Use of Hedges in Pakistani Academic Discourse: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of stance markers in Pakistani academic discourse of PhD theses of pure sciences and social sciences. Stance markers consist of hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. However, the researchers only investigated the hedges. Hyland (2005) model of metadiscourse is used to analyze the data. This model consists of two categories; interactional and interactive and is used to investigate the stance and engagement markers in different genres. Moreover, the researchers analyzed the data quantitatively as well. Antconc software has been used to extract the exact frequencies and examples from both corpora. It has been found that stance markers are used more frequently in the corpus of social sciences as compared to pure sciences. Moreover, Pakistani writers of PhD theses of social sciences use more stance markers of metadiscourse as compared to pure sciences. So, the writers of social sciences prefer to present their stance and engage the audience through hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self mentions, directives, questions, shared knowledge and personal asides. It can be concluded that the writers of social sciences make their theses more appealing and comprehensive for the readers through stance and engagement markers.

*Keywords:* *Academic Discourse; Metadiscourse; Stance Markers; Hedges; Boosters.*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a combination of symbols to convey our ideas and information. So, the obvious purpose of language is to convey ideas, experiences and information through communication (Widdowsen, 2007). The language which we use in our daily life is analyzed through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is defined as "a method for analyzing the ways that specific features of language contribute to the interpretation of text in their various contexts" (Barton, 2005, p.57). According to Brown and Yule (1983) language is not only used to share and exchange the content or information but it is also used to express personal relations and attitude. Language is described as a tool to communicate our ideas and information. For many years written language is considered more important than spoken because it is authentic and valid. Moreover, it is also considered important because all our valuable information is stored in written form and only the written language is the language of official communication all around the world (Widdowsen, 2007).

Metadiscourse is an umbrella term which covers many point of views of different authors. It was firstly used by Harris (1970). According to him it is a way of understanding language in use, presenting the writer's or speaker's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text. Then it was further developed by William (1981). Swales (1990) said that metadiscourse is an umbrella and fuzzy term which is easy to accept but it is very difficult to establish its boundaries. Metadiscourse is multifunctional and multilayered in nature because it takes the human conversation as implicit not explicit (Erman, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

Hyland's (2005) model of interaction is used in the present research. This model has been used to find out the interactional features of metadiscourse in the disciplines of pure science and social sciences. Hyland's (2005) model comprises of two categories; interactional markers and interactive markers. Interactional dimension of this model consists of two sub categories, stance markers and engagement markers.
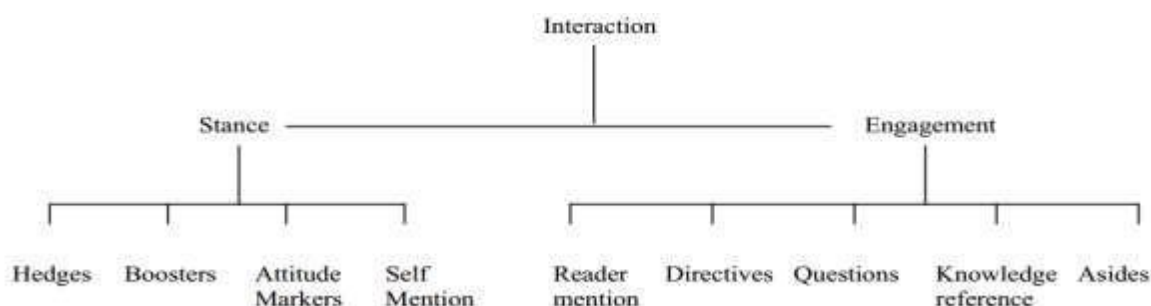
Stance Markers

Stance markers are included in the category of interactional markers of metadiscourse Hyland (2005). These markers are used by authors to present their opinions, attitude and personal feelings. Stance consists of 4 elements; hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self mentions.

Hedges

Hedges involve open dialogues which are without commitment Hyland (2005). The writer does not emphasize rather he/she stands on a distance. It is concerned with such kinds of words e.g., may, might, perhaps or possible.

Boosters

Boosters deal with close dialogue with writer's or speaker's certainty about message Hyland (2005). It consists of following examples like, in fact, definitely or it is clear that etc.

