

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| INTRODUCTION.....   | p.3   |
| Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION TO MODALITY.....   | p. 5  |
| 1.1 Basic concepts about modality.....  | p.5   |
| 1.2 Mood and modal systems.....   | p. 7  |
| 1.3 The classification of modality in modal systems according to Palmer (2001): propositional and event modality.....                                       | p. 8  |
| 1.3.1 Propositional modality: epistemic (speculative, deductive, assumptive) vs. evidential modality (reported, sensory, direct and indirect evidence)..... | p. 9  |
| 1.3.2 Event modality: deontic (directives and commissives) vs. dynamic (ability and willingness).....   | p. 10 |
| 1.4 Other types of modality.....  | p. 12 |
| 1.4.1 Past tense as a modal.....  | p. 12 |
| 1.5 An alternative classification of modality proposed by Coates (1983): epistemic vs. non-epistemic modality.....  | p.13  |
| 1.5.1 Epistemic modality.....   | p. 13 |
| 1.5.2 Root (i.e. non-epistemic) modality.....   | p. 14 |
| 1.6 Modal auxiliaries: the properties of the modal auxiliaries.....   | p.15  |
| 1.7 Modal meaning as a “fuzzy set”: the concepts of “core”, “periphery” and “skirt”.....  | p.15  |
| 1.8 Indeterminacy in the meaning of modal auxiliaries: gradience, ambiguity and merger.....   | p. 16 |
| 1.8.1 Gradience.....  | p. 16 |
| 1.8.2 Ambiguity.....  | p.17  |
| 1.8.3 Merger.....   | p. 17 |
| 1.9 The modals of obligation.....   | p. 17 |
| 1.9.1 Must.....   | p. 17 |
| 1.9.2 Need.....   | p. 19 |
| 1.9.3 Should.....   | p. 20 |
| 1.9.4 Ought.....  | p. 21 |
| 1.10 The modals of ability and possibility.....   | p. 21 |
| 1.10.1 Can.....   | p. 22 |
| 1.10.2 Could.....   | p. 23 |
| 1.11 The modals of epistemic possibility.....   | p. 24 |
| 1.11.1 May.....   | p. 24 |
| 1.11.2 Might.....   | p. 25 |
| 1.11.3 Epistemic could.....   | p. 26 |
| 1.12 The modals of volition and prediction.....   | p. 26 |
| 1.12.1 Will.....  | p. 26 |

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1.12.2 Shall.....   | p. 28 |
| 1.13 The hypothetical modals.....   | p. 29 |
| 1.13.1 Would.....   | p. 29 |
| 1.13.2 Should and hypothetical meaning.....                                 | p. 30 |
| Chapter 2 MODALITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A FOCUS ON HEDGES AND BOOSTERS..... | p. 31 |
| 2.1 Modality in expert academic writing.....                                | p. 31 |
| 2.2 What are hedges?.....   | p. 32 |
| 2.3 What are boosters?.....   | p. 37 |
| 2.4 Hedges and boosters in NS academic writing and corpora.....             | p. 38 |
| 2.5 Hedges and boosters in learners' academic writing.....                  | p. 40 |
| Chapter 3 MATERIALS, METHODS AND ANALYSIS OF THE CORPUS.....                | p. 49 |
| 3.1 Materials.....  | p. 49 |
| 3.2 Methods.....  | p. 50 |
| 3.3 Results of the investigation.....                                       | p. 52 |
| CONCLUSION.....   | p. 81 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....   | p. 85 |
| RIASSUNTO DELLA TESI.....   | p. 89 |

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with modality and modal verbs, and especially with modality in academic writing. The goals of this dissertation are: to provide an overview of modality and modal auxiliaries (chapter 1); to focus on modality in academic writing and, in particular, on the concepts of hedges and boosters (i.e. two categories of epistemic modality, chapter 2); finally, to investigate how hedges and boosters are used by non-native speakers (NNS) of English and to compare this use with that of expert writers.

As mentioned above, chapter 1 deals with modality and modal auxiliaries. More specifically, first of all the basic concepts related to modality, such as the notion of assertion, of proposition, proposal, polarity, mood and modal systems are introduced; then, the classification of modality in modal systems according to scholars such as Palmer (2001) is provided. This author, indeed, classifies modality into two types: propositional modality and event modality. Each can be subdivided into two further categories: epistemic and evidential for propositional modality; deontic and dynamic for event modality (and, as we will see later in chapter 1, further subcategories are present). Palmer (2001) also focuses on other types of modality, of which the most important one, namely the past tense as a modal, is described.

This classification of modality is compared to that proposed by Coates (1983), who distinguishes between epistemic and non-epistemic (also called “root”) modality. The two concepts are accounted for, together with the properties of modal auxiliaries. Moreover, the concepts of “core”, “periphery”, “skirt”, “gradience”, “ambiguity” and “merger”, which once again are explained by Coates (1983), are introduced. Finally, the chapter ends with a focus on the most important modal auxiliaries, subdivided into categories according to their function: the modals of obligation (*must, need, should* and *ought*); the modals of ability and possibility (*can* and *could*); the modals of epistemic possibility (*may, might* and epistemic *could*); the modals of volition and prediction (*will* and *shall*), and finally the hypothetical modals (*would, should* and hypothetical meaning).

Chapter 2 deals specifically with modality in academic writing. In the very first section of this chapter I investigate modality in native speakers’ (NS) academic writing, in order to see which choices expert writers make and why; in the second and third section I provide definitions of what hedges and boosters are. These two concepts are related to epistemic modality and central to academic writing. Indeed, to sum up, hedges are used when authors need to express indeterminacy, to make sentences more

acceptable to the reader and thus increase their possibility of ratification, whereas boosters, as Hyland (1998) states, “allow writers to express conviction and assert a proposition with confidence, representing a strong claim about a state of affairs” (Hyland 1998:2). After this explanation, I provide a literature review of the most recent and less recent articles related to hedges and boosters in NS academic writing and corpora, and in learners’ academic writing.

Chapter 3 is the core of the thesis; it compares two corpora, namely a corpus of 136 essays written by NNS of English and a corpus of 20 academic writing written by expert writers of English, in order to see how hedges and boosters are used by NNS of English and by expert writers. More specifically, I aim at answering the following research questions: 1a+1b) Do ESL learners (in our case, Italian students of English) use more hedges or boosters in academic writing? And compared to expert writers of English?; 2a+2b+2c+2d) What are the five most commonly used hedges in academic writing by these students? What are the five most commonly used boosters in academic writing by these students? What are the five most commonly used hedges in academic writing by expert writers? What are the five most commonly used boosters in academic writing by expert writers?; and 3a+3b) As Hyland and Milton (1997) argue, are the expressions of doubt and certainty (i.e. hedges and boosters, respectively) difficult to master for non-native speakers of English (in our case, for Italian students of English)? And if so, is this a culture-related phenomenon?

Before answering the above questions, I provide some information related to the materials and methods used for my investigation (e.g. the use of the AntConc software); then, I not only present the results of my investigation, but I also provide a more qualitative analysis by looking in greater detail at how one hedge and one booster, namely the commonly found in the NNS corpus hedge *according to* and the commonly found in the expert writers’ corpus booster *clearly*, respectively, are used in the two corpora (also, definitions of these two epistemic devices are provided), and by looking at the common patterns of two hedges, namely *could* and *should*, in both the NNS corpus and in the expert writers’ corpus and by comparing their use. The chapter ends with a comparison of the findings with those of chapter 2, and with the possible implications for teaching academic writing related to hedges and boosters. This thesis concludes with a conclusive chapter that summarizes the discussion, re-states the thesis purpose and provides implication for research or practice.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION TO MODALITY

As this thesis deals with modality and modal verbs, I will first introduce some concepts related to modality: that of modality itself; the distinction between realis and irrealis and the notion of assertion.

#### 1.1 Basic concepts about modality

As regards modality, Palmer (2001) explains that this is a category which is closely associated with tense and aspect because all three are categories of the clause and are generally marked within the verbal complex. He further argues that one possible approach to the analysis of the status of the proposition is to make a binary distinction between “non-modal” and “modal” or “declarative” and “non-declarative”, and to associate this distinction with the notional contrast of “factual” and “non-factual”, or “real” and “unreal”. However – the author continues – in recent years the terms “realis” and “irrealis” have been used for this distinction: the realis portrays situations as actualized, while the irrealis portrays them as within the realm of thought. Moreover, Palmer (2001) explains that there is variation in the categories that are treated as “realis” and “irrealis” in different languages: one language may mark, for instance, commands as irrealis, while another may mark them as realis, and yet another may not treat them as part of a system of modality at all.

As regards the notion of assertion, Palmer (2001) believes that the contrast between “factual” and “non-factual” is not clear enough to explain fully the distinction between “realis” and “irrealis”. He refers to the literature and points out that here it has been argued that the use of the “indicative” and the “subjunctive” (i.e. the traditional terms used in many European languages for the distinction realis/irrealis) can be accounted for in terms of “assertion” and “non-assertion”. The author refers to Lunn (1995, in Palmer 2001), who links the choice of the indicative to assertion and that of subjunctive to non-assertion. Lunn (1995, in Palmer 2001) suggests that a proposition may be unworthy of assertion for three reasons: the speaker has doubts about its veracity; the proposition is unrealized; the proposition is presupposed. According to Palmer (2001), her analysis shows quite clearly that the choice of the irrealis marker, the

subjunctive, does not depend on the distinction “factual”/“non-factual” (or “true”/“untrue”) but on the distinction between what is asserted and what is not asserted.

Compared to Palmer (2001), Huddleston (1988) also discusses modality in relation to time and tense. He states that there are just two tenses in English, past and present, because there is no verbal category in English whose primary use is to locate situations in future time, although future time is very often indicated by *will*. Huddleston (1988) argues that, from a semantic point of view, *will* involves elements of both futurity and modality. He says that in an example such as *she will be in London now*, the modal component is more salient because this is less assured than *she is in London now*, whereas in *she will be in London next week* the futurity component is more salient.

In order to further clarify the definition of modality given both by Eggins (2004) and by Halliday (2004), I need to introduce the notions of proposition, proposal and polarity. Halliday (2004) states that when language is used to exchange information, the clause takes the form of a *proposition*. The term proposition is used by Halliday (2004) to refer to a statement or a question, whereas in order to refer to offers and commands (i.e. in an exchange of goods and services) he uses the term *proposal*. The same terms are used by Eggins (2004,) who specifies that, in the exchange of information (i.e. with propositions), the response to an initiating move is nearly always verbal, whereas with proposals the responding moves may very often be non-verbal.

Polarity is defined by Halliday (2004) as the opposition between positive (e.g. *It is. Do that!*) and negative (e.g. *It isn't. Don't do that!*), modality as the speaker's judgment, or request of the judgment of the listener, on the status of what is being said (e.g. *It could be. Couldn't it be?*). So polarity is a choice between “yes” and “no”, but, as both Halliday (2004) and Eggins (2004) point out, there are intermediate degrees, and these are known collectively as *modality*. In a proposition there are two kinds of intermediate possibilities: a) degrees of probability: *possibly/probably/certainly* and b) degrees of usuality: *sometimes/usually/always*. Halliday (2004) refers to the scales of probability and usuality as *modalization*.

As concerns proposals, here again we have two kinds of intermediate possibilities: a) in a command, the intermediate points represents degrees of obligation: *allowed to/supposed to/required to*, b) in an offer, they represent degrees of inclination: *willing to/anxious to/determined to*.

## 1.2 Mood and modal systems

Now that I have introduced these basic concepts, I can move on to see in which ways languages deal with modality. There are indeed two ways in which languages deal grammatically with the overall category of modality: mood and modal systems. I will first give here the definition of mood. Leech (2006) gives the following definition:

[Mood is a] verb category which is not so useful in the grammar of English as it is for some other languages and has to do with the degree of reality attributed to the happening described by the verb. The indicative mood (that of normal finite forms of the verb) contrasts with the 'unreality' of the subjunctive mood. The imperative, infinitive and interrogative are also sometimes considered to be moods of the verb (Leech 2006:65).

Returning to Palmer (2001), he points out that both systems (i.e. mood and modal systems) may occur within a single language (e.g. German has a modal system of modal verbs and mood), but that in most languages one of these devices is much more salient than the other (e.g. in English the subjunctive has virtually disappeared and, at the same time, a modal system of modal verbs has been created). As regards mood, Palmer (2001) explains that typically with mood, all or most clauses are either realis or irrealis, so that the system is prototypically binary (e.g. in European languages the indicative marks clauses as realis, and the subjunctive marks them as irrealis), although with some exceptions. Within modal systems – Palmer (2001) continues – different kinds of modality are distinguished. A clear example is that of the English modal verbs when they are used to make judgments about the status of a proposition as in: *Kate may be at home now* (i.e. a possible conclusion= speculative); *Kate must be at home now* (i.e. the only possible conclusion= deductive) and *Kate will be at home now* ( i.e. a reasonable conclusion= assumptive). Finally, the author remarks that it is not always possible to draw a clear distinction between mood and modal system, since, in some languages, the overall system of modality has characteristics of both.

As concerns mood once again, both Halliday (2004) and Eggins (2004) focus on a different kind of Mood (with a capital letter, to distinguish it from the mood we have seen so far), namely the Mood structure of the clause. Eggins (2004) explains that “the Mood structure of the clause refers to the organization of a set of functional constituents including the constituent Subject” (Eggins 2004: 147), whereas Halliday (2004) states that “The Mood is the element that realizes the selection of mood in the

clause” (Halliday 2004: 113). Eggins (2004) provides a table with the speech functions and relative typical mood (in this case, “our” mood) of clause (Eggins 2004: 147). She explains that a statement typically has declarative mood, a question has interrogative mood, a command has imperative mood, an offer has modulated interrogative mood (i.e. a *would like* interrogative, e.g. *would you like to borrow my copy?*), both answer and acknowledgment has elliptical declarative mood (i.e. an abbreviated answer/acknowledgment such as *Yes, I have* instead of *Yes, I have read it* or *Yea* instead of *Yea I know it's by Henry James*), and finally both accept and compliance have a minor clause (i.e. a clause which has never a Mood constituent, such as *Oh dear!*, *Well!*, *Ok!*).

### 1.3 The classification of modality in modal systems according to Palmer (2001): propositional and event modality

I will now take a look at how Palmer (2001) classifies modality in modal systems. He argues that there are two types of modality: propositional modality and event modality. Each can be subdivided into two further categories: epistemic and evidential for propositional modality; deontic and dynamic for event modality. Epistemic and evidential modality (i.e. propositional modality) are concerned with the speaker's attitude to the truth-value or factual status of the proposition, whereas deontic and dynamic modality (i.e. event modality) refer to events that have not taken place but are merely potential. The examples given by Palmer (2001) for propositional modality are the following: *Kate may be at home now* and *Kate must be at home now* (both epistemic, they are concerned with the speaker's judgment of the proposition that Kate is at home); those given about event modality are *Kate may come in now* and *Kate must come in now* (both deontic, they are concerned with the speaker's attitude towards a potential future event, that of Kate coming in).

On the other hand, Huddleston (1988) groups the uses of the modals under three headings: epistemic uses, deontic uses and subject-oriented uses. Here I will just focus on subject-oriented uses. The examples given by Huddleston (1988) are *Liz can run faster than her brother* and *Liz wouldn't lend me the money [so I borrowed it from Ed]*. He argues that these are “subject-oriented uses” in that they involve some property, disposition or the like on the part of whoever/whatever is referred to by the subject (i.e. in the first example we are concerned with Liz's physical capabilities, in the second



with her willingness). Finally, Huddleston (1988) points out that all the examples given (also the ones I have not reported for the other categories) are intended just as prototypical illustrations of the categories of use.

Finally, as concerns the classification of modality once again, Biber et al. (1999) state that modals and semi-modals can be grouped into three major categories according to their main meanings. These groups are: permission/possibility/ability: *can, could, may* and *might*; obligation/necessity: *must, should, (had) better, have (got) to, need to, ought to* and *be supposed to*, and volition/prediction: *will, would, shall, be going to*. Biber et al. (1999) also argue that each modal can have two different types of meaning, which can be labeled *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* (also referred to as *deontic* and *epistemic* meanings). As they state:

Intrinsic modality refers to actions and events that humans (or other agents) directly control: meanings relating to permission, obligation, or volition (or intention). Extrinsic modality refers to the logical status of events or states, usually relating to assessment or likelihood: possibility, necessity, or prediction (Biber et al. 1999: 485).

### 1.3.1 Propositional modality: epistemic (speculative, deductive, assumptive) vs. evidential modality (reported, sensory, direct and indirect evidence)

We have just seen that propositional modality can be of two types: epistemic or evidential. As regards epistemic modality, Palmer (2001) explains that there are three types of judgment that are common in languages: one that expresses uncertainty, one that indicates an inference from observable evidence, and one that indicates inference from what is generally known. These may be identified typologically as speculative, deductive and assumptive, respectively (see also examples in 1.2).

As regards evidential modality, the author argues that there are basically only two types of purely evidential categories, that is reported and sensory (evidence of the senses). Sensory is related to languages other than English, such as Tuyuca (Brazil and Colombia) where there are evidential categories labeled “visual”, “non-visual”, “apparent”, “second-hand” and “assumed”. As regards reported (i.e. the other type of evidential category), for some languages – Palmer (2001) explains – it is necessary to recognize three subcategories: second-hand evidence: the speaker claims to have heard of the situation described from someone who was a direct witness; third-hand evidence: the speaker claims to have heard of the situation described, but not from a direct

witness, and evidence from folklore: the speaker claims that the situation described is part of established oral history. Finally, for some languages we have direct and indirect evidence.

### 1.3.2 Event modality: deontic (directives and commissives) vs. dynamic (ability and willingness)

As mentioned above, event modality can be of two types: deontic and dynamic. Deontic modality, according to Palmer (2001), relates to obligation or permission emanating from an external source, while dynamic modality relates to ability or willingness which comes from the individual concerned. The most common types of deontic modality are the “directives”, that is “where we try to get others to do things” (Searle 1983: 166, in Palmer 2001). Two kinds of directives are expressed in English by *may* and *must*, though in colloquial speech *can* is preferred to *may*. The examples given are: *You may/can go now* (permissive) and *You must go now* (obligative).

Apart from directives, we have commissives, “where we commit ourselves to do things” (Searle 1983: 166, in Palmer 2001). They are signaled in English by the modal verb *shall*. They can be usually seen either as promises or threats, depending on whether what the speaker undertakes to do is or is not welcome to the addressee. The examples given by Palmer (2001) are: *John shall have the book tomorrow* (promise) and *You shall do as you are told* (threat). Palmer (2001) explains that, in both examples, the speaker commits himself to ensuring that the event takes place.

After this explanation, Palmer (2001) points out that there appear to be two types of dynamic modality, expressing ability and willingness (Abilitive and Volitive), which are expressed in English by *can* and *will*. The examples offered are: *My destiny’s in my control. I can make or break my life myself* (Abilitive) and *Why don’t you go and see if Martin will let you stay?* (Volitive). Furthermore, he explains that, in many languages, there is no formal distinction between permission and ability, but in English the distinction is clear, in that *may* is not used to indicate ability.

