of. The fact that none of the authors employed Type 2, tentative adjectives and modals, confirms Serholt's (2012) view that the incorrect application of hedges or boosters could cause severe damages to the text. For this reason, authors may be reluctant to employ words and phrases whose meanings are not familiar to them.

From the analysis of this study, it is clear that the similarities in the preference of Type 3 and Type 1 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters suggest that authors use these types (Type 3 and Type 1) a rhetorical tactic to convince readers to continue reading their work, hence, confirming the argument by Biok and Mohseni (2014). The fact that none of the authors employed Hyland's (2004) Type 4 of hedges and boosters, Solidarity features, in the Introduction chapter confirms the findings of this study. Furthermore, the 0% preference of Type 4 in the Introduction chapter of the Rhetoric theses confirms the findings of Vande Kloppe and Crismore (as cited in Sedaghat, Biria and Amirabadi, 2015, p. 38) who state that readers read hedged texts critically and with keen interest compared to texts that are not hedged. Finally, the findings of this study confirmed the findings of Šeškauskien (2008) who said that the introduction chapter of a thesis is heavily hedged because it creates a platform for readers to analyse the background of the study which includes aspects such as the contexts, reasons, and purpose of the study.

5.4.2 Discussion chapter

The findings of this study revealed that although Type 3 of Hyland's (2004) categorisation of hedges and boosters is preferred the most, only Authors 3 and 5 employed it 134 and 118 times respectively. The other authors employed this type between 8 and 36 times. The findings of this study also revealed that there is a 0% preference of Type 4. Furthermore, the findings revealed that Type 1 remains the second preferred, with authors 3 and 5 employing it 30 and 31 times respectively. The high occurrence of Types 1 and 3 between Authors 3 and 5, as indicated above, confirmed Fraser's (2010) argument that the presence of hedging devices in a text minimises the effects of *vagueness*, (the assumption that there is a shared knowledge between the speaker/writer and the interlocutors), *evasion* (the communication breakdown between the speaker and the interlocutor or reader), *equivocation* (when the speaker or writer uses a word that has more than one meaning, with the aim of misleading the interlocutor or

reader), and *politeness* (the action toward the interlocutor or reader's positive or negative face).

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that the differences in occurrences of Type 3 and Type 1 among authors depend on the nature of the data being analysed. Although all 5 theses are Rhetorical based, there is still a difference in the type of data. Author 3, for example, analysed the selected epideictic speeches in an attempt to study the language of persuasion employed. Author 7 analysed the language of persuasion used in print advertisement. Hence, there is an imbalance in the frequency of Type 3 between the two authors. Author 6 employed the type 134 times, and Author 7 employed it 8 times. The findings of this study confirmed the arguments of Vaguez and Giner's (2009) who state that sometimes the application of more boosters could be attributed to the nature of the data being analysed because some data require the writers to show full commitment to their claims, while other data require writers to distance themselves from their claims.

Although the type of data determines the frequency of hedging and boosting devices in a text (Vaguez & Giner, 2009), this study found that Type 1 and Type 3 were preferred less by Authors 6, 7 and 8 in the Discussion chapter possibly because the authors' lack sufficient proficiency in the English language, thus, confirming the argument that research writers have not mastered writing proficiency, either in academic register or in reader-writer register (Dahme & Sastre, 2015; Hassani & Farahani, 2014).

Finally, the findings of this study revealed that the 0% preference of Type 4 of Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters is contrary to the argument postulated by Vazquez and Giner (2009) who argue that research writers should employ more boosters than hedges in Chapter 4 (Data Presentation and Analysis) because it is in this chapter that writers analyse their data and discuss their findings.

5.4.3 Conclusion chapter

The findings of this study revealed that Type 1 of Hyland's (2004) categorisation of hedges and boosters received the highest preference (33.3%) over the other types. The study also found that Hyland's (2004) Type 5 is the second most preferred (21.7%). Type 3 one of the least preferred, with only 46 out of 250 occurrences.