Attitude Markers

Certain words which are concerned with feelings and emotions whether positive or negative fall in this category. For example, unfortunately, pleased, thank you, I get disappointed etc

Self-Mentions

It deals with how much the writer or speaker makes their audience active or passive. We can also say that self mentions deal with certain pronouns that indicate whether the writer's identity is present in the text or not. It includes words like, I, we, me, my, our, or us.

Research questions

- How are hedges used in Pakistani PhD theses of pure sciences and social sciences?

- What kind of differences can be found in pure sciences and social sciences PhD theses?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term metadiscourse went through several developments. Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore (1989) figure out certain discourse markers such as hedges, boosters and text connecters etc. to show the relation between text producer and receiver. According to Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore (1989) writing works on two levels; the first one is discourse level and the other is metadiscourse level. The discourse level is the textual level but on the other hand the 2nd level deals with the pragmatic use of language. Abdi (2011) investigated both interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers in different parts of research articles. The objective of the study was to find out how writers use metadiscourse markers to reach to their audience. They made a corpus of natural sciences and pure sciences and then draw a comparison between these two. Researcher selected total 54 research articles (RA). From the discipline of natural sciences 3 subjects are selected which are, Physics, Biology and Medicine. However, from the discipline of social sciences the researcher selected Linguistics, Education and Anthropology. The result revealed that total 8649 metadiscourse markers were present in the discipline of natural sciences and 8651 in social sciences. The frequency showed very minor difference between two disciplines. By the result the researcher figured out that metadiscourse markers are useful instruments in the persuasion of research articles of disciplines, natural sciences and social sciences.

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Salek & Yazdanimoghaddam (2014) examined both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in different parts of research articles. The researchers selected 3000 lines from native English research articles on English Language and Teaching (ELT). They selected five sections which are, abstract, introduction, literature review, result and discussion. Hyland (2005) model of metadiscourse was selected for the study. The result revealed the following ratio of interactional metadiscourse markers in different sections.

Table 1: Interactional markers

Abstract	Introduction	Literature review	Result	Discussion
27.8	11.1	19.4	21.2	41.3

The ratio of interactive metadiscourse was following:

Table 2: Interactive markers

Abstract	Introduction	Literature review	Result	Discussion
58.2	26.8	45.6	56.4	51.1

The result revealed that the frequency of interactional and interactive metadiscourse does not remain same rather it varies from section to section in research articles.

A similar study on metadiscourse has been done by Firoozian et al. (2012). They made a corpus of two disciplines one is of applied linguistics and the other of engineering. The researchers selected 8 articles from applied linguistics and 8 from engineering. The main purpose of their study was to investigate both interactional and interactive markers of metadiscourse. The result revealed that in the case of interactive markers both disciplines, applied linguistics and engineering use more logical markers but there was difference in the usage of interactional markers between two disciplines. Their findings revealed that attitude markers were used mostly in the articles of applied linguistics. On the other hand, in the articles of engineering hedges were used most of the time. Overall result of the research showed that most metadiscourse markers were used in engineering research articles as compared to applied linguistics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate the interactional features of metadiscourse. The researchers compiled two corpora; corpus of social sciences and corpus of pure sciences. The researchers selected PhD theses of social sciences and pure sciences to compile the corpus. Moreover, Hyland's (2005) model of interaction is used to analyze the data quantitatively as well as qualitatively. In the present study, the researchers selected the sample from two disciplines, discipline of social sciences and discipline of pure sciences. From the discipline of pure science the researcher selects the following subjects:

- Biology
- Biotechnology
- Chemistry
- Geology
- Physiology

However, the discipline of social sciences consists of the following subjects:

- Education
- English
- History
- Political science
- Psychology

The researchers selected 10 PhD theses from every subject and compiled two corpora which are corpus of social sciences and corpus of pure sciences. The researcher selected all these PhD theses of social sciences and pure sciences by HEC digital library through purposive sampling. In purposive sampling the researchers decide the sample keeping in view the information required for the study (Bernard, 2002).