As regards directives and commissives, Carter and McCarthy (2006) point out that “when modality expressions concerned with necessity, obligation, permission etc. are used in declarative and interrogative clauses, they often function as directives [...] and commissives[...]” (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 684). They explain that directives include: commands and instructions; warnings, advice and suggestions; permissions and

prohibitions and requests. Commissives instead include: offers, invitations and promises, and undertakings.

There are other classifications of modality as well: that by Hengeveld (2004) and that by van der Auwera and Plungian (1998). As pointed out by Nauze (2008) (i.e. the author of the dissertation I am referring to for the classification proposed by Hengeveld, van der Auwera and Plungian), Hengeveld (2004, in Nauze 2008) proposes a typology of modality that reflects the different layers of the clause structure in the functional grammar tradition (i.e. predication, event or proposition). He uses two classifying parameters: the target of evaluation and the domain of evaluation. The target of evaluation is crucially the part that represents these different layers of modification in the clause. It is composed of three different parts: participant-oriented modality (which characterizes those modal items that somehow modify the relation between participant and event, e.g. *can* in *John can break this code*); event-oriented modality (it concerns the assessment of the descriptive content of a sentence and, most importantly, does not involve the speaker's judgment, e.g. *must* in *Thesis paper must be acid-free*); and proposition-oriented modality (it specifies the speaker's judgment, or attitude, towards the proposition, e.g. *maybe* in *Maybe John went to the conference*). The domain of evaluation is related to the traditional modal distinctions: facultative (abilities), deontic, volitive, epistemic and evidential. According to Hengeveld (2004, in Nauze 2008), these two parameters should lead to 15 different combinations. However, only 10 out of the 15 possible are actually realized, and this is due to incompatibilities between some values of the target evaluation and of the domain of evaluation. Nauze (2008) also compares Hengeveld's typology with Palmer's and notes that the most flagrant difference is the addition of Hengeveld's event-oriented modality, which he believes that it is situated somewhere in between Palmer's propositional and event modality.

As concerns the definition of modality by van der Auwera and Plungian (1998, in Nauze 2008), these authors define modality as the "semantic domains that involve possibility and necessity as paradigmatic variants" (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998: 80) and distinguish four main types: participant-internal modality, participant-external modality, deontic modality and epistemic modality. Nauze (2008) points out that "one important similarity with Hengeveld's typology is the space created for a modality that is neither a judgment on the part of the speaker (propositional-oriented and epistemic, respectively) nor the qualification of the performance of an event by an agent (participant-oriented and participant-internal respectively)" (Nauze 2008: 17).

## 1.4 Other types of modality

As regards modality, Palmer (2001) points out that the subtypes of modality summarized above are mainly relevant to the analysis of modal systems, but that there are, however, other grammatical categories that are associated with modality, especially (but not solely) with respect to mood. Here I will focus on the most important, namely the past tense as a modal.

### 1.4.1 Past tense as a modal

As regards past tense, Palmer (2001) explains that past tense forms may be used to express “unreality”, “tentativeness”, “potentiality” etc. The three past tense forms of *will*, *can* and *may* (*would*, *could*, *might*) can be used with past time reference, but this is not their most common function (so does Palmer (2001) point out). Rather, they are used to express greater tentativeness as in *He'd be there now*, *He might be there now* and *He couldn't be there now*.

As regards past tense and modality once again, Huddleston (1988) also states that there is some association between pastness and modality. He affirms: “the modal use of the past tense is for the most part confined to subordinate clauses, but even in main clauses the past tense – provided, significantly, that it is carried by a modal operator – can have a meaning relating to modality rather than time” (Huddleston 1988: 81). He asks to compare *you may/might be right* (where *might* suggests a slightly remoter possibility), *can/could you come next time?* (with *could* considered as more polite than *can*) and *he'll be/he'd be about seventy now* (with *'d* more tentative than *'ll*).

Something different is explained by Falinski (2008): he highlights that *would* indicates characteristic behavior or activity, “also emphasizing the iterative characteristics of single actions in the past (repeated actions)” (Falinski 2008: 105). He also points out that only verbs which can express iterative meanings (i.e. dynamic verbs) or those which warrant emphasis on an iterative meaning in the context in which they are found are used with *would*. He gives, among others, the following example: *When he came home he would sit and light his pipe*. According to Falinski (2008), modal *will* and *would* can also express disapproval or reproach on the part of the speaker: *She will make a nuisance of herself* (“he insists on saying...”) and *He would*

*say such stupid things* (“he insisted on...”). Finally, Falinski (2008) points out that *would* is used typically in written, literary language, “as a kind of stylistic reinforcement marker, to stress the iterative mode in an unstable past tense which [...] ranges between durational, iterative, and singulative meanings” (Falinski 2008: 107).

Finally, Quirk et al. (1985) explain that there is a specialized use of *could*, *might*, and *would* in which the past tense form simply adds a note of tentativeness or politeness. We have tentative permission in polite requests (e.g. *could I see your driving license?*; *I wonder if I might borrow some coffee?*), tentative volition in polite requests (e.g. *would you lend me a dollar?*) and tentative possibility in a) expressing a tentative opinion (e.g. *There could be something wrong with the light switch*; *Of course, I could be wrong*) or b) polite directives and requests (e.g. *Could you (please) open the door?*). The authors point out that in these constructions, apart from the last-mentioned case of requests, *could* and *might* have the same meaning, that is, this is an exceptional case in which *could* is the past tense equivalent of *may* instead of *can*.

### 1.5 An alternative classification of modality proposed by Coates (1983): epistemic vs. non-epistemic modality

Coates (1983) proposes a classification of modality which distinguishes between epistemic and root (i.e. non-epistemic) modality. Epistemic is a term that comes from the Greek *episteme* (i.e. “knowledge”) and it is concerned with matters of knowledge and belief, whereas root modality refers to the non-epistemic sense of modals, which deals “with obligation, permission, ability etc.” (Incharralde Besga 1998: 1).

#### 1.5.1 Epistemic modality

As regards the first kind of modality described by the author (i.e. epistemic), according to Coates (1983) and also to Palmer (2001), epistemic modality indicates the speaker’s confidence (or lack of confidence) in the truth of the proposition expressed. The modals relating to assumption are *must*, *should* and *ought*; those relating to an assessment of possibilities are *may*, *might* and *could*. Coates (1983) gives the following example of epistemic *must*: *Paul must be in Liverpool by now*, whose interpretation could be “I assume, taking into account what time he left home, the time now etc. that Paul is now

in Liverpool”. Finally, all the epistemic modals can be roughly placed at two ends of a scale, whose extremes represent confidence and doubt.

### 1.5.2. Root (i.e. non-epistemic) modality

As concerns the second kind of modality proposed by the author (i.e. non-epistemic), Coates (1983) calls non-epistemic modality “root” and does not adopt the term “deontic”, which seems to her inappropriate as it refers to the logic of obligation and permission, whereas – she adds – typical root modals such as *must* and *may* cover a range of meanings, of which “Obligation” and “Permission” represent only the core.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, she argues that all the meanings of non-epistemic *must* (for instance) are related and can be shown to lie on a cline extending from strong “Obligation” (the core) to cases at the periphery where the sense of “Obligation” is extremely weak. In any case, there is a basic meaning: something like “it is necessary for”. So that, for example, *You must get out of the bath now* (mother to child) means “it is necessary for you to get out of the bath and I am going to see that you do”.

As regards the classification of modality proposed by other authors, Falinski (2008) distinguishes between epistemic and root modality too, but he adds the two subcategories “deontic” and “dynamic” to root modality. I have already described these two subcategories when discussing Palmer (2001), so here I will summarize what Falinski (2008) adds. Deontic modality is related to obligations, prohibitions, promises, threats, permissions (both given and required by the speaker), offers, requests, and advice (asked by the speaker). These are all connected to performative verbs (i.e. verbs that “perform” their meaning at the moment of utterance). Moreover, the author explains that the term *deontic* comes from the Greek for “binding” and that the main semantic areas are obligation (*must* and *shall*), permission (*may* and *can*) and volition (*will* and *shall*).

As regards dynamic modality, Falinski (2008) explains that here the modality is not oriented on the speaker or addresser, but oriented on the grammatical subject of the sentence, or neutrally on external circumstances. Together with the same modals as are used for deontic modality, we find semi-modals like *have to*, *be able to* and *be supposed to*, and the concept of actuality (i.e. actions carried out, rather than simply seen as potential).

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<sup>1</sup> For the concept of core, see below 1.7.

## 1.6 Modal auxiliaries: the properties of the modal auxiliaries

The modal auxiliaries have some properties that distinguish them from the other auxiliaries. Coates (1983), in 1.4.1., explains that in her study she was concerned with the modal auxiliaries by which she means *must, should, ought, may, might, can, could, will, would, shall*. They have the following characteristics: a) take negation directly (*can't, mustn't*); b) take inversion without *do* (*can I? must I?*); c) “Code” (*John can swim and so can Bill*); d) Emphasis (*Ann COULD solve the problem*); e) no s-form for third person singular (*\*cans, \*musters*), f) no non-finite forms (*\*to can, \*musting*); g) no co-occurrence (*\*may will*, although Biber et al. (1999) note that some regional dialects allow modals in series (e.g. *might could*)). Coates (1983) explains that the first four of these are what Huddleston (1976, in Coates 1983) calls the NICE properties (Negation, Inversion, Code, Emphasis) and they very clearly draw a dividing line between auxiliaries and main verbs; the last three, which are specifically “modal” criteria, are needed to exclude the auxiliaries *be, have* and *do*.

## 1.7 Modal meaning as a “fuzzy set”: the concepts of “core”, “periphery” and “skirt”

Before focusing our attention on the analysis of the single modal auxiliaries, it is useful to consider some theories related to modal meaning. Coates (1983) explains that she initially worked with a model in which the indeterminacy of much of modal meaning was described in terms of gradience. This is based on Quirk's (1965, in Coates 1983) work on syntactic gradients and it implies the existence of two poles linked by a cline. Coates (1983) explains that an indeterminate example is said to exhibit gradience when it fits neither category a) nor category b), but has elements of both. However, her data showed, first, that it was only true to say that one extreme of any cline was “clearly distinct” – the other extreme often seemed to be as “fuzzy” as any intermediate point; and, secondly, that the majority of examples appeared to cluster between the two extremes, so that the gradience model no longer seemed adequate to describe her findings.

Coates (1983) therefore directed her attention to Zadeh's (1965, in Coates 1983) “fuzzy set theory”. This theory, as she explains, is the basis of modern mathematics and there is a clear relationship between the classification which takes place in everyday language (*John is tall*) and the mathematical formulation of a set (the set of *tall* people). However, membership of a set is a precise concept and this raises the

problem of borderline cases. Zadeh (1965, in Coates 1983) solves the problem suggesting sets with a continuously graded degree of membership, which he calls *fuzzy sets*. Coates (1983) states that she will use the term “fuzzy set” to mean “a class in which the transition from membership to non-membership is gradual rather than abrupt” (Zadeh 1972, in Coates 1983). She also introduces the terms “core”, “skirt”, and “periphery”. The *core* – she explains – represents the meaning learned first by children and yet occurs infrequently. Between the core and the periphery are found examples which are intermediate in grading, in the area which she calls the *skirt*. The majority of examples are found in the *skirt* and the *periphery*: the latter often has the qualities of an emergent category because it is often possible to define peripheral examples by contrast with the core.

## 1.8 Indeterminacy in the meaning of modal auxiliaries: gradience, ambiguity and merger

In her corpus of written and oral texts, Coates (1983) found three types of indeterminacy in the meaning of modal auxiliaries: gradience, ambiguity and merger.

### 1.8.1 Gradience

The first type of indeterminacy described by the author is gradience: Coates (1983) illustrates it by looking at the continuum of meaning extended from the core of “Ability” to the periphery of “Possibility” found in *can*. Examples that belong to the core (e.g. *I can only type very slowly as I am quite a beginner*) have the following features: subject is animate and has agentive function; main verbs denote physical action/activity; and the possibility of the action is determined by inherent properties of the subject (this includes what the subject has learned – as in the example above). Similarly – the author continues – at the periphery, where *can* means “it is possible for...”, the clearest cases are those where the enabling or disabling circumstances are actually specified (as in *You can't see him because he's having lunch with a publisher*). Coates (1983) labels this kind of gradient “the gradient of inherency” since the inherency or otherwise of a property (i.e. in the example just seen, the possibility of the action is *not* determined by inherent properties of the subject) is the feature which most clearly distinguishes examples as being of the “Ability” type or not.



### 1.8.2 Ambiguity

The second type of indeterminacy described by the author is ambiguity: Coates (1983) states that an indeterminate example is said to be ambiguous when it is not possible from the immediate context to decide which of two meanings is intended. An example is : *He must understand that we mean business* (Epistemic: “surely he understands that we mean business” or Root “it is essential that he understands that we mean business”).

### 1.8.3 Merger

The last type of indeterminacy described by the author is merger: Coates (1983) explains that, with merger, the two meanings involved are not in certain contexts mutually exclusive (“contextual neutralization”). She gives the following examples to illustrate this concept: *Civil servants should be seen and not heard* (Root *should* = weak obligation); *Stuart Hallinan, defending king, asked the handcuffs should be removed* (quasi-subjunctive *should*) and *Rutherford suggested to Marsden that he should follow this up* (merger between the two above meanings).

## 1.9 The modals of obligation

In the following section I will illustrate the modals of obligation *must*, *need*, *should* and *ought*.

### 1.9.1 Must

As concerns the first modal of obligation, *must* has two main meanings, a Root meaning (Obligation/Necessity) and an Epistemic meaning (logical Necessity/confident Inference). Here are two examples given by the author: “*You must play this ten times over*”, *Miss Jarrova would say [...] (Root)* and *That place must make quite a profit for it was packed out and has been all week (Epistemic)*. Core *must* is essentially performative and can be paraphrased by “I order you to play this”. Finally, *must* has no past tense form: *had to* supplies the missing form (as also stated by Carter and McCarthy 2006).

In the interpretation of Epistemic *must* – Coates (1983) explains – there are two elements of meaning to be taken into account: first, logical inference, and secondly, the extent to which the speaker expresses his confidence in the truth of this inference. As said before, *must* has no past forms, but Epistemic *must* can refer to states and activities in the past through the use of the *have+en* construction, as in *She must have been such a*

*pain in the neck to her mum and viceversa* (i.e. “I confidently infer that she was such a pain in the neck [...]”). As regards negation, Epistemic *must* does not occur with negation: *can't* supplies the missing form (as also stated by Carter and McCarthy 2006 and Falinski 2008).

As regards the analysis of *must* proposed by other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) point out that *must* is used for different strength of obligation (from polite invitations to laws) and that it is also frequently used to express deduction, especially to express reactions in spoken contexts (e.g. *A: There was a power-cut on the London underground B: That must have been terrible. Er, I read about that. Yeah*). Moreover, *must* and *must not* often occur in public signs and notices indicating law, rules and prohibitions (e.g. [public notice at a railway station] *Passengers must not cross the line*) and, more importantly, *must* in the interrogative form is used to issue reproaches and often expresses a feeling of exasperation on the part of the speaker, as in *Must you have that music so loud?*. References to obligations which will occur in the future are made with the future forms of *have to* (e.g. *Maybe one day he will have to accept the inevitable truth*). As regards the negative of *must*, Carter and McCarthy (2006) highlight that *must not* is used to forbid something, whereas *need not* is used to express an absence of obligation. Finally, the two authors also point out that *mustn't* is also used to express negative deductions, especially in more informal spoken contexts (e.g. *But she said 'Oh, you mustn't have filled it because I haven't got any record of you working those two shifts'*).

Compared to Coates (1983), according to Falinski (2008) too, *must* can express epistemic necessity or root necessity. Of the former, he analyses negation, reference to the future, to the past and in the past. As regards negation, he states that the negative *must not* (*mustn't*) is used epistemically: in tag-questions (e.g. *He must be there, mustn't he?*); and in verbal “crossing out” (e.g. *He must be there. Oh no, he mustn't – he must be at home*). As regards reference to the future, according to the author epistemic *must* does not normally refer to states or activities in the future, as there generally is a danger of a root modality interpretation (e.g. *She must be there tomorrow* = epistemic? root?), but it can be used when there is no danger of a root modality interpretation, as in *Something must happen soon*. As regards reference to the past, the modal *must* is used with a perfective verb to indicate both past tense and present perfect meaning, as in *She must have gone*. As regards reference in the past, since *must* has not past tense form (as we know from Coates 1983 and Carter and McCarthy 2006), *had to* is sometimes used,

but only for the affirmative, whereas the negative form is *couldn't* (e.g. *He had to be in. He couldn't be out* → my conclusion then). As concerns root *must*, this ranges “from “subjective” to “objective”, from “strong” to “weak” meanings; from “I oblige you...” to “it is essential that”, to “it is important that”, and finally to “circumstances compel”” (Falinski 2008: 175).

### 1.9.2 Need

As regards the second modal of obligation described by the author, Coates (1983) distinguishes between the modal *need* and the related *need to*, and analyzes the former. The modal *need* possesses the seven criterial modal properties that I have described in 1.6. It expresses both Root and Epistemic necessity: “*I'm very grateful to you*” “*You needn't be. I told you. I'm glad to do it*”(Root; paraphrase: “it isn't necessary for you to be grateful”) and *oh gosh getting married is an awfully complicated business. actually, it needn't be, it can be very straight forward* (Epistemic; paraphrase: “it isn't necessarily the case that it is awfully complicated”).

Moving on to the analysis of *need* by other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) argue that the semi-modal *need* most commonly occurs in the negative declarative to indicate an absence of obligation (e.g. *She needn't take the exam if she doesn't want to*). On the other hand, according to the authors, affirmative declaratives with the semi-modal are much rarer and are associated with formal styles and contexts (e.g. *No one else need see what he was doing either*). As regards past form, the two authors point out that the semi-modal *need* has no past tense equivalent so the lexical verbs *didn't need to* or *didn't have to* are used to express absence of obligation in the past. Finally, the semi-modal *need* can be used with a future-in-the-past meaning (e.g. *I was locked out but I knew I needn't panic because Laura would be at home at five*).

In contrast with Coates (1983), Falinski (2008) analyses both the core modal *need*, indicating root necessity, and the semi-modal *need to*, which is very similar to *have to*. He argues that, as a core modal, *need* is restricted to negative and interrogative contexts (e.g. *You needn't do if you don't want to* and *Need we really do it?*) and explains that it is found in the affirmative only when there is “negative raising” such as in *I don't think he need waste his time applying here* or in *No citizen need fear the law*, or in semantically negative contexts (e.g. *He need do it only if it is strictly necessary*).

On the other hand, *need to* is a lexical, catenative verb, expressing root necessity such as in *She doesn't need to work because she's stinking rich*.

### 1.9.3 Should

As concerns the modal of obligation *should*, Coates (1983) explains that this is used in four ways in modern English: it has a Root meaning (*You should walk round the ramparts of the old city too*), an Epistemic meaning (*Have sent off my diary a couple of days ago – you should get it soon*), it sometimes function as a quasi-subjunctive (*and it's indeed fitting that there should be a splendor about these funeral rites*) and it also supplies a first-person variant for hypothetical *would*. As regards Root meaning, at its strongest, *should* takes on the meaning of moral obligation or duty, while at its weakest, it merely offers advice or describe correct procedure.