The dominance of Type 1, Tentative Verbs and Modals, confirms the arguments by Ebadi and Khaskar (2015) who state that research writers do not employ personal doubts and direct involvement in the Conclusion chapters. This is because in academic writing writers are expected to base their conclusions on academic findings and not merely on their personal ideas/opinions. Hence, authors deemed it necessary to be as cautious as possible by employing tentative verbs and modals as illustrated in the previous chapter. This study also discovered that the authors found it necessary to employ Type 1 by Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters in their Conclusion chapters in an attempt to not only distance themselves from their claims, and hence, save themselves from receiving negative criticisms from the discourse community, but also as an attempt to write and disseminate their academic knowledge in the academic register that is considered acceptable by the discourse community. The latter finding confirms the argument of Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman (as cited in Ebadi & Khaskar, 2015, p. 156) who state that students have to master the academic register through learning the linguistic register and the rhetorical conventions that are considered convincing by the discourse community.

5.5 Summary

To conclude, the findings of this study revealed that the similarities and differences in the choice of the types of hedges and boosters, and their frequencies depend on four factors: the nature of the data being analysed, the writer's level of English language proficiency, the

writer's need to conform to the accepted academic writing style, and the need to minimise the effects of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) from the discourse community. The findings of this study also revealed that writers hardly employ hedges and boosters they are not very familiar with. Hence, Type 2 was employed the least in all the three genres.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary and conclusions of this study. Recommendations are made based on the findings of the research. The study provided an account of the functions of hedges and boosters in the Master of Arts in English Studies theses that were submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015.

6.2 Summary

Writers in the academic setting use various phrases to either distance themselves from their claims or show full commitment to their claims. This study used Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of hedges and boosters to examine how research writers use hedges to distance themselves from their claims, and how they use boosters to show full commitment to their claims. Kaplan's (1997) Contrastive Rhetoric Theory was used to suggest the possible reasons writers used the various types of hedges and boosters.

Hyland (2000) argues that in academic research articles, researchers use different hedging and boosting devices. Depending on the choice of these devices, the intended meaning of texts might be lost, and in some instances, the texts produced might turn out to be ambiguous because of the wrong application of hedges and boosters. Hence, this study was undertaken to examine how writers use hedging devices to show the degree of their uncertainties, and how they use boosting devices to show their commitment towards their claims. The analysis of data focused on three chapters of the ten theses: Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion. The collected data were analysed, presented, and interpreted according to the research objectives of the study:

- (e) Examine how the writers of Master of Arts in English Studies (MAES) theses use hedging and boosting devices in their Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion chapters.
- (f) Analyse the frequency of hedges and boosters used in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion chapters of MAES theses.

A mixed methods approach was used to critically examine and analyse the existing written and published theses.

6.3 Findings

The main findings of this study were that the similarities and differences in the choice of the types of hedges and boosters, and their frequencies depend on four factors:

1. The nature of the data being analysed. Some theses require the application of more hedges and fewer boosters because the nature of the data being analysed allow the writer to make assumptions, educated guesses not necessarily acquired from a primary source.
2. The writers' level of English language proficiency. The differences in the application of hedges and boosters among writers can be attributed to the writer's proficiency in the English language. In the end, these writers' intended claims may be distorted.
3. The writer's need to conform to the accepted academic writing style.
4. The writer's need to minimise the effects of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) from the discourse community.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings derived from the data examined, this study recommends that a guideline of hedges and boosters be created for students to use in their academic writing. The study further recommends that research be conducted to compare how various theses genres such as Literature, Linguistics and Rhetoric use hedges.

6.5 Conclusion

The study examined the significance of hedges and boosters in all the theses of the Master of Arts in English Studies submitted and examined at the University of Namibia between 2014 and 2015. The study focused on how research writers use hedges to distance themselves from their claims, and how boosters were employed to show full commitment towards their claims. The findings indicate that the similarities and differences in the application of various types of hedges and boosters depend on four main factors: the nature of the data being analysed, the writer's level of English language proficiency, the need to conform to the accepted academic writing style, and the need to minimise the effects of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) from the discourse community. This research makes a contribution to the study of hedges and boosters, most particularly in Namibia where, according to the researcher's observation, no similar studies have previously been conducted.

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