Antconc 3.4.4 software has been used in the present research. This software is used for the corpus based research. Antconc was designed by Anthony (2004). This software is used to see the concordances of words and their functionality in sentences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Hedges in PhD theses of social sciences

Stance markers are the linguistic token and signals through which writers or speakers can display their emotions and feelings (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989). Hyland (2005) also described stance according to three perspectives. According to his point of view, stance consists of three parts which are evidentiality, relation and affect.

Hedges

Hedges involve open dialogues which are without commitment. The writer does not emphasize rather he stands on a distance. It is concerned with such kinds of words e.g., may, might, perhaps or possible. The main purpose of using hedges in conversation is that the speaker or writer stays at a distance as against to boosters where writer or speaker make strong statements. The Antconc software is used to trace out the exact frequencies of interactional markers. The result shows that thirty three thousand three hundred sixty six (33,366) hedges are present in (3322138) words. The result indicates that the frequency of hedges is very high in Pakistani PhD theses of social sciences which means that the writers of social sciences use hedges most frequently. Total 89 hedges are traced out in the corpus of social sciences and 15 examples are presented below for the discussion. The most frequently occurring hedges are ***about, almost, may, often, could, seems, in general, would, perhaps, probable***, *feels*, *doubt.*

Examples

1. And remember Allah much that you ***may*** get success.
2. Islam is a legalistic religion which prescribe rule of conduct Muslims, ***almost*** for every sphere of life.
3. He ***could*** be highly selfish and deliberately ignore his duty towards his neighbors or even towards his family.
4. But ***perhaps*** no study has so far been conducted in the area of private sector despite the fact that this aspect deserved some deep consideration.
5. Dr. Slavin ***suggests*** that cooperative learning is not only a great way of learning but it is also a very vast field of research and analysis
6. Pakistani Government ignored the Iranian threat, ***probably*** Pakistan did not want to waste its everlasting efforts played as frontline State in the Afghan war.
7. The Congress ***would*** accommodate them because the Congress definitely needed their help at the centre.
8. Why it is ***usually*** considered that large class size results in the lower academic achievement.

9. Charts are ***generally*** used during lecture and discussion about the relationships of the things.

10. Takht-i-Bahi Buddhist complex is situated on the main road from Marxian to Malakand, 500 feet above plain area on a hill ridge ***about*** 15 kilometer north cast of Mardan.

11. Secondary education occurs ***mainly*** during the years of teenage.

12. Open unemployment was estimated ***around*** 2.0 per cent, underemployment or disguised unemployment in agriculture was estimated at over two million workers.

13. In schools, children generally have at least two or three periods of Islamiyat a week, ***sometimes*** more, of 45 minutes each.

14. Findings of the study revealed that students are ***somewhat*** satisfied with their classroom environment.

15. Islam permits man to increase their income in ***quite*** positive way.

The above mentioned examples are the most occurring examples of hedges in Pakistani PhD theses of social sciences. For the further explanation only even numbers are selected. So, only 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th, 12th and 14th examples are selected for further clarification and explanation. In 2nd example, the word ***almost*** is used as a hedge according to the Hyland's (2005) point of view. Here in this example, the writer is not making strong statement because he or she is not sure about the statement. Therefore, the writer uses the word almost to stand on a distance from his or her own words. Another hedge is in example 4 is ***perhaps***. Perhaps is also a hedge because it represents the writer's or speaker's uncertainty about his/her statement. Another example which is presented for further analysis and explanation is example no 6. In this example, the writer used the word ***probably*** because he/she does not know about the exact statement. Here in this example, the word probably acts like a hedge because it depicts the writer's or speaker's point of view instead of presenting a fact. In 8th example, word usually acts like a hedge. In this example, the writer used the word ***usually*** because he/she avoids making strong statements. Word usually functions like a hedge because Lakoff (1972) believes that main job or function of hedges is to make the things ambiguous. Another example for further clarification and explanation is example no 10. In this example, the writer uses the word ***about*** to explain the distance. The writer is not sure about the exact distance therefore; he/she used the word about 15 kilometers. The writer used the hedge because he/she does not want to make strong statements and to create ambiguity. In the 12th example, the writer used the word ***around*** to stand on a distance therefore it acts like a hedge. The writer used the hedge because he/she is presenting his/her opinion and point of view instead of exact true information. Therefore, the word 'around' is used as a hedge. In the last example, the word ***somewhat*** is used because the writer is presenting his/her opinion. Here in the 14th example, the writer is not sure about whether the students