According to the author, in its Epistemic meaning, *should* expresses a tentative assumption, an assessment of probability based on facts known to the speaker (e.g. *the trip should take about sixteen days* = “I think it is probable that the trip will take about sixteen days”). Finally, both Coates (1983) and Falinski (2008) explain that, in subordinate *that*-clauses, *should* is common as a quasi-subjunctive in British English, e.g. *it is not necessary that we should have the funeral bill*. In this case, *should* is preceded by adjectives like *legitimate*, *necessary* and *inevitable*, but it also occurs after verbs such as *ask*, *demand*, *decide*. Furthermore, Falinski (2008) state that the quasi-subjunctive *should* occurs after adjectives of mainly emotional states and adjectives indicating modality or volition.

As regards the viewpoint of other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) summarize what Coates (1983) says by stating that *should* can refer to things that are likely or possible (e.g. *It should be back to normal next week/It should be a pleasant day then*), but that it is more frequently used to refer to things that are desirable (e.g. *He should have been here at five and he's not here yet*), and to give advice and make suggestions (e.g. *You should tell him straight what you think*). Interestingly, *should* is also used for surprise or thanking: as regards the former, here *should* is used for events which happened but to which the speaker reacts with surprise/disbelief (e.g. *I'm amazed that he should have done something so stupid*); as regards the latter, *shouldn't have* is used conventionally to express gratitude for gifts (e.g. *Thanks so much for the CD. You shouldn't have*).

Finally, Falinski (2008) treats *should* and *ought to* together, although he explains that in an epistemic sense *ought to* is not used so extensively as *should*. He also states that in both epistemic and root modality, the main characteristic of *should* and *ought to* is that of relative non-commitment of the speaker. In epistemic modality this non-involvement takes the form of a sense of doubt (e.g. *That letter should be here by now*). Finally, *should* and *ought to* refer easily to both the present and future (e.g. *The film should be good* → present + future reference, and *It ought to be ready for tomorrow* → assumption about the future).

#### 1.9.4 Ought

Turning to the last modal of obligation, Coates (1983) explains that *ought* has only a Root and an Epistemic meaning, both of which are, according to Carter and McCarthy too (2006), often synonymous with those of *should*. Root *ought* expresses weak obligation: it offers advice rather than gives a command. Epistemic *ought* is concerned with tentative assumption, with the speaker's assessment of probability based on a process of logical inference (e.g. *the job here ought to be finished in a matter of days*).

Carter and McCarthy (2006) point out that *ought to* is used to refer to ideal or desired state of affairs, but in this case is far less frequent than *should* (e.g. *I really ought to go outside and get some fresh air for a bit*), and, even less frequently, *ought to* is used to state what is likely or probable (e.g. *I think it ought to take about three hours, if the traffic is not too bad*). As regards the negative form, its negative is *ought not to* or *oughtn't to* but both are infrequent, especially in informal spoken language. As concerns past form, *ought to* has no past form, and the perfect construction *ought to have* + *-ed* participle is used to refer back to states of affairs which were desirable in the past (e.g. *We probably ought to have talked about it ages ago*).

#### 1.10 The modals of ability and possibility

In this section I will illustrate the modals associated with ability and possibility: *can* and *could*.

### 1.10.1 Can

Coates (1983) states that *can* is the only modal auxiliary where we do not find the Root-Epistemic distinction. According to Coates (1983) and Carter and McCarthy (2006), the meanings of *can* can be discussed under the three headings “permission”, “possibility” and “ability”. “Permission” can be illustrated by the example *Poppy now can look at her little car which she can't drive because she hasn't got any insurance on it*. Moreover, most examples of *can* = “permission” are concerned with the description of “rule and regulations”. An example of *can* = “ability” is *I can walk far, mister Brook, I can walk all the way to the mine*. Coates (1983) points out that the majority of examples mean neither “permission” nor “ability”, but have the more neutral meaning of “possibility”. *I can do it* seen as *can* = “possibility” can be paraphrased as “external circumstances allow me to do it”.

Carter and McCarthy (2006) explain that in the case of permission, *can* is frequently used to seek permission, give permission or, in the negative, to forbid (e.g. *No. You can't have that. You might break it*). Ability is frequently found with verbs of perception such as *hear* and *see*, and with mental process verbs such as *follow* (meaning “understand”), *guess*, *imagine*, *picture*, *understand* (e.g. *I can guess what you're thinking right now*). As regards possibility, *can* is used to indicate/assess logical possibilities (e.g. *How can they be there already? They only left ten minutes ago*). More interestingly, the two authors explain that *can* may be used in statements about events and states which are true or which are usually the case (e.g. *Steel can resist very high temperatures*).

Although Coates (1983) states that *can* is the only modal where we do not find the Root-Epistemic distinction, Falinski (2008) places it under the heading “root possibility” and divides it roughly into three main semantic areas: permission (“human rules and regulation permit”), possibility (“external circumstance permit”) and ability (“inherent properties permit”). Permission *can* reflects the speaker's or human authority, rules and regulations, and other extended performative uses for “offer” and “request for permission” (e.g. *Can I pour you a drink?* and *Can I smoke?*). Finally, Falinski (2008) also states that the dividing line between “permission” and “possibility” is difficult to draw: for instance, in a sentence like *He can go now* are we talking about permission or possibility?

### 1.10.2 Could

As concerns *could*, according both to Coates (1983) and Carter and McCarthy (2006), this modal has several meanings: Epistemic possibility = “it is possible that”; past of *can*: Root possibility = “it was possible for...”, Root permission = “it was permissible for...”, Root ability = “x was able to”; remote of *can* (conditional): Root possibility = “it would be possible for...”; Root permission = “it would be permissible for...”, and Root ability = “x would be able to”. Root possibility is the most common meaning, with the two cores, particularly that of “permission”, occurring far less frequently.

An example of the “permission” core is *Duchess and courtesans could insist on the ‘lit de parade’ as a right based on riches, social positions, or physical attraction*. An example of the “ability” core is *“I just cannot remember a time where I couldn’t swim”, she told me*. *Could* occurs frequently as a past tense form of Root “possibility” *can*. Coates (1983) gives a typical example of *could* = “Root possibility” in reported speech: *The taxi driver said that he would deposit them with the Department of English if he could but he felt (though) probably he’d have to deposit them with at the porter’s lodge* (paraphrase: “if it’s possible for me to do so”).

Finally, according to the author, *could* functions as the hypothetical form for all three of the meanings identified for *can*. An example of hypothetical “permission” meaning is *and they don’t do many things which they could do legally because they know that this would be the death*; an example of hypothetical ‘ability’ meaning is *all good salesmen and women possess four attributes without which they could not succeed*; finally, an example of hypothetical “possibility” meaning is *you know, I mean I could do that if I was certain I’d got the degree results* (general meaning: “if certain conditions were fulfilled, then nothing would prevent x”).

As regards the viewpoint of other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) state that the most frequent uses of *could* are: for possibility/probability; for making suggestions, and as the past tense of *can*. Moreover, *could* is also used to ask for permission (e.g. *Could I talk to you for a moment?*) and *could have* + *-ed* participle is often used to express disapproval or criticism (e.g. *You could have told me. Why did you keep it all for yourself?*). As regards the use of *could* as the past tense of *can*, the two authors point out that, when actual achievements are indicated, *was/were able to*, not *could*, is preferred in the past affirmative clauses (e.g. *The thieves escaped but the*

*police were able to arrest them later that evening*), whereas the negative forms *couldn't* or *wasn't/weren't able to* are both used to indicate non-achievement (e.g. *She was not able/she couldn't move on her own*).

Compared to Coates (1983), Falinski (2008) states that the semantic range of *could* can be covered in only three points: (epistemic) possibility *couldn't*; past-tense form of *can* (aspectual, ability); and hypothetical modal *could/could have* to indicate root possibility in unreal conditions. He finally states that *could* is the past-tense form of *can* only in the second case; it is a tentative form for *can* in the first case and a hypothetical form in perfective forms, and also conditionals (*could/could have*), in the last case.

### 1.11 The modals of epistemic possibility

In this section I will illustrate the modals of epistemic possibility, namely *may*, *might* and epistemic *could*.

#### 1.11.1 May

As regards the first modal of epistemic possibility described by the author, Coates (1983) explains that, apart from expressing Epistemic possibility, *may* is also used to grant permission and to express Root possibility (but these uses occur only in more formal context); it can also be used as a quasi-subjunctive (also according to Falinski 2008, who states that it is used in clauses with *-ever* determiners and adverbial clauses of concession) and, also according to both Carter and McCarthy (2006) and Falinski (2008), to express benediction/malediction (again, these two uses are rare).

The modal *may* is primarily used to express Epistemic possibility, that is, to express the speaker's lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition, and it can be paraphrased by "it is possible that.../perhaps" (e.g. *B: Have you got a pen? I'll leave a message A: I may have one*). Epistemic *may* is characterized by its use as a hedge, that is, the speaker avoids committing himself to the truth of the proposition. The Root meaning of *may* can be described in terms of a fuzzy set in which the core means, roughly, "it is permissible/allowed for x" and the periphery means "it is possible for x". Where the context identifies some form of authority, *may* is understood in terms of permission; when the constraining factors are identified with external circumstances,



then *may* is understood in terms of possibility. A core example of *may* = “permission” is *A: May I read your message? B: yes*; an example of *may* = “possibility” is *I’m afraid this is the bank’s final word. I tell you this so that you may make arrangements elsewhere if you are able to*.

As regards the analysis of *may* by other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) point out that *may* is used: for permission (i.e. to ask for, grant and refuse permission, although it is the most polite form among *can*, *could* and *may*); to refer to weak probability (e.g. [talking about a delivery] *There’s a bank holiday in between, so it may or may not get to you by the end of that week*); to express concession (especially when accompanied by *well* or followed by *but* (e.g. *Stalin may be long since dead, but Stalinism is not*) and, more interestingly, it is used in formal written English to describe things which are likely to occur or which normally occur (in this sense, it is a more formal equivalent of *can*), as in *Frog spawn may be found in riverbeds at that time of year*. Finally, Falinski (2008) analyses *may* and *might* together as indicators of epistemic possibility concerning present or future time. He states that *might* possibly has a more tentative meaning, but only if stressed (e.g. *Well, it might just be possible, I’m not sure*). Finally, *may* and *might* can be used to refer to both present and future, with the meaning of “it is possible that...is/will”.

### 1.11.2 Might

According to Coates (1983), *might* is associated with seven possible meanings: Epistemic possibility = “it is possible that x” (e.g. *If I go I might get into Sainsbury’s before the close*); past of *may*: Epistemic possibility = “it was possible that x”, Root possibility = “it was possible for x” and Root permission = “x was allowed”; Remote of *may* (hypothetical): Epistemic possibility = “it is possible that x would...”, Root possibility = “it would be possible for x” and Root permission = “it would be permissible for x”. Coates (1983) explains that *might* is mainly used to express Epistemic possibility and as a conditional, and that, in its epistemic meaning, *might*, like *may*, is used as a hedge.

As concerns the point of view of other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) state that, in general, *might* is a more indirect and tentative alternative to *may*. Moreover, it is used as the past form of *may* in indirect reports (e.g. *She said that mother might be expecting him*) and, more interestingly, it is also used to issue advice or

suggestions politely or indirectly, especially when used together with *like* or *want* (e.g. [University tutor recommending a book to a student] *I won't go any further with it now but you might like to take a copy of it out with you*).

### 1.11.3 Epistemic *could*

Like Epistemic *may* and *might*, as Coates (1983) states, *could* conveys the speaker's lack of confidence in the proposition expressed and can be paraphrased by "it is possible that...perhaps". The modal *could*, unlike *might* and *may*, seems to the author to express only tentative possibility. An example is: *Mambo, from Peter Ashworth's Treadwell stables, could be the one to give King's Probity most trouble [...] but Nightingalls' charge may just have the edge* (paraphrase = "it is (tentatively) possible that Mambo will be the one to..."). Finally, Coates (1983) points out that while *might* is becoming the main exponent of Epistemic possibility in everyday spoken language, *could* is filling the gap left by *might* and is the new exponent of tentative Epistemic possibility.

## 1.12 The modals of volition and prediction

In this section I will illustrate the modals of volition and prediction: *will* and *shall*.

### 1.12.1 Will

The first modal of volition/prediction described by the author is *will*. Coates (1983) explains that the meanings associated with *will* are those of "willingness", "intention", "predictability" and "prediction", all of which are closely related to concepts of futurity (as stated also by Carter and McCarthy 2006 and Falinski 2008). Examples are: *I mean I don't think the bibliography should suffer because we can't find a publisher who will do the whole thing* (= willingness); *I'll put them in the past today* (= intention); *Your Lordship will know what her age was* (= predictability) and *I think the bulk of this year students will go into industry* (= prediction). Those meanings are subdivided into Root meanings (willingness + intention) and Epistemic meanings (predictability + prediction). Examples of *will* = willingness can be paraphrased by *willing* or *want* and have an animate subject and an agentive verb. In the case of questions, most cases of *will you* in the corpora, while overtly negative, are actually functioning as imperatives,

for example: *will you listen to me and stop interrupting!*. *Will* = intention is also used to make an arrangement, that is, the speaker states his intended course of action, which involves the co-operation of the addressee, who normally signals his willingness to co-operate by saying *Yes* or *Mm* (e.g. *B: all right then I'll see you this afternoon then A: Yeah*).

As regards Epistemic meanings, examples which can be assigned to the category “predictability” mean something like “I confidently predict that it is the case that p”. Epistemic *will* expresses the speaker’s confidence in the truth of the proposition; moreover, the crucial feature of Epistemic *will* is that the speaker makes a claim about the present (in other words, the time reference of the main predication is present, e.g. *A commotion in the hall... "That will be Celia", said Janet*). On the other hand, examples of Epistemic *will* = prediction can be paraphrased “I predict that x” and the main predication always has future time reference (e.g. *It will be lovely to see you*).

As regards *will*, Carter and McCarthy (2006) point out that it has a number of uses, but the reference to future time is one of its principal functions since, as we have already seen with Huddleston (1988), English does not have a separate, inflected future tense. But, apart from this use, *will* has other interesting uses highlighted by the two authors: it can be used to refer to habitual events (e.g. *On a Friday night we'll get a take-away and we'll just relax*), to make offers (e.g. *I'll carry that for you*), for requests and invitations (e.g. *Will you pass me that newspapers please?* and *Will you join us for a drink after the concert?*), for strong directives (e.g. *Will you sit down and just be quiet!*), to express disapproval (when referring to persistent actions of oneself or others, e.g. *He will leave that door open every time he goes through*).

Another author, Falinski (2008), compares *will* with *must*. He points out that although the meaning of epistemic *will* is very close to that of *must*, they differ in one essential point: *will* expresses a confident statement (e.g. *You will be tired after such a long journey*), whereas *must* expresses a confident conclusion (logical necessity; *The lights are on. Peter must still be in the office*) or – said in other words – *must* is an expression of direct deduction, while *will* is not. Falinski (2008) explains that modal *will* ranges from root to epistemic meaning. Epistemic *will* covers a range of meaning from predictability to prediction (e.g. *Ah! That will be the children* and *Children will often say things which make adults gasp*). The root meanings of *will* (grammatical subject’s volition) covers several meanings: volition and intention (e.g. *I can't find*

*anyone who will do it for me*), characteristic or typical behavior (e.g. *He'll drink anything*) and requests and commands (e.g. *Will you come with me?*).

### 1.12.2 Shall

The other modal of volition described by the author is *shall*. According to Coates (1983), *shall* has two Root meanings, one meaning “intention” and one used frequently in interrogatives to consult the wishes of the addressee: “addressee’s volition”, and one Epistemic meaning, the weak futurity sense of prediction.

As regards the meaning “addressee’s volition”, the construction *shall I* + agentive verb has the effect of consulting the addressee’s wishes: it means roughly “do you want me to...”, for instance *shall I get a cup of coffee?* can be paraphrased with “would you like me to get a cup of coffee?”. The time reference of the main predication is present: it consults the wishes of the addressee at the moment of speaking. As regards the Epistemic meaning “prediction”, *shall* in this use is very similar to *will* = prediction. Coates (1983) explains that examples of *shall* = prediction can all be paraphrased by “I predict that.../it is predictable that...” (e.g. *I shall have to sort of see what Jim says when I see him*).

As regards the point of view of other authors, Carter and McCarthy (2006) also point out that *shall* can refer to future intentions/predictions, but that it is used in rather formal contexts (e.g. *I shall always be grateful for what he did on that day*; less formal: *I will always be grateful [...]*). Moreover, it is used in directives, although this use is very formal and rare (e.g. [notice in an aircraft cabin] *This curtain shall be left open during takeoff and landing*).

Finally, Falinski (2008) compares *shall* and *must*, and explains that *shall*, as *must*, also has a strong necessity meaning, even if it is only in “fossilized”, rather archaic contexts. Like Coates (1983), he also points out that *shall* is used in questions inquiring about the volition of the addressee (e.g. *Shall I do it for you?*), asking for advice or suggestions, and in implied commands or interpolations (e.g. *Shall we try again?* and *What about leaving at – shall we say – 8.30?*).

### 1.13 The hypothetical modals

In this subsection I will discuss *would*, *should* and hypothetical meaning.

#### 1.13.1 Would

The first hypothetical modal discussed by Coates (1983) is *would*. She explains that *would* functions as both the past tense form of *will* and as a general hypothetical marker. As regards past tense forms, we have both Root meanings and Epistemic meanings. The Root meanings are “willingness” and “intention”; the Epistemic meanings are “predictability” and “prediction”. Examples of *would* = willingness can be paraphrased by “willing to” or “prepared to” (e.g. *He decided to wait in a doorway for the rain to stop. He wanted to think. He wouldn't go back to Viareggio*). Compared with *will* = “intention”, *would* = “intention” occurs infrequently. This is – according to Coates (1983) – presumably due to the fact that “intention” is intrinsically bound up with the future. As regards *would* = “intention”, examples can be paraphrased by “intend to” (e.g. *He ran his hand over the gun and the anger he felt subsided slightly. He'd show her*). True core examples of “predictability” make a confident assertion or prediction about some action/state in the past (e.g. *That would be the milkman* = “I confidently predict that that was the milkman”).