are satisfied or not therefore, the writer precedes the sentence by using a hedge somewhat because he/she is not sure about his/her statement. All the above examples function like hedges. Hedges are used to convey ambiguity in sentences so that the readers or hearers may accept the information (Slagar-meyer, 1994). Following table is presented to list the hedges in Pakistani PhD theses of social sciences. Total 89 hedges are explored in the corpus of social sciences.

Table 1: Hedges in the corpus of social sciences

Hedges	Occurrence	Hedges	Occurrence	Hedges	Occurrence
Almost	575	May	2885	Plausible	14
In my view	9	May be	837	Plausibly	1
In this view	1	Might	506	Possible	732
In our opinion	1	Mostly	622	Possibly	57
In our view	2	Often	1167	Postulate	2
Largely	194	On the whole	60	Postulated	3
Mainly	469	Ought	31	Postulates	9
Presumable	1	Appears	234	Certain amount	7
Presumably	7	Approximately	154	Certain level	14
Probable	26	Argue	104	Claim	256
Probably	311	Argued	250	Claims	141
Quite	480	Argues	98	Claimed	216
Rather	784	Around	505	Could	2296
Apparent	70	Assume	53	Could not	782
Apparently	56	Assumed	186	Doubt	133
Appear	282	Broadly	29	Doubtful	25
Appeared	136	certain extent	8	Essentially	51
Estimate	76	Estimated	127	Fairly	78
Feels	68	Felt	300	Frequently	323
Generally	483	Guess	18	Indicate	300
Indicates	607	Indicated	677	In general	250
In most cases	21	In my opinion	17	Relatively	298
Roughly	28	Seems	376	Should	2946
Sometimes	392	Somewhat	291	Suggests	195

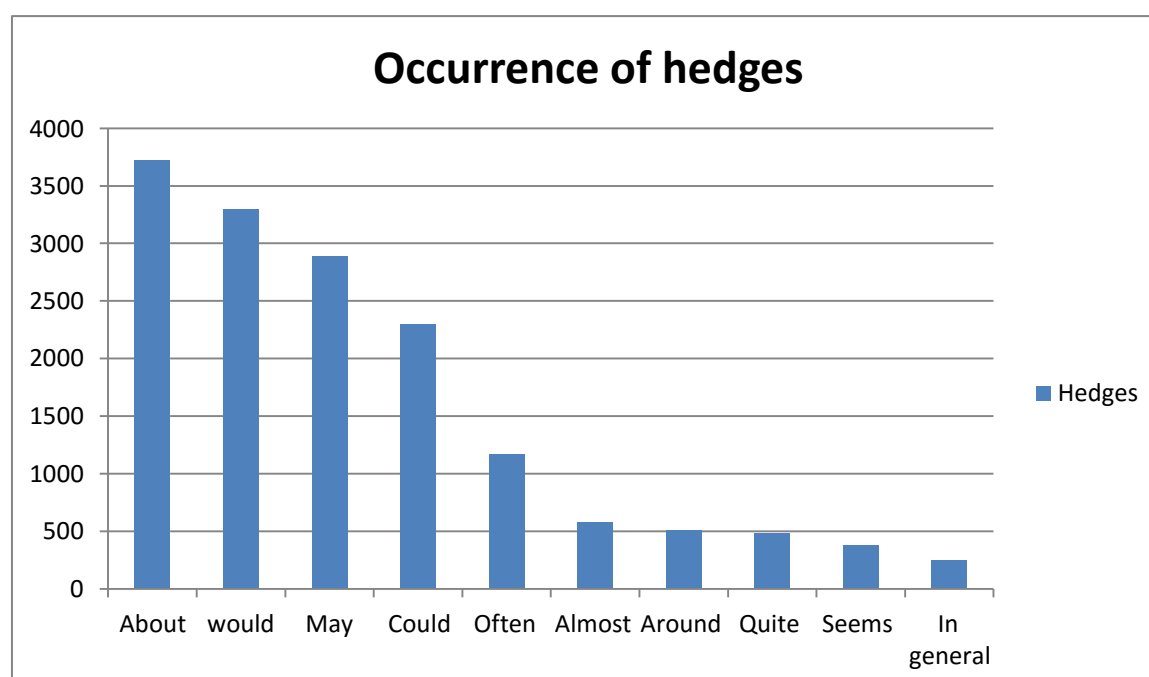| Suppose	8	Supposed	155	Suspect	7
Tend to	122	Tended to	28	Tends to	45
To my knowledge	1	Typical	102	Typically	56
Uncertain	177	Unclear	25	Unlikely	80
Usually	908	Would	3298	Would not	275
About	3721	Likely	475	Perhaps	140
				Total	**33,366**