As regards “prediction”, outside the predictability core, we find examples which range from those meaning “x predicted that y” to those where the sense of prediction is very weak. Virtually all examples of *would* = “prediction” occur in indirect or free indirect speech (e.g. *She felt icy cold and completely desperate. He would have no hesitation about getting rid of the child as well as her*). As mentioned above, *would* is also used to express hypothetical meaning. An example is: *if you had that job lined up, would Fulbright then pay up?*. The modal *would* also functions as a general hypothetical marker. An example is *God knows what would happen to me if I ever got caught*. Coates (1983) notes that although it is true to say that *would* is not just the hypothetical marker of *will* = “prediction”, in the vast majority of cases in her samples this is *would*'s function, and she therefore proposes to call this usage of *would* “Epistemic”. Finally, hypothetical *would* is also used pragmatically to express politeness or tentativeness rather than a genuine hypothesis, that is, it can be used as a

polite suggestion: [...] *I think it would cheaper for you to stay with somebody and you could spend the proceeds on taking us out to dinner.*

Compared to Coates (1983), Carter and McCarthy (2006) repeat most of the uses related to *would* mentioned by Coates (1983). They subdivide its uses into two categories: past time and other uses. As regards past time, what is not known is that *would* can refer to future-in-the-past, that is when the speaker looks forward in time from a point in the past (e.g. *Perhaps one day he would summon the courage to speak to her, see how thing went*). The other uses of *would* include its use in conditional sentences (where it is common in the main clause; e.g. *If I had to leave, I would probably go to India*), its use as a hedge with verbs such as *advise, imagine, recommend, say, suggest, think* (e.g. *The total would be about £ 260, I would think*) and its frequent use in requests, as a more polite or indirect form of *will* (e.g. *Would you give me a call this evening?*). Finally, Falinski (2008), as regards epistemic necessity, simply states that *would*, a rare substitute for epistemic *will*, is used as a tentative form referring to the present and past (e.g. *That would be Jones's wife, I suppose?* and *You say there was a man on the stairs. That would be/would have been the bailiff*).

### 1.13.2. Should and hypothetical meaning

The other hypothetical modal described by Coates (1983) is *should*. She explains that, apart from the fact that it is restricted to first person subjects, hypothetical *should* is very similar to hypothetical Epistemic *would*. However, hypothetical *should* is more often used pragmatically, to express politeness or tentativeness (e.g. *I should ask him [if there any seminars you ought to go to]* = polite version of “Ask him if [...]”). It also occurs particularly frequently in the phrase *I should think*, the hedged or tentative version of *I think* (itself a hedge), or similar expressions like *I should like/imagine/say*. For other opinions about *should* and hypothetical meaning, see 1.9.3.

## Chapter 2

### MODALITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A FOCUS ON HEDGES AND BOOSTERS

This chapter deals with hedges and boosters, two categories of epistemic modality, in academic writing. In the first part of this chapter I will deal with modality in expert academic writing; secondly, I will provide definitions of hedges and boosters; thirdly, I will review the most recent research on hedges and boosters in NS academic writing; and finally, I will focus on hedges and boosters in learners' academic writing.

#### 2.1 Modality in expert academic writing

In this section I will investigate modality in native speakers' (NS) academic writing, in order to see which choices expert writers make and why. To begin with, the work by Piqué-Angordans, Posteguillo and Andreu-Besó (2001) analyzes the language of three different academic and professional contexts (i.e. health science, journalese and literary criticism) in order to identify possible variations in the use of epistemic or deontic modality. To this purpose, they gathered three distinct corpora: a corpus of health science Research Articles (RAs); a corpus of newspaper articles; and a corpus of literary criticism RAs dealing with American and British literature. In each corpus they systematically consider the modal verbs *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *ought*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would* and the two semi-modal verbs *dare* and *need*. The results related to Corpus 1 show that deontic modality is almost non-existent in health science RAs, representing only 2.97% of the total modal and semi-modal verbs. The results obtained in texts from Corpus 2 show that epistemic modality continues to be the main type of verb used by journalists (91.2%), although a slight increase is present with regard to verbal expressions with a deontic orientation. The results obtained in Corpus 3 show that the pattern epistemic/deontic usage is reversed with the modals *must* and *shall*, both of which are more frequently used in deontic expressions than in epistemic ones. According to the authors, there is an evident increase in the use of deontic modality if we compare the results obtained in Corpus 1 (where epistemic modality is close to 100%), Corpus 2 (where it somewhat diminishes) and Corpus 3 (where there is a significant decrease of epistemic modality). The three authors conclude that different disciplines favour different types of modality, and they suggest that the combination of deontic modality and epistemic modality is a representative feature of (at least) RAs in

literary criticism, whereas health science researchers may only resort to epistemic modality in their RAs.

Candlin, Crompton and Hatim (2016) focus instead on popularized RAs, including the use of modal verbs to indicate degrees of certainty, and on the importance of hedging. As regards the former point, the three authors state that “modal verbs make the sentences either more certain or more possible. Because research scientists want to find out what is possible and what is certain, modal verbs are common in research writing” (Candlin et al. 2016: 7). As regards the latter, they affirm that “apart from using modal verbs, there are other ways in which researchers show that their statements are not [...] definite” (Candlin et al. 2016: 8). They call the use of modal verbs and expressions such as *seem* and *suggest* “hedging” and explain that “researchers use hedging to show that their statements are not based on certain knowledge but on reasoning from the evidence which they have” (Candlin et al. 2016: 8). I will develop these points further in the sections devoted to hedges and boosters.

Finally, Gruber (2005) explains that modality is a widely used resource in English academic texts. Gruber (2005) refers both to Butler’s (1990, in Gruber 2005) and Hyland’s (1997, 1998, in Gruber 2005) studies. He points out that Butler (1990), in his study of modals in English academic texts, found that epistemic modals were far more frequently used than deontic modals, and that most modals were found in the discussion sections of academic papers or the explanation/discussion chapters of textbooks. However Hyland (1997, 1998) showed that metadiscursive devices (which include modal constructions) were used differently in different disciplines, for example in “hard” and “soft” sciences. The conclusion of Gruber, therefore, is that “the interpretation of certain patterns of use of modal constructions has to take into account discipline culture” (Gruber 2005: 47).

## 2.2 What are hedges?

As we have just seen, epistemic modality and the related concepts of hedges and boosters are central to academic writing. For this reason, in this section I will provide definitions of hedges as proposed by some scholars, and in the following section those of boosters. An interesting debate about the meaning of the word hedge/hedging is found in Riekkinen (2009). The author states that hedging is a communicative strategy



which enables speakers to, for example, soften the force of their utterance. Riekkinen (2009) also gives background to the origin of the term *hedge*. She states that it was Lakoff who first introduced it in 1972. However, he used the term to refer to words that “make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (1972: 195, in Riekkinen 2009), so that, in this original sense of the word, hedging referred only to expressions such as *kind of* and *sort of*. Moreover, Lakoff (1972, in Riekkinen 2009) did not consider context to be important for giving hedges their meaning. His ideas, in any case, have been further developed by a number of linguists, so that hedges are no longer seen as conveying only inexactitude, but also contributing to pragmatic strategies such as mitigation. Riekkinen (2009) then explains that Prince et al. (1982, in Riekkinen 2009) divided hedges into two categories: *approximators* and *shields*. Approximators are hedges that make the propositional content itself fuzzier, whereas shields are hedges that introduce fuzziness between the propositional content and the speaker, thus enabling the speaker to signal uncertainty and a lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition. However, Riekkinen (2009) adds that Markkanen and Schröder (1997, in Riekkinen 2009) questioned the logic of splitting hedges into semantic/pragmatic categories such as approximators and shields because “[both] perform the same function of expressing indeterminacy, of making sentences more acceptable to the hearer and thus increasing their chances of ratification” (Markkanen and Schröder 1997: 5).

Like Riekkinen (2009), Skelton (1988) also states that the term “hedging” dates back to Lakoff (1972, in Skelton 1988), who spoke of “words whose job is to make things fuzzy or less fuzzy”. Lakoff (1972, in Skelton 1988) gives, as an example of what he means, the way we might talk about birds. Eagles, for instance, are birds, whereas a chicken is a sort of bird, and that *sort of* is a hedge. Skelton (1988) explains that there are a large number of ways in which one can hedge in English: for instance, through the use of impersonal phrases, the modal system or verbs like *seem* and *appear*. He also specifies that it is a pity that the word *hedging*, with the pejorative connotations of its ordinary language use, has been adopted, and, like Riekkinen (2009), he also explains that Prince et al. (1982, in Skelton 1988) divided hedges into two categories: *shields* and *approximators*. In *shields*, they suggested, the speaker is hedged: their degree of commitment to a proposition is stated (e.g. *I suspect the moon is not made of green cheese after all*), whereas in *approximators* the proposition itself is hedged: the extent to which is true is stated (e.g. *It’s made of some sort of rock stuff*).

Like most of the other authors, Crompton (1997) reviews and evaluates some of the different ways in which the term *hedge* has been understood and defined in the literature. He states, first of all, that Lakoff (1972, in Crompton 1997) introduced the subcategory of *performative hedges*, which modify the illocutionary force of the speech act they accompany. Then, he explains that Prince et al. (1982, in Crompton 1997) counted the number of words and phrases in their corpus which made things “fuzzier” and analyzed each item as falling into one of two categories: *approximators* and *shields*, which we have just seen. On the other hand, Skelton (1988, in Crompton 1997) proposes the abandonment of the term *hedge* in favor of a distinction between *proposition* and comment (where hedges would be designated commentative language). In the same article, Crompton (1997) argues that Salager-Meyer (1994, in Crompton 1997) focuses on the relationship between hedging and modesty, arguing that “hedges are first and foremost the product of a mental attitude which looks for proto-typical linguistic forms” (Salager-Meyer 1994: 274-275). Crompton (1997), however, believes that rather than seeing hedging as a reflex of personal qualities such as attitude and modesty, hedges are better understood as a product of social forces. For example, the hedge *as far as I can see* mitigates the claim being made in that the readers are still allowed to judge for themselves. Finally, a different rationale behind hedging in academic writing is emphasized by Hyland (1994, in Crompton 1997), who identifies hedging with epistemic modality as defined by Lyons: “any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters [...] is an epistemically modal or modalised sentence” (Lyons 1997:797, in Crompton 1997).

After having focused on the different ways in which the term *hedge* has been understood and defined in the literature, Crompton (1997) also focuses on the taxonomies of hedges by briefly reviewing those forms researchers have chosen to regard as hedges: Skelton (1988, in Crompton 1997) chose copulas other than *be*, modal auxiliaries and lexical verbs such as *believing* and *arguing*. Cited in Crompton (1997), we find Myers (1989), Hyland (1994) and Salager-Meyer (1994). Myers (1989) listed modal conditional verbs and modifiers, whereas Hyland (1994) omitted *approximators* but included, as well as epistemically modal expressions, *if*-clauses, question forms, passivisation, impersonal phrases and time reference. Finally, Salager-Meyer (1994) identified *shields*, *approximators*, expressions of the authors’ personal doubt and direct involvement (e.g. *we believe*) and emotionally charged intensifiers (e.g. *particularly*

*encouraging*). Crompton (1997) points out how this brief study of how the term *hedge* has been used in the literature suggests that the only item on which there seems to be complete agreement is copulas other than *be*. He therefore tries to suggest the following definition for hedges in academic writing, which applies only to hedges on proposition: “a hedge is an item of language which a speaker uses to explicitly qualify his/her lack of commitment” (Crompton 1997: 281). He also proposes the following test for determining whether or not a proposition is hedged: “can the proposition be restated in such a way that it is not changed but that the author’s commitment to it is greater than at present? If “yes”, then the proposition is hedged” (Crompton 1997: 282). Finally, the author suggests the following characterization of hedged propositions:

a) sentences with copulas other than *be*; b) sentences with modals used epistemically; c) sentences with clauses relating to the probability of the subsequent proposition being true; d) sentences containing sentence adverbials which relate to the probability of the proposition being true; e) sentences containing reported propositions where the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for any tentativeness in the verbal group, or non-use of factive reporting verbs such as *show*, *demonstrate*, *prove* [...], and f) sentences containing a reported proposition that a hypothesized entity X exists and the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for making the hypothesis (Crompton 1997: 284).

Another author (Hyland 1995) focuses specifically on the functions of hedging in scientific writing. He gives a definition of hedging and describes the three functions of hedging in this kind of writing. He states that hedging “represents an absence of certainty and is used here to describe any linguistic item or strategy employed to indicate either a) a lack of commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition or b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically” (Hyland 1995: 34). The three functions of hedging are the following: first, hedges allow writers to express propositions with greater precision in areas often characterized by reformulation and reinterpretation; secondly, hedges are related to the writer’s desire to anticipate possible negative consequences of being proved wrong; finally, hedges contribute to the development of the writer-reader relationship, addressing the need for deference and cooperation in gaining reader’s ratification of claims.

As regards the types of hedges that we can find, Hyland (1996) explains that hedging is the expression of tentativeness and possibility and it is central to academic writing where the need to present unproven propositions with caution and precision is essential. According to the author, hedges can be divided into two types: content- and

reader-oriented. Content-oriented hedges are related to claims that “have to correspond with what is believed to be true in the world” (Hyland 1996: 5), whereas reader-oriented hedges refer to propositions which could be presented from an objective perspective but that are explicitly hedged because of readers’ considerations. Moreover, the author argues that content-oriented hedges can be subdivided into two further categories: accuracy-oriented hedges (related to the obligation to present claims as accurately as possible) and writer-oriented hedges (related to the need to anticipate what may be harmful to the writer). Hyland (1996) also focuses on the fact that analysis of epistemic language use reveals that hedges are polypragmatic (i.e. they can convey a range of different meanings, often at the same time) so that they do not fit into a neat scheme of discrete categories.

The author then discusses in detail content-oriented hedges and writer-oriented hedges. He explains that the former hedge the correspondence between what the writer says about the world and what the world is thought to be like. Then, he focuses on accuracy-oriented hedges – which “involve the writer’s desire to express propositions with greater precision in areas often subject to revision” (Hyland 1996: 9) and whose main function is to imply that the proposition is based on plausible reasoning in the absence of certain knowledge – and on attribute hedges, which “enable writers to restructure categories, define entities and conceptualise processes more exactly to distinguish how far results approximate to an idealised state” (Hyland 1996: 10). Writer-oriented hedges limit the writer’s commitment to statements. While accuracy-oriented hedges are proposition focused and seek to increase precision by referring to the exact state of knowledge, writer-oriented hedges are writer-focused and aim to shield the writer from the consequences of opposition by limiting personal commitment. Hyland (1996) argues that the most distinctive signal of writer-oriented hedges is the absence of writer agency. Finally, reader-oriented hedges mark claims as provisional, inviting the reader to participate in a dialogue.

After this explanation, Hyland (1996) summarizes the three main functions of hedging in scientific RAs: to present claims with greater precision; to signal reservations in the truth of a claim; to limit the professional damage which might result from bald propositional content and to give deference and recognition to the reader and avoid unacceptable over-confidence. However, the author also highlights that a principal feature of hedging is indeterminacy, so that particular forms are always likely to carry more than one meaning.

### 2.3 What are boosters?

Boosters, although much less frequently used than hedges, are also important in academic writing. For this reason, I will provide some definitions of boosters proposed by scholars. One is given by Yagiz and Demir (2015): they state that “boosting, also called intensifier or certainty marker interchangeably, is an issue studied under metadiscourse” (Yagiz and Demir 2015: 12). Moreover, “boosters may be thought as metadiscoursal markers aiming to strengthen writers’ claims on the issue [...]. They have a purpose of increasing the propositions, and prove the writer’s engagement and commitment to his/her statements” (Yagiz and Demir 2015: 12). A similar perspective is found in Yeganeh et al. (2014): they also see hedges and boosters as meta-discourse markers. According to these authors:

hedges show the speaker’s unwillingness to present propositional information categorically, such as *seem*, *probably*, *could*. These words and utterances indicate the speaker’s uncertainty; that is, he or she talks about what he or she does not have enough information. [...] It can also be used as a way of avoidance from full responsibility for the statement in utterance. So, as Yule (1996) claims hedges violate the quality of maxim of Grice (1975) (Yeganeh et al. 2014: 680).

On the other hand, expressions used to indicate strong persuasion are described as boosters (e.g. *clearly*, *obviously*, and *of course*). They indicate strong persuasion and also show engagement and solidarity with the audience by emphasizing shared information, group membership, and direct engagement. Finally, Hyland (1998) refers to hedges and boosters as “the expression of doubt and certainty” (Hyland 1998: 1) and to hedges as “a resource for expressing uncertainty, skepticism and deference in academic contexts” (Hyland 1998: 1). He adds that hedges and boosters are communicative strategies for reducing or increasing the force of statements, respectively. More specifically:

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. [...] They also mark involvement and solidarity with an audience, stressing shared information, group membership, and direct engagement with readers (Hyland 1998: 2); 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 (Hyland 1998: 2)

Hyland (1998) then concludes his explanation by stating that “hedges and boosters [...] draw attention to the fact that statements don’t just communicate ideas, but also the writer’s attitude to them and to readers” (Hyland 1998: 3).

#### 2.4 Hedges and boosters in NS academic writing and corpora

In this section, I will refer to the studies by Hyland (2001), Vázquez and Giner (2009), and Kim and Lim (2015). Hyland (2001) deals with epistemic modality in academic argument. He first introduces the definitions of hedges and boosters (on which I will not focus since we have already seen them in sections 2.2 and 2.3) and then he presents the data of his study. As regards the data, this consists of a corpus of published articles related to different disciplines (i.e. mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, marketing, philosophy, sociology, applied linguistics, physics and microbiology) together with a series of interviews with members of the relevant discourse communities. The results show two important findings. The first is that hedges exceed boosters by nearly 3 to 1, which, according to the author, reflects the need for claims to be presented provisionally. The second finding is that there is a broad division between the soft knowledge fields of philosophy, marketing, linguistic and sociology on one hand, and physics and engineering on the other. Indeed, over 70% of all hedges occur in the humanities/social science papers. According to the author, this result reveals a clear distinction between the sciences and humanity social sciences. Indeed, he goes on to say that, in the soft fields, research cannot be reported with the same confidence as shared assumptions because, compared to hard sciences, soft-knowledge areas are more interpretative and less abstract, and so it has to be expressed more cautiously using more hedges.

On the other hand, Vázquez and Giner (2009) focus specifically on boosters. Indeed, their study is based on the analysis of RAs randomly selected from three disciplines (Marketing, Biology and Mechanical Engineering). Their main aim is to understand to what extent boosters are used in these fields with a persuasive and intensifying value. The results of their study show that the number of boosters differs a great deal in each discipline, as expected by the authors. Indeed, the results reveal that the total number of boosters per 1,000 words in the three disciplines indicates that

proportionally there is a major presence of boosters in the subject area of Marketing. In particular, the number of boosters in this area seems to be double the quantity found in the discipline of Biology and that found in Mechanical Engineering. The two authors explain this result by arguing that the data included in the RAs of Marketing are not very precise, but rather based on speculations. As a consequence, the nature of this science seems to strongly influence the use of interactional elements like boosters. A striking result is that regarding boosters in Mechanical Engineering RAs: “According to certain theories regarding academic writing – the two scholars point out – authors in hard sciences did not seem to feel the need of using persuasive linguistic tools in their discourse” (Vázquez and Giner 2009: 227) because these are based on reliable data. Nevertheless, the data in the authors’ analysis reveal a considerable amount of boosting, which reminds one of the quantity of boosters found in the RAs belonging to the discipline of Biology. Vázquez and Giner (2009) explain that Biology spans everything, so that this discipline uses data that are both numerical and not. Consequently, the number of boosters locates this discipline in a middle point between the other two disciplines. As concerns Mechanical Engineering, the two authors point out that although the accurate data of this discipline may appear to be very assertive one must also consider that there do not seem to be absolute truths. Moreover, hard sciences construct new knowledge departing from the negation of statements derived from accurate data. As a consequence, boosters contribute to the assurance of new statements in defense of the author’s work.

Finally, the paper by Kim and Lim (2015) attempts to explore the linguistic realizations of hedges in academic writing using Hyland’s (1996, in Kim and Lim 2015) categorization of hedging devices. To this purpose, thirty research article discussions restricted to empirical studies were randomly selected from the Journal of English for Academic Purposes. The authors specify that Hyland (1996, in Kim and Lim 2015) divides hedges into two main categories, that is content-oriented and reader-oriented, which I have already discussed in section 2.2. The findings show that writer-oriented hedges are linguistically realized by impersonal subjects with epistemic speculative verbs (e.g. *the following section will discuss...and suggest*), passive constructions (e.g. *can be discussed*), reference to a wider body of knowledges through the use of non-integral citations, and reference to information presented earlier in the article (e.g. *as evidenced in Table 1*). As regards attribute-oriented hedges, these are realized by adverbs (degree of precision; e.g. *somewhat*), style disjuncts (e.g. *generally*), sentence

adverbs (e.g. *essentially*), and the use of qualification (e.g. *considering the content and structure of the course*). The realization of reliability-oriented hedges include modal verbs (e.g. *may*), adverbs of certainty which weaken the force of an attribute (e.g. *likely*) and evidential verbs (e.g. *seem*). Finally, reader-oriented hedges are realized by first-person pronouns (e.g. *we*), adverbs/sentence modifiers (e.g. *arguably*), hypothetical conditionals (e.g. *if*), and contrastive connectors (e.g. *however*). According to the authors, these findings generally suggest that hedging is a salient feature of academic discourse and that its appropriate use is central to the process of weighing fact and evaluation, which is at the heart of academic writing.

## 2.5 Hedges and boosters in learners' academic writing

In this section I will first refer to the studies by Hyland (2000), Hyland and Milton (1997), Hinkel (2005 & 2009), Hsin-I (2010), Serholt (2012), and Khrosravian et al. (2014); then to the studies by Seškauskienė (2008) and Hyland (2000); and finally to the study by Chunyu and Xuyan (2015). The first group of authors all deal with epistemic devices (i.e. a general term that, in our case, refers to hedges and boosters) by comparing differences and similarities related to the use of hedges and boosters between NS and NNS, sometimes focusing also on the possible differences between male and female students (as is the case of Serholt 2012).

First of all, Hyland (2000) draws on various studies of L2 students' academic writing, focusing on hedging and second language writers, and he states that, despite the significance of hedging, proficiency in this area appears to be difficult to achieve in a foreign language. More specifically, the author argues that there seem to be four main reasons that explain the reasons why students have difficulties with hedging: a) a single expression can convey a range of meanings; b) hedging can be expressed in a large variety of ways; c) students may be confused by cross-cultural differences in expressing doubt and certainty, and d) students tend to receive poor advice from their published textbooks. As regards point a), *could*, for instance, can convey ability, permission and possibility. In addition, hedges do not only convey the writer's confidence in the truth of information but they also contribute to a relationship with the reader. So, for example, a writer may strongly believe something is true, but hedge it out of consideration for the readers' opinions. As regards point b), hedging can be signaled in many different ways,



not only by modal verbs, but also by other items (among them, epistemic verbs, sentence adverbs of probability, epistemic adjectives or adjectival clauses etc.). As concerns point c), the author states that there are variations in how different cultures and languages express arguments. For example, academic writing in German and Czech seems to be more direct than in English, whereas Japanese and Chinese seem to prefer more cautious and indirect argument patterns than typically expected in English. Finally, as regards point d), the author points out that hedges are generally ignored or misrepresented in style guides and textbooks. Hyland (2000) points out that there have been some recent improvement in this picture, but generally research interest in hedging has not been translated into pedagogic materials. In addition, problems are duplicated by teachers who rely on textbooks as sources for their own courses and by students who regard textbooks as containing all they need to learn.

Hyland and Milton (1997) also state that the ability to express doubt and certainty (i.e. the use of hedges and boosters) appropriately in English is a complex task for language learners, but critical for successful academic writing. Their paper compares the expression of doubt and certainty in the examination scripts of 900 Cantonese speaking school leavers writing in English with those of 770 British learners of similar age and educational level, with the aim of determining the typical forms and meanings used by the two groups to present claims in academic English prose. The two scholars explain that modal expressions are complex for a number of reasons: first, they can simultaneously convey a range of different meanings so that they can be understood only by attending to the context; secondly, students experience difficulties because epistemic meanings can be signaled in many different ways; finally, the significance of epistemic devices is largely ignored in style guides.

The analysis reveals remarkable similarities in the overall frequencies with students from both samples employing one device every 53 words. There are also considerable similarities of usage, although with strikingly different frequencies. Indeed, for instance, epistemic *will* occurs twice as often in the NNS sample while *would* is represented twice as frequently in the NS data. According to the two scholars, these distributions suggest conceptual differences, with L2 writers favouring confident prediction, whereas NS use more tentative expressions. The analysis of the grammatical distribution of epistemic devices also show marked differences in the use of adverbs and modal verbs. Indeed, L2 writers appear to depend far more heavily on modal verbs than NS. Moreover, there seems to be a popularity of adverbs over semantically equivalent

verb forms in L2 writings which, according to the two authors, may be due to uncertainty in how to employ lexical verbs appropriately in stating claims.

The scholars also analyze the categories of epistemic commitment. The results confirm that the academic writing of many L2 learners is characterized by firmer assertions, a more authoritative tone and stronger commitments when compared with native speaker discourse. According to Hyland and Milton (1997), this could be due to inadequate linguistic knowledge on the part of Chinese students or, alternatively, it could result from an imperfect awareness of appropriate language use, that is, while students may typically be more indirect when writing in Chinese, they overcompensate in English (so this finding is in contrast with what we have just seen in Hyland 2000). The authors conclude their article by pointing out once again that the manipulation of certainty and affect in academic writing is particularly problematic for the L2 students. They also highlight that this study refers to only one L2 language group, but that the literature suggests it is unlikely that Hong Kong students differ greatly from other learners in the difficulties they experience in expressing doubt and certainty in English.

As regards Hinkel's (2005) study, the author analyzes the types and frequencies of hedges and intensifiers (also known as boosters) employed in NS and NNS (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Arabic) academic essays included in a corpus of L1 and L2 student academic texts. More specifically, six hedging devices were examined: epistemic hedges (e.g. *clearly, mostly*), lexical hedges (e.g. *kind of, maybe*), possibility hedges (e.g. *perhaps, possibly*), downtoners (e.g. *a bit, nearly*), assertive pronouns (*any-* and *some-*words) and adverbs of frequency (e.g. *often, usually*). In addition, three types of intensifiers are also included: universal pronouns (*every-* and *no-*words), amplifiers (e.g. *extremely, completely*) and emphatics (e.g. *sure/for sure, no way*). The 745 NS and 626 NNS wrote their essays in response to three assigned prompts: a) some people believe that when parents make their children's lives too easy, they can actually harm their children instead. Explain your views on this issue; b) many people believe that grades do not encourage learning. Do you agree or disagree with this opinion?, and c) some people choose their major field of study based on their personal interests [...]. Other choose major in fields with a large number of jobs and options for employment. What position do you support?

As regards the results, the author says that the median frequency rates of the first three types of hedges imply that L2 academic prose contained fewer hedging devices than that of NS writers. This can be compared to Hyland and Milton's (1997)

study, which states that the academic writing of many L2 learners is characterized by firmer assertions, a more authoritative tone and stronger commitments when compared with native speaker writing, which means that NNS use less hedges and more boosters than NS. Moreover, the L2 prose of, for example, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian speakers, seems to rely extensively on epistemic but not other types of hedges. What is more interesting, however, is Hinkel's (2005) argument that, on the whole, the data demonstrate that the frequencies and types of hedges in L2 academic writing are severely restricted and limited to those that are associated with casual spoken interactions. According to the author, these findings are not surprising because even in the case of academically-bound students, conversational discourse constitutes their preeminent venue of exposure to L2. In addition to these findings, Hinkel (2005) repeats what we already know thanks to Hyland and Milton (1997), that is, NNS writers' essays seem to be prone to exaggerations and overstatements, possibly due to the high rates of universal pronouns, amplifiers, and emphatics in their texts, whereas NS students tend to rely less on such universal pronouns as *no* and *every*-words and are able to express their ideas without relying on intensifiers to the same extent.

Hinkel's (2009) study examines, instead, NS and NNS uses of possibility/ability and obligation/necessity modal verbs in a small corpus of L1 and L2 academic essays. The essays included in the corpus were written in response to five prompts in five different topic areas: the first three prompts were already examined in the study we have just seen (Hinkel 2005), the other two prompts were the following: a) some people learn best when a classroom lesson is presented in a serious, formal manner. Others prefer a lesson that is enjoyable and entertaining. What position do you support?, and b) some of the wealthiest, most famous people in the world are musicians, singers, movie stars and athletes. Do you think these performers and athletes deserve salaries such as millions of dollars every year?

Hinkel (2009) discusses first possibility and ability modals and then obligation and necessity modals. The author argues that the uses of possibility and ability modals (such as *can*, *may*, *might*, *could* and *to be able to*) in written academic discourse contribute to the broad range of syntactic and lexical means of hedging, while obligation and necessity modals have several pragmatic functions, for example they can be used to strengthen the writer's claim and import an element of objectivity. As regards the results of possibility and ability modals in L1 and L2 student writing, the median frequency rates of these modals are similar among most groups.

As concerns the L1 and L2 uses of obligation and necessity modals, the author presents a different picture. Here in the essays on the topics of Parents, Grades, Major and Manner, speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Korean employed significantly higher rates of these verbs than NS did. According to the author, the uses of obligation/necessity modals in the writing of these ethnic groups can be particularly culture- and topic-dependent. Indeed, Hinkel (2009) notes that personally distant and less culturally-bound topics, namely the L1 and L2 essays on the topics of wealthy athletes and entertainers, do not contain high rates of obligation/necessity modals, maybe because – according to the author – these essays largely consist of fact-based argumentation.

As regards Hsin-I's (2010) study, this author first introduces the notion of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), which is defined as the study of non-native speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic actions patterns in a second language (L2); then explains that the present study adopts a corpus-based approach to examining both NS and NNS corpora in terms of the use of epistemic devices in academic writing. The two corpora are a native English speaker corpus (the academic prose section of BNC baby) and a learner corpus, Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC). Nine epistemic devices were selected from the list of the most frequent epistemic devices in academic writing: two modal verbs (*may*, *might*), five adjectives (*possible*, *likely*, *unlikely*, *certain*, *sure*) and two adverbs (*possibly* and *probably*). The results show a remarkable difference in the total frequency of the epistemic modality used by NS and NNS. Indeed, epistemic modality appeared in the NNS and NS corpora for a total of 18.76 and 48.8 per 10,000 words, respectively. Moreover, the two groups also differ from each other in the frequency of the nine epistemic devices. For instance, in the case of epistemic modal verbs, the NS writers use *may* and *might* more frequently than the NNS writers, and when we consider the epistemic modality used by the NNS writers with different proficiency levels, further differences become apparent: indeed, the results indicate an increasing use of *may* and *might* in the NNS corpus with increasing proficiency levels. To sum up, the findings not only confirm the fact that L2 writers employ significantly fewer hedges but more boosters when compared with the NS in academic writing, but also demonstrate that, with increasing proficiency, the NNS writers perform more like the NS writers in terms of their linguistic behaviors in applying epistemic devices in writing. In other words – the author explains – there is a developmental continuum of L2 pragmatic competence and performance.

On the other hand, Serholt's (2012) study has a twofold aim: the primary aim is to investigate the overall frequency in which Swedish learners of English use epistemic modality to express doubt (hedges) and certainty (boosters) in their academic writing, and if there is any gender-related differences; the secondary aim is to study if the frequency of hedges and boosters occur in varying degree in the different sections of their academic essays. The hedges and boosters used in the study are: *suggest, may, seem, appear, could, might, assume, likely, possible/possibly, speculate, believe, indicate, probable/probably* (hedges); *show that, always, demonstrate, substantially, fact that, obviously show, clear/clearly, definite/definitely* and *certain/certainly* (boosters). The author explains that only linguistic C-essays (i.e. bachelor thesis) that follow the IMRAD model (Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion) were included in the study, and that the material consisted of 20 essays: 10 written by female students and 10 by male students.

The data suggest that Swedish learners of English use hedges more frequently than boosters regardless of gender. Furthermore, the results indicate that some hedges were used more often than others. For instance, the modal verbs *might, could* and *may* appear to be the most frequently used hedges for both groups. As concerns boosters, the students in her study did not seem to use boosters excessively, since they occurred merely once or twice per 1,000 words. Moreover, the results of the study indicate a distinct preference for certain boosters. The results suggest that boosters such as *substantially* and *demonstrate* were rather infrequently used among students.

As concerns the frequency with which hedges and booster were found in the different sections of the essays, the distribution turned out to be fairly similar for both gender groups. Moreover, the results indicate that both hedges and boosters were commonly used in the *Introduction* as well as in the *Discussion*, whereas the remaining sections comprised significantly fewer hedges and boosters. The conclusion of the author is that gender does not seem to be a determining factor for Swedish students of English when it comes to softening or asserting a statement in academic writing.

Khosravian et al. (2014), instead, focus specifically on hedges: their study examines the types and frequency of hedges employed by Persian and English native speakers in the introduction section of academic RAs in the field of literature. To this purpose, a corpus of forty RAs published in national and international journals were selected. The authors aimed at answering the following research questions: a) do Persian and English native speakers employ the same types of hedges in the

introduction of their academic RAs? and b) do Persian and English native speakers employ the same number of hedges in the introduction of their academic RAs?

To analyze the data, the three main categories of *main verbs*, *non-main verbs* and *modal auxiliaries* were used to show the distribution of hedging form in this study. As concerns the types of hedging devices, *main verbs*, *non-main verbs* and especially *modal auxiliaries* employed by English RAs writers are more than those applied by Persian RAs writers. Also, the percentage of the total number of hedging forms reveals that English RAs writers employed hedges twice as much as Persian RAs writers did. Moreover, the data analysis reveals that there was a difference between the choice of terms used as hedging devices in the articles written by English native authors and Persian native authors in terms of their type and frequency: more specifically, English native writers used *modal auxiliaries*, *evidential main verbs*, *adjectives* and *nouns* in RAs more frequently than their Persian native writers counterparts. These results confirm what we have already seen with Hsin-I (2010), that is “the tendency toward using fewer hedges by NNS might be explained by the observation that non-native speakers with a lower-level proficiency hedge less than those with a higher level of proficiency” (Khosravian et al. 2014: 1684, my citation).

Both Šeškauskienė (2008) and Hyland (2000) focus on the Lexical Invisibility Hypothesis (LIH). The LIH argues that in the text intensifiers (i.e. a synonym for boosters) are “invisible” whereas hedges are even more “invisible”. In this context, Šeškauskienė’s (2008) research aims at testing the LIH on non-native speakers of English– Lithuanian students majoring in English and writing their graduation papers in linguistic or language-related areas. The general results show that the five most frequent hedges are *can*, *some*, *may*, *try* and *certain*, whereas the least frequent hedges include *apparently*, *basically*, *fairly*, *largely*, *possibly*, *seemingly* etc. The author also discusses the interpretation of the results by stating that the corpus has manifested a high frequency of modals, which is in conformity with the general tendency of hedging in English.

The author concludes that this investigation has shown that the LIH does not work in the texts produced by more advanced and proficient non-native users of English. “Moreover – Šeškauskienė (2008) adds – the present investigation has established that hedging in L2 of proficient users of English has not been less frequent than the average frequency of hedging in the papers of competent users of English” (Šeškauskienė 2008: 75). Finally, the results of the investigation show that the

interference of the socio-pragmatic background has been overestimated because this investigation could be seen as a proof to the argument that, when acquiring a language, many NNS also acquire many of its textual and metadiscoursal features, including hedging, boosting etc.

As explained before, Hyland (2000) also examines the LIH. The author explains that the purpose of his study is to present data from a small retrospective think aloud study (i.e. a method which involves recording participants' utterances as they attempt to perform a task) which explore how 14 Cantonese L1 undergraduate respond to hedges and boosters in an academic text. More specifically, the students were either at their first or final year of study for a BA in English for Professional Communication at Hong Kong university. For purposes of validity, participants were not told the precise focus of the study. The data comprised taped interview data, which sought to elicit subjects' awareness of hedges and boosters after completing a comprehension task, and a questionnaire which focused more directly on their understanding of these items. The general results show that students attended to hedges and boosters in only 50 out of 210 possible cases, and that boosters tended to be more visible than hedges. The author then focuses on the results of the questionnaire. The results indicate that participants had great difficulties in assigning an appropriate degree of certainty to hedges and that, while boosters were generally identified correctly, subjects tended to overestimate the strength of statements. So, in contrast with Šeškauskienė's (2008) study, this study seems to show that the LIH does work on NNS of English.

Finally, Chunyu and Xuyan (2015) also analyze epistemic modality in the argumentative essays of Chinese EFL learners. They start by mentioning the fact that epistemic modality, as we have just seen, is generally acknowledged to be difficult for both first and second language learners to acquire. Considering that the essay topics in previous studies are not well controlled, Chunyu and Xuyan's (2015) paper sets out to explore much more comparable data from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) with the purpose of investigating how similar (or different) L1 and L2 writers employ epistemic devices (EDs) and how L2 learners' use of EDs changes with their general English proficiency. For the EFL participants, their proficiencies are classified into four levels: A2, B1-1, B1-2 and B2+. As regards the semantic distribution of EDs, the results show that all learners, like the native group, used notably more hedges than boosters in their essays, which is in sharp contrast with many previous studies, for example the one above by Hyland and Milton (1997).

Moreover, higher ability students modify their statements with less certainty markers and more tentative expressions than their L1 counterparts. As concerns the grammatical distribution of EDs, the results show broad agreement between the most advanced L2 group and the L1 group in the use of adverbials and nouns to express degrees of certainty, but marked differences in the use of modals, lexical verbs and adjectives.

Section 5 of Chunyu and Xuyan's (2015) paper is devoted to the discussion of factors that influence L2 writers' use of EDs: the inherent properties of English EDs, L2 modal instruction and learner factors. As concerns the first point, form complexity, for instance, is an important factor to determine which item learners prefer so that, for example, students will prefer, between *probably* and *maybe*, the less complex *maybe*. As regards the second point (i.e. modal instruction), the most frequent item *may* in the textbooks is also the most frequently used one by learners, and the infrequent form *probably* in the textbooks is also infrequent in learners' output, although not all learners' modal behavior is traceable to input frequency. As regards the third point (i.e. learner factors), the two authors focus on L1 influence and the one-to-one principle. L1 influence refers to the fact that, since there already exists a powerful L1 modal system, learners will probably transfer everything they can in order to establish form-meaning relationship. On the other hand, the one-to-one principle states that one form is mapped onto a single meaning, so that when, for example, *maybe* becomes the dominant form to mark epistemic possibility, other devices such as *perhaps*, *possibly* and *probably* become less significant. According to the authors, all the identified factors interact continuously in intricate ways.