Figure 1: Hedges in the corpus of social sciences

Hedges in PhD theses of pure sciences

Hedges

The main purpose of using hedges in conversation is that the speaker or the writer stays at a distance as against to boosters where the writer or speaker makes strong statements. Hedges are used to create ambiguity in sentences. The Antconc software is used to trace out the exact frequencies of interactional markers. The result shows that ten thousand six hundred thirty three (10,633) hedges are present in (1924166) words. The result indicates that the frequency of hedges is less in PhD thesis of pure sciences as compared to social science. Total 76 hedges are found where some occur more frequently as compared to other. For example most frequently occurring hedges are *about, almost, mainly, may, might, mostly, possible, could, around, generally, indicate, should* and *would*.

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However, hedges with less frequency are ***in our opinion, on the whole, postulate, presumably, certain extent, doubt, feel, suppose, unlikely*** and ***uncertain***. Examples of hedges of higher frequency are presented below:

Examples

1. A severe periodontal condition affecting individuals during puberty and which may lead to premature loss of teeth, affects ***about*** 2% of youth population.

2. ***About*** 30% of cases occur in patients aged _ 40 years.

3. Adult stem cells can be harvested from ***almost***, all organs and tissues like bone marrow, cornea, retina, brain, blood, kidney, liver and pancreas.

4. Ingredients of these exudates ***mainly*** include amino acids, fatty acids, carbohydrates and nucleotides.

5. On the basis of results it ***might*** be concluded that ground water in area was of generally good quality and wastewater in drain had apparently little or no effect on the shallow wells.

6. Superficial burns ***may*** be managed with little more than simple pain relievers while major burns ***may*** require prolonged treatment in specialized burn centers.

7. Although oral disease are ***often*** life threatening conditions, a healthy mouth overall improves the quality of life.

8. Oral cancer is ***probably*** underreported, particularly in developing countries.

9. The canal covers around 187 km stretch with RD from 0 to 575.

10. Many epidemiological studies have confirmed the ***generally*** poor oral health of adults in developing countries.

11. It is cheaper and ***relatively*** safe for investigators.

12. Looking at these lengthening effects on radical the results ***seems*** unclear and ambiguous.

13. The diagnosis of type 2 diabetes usually occurs after the age of 40 years but ***could*** occur sooner especially in population with high diabetes prevalence.

14. ***Approximately*** 60 % marriages are consanguineous and of these more than 80 % are between first cousins.

15. He defined the relationships between texture and the environment ***somewhat*** differently.

Above mentioned examples are extracted out from the corpus of pure science. However, for qualitative analysis even numbers are selected. So, in the 2nd example, ***About*** is used by the writer which functions like a hedge in the sentence. Here the writer consciously used the word about because he/she is not sure about the exact percentage. In the 4th example, ***mainly*** functions as a hedge. The writer used the word mainly because of the uncertainty of message or statement. In

example no 6, the word **_may_** act like a hedge because by using a hedge may the writer can stand at a distance from the audience. The writer is perhaps not clear about his statement when he said. So in order to stand at a distance from his own words, the writer used the hedge. In 8th example, again the writer used a hedge **_probably_** due to uncertainty and vagueness of the message. It seems that the writer is not sure about his or her statement. The writer could complete his statement even without the word probably which functions like a hedge in the given sentence. But the writer used the hedge to stay at a margin and stay at a distance from his own words. In 10th example, a hedge is used by the writer. **_Generally_** functions like a hedge because it shows uncertainty and difference. In 12th example, a hedge **_seem_** is used consciously by the writer. The writer avoids making strong statement in the sentence. Here in this example, the writer could also complete the sentence without the word seems but by consciously using a hedge the writer unconsciously revealed the non-clarity of the message or statement. In 14th example, the word **_approximately_** functions like a hedge. Here **_approximately_** functions like a hedge because the writer is not sure about the exact percentage.