## Chapter 3

### MATERIALS, METHODS AND ANALYSIS OF THE CORPUS

In this chapter I will first analyze a corpus of 136 essays written by non-native speakers of English and then I will compare it with a corpus of academic writing written by expert writers of English. My purpose is to see how hedges and boosters are used by NNS of English and to compare this use with that of expert writers. More specifically, I aim at answering the following research questions: 1a+1b) Do ESL learners (in our case, Italian students of English) use more hedges or boosters in academic writing? And compared to expert writers of English? ; 2a+2b+2c+2d) What are the five most commonly used hedges in academic writing by these students? What are the five most commonly used boosters in academic writing by these students? What are the five most commonly used hedges in academic writing by expert writers? What are the five most commonly used boosters in academic writing by expert writers?; 3a+3b) As Hyland and Milton (1997) argue, are the expressions of doubt and certainty (i.e. hedges and boosters, respectively) difficult to master for non-native speakers of English (in our case, for Italian students of English)? And if so, is this a culture-related phenomenon? But first of all, I will provide some information related to the materials and the methods used for my investigation.

#### 3.1 Materials

As mentioned above, in order to see how hedges and boosters are used both by NNS of English and by expert writers, I have collected a corpus of 136 essays written in English by Italian students of the University of Padua graduating in *Discipline della mediazione linguistica e culturale*. The texts were written by both male and female third-year-students and consist of short argumentative essays related to the topic of bilingualism. For the contrast with the expert writers of English, I also have collected a corpus of 20 academic writing written by expert writers of English. I found the articles for this second corpus by looking at the *International Journal of Bilingualism*, which was found under the *Catalogo dei Periodici Elettronici*, available at the University and Padua and also at home (but, in this second case, one has to download and install the Proxy Docile to access the catalogue). Here is a table with the main information about the NNS corpus:

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Text types              | Student essays   |
| Language                | English  |
| Authorship              | NNS students studying English at the University of Padua |
| Subject                 | Bilingualism   |
| Date                    | 2016   |
| N° of texts             | 136  |
| N° of types             | 3,806  |
| N° of tokens            | 75,880   |
| Average length of texts | 558 words  |

Table 1: main information about NNS corpus

Here, instead, is the table with the main information about NS corpus (i.e. the one written by expert writers of English):

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Text types              | Journal articles   |
| Language                | English  |
| Authorship              | Expert writers writing for the International Journal of Bilingualism |
| Subject                 | Bilingualism   |
| Date                    | 2007-2016  |
| N° of texts             | 20   |
| N° of types             | 8,113  |
| N° of tokens            | 128,670  |
| Average length of texts | 6,434 words  |

Table 2: main information about expert writers' corpus

### 3.2 Methods

In order to analyze the corpora, first of all I have prepared a list of hedges and one of boosters. These items were collected by looking at instances of hedges and boosters in

the articles and books used for chapter 2. In these lists I tried to include modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, and other expressions. The list of hedges include the following lexical items: *may, would, possible/possibly, the possibility that, could, might, can, try, attempt, think, believe, according to, normally, essentially, hypothesize, speculate, assume, suggest, indicate, propose, seem, assumption, about, probable, probably, presumably, usually, rarely, virtually, as much as, it is unlikely/likely, perhaps, it appears that, apparently, should, partially, one implication of my research, it is unclear, approximately, generally, quite, and maybe* (for a total of 44 hedges examined). The list of boosters, on the other hand, include the following elements: *must, the fact that, research shows that, it is clear, clearly, surely, definitely, strongly, actually, it is evident that, indeed, always, obviously, one obvious implication, of course, demonstrate, highly, it is generally believed, and it is undoubtedly* (for a total of 19 boosters examined). The total of hedges found in the NNS corpus is 1,579, whereas that of boosters is 193; the total of hedges found in the first eleven journal articles of the expert writers' corpus is 782, whereas that of boosters is 140. The normalized frequency per 10,000 words is: of 208 hedges in the NNS corpus and of 25 boosters in the NNS corpus; in the expert writers' corpus, it is of 61 hedges and of 11 boosters.

For the analysis of the first corpus I used the AntConc concordancing software, which is downloadable for free on the website of Professor Laurence Anthony: <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>. I used the concordance button to see the concordances of each hedge and booster, and clicked on the text button to see each hedge and booster in context, in order to determine whether that specific element was a real hedge/booster or not. For instance, *about* appeared 129 times in the first corpus, but only once with the meaning of “more or less”, which I considered to be a real hedge since it was used as an approximator, whereas the other times it was used to introduce a complement of specification (i.e. mainly *about bilingual education*). Here is the only example of *about* in the NNS corpus used as an approximator:

1        *In the world we live in today, there are 196 sovereign states, yet the spoken languages are **about** 6000.*

I also paid attention to the fact that these hedges/boosters were not inserted in citations of other authors, in order to provide just examples used by non-native speakers of English, namely Italian students of this language. This and the procedure described above was applied also to the expert writers' corpus.

### 3.3 Results of the investigation

The number of real hedges and boosters (together with the totals and the percentage) are provided in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively. These lists follow the alphabetical order.

| HEDGE(S)        | N° OF HITS | N° OF HEDGES | PERCENTAGE (=number of each hedge/ total number of hedges x 100) |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|--|
| About           | 129        | 1            | 0.06%  |
| According to    | 157        | 155          | 9.82%  |
| Apparently      | 3          | 2            | 0.13%  |
| Approximately   | 1          | 1            | 0.06%  |
| As much as      | 6          | 2            | 0.13%  |
| Assume          | 6          | 2            | 0.13%  |
| Assumption      | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| Attempt         | 3          | 0            | 0%   |
| Believe         | 29         | 29           | 1.84%  |
| Can             | 503        | 392          | 24.82%   |
| Could           | 231        | 219          | 13.87%   |
| Essentially     | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| Generally       | 25         | 22           | 1.39%  |
| Hypothesize     | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| Indicate        | 8          | 6            | 0.38%  |
| It appears that | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| It is likely    | 3          | 2            | 0.13%  |
| It is unclear   | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| It is unlikely  | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| May             | 305        | 234          | 14.82%   |
| Maybe           | 7          | 6            | 0.38%  |
| Might           | 92         | 87           | 5.51%  |

|                                      |       |       |         |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Normally                             | 1     | 1     | 0.06%   |
| One<br>implication of<br>my research | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Partially                            | 2     | 1     | 0.06%   |
| Perhaps                              | 6     | 6     | 0.38%   |
| Possible                             | 66    | 55    | 3.48%   |
| Possibly                             | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Presumably                           | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Probable                             | 2     | 2     | 0.13%   |
| Probably                             | 21    | 20    | 1.27%   |
| Propose                              | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Quite                                | 9     | 6     | 0.38%   |
| Rarely                               | 1     | 1     | 0.06%   |
| Seem                                 | 20    | 19    | 1.20%   |
| Should                               | 164   | 152   | 9.63%   |
| Speculate                            | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Suggest                              | 18    | 12    | 0.76%   |
| The possibility<br>that              | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Think                                | 88    | 31    | 1.96%   |
| Try                                  | 28    | 26    | 1.65%   |
| Usually                              | 29    | 17    | 1.08%   |
| Virtually                            | 0     | 0     | 0%      |
| Would                                | 80    | 70    | 4.43%   |
| TOTALS                               | 2,043 | 1,579 | 100.06% |

Table 3: number of hits, of hedges and percentage in the NNS corpus

| BOOSTER(S<br>)                 | N°<br>OF<br>HIT<br>S | N° OF<br>BOOSTER<br>S | PERCENTAG<br>E (=number of<br>each<br>booster/total<br>number of<br>boosters x 100) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Actually                       | 15                   | 8                     | 4.15%   |
| Always                         | 59                   | 14                    | 7.25%   |
| Clearly                        | 14                   | 5                     | 2.59%   |
| Definitely                     | 15                   | 11                    | 5.7%  |
| Demonstrate                    | 0                    | 0                     | 0%  |
| Highly                         | 3                    | 1                     | 0.52%   |
| Indeed                         | 61                   | 59                    | 30.56%  |
| It is clear                    | 6                    | 4                     | 2.07%   |
| It is evident                  | 1                    | 1                     | 0.52%   |
| It is<br>generally<br>believed | 0                    | 0                     | 0%  |
| It is<br>undoubtedly           | 0                    | 0                     | 0%  |
| Must                           | 36                   | 30                    | 15.54%  |
| Obviously                      | 6                    | 5                     | 2.59%   |
| Of course                      | 8                    | 6                     | 3.11%   |
| One obvious<br>implication     | 0                    | 0                     | 0%  |
| Research<br>shows that         | 2                    | 2                     | 1.04%   |
| Strongly                       | 13                   | 12                    | 6.22%   |
| Surely                         | 12                   | 9                     | 4.66%   |
| The fact that                  | 28                   | 26                    | 13.47%  |
| TOTALS                         | 279                  | 193                   | 99.99%  |

Table 4: number of hits, of boosters and percentage in the NNS corpus

We can therefore reply to the first research question: 1) Do ESL learners (i.e. in our case, Italian students of English) use more hedges or boosters in academic writing? From the analysis of this corpus, it seems that Italian students of English use far more hedges than boosters in academic writing: we have a total of 1,579 hedges and a total of 193 boosters (although we must consider that the list of hedges is longer than that of boosters). Moreover, this finding is in contrast with some of the studies we have seen in chapter 2. It does not confirm the studies by Hyland (2000), who stated that NNS experience difficulties with the use of hedging and with Hinkel (2005), who stated that NNS writing is prone to exaggerations and overstatements. Only Serholt (2012) stated that, in her case, Swedish learners of English (i.e. L2 learners) used hedges more frequently than boosters (and this regardless of gender).

We can also answer the second research question: 2a) what are the five most commonly used hedges by these students?, 2b) what are the five most commonly used boosters by these students? Here Table 5 shows the five most commonly used hedges by these students:

| Most commonly used hedges | N° of hedges |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Can                    | 392          |
| 2. May                    | 234          |
| 3. Could                  | 219          |
| 4. According to           | 155          |
| 5. Should                 | 152          |

Table 5: The five most commonly used hedges by NNS students

As one can see, the five most commonly used hedges by these students are the following: the modal verbs *can* (392 hedges, which represents the 24.82% of the total number of hedges; e.g. *Bilinguals **can** be described as “people who develop some knowledge and ability in a second language”*), *may* (234 hedges, 14.82%; e.g. *But, speaking two languages and being part of two different cultures **may** represent a problem of identity*), *could* (219 hedges, 13.87%; e.g. *At the beginning children who have both monolingual parents **could** have difficulties to learn the foreign language*

*talked at school and parents **could** not help them in this problem*), the expression *according to* (155 hedges, 9.82%; e.g. *According to Baker and Prys Jones (1998: 5), bilingualism: "...is usually reserved to describe two languages within an individual"*), and finally the modal verb *should* (152 hedges, 9.63%; e.g. *In addition teachers **should** not be worried about changings but they should keep themselves up to date, for instance through technology*).

On the other hand, the five most commonly used boosters by these students are provided by Table 6:

| Most commonly used boosters | N° of boosters |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Indeed                   | 59             |
| 2. Must                     | 30             |
| 3. The fact that            | 26             |
| 4. Strongly                 | 12             |
| 5. Surely                   | 9              |

Table 6: The five most commonly used boosters by NNS students

As one can see, the five most commonly used boosters by these students include: *indeed* (59 boosters, 30.56%; e.g. *It is **indeed** this last purpose which inspired the experiments of the University of Padua conducted between 2008 and 2009*), which is by far the most commonly used booster in my sample, *must* (30 boosters, 15.54%; e.g. *There is indeed evidence to stress the importance of promoting bilingualism. This is why, bilingual children's parents **must** enable them to obtain a full proficiency in both the children's first and second language*), *the fact that* (26 boosters, 13.47%; e.g. *when bilingual children are exposed to another culture, they are able to manifest a good approach with it, whereas monolingual children do not. This can be due to **the fact that** the former is predisposed to enter in other cultures*), *strongly* (12 boosters, 6.22%; e.g. *this is one of the main reason why bilingual education should be **strongly** valorised*), and *surely* (9 boosters, 4.66%; e.g. *All things considered, raising a child as a bilingual is **surely** challenging because there would be many problems to figure out, not only concerning children themselves but also parents*). However, if we look at the percentages which I have just reported in brackets, we can see that there is only a slight



difference between hedges and boosters, and that in the case of *indeed* this booster supersedes the hedge *can* (30.56% vs. 24.82%).

There are also other interesting findings. In the table of hedges, we can see that some hedges did not appear at all in the corpus, for example *hypothesize*, *speculate*, *propose*, *assumption*, *presumably* etc. It is probable that these students are less familiar with these verbs and expressions so that they could not use them. Also, I did not report it in the table, but *believe* was sometimes used with *strongly* and *firmly* before, which makes it somewhat more of a booster than of a hedge. Here are the instances of *believe* with *strongly* and *firmly* before:

1        *The fact some friends of mine are bilingual and they have almost all the advantages above, brings me to support this view and to **strongly** believe in the importance of growing up a child as bilingual.*

2        *I **strongly** believe that no parent should fear bilingualism and deprive his/her child of this extraordinary chance that makes the “linguistic semiotic capital of human kind [...] as rich and as diversified as possible” (Kramsch, 1998: 77).*

3        *Thus, “the bilingual has the chance of bridging that generation gap, building closer relationship with relatives, and feeling a sense of belonging and rootedness with the extended family” (Baker, Colin & Prys Jones, Sylvia. 1998). I **firmly** believe this aspect is often not considered.*

As regards boosters, also in the case of boosters we find expressions like *one obvious implication*, *demonstrate*, *it is generally believed* and *it is undoubtedly* which are missing in the corpus.

The following tables provide the number of real hedges and boosters (together with the totals and the percentage) for the first eleven articles of the expert writers' corpus.

| HEDGE(S)                           | N° OF HITS | N° OF HEDGES | PERCENTAGE (=number of each hedge/ total number of hedges x 100) |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--|
| About                              | 76         | 9            | 1.15%  |
| According to                       | 36         | 14           | 1.79%  |
| Apparently                         | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| Approximately                      | 3          | 3            | 0.38%  |
| As much as                         | 8          | 7            | 0.9%   |
| Assume                             | 4          | 3            | 0.38%  |
| Assumption                         | 9          | 7            | 0.9%   |
| Attempt                            | 8          | 8            | 1.02%  |
| Believe                            | 3          | 2            | 0.26%  |
| Can                                | 252        | 191          | 24.4%  |
| Could                              | 56         | 49           | 6.27%  |
| Essentially                        | 3          | 2            | 0.26%  |
| Generally                          | 14         | 11           | 1.41%  |
| Hypothesize                        | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| Indicate                           | 11         | 6            | 0.77%  |
| It appears that                    | 1          | 1            | 0.13%  |
| It is likely                       | 2          | 2            | 0.26%  |
| It is unclear                      | 0          | 0            | 0%   |
| It is unlikely                     | 1          | 1            | 0.13%  |
| May                                | 181        | 167          | 21.4%  |
| Maybe                              | 6          | 5            | 0.64%  |
| Might                              | 28         | 27           | 3.45%  |
| Normally                           | 3          | 3            | 0.38%  |
| One implication of my/our research | 0          | 0            | 0%   |

|                         |     |     |         |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|---------|
| Partially               | 2   | 2   | 0.26%   |
| Perhaps                 | 6   | 6   | 0.77%   |
| Possible                | 39  | 31  | 3.96%   |
| Possibly                | 2   | 1   | 0.13%   |
| Presumably              | 1   | 1   | 0.13%   |
| Probable                | 0   | 0   | 0%      |
| Probably                | 11  | 11  | 1.41%   |
| Propose                 | 7   | 6   | 0.77%   |
| Quite                   | 21  | 20  | 2.56%   |
| Rarely                  | 9   | 4   | 0.51%   |
| Seem                    | 16  | 16  | 2.05%   |
| Should                  | 38  | 34  | 4.35%   |
| Speculate               | 1   | 1   | 0.13%   |
| Suggest                 | 22  | 21  | 2.69%   |
| The possibility<br>that | 4   | 3   | 0.38%   |
| Think                   | 22  | 20  | 2.56%   |
| Try                     | 7   | 2   | 0.26%   |
| Usually                 | 21  | 21  | 2.69%   |
| Virtually               | 1   | 0   | 0%      |
| Would                   | 90  | 64  | 8.18%   |
| TOTALS                  | 999 | 782 | 100.07% |

Table 7: number of hits, of hedges and percentage in the first eleven articles of the expert writers' corpus

| BOOSTER(S )              | N° OF HITS | N° OF BOOSTERS | PERCENTAGE (=number of each booster/total number of boosters x 100) |
|--------------------------|------------|----------------|---|
| Actually                 | 10         | 7              | 5%  |
| Always                   | 20         | 12             | 8.57%   |
| Clearly                  | 32         | 24             | 17.14%  |
| Definitely               | 4          | 2              | 1.43%   |
| Demonstrate              | 9          | 6              | 4.29%   |
| Highly                   | 8          | 4              | 2.86%   |
| Indeed                   | 17         | 17             | 12.14%  |
| It is clear              | 7          | 6              | 4.29%   |
| It is evident            | 3          | 3              | 2.14%   |
| It is generally believed | 0          | 0              | 0%  |
| It is undoubtedly        | 0          | 0              | 0%  |
| Must                     | 29         | 27             | 19.29%  |
| Obviously                | 2          | 2              | 1.43%   |
| Of course                | 11         | 3              | 2.14%   |
| One obvious implication  | 0          | 0              | 0%  |
| Research shows that      | 1          | 1              | 0.71%   |
| Strongly                 | 7          | 5              | 3.57%   |
| Surely                   | 0          | 0              | 0%  |
| The fact that            | 26         | 21             | 15%   |
| TOTALS                   | 186        | 140            | 100%  |

Table 8: number of hits, of boosters and percentage in the first eleven articles of the expert writers' corpus

In this case too, I have prepared two tables with the most commonly used hedges and boosters by expert writers of English, namely Tables 9 and 10.

| Most commonly used hedges | N° of hedges |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Can                    | 191          |
| 2. May                    | 167          |
| 3. Would                  | 64           |
| 4. Could                  | 49           |
| 5. Should                 | 34           |

Table 9: The five most commonly used hedges by expert writers of English

| Most commonly used boosters | N° of boosters |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Must                     | 27             |
| 2. The fact that            | 21             |
| 3. Clearly                  | 24             |
| 4. Indeed                   | 17             |
| 5. Always                   | 12             |

Table 10: The five most commonly used boosters by expert writers of English

As one can see, there are both similarities and differences between the two corpora. By comparing Table 9 with Table 5, we can see that both *can* (e.g. *We **can** assume that there are many such people in the catchment area of the Spanglish Times[...]*) and *may* (e.g. *All these are “noise” factors that **may** trigger a bilingual mode (or an intermediary mode) and hence product contact phenomena which cannot be classified as transferences/interferences*) are the first two most commonly used hedges by both NNS and expert writers. *Could* (e.g. *[...] it **could** be assumed that the emotional stimuli produce systematic increases in physiological arousal across different experimental settings*), instead, was the third most commonly used hedge by NNS, whereas it becomes the fourth most commonly used hedge by expert writers. *Should* (e.g. *We **should** note here that it is rare that the two cultures have the same importance in the life of the bicultural*) is the fifth most commonly used hedge by both NNS and expert writers of English. *According to* (e.g. ***According to** Gumperz (1971, 1995)*)

*speech communities are based on language repertoires of conventionalized social styles*) is present only in Table 5.