Table 4: Hedges in the theses of pure sciences

Hedges	Occurrence	Hedges	Occurrence	Hedges	Occurrence
Almost	260	Likely	114	Often	144
In our opinion	2	May	1645	On the whole	2
Largely	38	Might	282	Ought	3
Perhaps	12	Plausible	8	Possible	438
Possibly	66	Postulate	3	Postulated	4
Presumably	14	Probable	36	Probably	230
Quite	73	Rather	81	Apparent	35
Apparently	28	Appear	119	Appeared	161
Appears	232	Approximately	188	Argued	13
Around	308	Assume	38	Assumed	97
Broadly	28	Certain extent	4	Certain level	6
Claim	7	Claimed	6	Claims	3
Could	618	Could not	74	Doubt	10
Essentially	20	Estimate	62	Estimated	217
Fairly	93	Feels	2	Felt	7

| Frequently	63	Generally	394	Guess	3
Indicate	337	Indicates	348	Indicated	612
In general	75	In most cases	6	Relatively	304
Roughly	11	Seems	105	Should	313
Sometimes	34	Somewhat	20	Suggests	163
Suppose	3	Supposed	23	Tend to	31
Tended to	3	Tends to	18	Typical	121
Typically	39	Uncertain	11	Unclear	12
Unlikely	8	Usually	180	Would	286
About	722	Mainly	262	Mostly	278
Would not	17			**Total**	**10,633**
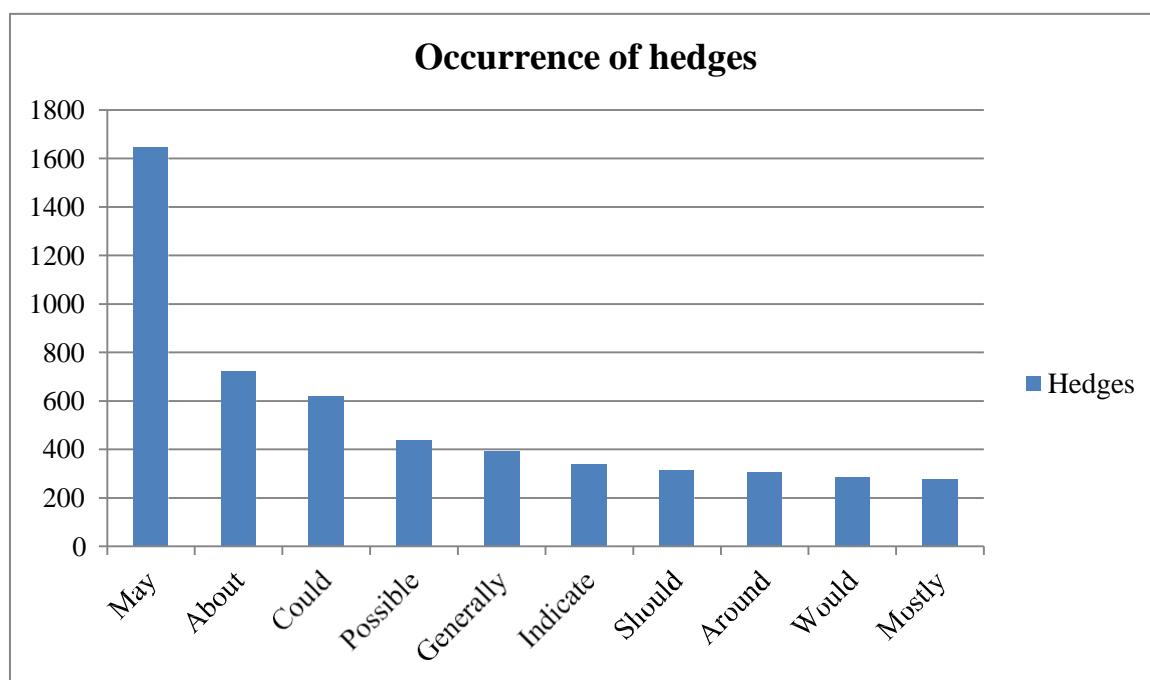
Figure 2: Hedges in the corpus of pure sciences

A comparative analysis of hedges in theses of social sciences and pure sciences
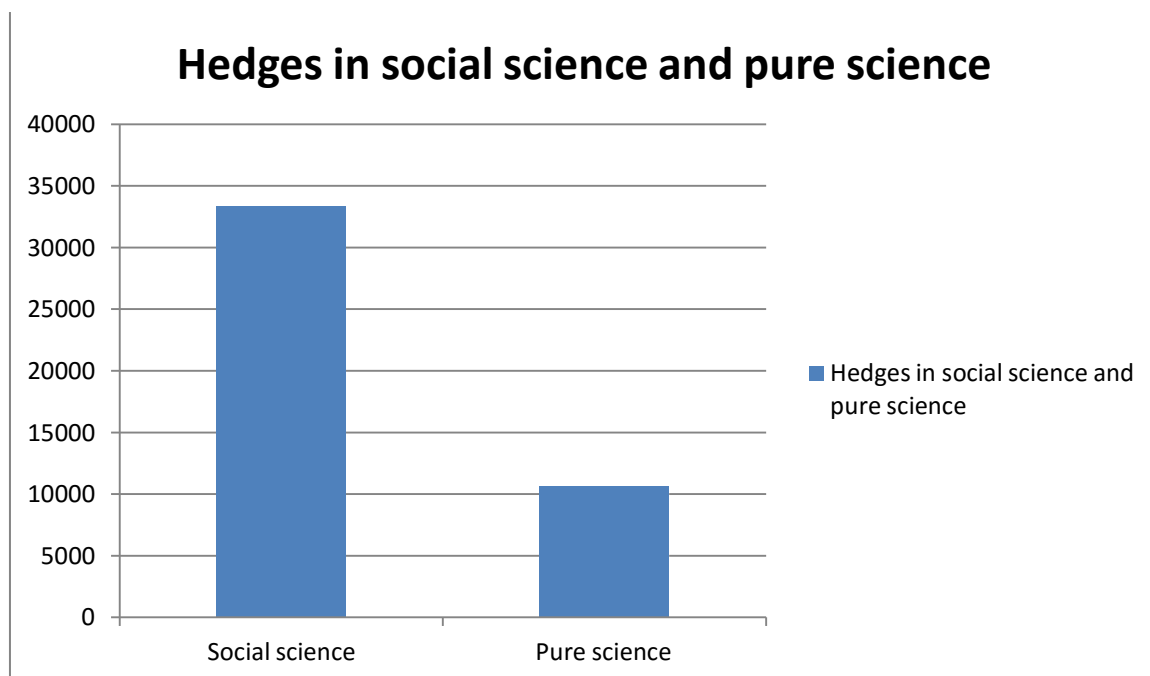

Figure 3: Hedges in the corpus of social and pure sciences

The result reveals that hedges are the stance markers which occur with the highest frequency in the PhD theses of social sciences. About thirty three thousand three hundred sixty six (33366) hedges are

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prevalent in the corpus of social sciences. On the other hand a number of ten thousand six hundred thirty three (10633) hedges are there in the corpus of pure sciences.

CONCLUSION

This study is conducted to find out the use of hedges in Pakistani theses of social science and pure sciences. Hyland (2005) model of interaction is used to analyze the data. The results revealed that the writers of social sciences use more hedges as compared to pure sciences. We can infer that the writers of PhD theses of social sciences use more hedges because they want to stand on a distance. Instead of using powerful words they use hedges to reflect their stance. Hedges involve open dialogues which are without commitment. The writer does not emphasize rather he stands on a distance. It is concerned with such kinds of words e.g., may, might, perhaps or possible.

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