By comparing Table 10 with Table 6, instead, we can see again both similarities and differences between NNS and expert writers of English. *Indeed* (e.g. **Indeed** *Natasha was found to use the L1 for about 75 per cent of the lesson*) which was the first most commonly used booster by NNS, becomes only the fourth most commonly used booster by expert writers of English. *Must* (e.g. *Other factors **must** also be present [...]*) and *the fact that* (e.g. **The fact that** *fast activation of word semantics was found in L2 is also in line with research showing that not only L1 but also L2 word forms can automatically access their underlying semantic representation very quickly [...]*) are very much used by both NNS and expert writers, although they are, respectively, the second and the third most commonly used boosters in the NNS corpus, and the first and the second most commonly used boosters in the expert writers' corpus. *Strongly* and *surely* are absent from Table 10, and we find instead *clearly* (third place; e.g. **Clearly**, *for a rich analysis of this multilingual advertisement, both visual and linguistic aspects must be taken into account*) and *always* (fifth place; e.g. *I am not sure that speakers **always** "recognize" such errors, as Paradis writes* ).

As I would like to provide a more qualitative analysis, I will now look in greater detail at how one hedge and one booster, namely the commonly found in the NNS corpus hedge *according to* and the commonly found in the expert writers' corpus booster *clearly*, respectively, are used in the two corpora. First of all, I will provide definitions of *according to* found in dictionaries and grammars.

As regards this hedge, *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2003) gives the following three definitions (with relative examples) of *according to* (indicated as preposition): 1) as shown by something or stated by someone (e.g. *According to the police, his attackers beat him with a blunt instrument*); 2) in a way that depends on differences in situations or amounts (e.g. *You will be paid according to the amount of work you do*); 3) in a way that agrees with a system or a plan, or obeys a set of rules (e.g. *The game will be played according to rules laid down for the 1992 Cup*). Under definition 1 we also find this important note: "Do not say "according to me" or "according to my opinion/point of view". Say **in my opinion**: *in my opinion his first book is much better*".

On the other hand, in the *Pocket Oxford Thesaurus* (2008) we find instead synonyms of *according to* under *according* (which is indicated as an adverb): we have

two entries with two relative examples. The first one is *Cook the rice according to instructions* and the synonyms are: *in line with, as per, in accordance with*. The second one is *Salary will be fixed according to experience* and the synonyms are: *in proportion to, proportional to, commensurate with, in relation to, relative to, again in line with and corresponding to*.

If we look at online definitions of this hedge, we can see that the website of the *Cambridge English Dictionary*<sup>2</sup> subdivides the definitions for English into two categories: the first one is *according to* (opinion), the second one is *according to* (method). As regards the first definition, we find “as stated by” (e.g. *According to Sarah they're not getting on very well at the moment*); as regards the second definition, we find “in a way that agrees with” (e.g. *Students are all put in different groups according to their ability*). This website also provides the definitions for American English (“as stated by”; “in a way that agrees with; by”) and Business English (“used for saying which person, group, piece of information, etc. provides a particular fact”, e.g. *According to a company spokesman, the firm is expected to have sales of more than \$3.5 billion this year*). Once again on the webpage that I have reported, we find *according to* related to grammar (from *English Grammar Today*). This is what is stated: “*According to* means ‘as reported by’ or ‘as stated by’ and refers to an opinion which is not the speaker’s opinion. *According to* usually occurs in front position. It is commonly followed by a noun phrase and sometimes by a clause: ***According to* Jeff, the film starts at 7.30; *According to* the instructions, you’ll need to buy some glue; The government, ***according to* a poll taken last month, may lose the next election**. We often use *according to* in formal contexts to refer to official evidence such as statistics or reports: ***According to* a recent report by the Department of Health, most people still do not take enough exercise**. *According to* also means ‘depending on’ or ‘in agreement with’: *They take a test and are then put in to groups **according to** their ability; The rents are high but they vary **according to** whether you want a garden*. Typical error: we only use *according to* when we refer to an opinion from someone else or somewhere else. When we talk about our opinion, we use phrases such as ‘in my opinion’ or ‘in our view’: ***In my opinion, they were not very polite***. Not: *According to me ...*”.**

As concerns other websites, the website of the *Collins English Dictionary*<sup>3</sup> reports various acceptations of the expression *according to*. The first one states: “If

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<sup>2</sup> Here is the link for *according to*: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/according-to>

<sup>3</sup> Here is the link for *according to*: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/according-to>

someone says that something is true **according to** a particular person, book, or other source of information, they are indicating where they got their information” (e.g. *Philip stayed at the hotel, according to Mr Hemming*). Synonyms are: *as claimed by, in the opinion of, on the authority of, as stated by*. The second one states: “If something is done **according to** a particular set of principles, these principles are used as a basis for the way it is done” (e.g. *They must take their own decision according to their own legal advice*). Synonyms are: *in keeping with, in line with, consistent with, in accordance with*. The third one states: “If something varies according to a changing factor, it varies in a way that is determined by this factor” (e.g. *Prices vary according to the quantity ordered*). Synonyms are: *in relation to, depending on, in proportion to, proportional to*. The website also distinguishes between British and American English. The definitions provided for BrE are the same of those I have just reported; those for AmE are: 1. in agreement with 2. in the order of (e.g. arranged according to size) 3. as stated in or reported by.<sup>4</sup>

Very similar definitions are given also by the website of the *MacMillan Dictionary*.<sup>5</sup> It is stated that: “1) if you do something according to a plan, system, or set of rules, you do it in a way that agrees with or obeys that plan, system, or set of rules (e.g. *We should try to play the game according to the rules*). Synonyms and related words: According to something: *according to, under, by...* ; 2) used for saying where information or ideas have come from (e.g. *According to newspaper reports, fighting has broken out in the northern provinces*). Synonyms and related words: According to someone: *according to, officially, in someone’s opinion...*; 3) used for saying that something changes or is different depending on the situation (e.g. *Each child will be helped according to his or her needs*). Synonyms and related words: According to something: *according to, under, by...*”

Finally, as concerns websites once again, the website of the *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*<sup>6</sup> reports other similar definitions under *according* (which is indicated as an adverb): 1) usually *according to*: As stated by or in (e.g. *the outlook for investors is not bright, according to financial experts*). Synonyms: *as stated by, as maintained by, as claimed by, on the authority of, on the report of, in the opinion of*; 2) In a manner corresponding or conforming to (e.g. *cook the rice according to the*

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<sup>4</sup> These definitions are taken from the *Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th Edition. Copyright © 2010 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. All rights reserved.*

<sup>5</sup> Here is the link for *according to*: <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/according-to>.

<sup>6</sup> Here is the link for *according to*: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/according>.



instructions). Synonyms: *as specified by, as per, in accordance with, in compliance with, in agreement with, in line with, in keeping with, commensurate with, in harmony with, in conformity with, in obedience to, true to, in fulfillment of, following, honouring, heeding, observing*; 3) In proportion or relation to (*salary will be fixed according to experience*). Synonyms: *in proportion to, proportional to, commensurate with, in relation to, relative to, corresponding to, dependent on, based on*.

Finally, as concerns grammars, Downing and Locke (2006) do not give a definition of *according to*, but list it under the two-word prepositions, explaining that these consists of a preposition, an adjective, an adverb or a conjunction followed by one of the prepositions *for, from, of, to, with*. The authors also state that, in most cases, the meaning is expressed by the first word, the second serving to link the preposition to the complement (as is the case with *according to*).

I will now make a comparison between the learners' corpus and the expert writers' corpus by dividing examples of *according to* in the NNS corpus into three categories:

- examples of *according to* exactly used in the same way of expert writers;
- examples of *according to* that are actually mistakes in the students' corpus;
- examples of *according to* differently used than expert writers but not grammatically incorrect.

As regards the first point, most examples are exactly used in the same way of expert writers. For instance:

|   |
|---|
| <p><i><b>According to</b> Francois Grosjean bilingualism is not a rare phenomenon and “is found in all parts of the world, at all levels of society, in all age groups”</i></p> |
|---|

|  |
|--|
| <p><i><b>According to</b> Baker and Prys Jones (1998 :469) there are weak and strong forms of bilingual education.</i></p> |
|--|

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>The widespread idea <b>according to</b> which bilingual people master two languages in the same way and with the same proficiency concerns a very small number of bilinguals.</i></p> |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| <p><i><b>According to</b> Baker and Prys Jones (1998: 5), bilingualism: “...is usually reserved to describe two languages within an individual”</i></p> |
|---|

So this system is not enough, and **according to** Professor Rebecca Oxford (Oxford, Rebecca L. 1990): “It is likely that learning<sup>1</sup> and acquisition<sup>2</sup> are not mutually exclusive but are rather parts of a potentially integrated experience [...]

**According to** Dr Carol Griffith it has become known only in 1975 with an article written by Joan Rubin, in which she defined the learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” or simply “what students do” (Griffiths, Carol. 2008:1)

**According to** most people, bilinguals should reach the same ( high) level in both of their languages and consider themselves as bicultural as well.

**According to** Baker and Jones :” [...]few bilinguals are equally proficient in both languages, even though this is often thought to be the case. One languages tends to be stronger and better developed than the other”.

In addition , **according to** Riley (Riley, Philip. 2007.) there is a “close relationship between “occupation” and vocabulary” that is to say, the more we are immersed in a certain context, the more we learn and we express by means of that vocabulary, “ [...] you are much more likely to know and use domain specific terms if you are a practitioner in the domain in question” **according to** Kramsch 1998, chapter 1).

Professor Grosjean [...] asserts that “becoming bicultural is at times more difficult than becoming bilingual”. Some young people decide to live following only one culture and **according to** his studies, people could be dissatisfied with this decision in future.

Does he would be able to switch way of thinking **according to** the language that she or he wants to speak?

**According to** what a sociolinguistic said, bilingualism defines a person who has some functional ability in a second language (Spolsky, 1998).

They can easily switch languages **according to** the situation and the people around them.

|   |
|---|
| <i>Furthermore grammar and vocabulary vary <b>according to</b> the people speaker [sic] is talking to.</i>  |
| <i>as Grosjean says, a bilingual person can have the possibility to interchange the two languages, <b>according to</b> different situations and contexts.</i>                     |
| <i>[...] this “brain training” is very helpful, mostly for kids: it can build more elastic minds as they can switch the two or more languages <b>according to</b> situations.</i> |

Table 11: Examples of *according to* used in the same way of expert writers

As regards the second point, there are three mistakes in the NNS corpus: two examples with *\*according to me* and one with *\*according to my point of view* (instead of *in my opinion*). Here are the examples:

|   |
|---|
| <i>Now, <b>*according to me</b> and according to what she said, she feels richer than another American girl does, because of her knowledge.</i> |
| <i><b>*According to me</b>, he/she should talk language as much as he/she talks his/her mother tongue.</i>                                      |
| <i><b>*According to my point of view</b>, this is one of the main reason why bilingual education should be strongly valorized.</i>              |

Table 12: Examples of *according to* that are actually mistakes in the learners' corpus

As regards the third point, there are no examples of *according to* used differently from expert writers but not grammatically incorrect, so I decided to focus on the examples of the expert writers corpus that look more complex than those of the NNS:

|   |
|---|
| <i><b>According to</b> the nature of the study, these features would be included or put aside.</i>              |
| <i>[...] participants were asked to rate the words <b>according to</b> their unpleasantness.</i>                |
| <i><b>According to</b> this view, differences in emotionality of L1 and L2 depend on the age of acquisition</i> |

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>According to the emotional contexts of learning theory, differences between L1 and L2 would be predicted, as the bilinguals were late learners of L2 and reported a lower level of proficiency in this language.</i></p>  |
| <p><i>The stimuli consisted of four lists of 20 English words, which were selected according to their emotional content (for full list of items see Appendix 2).</i></p>  |
| <p><i>[...] not all behaviours, beliefs and attitudes can be modified according to the cultural situation the bicultural person is in.</i></p>  |
| <p><i>In fact, as we will see later on in this paper, many biculturals only identify with the one or the other culture, or sometimes do not identify with either, even though they are bicultural according to the characteristics given above.</i></p>   |
| <p><i>Thus, many biculturals will know how to adapt to such situations as welcoming monocultural acquaintances at home, holding a meeting at home, dealing with relatives who belong to just one culture, doing business with the local administration, dressing according to the context and so on.</i></p>              |
| <p><i>The following is an individual account of the observed data as well as the reasoning provided by each teacher (via the questionnaires and interviews) presented according to their degree of L1 use.</i></p>  |
| <p><i>According to the local language maxim, speakers will prefer English whenever possible, since it is the official language of the court.</i></p>  |
| <p><i>The CCT was presented in either English or French according to the child's L1.</i></p>  |
| <p><i>According to parental reports, our sample of 24-month-old bilinguals had developed an expressive vocabulary size in L1 that was smaller than that of monolinguals.</i></p>  |
| <p><i>According to the investigation of Roberts (2005), the English-as-a-foreign-language speaker avoids idiomaticity (formulaic expressions)[...]<br/>according to this line of argument, this is really an advertisement for a Spanish speaker, although it has the appearance of one addressed to a bilingual.</i></p> |

*For example, in an accounting record regarding candles, the Latin (but almost-English) word *candela* ends with an abbreviation that allows it to be read as 'candle' or 'candelarum' (the genitive plural, and correct Latin form in this instance), 'according to competence and choice' (Wright, 2000, p. 151).*

Table 13: Examples of *according to* of the expert writers corpus that look more complex than those of the NNS corpus

I will now follow the same procedure for the booster *clearly*. As regards the definitions of this booster in paper dictionaries, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2003) lists three entries for the booster *clearly*: “1) [sentence adverb] without any doubt = **obviously**: *Clearly, ignoring him had been a mistake*; 2) in a way that is easy to see, hear, or understand: *Please speak clearly/ The economy was clearly failing*; 3) in a way that is sensible: *I wasn't thinking clearly*” (2003: 274). On the other hand, the *Pocket Oxford Thesaurus* (2008) lists the synonyms of *clearly* (indicated as an adverb) under two entries: “1) *write clearly*: **intelligibly**, plainly, distinctly, comprehensibly, legibly, audibly; 2) *clearly, substantial changes are needed*: **obviously**, evidently, patently, unquestionably, undoubtedly, without doubt, plainly, undeniably, incontrovertibly, doubtless, it goes without saying, needless to say” (2008: 128).

As regards websites, the website of the *Cambridge English Dictionary*<sup>7</sup> reports three entries for the English meaning of *clearly*: *clearly* (easy to understand: in a way that is easy to see, hear, read, or understand), *clearly* (certain: used to show that you think something is obvious or certain), and *clearly* (not confused: When you think clearly, you are not confused). The respective examples are (I will list here just one example for each entry, where there are any): *When you fill in the form, please write clearly in black ink*; *Clearly, you should tell her the truth*, whereas for the third entry there are no examples given. As regards the American meanings, we find two acceptations: *clearly* (understandably: in a way that is easy to understand, or easy to see or hear) and *clearly* (certainly: certainly; obviously; without doubt). The respective examples are: *I think this report clearly shows why we have to act now* and *The accident was clearly the truck driver's fault*.

<sup>7</sup> Here is the link for *clearly*: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/clearly>.

Another website, namely that of the *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*<sup>8</sup>, gives two entries, but they are connected to each other: 1) in a clear manner; with clarity: *'her ability to write clearly, [as submodifier] 'on white paper, the seeds are clearly visible and 1.1) [sentence adverb] Without doubt; obviously, 'clearly, things have changed in the last six weeks'*.

Furthermore, the website of the *Macmillan Dictionary*<sup>9</sup> lists three acceptations of *clearly*: 1) used for showing that what you are saying is true and that most people will realize this, e.g. *Both companies clearly like to do things their own way*; 2) in a way that people can easily see, hear, or understand, e.g. *His contract clearly states that he cannot leave before next year*, and 3) in a way that is sensible and not confused, e.g. *You can't think clearly on four hours' sleep*. The synonyms and related words for number 1 are *actually, certainly, clearly...*, those for number 2 are *obvious, apparent, show up...*, and finally those for number 3 (on the website indicated actually as "a") are *alert, lucid, be clear that...*

Finally, the website of the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*<sup>10</sup> lists three definitions that are very similar to those listed above: 1) in a way that is easy to see or hear (e.g. *It's difficult to see anything clearly in this mirror*); 2) in a way that is sensible and easy to understand (e.g. *She explained everything very clearly*) and 3) used to emphasize that what you are saying is obvious and true (e.g. *Clearly, this will cost a lot more than we realized*; it is also indicated that its synonym is *obviously*).

As concerns grammars, Downing and Locke (2006) do not provide a definition for *clearly*, but list the general characteristics of adverbs and adverbial groups, here summarized: 1) adverbs modify verbs, clauses, adjectives and other adverbs; 2) adverbs and adverbial groups function typically in the clause as Adjunct or Complement, and in group structures as pre-modifier and post-modifier; 3) adverbs and adverbial groups express a variety of types and subtypes of meaning; 4) they perform a wide variety of syntactic functions; 5) they can occupy different positions in clause structure; and 6) they are very frequently optional.

As I have collected a consistent number of definitions, I will now proceed to the comparison between expert writers' use of *clearly* and student writers' use of this booster. I noticed that this booster is used both by students and expert writers of my

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<sup>8</sup> Here is the link for *clearly*: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/clearly>.

<sup>9</sup> Here is the link for *clearly*: <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/clearly>.

<sup>10</sup> Here is the link for *clearly*: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/clearly>.

corpus, but more used by experts. As with the hedge *according to*, I will look for these three points:

- examples of *clearly* exactly used in the same way of expert writers;
- examples of *clearly* that are actually mistakes in the students' corpus
- examples of *clearly* differently used than expert writers but not grammatically incorrect.

As regards the first point, I noticed that some of the examples of *clearly* in the NNS corpus come from quotations: this may be the reason why they are less numerous (as already mentioned in my thesis, I did not consider hedges and boosters that came from quotations). In any case, here are the examples that are similar to those of expert writers (not considering quotations):

*On the opposite side there are many advantages and disadvantages that can be distinguished in more concrete and immediate ones and potential and future ones, and they are both **clearly** identified by Baker (1995: 10-12; 1998: 6, 7).*

*[...] as Baker (1995:10 ) claims that “bilingualism is more than owning two languages”. However, it comes **clearly** to light that it is a widespread phenomenon, which involves “more than half the world’ [...]*

*[...] the parents have to deal with a strenuous task, but the reward for these efforts **clearly** brings more advantages than disadvantages for what concern bilingual children.*

*Therefore, the more competence you have, the better it is, and this is **clearly** one of the biggest advantages of being bilingual [...]*

*To conclude, as this essay **clearly** shows there are more advantages than disadvantages in raising a bilingual child.*

*Over the last two centuries the number of children grown up as bilingual has been significantly increased and will probably keep on rising in future. One of the main reasons is the internationalization, that we are **clearly** experimenting in this century [...]*

*Fourthly, it has been **clearly** proven that a wider portfolio of languages facilitates the access to the labour market [...]*

*To conclude, this essay **clearly** shows that there are much more advantages than disadvantages in raising a bilingual child.*

*Furthermore, research has proved that bilingual children are more creative and tend to have a more flexible mind; they **clearly** own this sort of “advantages” since they are able to think in two different manners, associating two words to the same concept or object.*

Table 14: Examples of *clearly* used in the same way of expert writers

As regards the second point, I noticed just one mistake in the use of *clearly* by students, namely *\*a clearly* instead of *a clear*:

*\*A **clearly** definition of bilingualism is difficult to be found, however Spolsky affirms that “the simplest definition of a bilingual is a person who has some functional ability in a second language” (1998: 45).*

Table 15: Example of *clearly* that is actually a mistake

As regards the third point, I noticed that expert writers used **clearly** at the beginning of some sentences, which I did not see in the students’ sentences. Here are the examples I found:

***Clearly**, psycholinguistics models will have to be very detailed to account for such on-line bilingual contact phenomena.*

***Clearly**, and not too surprisingly, texts that contained interferences gave bilinguals no problems [...]*

***Clearly** interferences such as ‘partitures’, ‘autogramme’, ‘dressure’ and ‘prognose’ slowed both groups down.*

***Clearly**, definitions of biculturalism will have to leave open the fact that some people do indeed take part in the life of more than two cultures and that they adapt to each of these cultures, as well as combine and blend aspects of several cultures.*



Table 16: Examples of *clearly* at the beginning of sentences in the expert writers' corpus

I also have decided to look at the common patterns of two hedges, namely *could* and *should*, in both the NNS corpus and the expert writers' corpus, and to compare their use. The results for NNS are provided in Table 17 and Table 18.

| Common patterns of <i>could</i> in NNS corpus | Example(s)   |
|---|--|
| could affect (5 instances)                    | <i>However, there seem to be also some potential problems that could affect bilingual children.</i>  |
| could be (74 instances)                       | <i>bilingualism could be a problem for children's learning; this process could be challenging; every type of support could be important.</i>   |
| could cause (8 instances)                     | <i>For many, identity is not a problem but it could cause confusion.</i>   |
| could face (6 instances)                      | <i>what could be the main advantages they can gain and the main challenges parents could face?</i>   |
| could feel (4 instances)                      | <i>They could feel rejected as human beings by the society too.</i>  |
| could find (6 instances)                      | <i>[...] they could find difficult to speak one language only</i>  |
| could have (19 instances)                     | <i>it would seem that a bilingual could have a more opened mind; they could have an identity crisis; this may indicate that they could have more opportunities in their life; on the contrary, children could have some problems also at school.</i> |
| could lead (7 instances)                      | <i>achieving biculturalism through bilingualism could lead to identity struggles.</i>  |
| could not (5 instances)                       | <i>He/She could not manage the situation.</i>  |

Table 17: Common patterns of *could* in NNS corpus

| Common patterns of <i>should</i> in NNS corpus                                   | Example(s)  |
|--|---|
| should be (50 instances);<br>aware of (4 instances);<br>considered (6 instances) | <i>parents should be aware of the great possibilities given by bilingualism; it should be considered also the learning speed.</i> |
| should consider (3 instances)  | <i>we should also consider the complex phenomena of bilingualism.</i>   |
| should encourage (6 instances)   | <i>Teachers should encourage home language in school as equally important.</i>  |
| should have (4 instances)  | <i>Discussions are open especially in regard of the linguistic level that a bilingual should have.</i>                            |
| should help (3 instances)  | <i>Adults should help children to accept another language.</i>  |
| should not (17 instances)  | <i>They should not expect too much too soon from him/her.</i>   |
| should support (3 instances)   | <i>[...] parents should support their children.</i>   |
| should try (4 instances)   | <i>They should try not to point out the mistakes but to expand and to improve child's attempt to communicate.</i>                 |

Table 18: Common patterns of *should* in NNS corpus

Here, instead, in Table 19 and Table 20 I provide the results for the expert writers' corpus.

| Common patterns of <i>could</i> in the expert writers' corpus                                    | Example(s)  |
|--|---|
| could be (29 instances); expected (3 instances); observed (2 instances); predicted (2 instances) | <i>[...] differences between the emotionality of L1 and L2 could be expected if L2 has been learnt later; [...] an asymmetric distribution could be observed; It could be predicted that L1 words are</i> |

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| instances)                       | <i>likely to activate the semantic system to a greater extent [...].</i>  |
| could explain (2 instances)      | <i>The bilingual participants studied were dominant in L2, which could explain why emotional arousal associated with the prime words was accessed rapidly [...]</i>   |
| could have been (4 instances)    | <i>Because of this, it could have been introduced at the start of this paper but it was important to discuss other aspects [...]</i>  |
| could indicate (3 instances)     | <i>This finding could indicate that interpreters have better executive control of language than non-interpreters.</i>   |
| one could use (2 instances)      | <i>Since presence and acceptability judgements [sic] give similar results, one could use either approach to decide whether one is dealing with a transfer (the value word to be high) or an interference (the value would need to be low)</i> |
| some/it could well (2 instances) | <i>It could well be described as “talk between...two monolinguals who speak different languages but nevertheless understand one another”, thanks to the help of a bilingual intermediary.</i>   |

Table 19: Common patterns of *could* in the expert writers' corpus

| Common patterns of <i>should</i> in the expert writers' corpus   | Example(s)  |
|--|---|
| should be (33 instances);<br>done (2 instances);<br>emphasized (2 instances);<br>found (2 instances);<br>mentioned (2 instances);<br>noted (5 instances) | <i>“because this is how it should be done, isn't it?”; It should be emphasized that inferences can be seen as mental activations in multilingual communication; If this is indeed the case, positive significant correlations should be found between D-values for both languages among the Brussels group, but not among the Paris group; Given the two approaches, it should be</i> |

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
|                                   | <i>mentioned that in addition to the processes discussed, a whole range of discursive components comes into play [...]); It should be noted finally that both types of deviations, although sometimes quite apparent (such as a foreign accent), usually do not interfere with communication.</i> |
| should have (2 instances)         | <i>it is desirable that we should have an understanding of the circumstances [...]</i>  |
| should recall (2 instances)       | <i>[...] participants should recall the word “miner” because “miner” followed “apple” in the stimulus list.</i>   |
| should test (2 instances)         | <i>Further research should test this hypothesis.</i>  |
| should therefore be (2 instances) | <i>The creation and implementation of guidelines for L1 use in young language learners’ classrooms should therefore be perceived as a joint collaborative endeavor [...]</i>  |

Table 20: Common patterns of *should* in the expert writers’ corpus

If we look at the patterns of *could*, we can notice that there are some similarities but generally more differences in the patterns used by NNS and expert writers, respectively. As concerns similarities, we find the very frequent use of *could be* in both corpora, although we have 74 instances in the NNS corpus and just 29 in the expert writers’ corpus; moreover, whereas I found a more general use of *could be* in the NNS corpus, in the expert writers’ corpus we can find *could be expected*, *could be observed* and *could be predicted* (although, as the numbers above indicate, they are not so much frequent). We also find the very frequent use of *could have* in the NNS corpus (19 instances), whereas expert writers used *could have been* (although not so frequently: we have only 4 instances).

As concerns differences, we have patterns that are used by NNS and not by expert writers, and vice versa: *could affect*, *could cause*, *could face*, *could feel*, *could find*, *could lead* and *could not* used by NNS; *could explain*, *could indicate*, *one could use*, *some/it could well* used by expert writers. Once again, the patterns used by expert

writers are less numerous than those used by NNS (we have from 2 to 3 instances for each of the patterns just mentioned).

If we look at the patterns of *should*, once again we notice that there are some similarities but generally more differences in the patterns used by NNS and expert writers, respectively. As concerns similarities, we find the very frequent use of *should be* in both corpora, although what follows this pattern is different: *aware of* and *considered* in the NNS corpus; *done*, *emphasized*, *found*, *mentioned*, and *noted* in the expert writers' corpus.

As concerns differences, once again we have patterns that are used by NNS and not by expert writers, and vice versa: *should consider*, *should encourage*, *should help*, *should not*, *should support*, *should try* used by NNS; *should recall*, *should test*, *should therefore be* used by expert writers. Once again, the patterns used by expert writers are less numerous than those used by NNS (we have just 2 instances for each of the patterns just mentioned).

One final note: the sentences used by expert writers are generally longer and/or more complex than those used by NNS (see, for instance, the last sentence about *should* in the expert writers' corpus, where the subject is *The creation and implementation of guidelines for L1 use in young language learners' classrooms*).

We can also finally reply to the third research question: 3a+3b) As Hyland and Milton (1997) argue, are the expressions of doubt and certainty (i.e. hedges and boosters, respectively) difficult to master for non-native speakers of English (in our case, for Italian students of English)? And if so, is this a culture-related phenomenon? From the analysis I have conducted, it seems that these students generally have few difficulties in mastering hedges and boosters. We have, however, seen with the analysis of *according to* and *clearly* that sometimes students commit errors when they use these epistemic devices (i.e. the use of *according to* when referring to one own's opinion, or of *\*a clearly* instead of *a clear*, although this last mistake is probably due to an oversight), and there could be other mistakes that went unnoticed.

What is striking, in any case, is that if we look again at the total number of hedges and boosters used both by NNS and expert writers, we can see that the total of hedges found in the NNS corpus is more than the double that found in the expert writers' corpus (782 as compared to 1,579). This is partially in line with Hyland's (2001) study, which found that, in his corpus of academic writing, hedges exceeded boosters by nearly 3 to 1. According to this author, as we have seen in chapter 2, this

reflects the need for claims to be presented provisionally in academic argument. It does not appear to be true, therefore, that NNS academic prose contains fewer hedging devices than that of NS writers, as stated by Hinkel (2005) and other authors (although I must point out that we are comparing NNS and expert writers' academic writing). As regards boosters, however, we can see that the total of these devices in the NNS corpus slightly exceeds that of the expert writers' corpus (193 as compared to 140), although, as I have just pointed out, the difference is minimal.

All of this could suggest that, as stated by Hyland (2000), there actually are cross-cultural differences in expressing doubt and certainty, that is, while academic writing in German, for instance, seems to be more direct than in English (as suggested by the same author), Italian students generally tend to be more cautious. It could also be that, by being university third-year-students, these students are more aware of the rules that regulate academic writing, including the use of hedges and boosters. Indeed, Seškauskienė (2008) affirms both that, when acquiring a new language, many NNS also acquire many of its textual and metadiscoursal features, including hedges and boosters, and that hedging in L2 of proficient users of English is not less frequent than the average frequency of hedging in the papers of competent users of English.

Going into a deeper analysis, we can look again at Table 5 and Table 9, which report, respectively, the five most commonly used hedges by NNS students and by expert writers of English. It seems not to be true that L2 writers appear to depend far more heavily on modal verbs than NS, as stated by Hyland and Milton (1997). Indeed, Table 5 includes four modal verbs out of the five most commonly used hedges (i.e. *can*, *may*, *could* and *should*), whereas Table 9 includes all modal verbs (*can*, *may*, *would*, *could* and *should*)!

Once again, Hyland and Milton (1997) point out to the popularity of adverbs over semantically equivalent verb forms in L2 writing, but if we look at Table 3 (i.e. number of hits, hedges, and percentage in the NNS corpus) we can notice that adverbs are present in very small percentage (e.g. *approximately*= 0.06%, *generally*= 1.39%), when they are not absent at all (e.g. *essentially* and *possibly*). The very small frequency of adverbs may be related to what Hinkel (2005) affirms, that is, that the types of hedges in L2 academic writing are limited to those that are associated with casual spoken interactions. Indeed, while we find few adverbs or particular expressions such as *one implication of my research* (which is absent at all in the NNS corpus), we have seen above the popularity of modal verbs such as *can*, which is very used in conversation.

Instead, in her study Serholt (2012) affirmed that the modal verbs *might*, *could* and *may* appeared to be the most frequently used hedges by Swedish learners of English: in our case *might* is absent from Table 5 (but it could have been present if I had considered the ten most frequently used hedges by NNS), whereas we have seen that *may* and *could* are, respectively, at the second and third place of this Table.

Finally, Chunyu and Xuyan (2015) affirm that form complexity determines which items learners prefer so that, for instance, students will prefer, between *probably* and *maybe*, the less complex *maybe*: once again, this is not true in our case, since *probably* has a frequency percentage of 1.27%, whereas *maybe* has a frequency percentage of just 0.38% (see Table 3). This also leads us to the final point stated by the two authors, that is that when, for instance, *maybe* becomes the dominant form to mark epistemic possibility, other devices such as *perhaps*, *possibly* and *probably* become less significant: once again, this is not true in our case, since as, apart from the absent *possibly*, both *maybe* and *perhaps* have a frequency percentage of 0.38%, while the frequency percentage of *probably* is even of 1.27%.

As regards the implications for teaching academic writing related to hedges and boosters, I noticed that, while on the web one can find several articles related to the use of hedges and boosters (but especially related to hedges), I had more difficulties in finding textbooks that explain how to use these epistemic devices. Indeed, during my research for chapter 2, I found just one book out of four, namely Candlin, Crompton and Hatim's *Academic Writing Step by Step: A Research-based Approach* (2016), which devotes a very small number of pages (just two) to the use of modal verbs to indicate degrees of certainty and to the importance of hedging in popularized RAs, but no mention is made to the use of boosters. It is necessary that all the books devoted to academic writing deal with hedges and boosters, since we have seen the importance of these devices in chapter 2, and also that teachers introduce these topics when they teach how to write in academic English (or whatsoever language). Moreover, when writing chapter 2 of my thesis, I noticed that the focus of most studies is on hedges, whereas only few studies deal with boosters. As we have seen in that chapter, hedges are necessary to indicate the speaker's uncertainty about what they argue, but I believe that an overuse of hedges can be deleterious: indeed, it could give the idea that the writer is not sure about anything they state, either because they want to avoid full responsibility for the statement in utterance or because they do not have any reliable data. Consequently, they would fail in their argumentation. This is why I believe that not only

hedges but also boosters should be taught to university students learning how to write in academic English.



## CONCLUSION

As I stated in the introduction, with this thesis I wanted to deal with modality, especially with modality in academic writing. More specifically, my goals were: to provide an overview of modality and modal auxiliaries; to focus on modality in academic writing, in particular on the concepts of hedges and boosters; and finally, to investigate how hedges and boosters are used by NNS of English and to compare this use with that of expert writers.

I believe these goals have been achieved to a great extent. In chapter 1, together with the notion of assertion, proposition, proposal and polarity, I have introduced the definition of mood proposed by Leech (2006) and compared it with that of a different kind of Mood proposed both by Halliday (2004) and Eggins (2004), namely the Mood structure of the clause. Then, I have taken a look at how scholars such as Palmer (2001) classify modality in modal systems. We have, indeed, seen that modality can be classified into two types, namely propositional and event modality, but that further categorizations are possible, whereas other authors, for instance Biber et al. (1999), group modals and semi-modals into three categories according to their meanings, that is: permission/possibility/ability; obligation/necessity; and volition/prediction. Finally, before comparing Palmer's (2001) classification with that of Coates (1983), we have seen another type of modality, namely the past tense as a modal (other types of modality are present too but, for reasons of space, I had to limit the discussion only to this type of modality). Then, I have introduced an alternative classification of modality proposed by Coates (1983), a classification that may seem simpler than that by Palmer (2001) because it just distinguishes between epistemic and root modality, but it is only apparently so for at least two reasons: the first is that we have seen how many other concepts are involved, such as that of *core*, *skirt* and *periphery*, and the second is that we have seen how, for each modal, generally more meanings are present (e.g. *should* has a Root meaning, an Epistemic meaning, it sometimes functions as a quasi-subjunctive, and finally it also supplies a first-person variant for hypothetical *would*).

In chapter 2, as stated above, I have analyzed modality in academic writing. We have seen, for instance with Piqué-Angordans et al. (2001), that different disciplines favour different types of modality. Then, I have focused my analysis on hedges and boosters. We have seen how hedges are central to academic writing because they make sentences more acceptable to the reader by expressing indeterminacy and increase their

chances of ratification. However, we have also seen how boosters, although much less frequently used than hedges (and also less studied, I would add, as the presence of more studies about hedges than about boosters in my thesis would suggest), are important in academic writing. They are used, indeed, when authors are sure about what they state, and so they indicate strong persuasion and also show engagement and solidarity with the audience. After this explanation, I have focused my attention on two topics: hedges and boosters in NS academic writing and corpora, and hedges and boosters in learners' academic writing. As regards the first topic, we have seen with Hyland (2001) that different types of knowledge favour a different use of hedges and boosters: indeed, this author stated that over 70% of all hedges occurred in the humanities/social science papers because in the soft fields the research cannot be reported with the same confidence as shared assumptions since as soft-knowledge areas are more interpretative and less abstract compared to hard-knowledge areas. As regards the second point, we have seen that most authors, such as Hyland (2000), Hyland and Milton (1997) and Hsin-I (2010), argued that the expressions of doubt and certainty (i.e. hedges and boosters, respectively) are difficult to master for NNS of English (although Hsin-I 2010 also added that, with increasing proficiency, the NNS writers perform more like the NS writers).

It is for this reason that in chapter 3 I have attempted to see how hedges and boosters are used by NNS of English and to compare this use with that of expert writers. My research questions were the following: 1a+1b) Do ESL learners (in our case, Italian students of English) use more hedges or boosters in academic writing? And compared to expert writers?; 2a+2b+2c+2d) What are the five most commonly used hedges in academic writing by these students? What are the five most commonly used boosters in academic writing by these students? What are the five most commonly used hedges in academic writing by expert writers? What are the five most commonly used boosters in academic writing by expert writers?; 3a+3b) As Hyland and Milton (1997) argue, are the expressions of doubt and certainty (i.e. hedges and boosters, respectively) difficult to master for non-native speakers of English (in our case, for Italian students of English)? And if so, is this a culture-related phenomenon? Surprisingly enough, by preparing tables for both NNS of English and expert writers, I have discovered that the total of hedges found in the NNS corpus was more than the double that found in the first eleven journal articles of the expert writers' corpus (1,579 as compared to 782), whereas the total of boosters found in the NNS corpus was pretty similar to that found in the

expert writers' corpus (193 as compared to 140). The normalized frequency per 10,000 words is: of 208 hedges in the NNS corpus and of 25 boosters in the NNS corpus; in the expert writers' corpus, it is of 61 hedges and of 11 boosters.

Moreover, I have found out that, while the most commonly used hedges by NNS students and the most commonly used hedges by expert writers were more or less the same (i.e. *can*, *may*, *could*, *according to* and *should* for NNS; *can*, *may*, *would*, *could* and *should* for expert writers), there were differences as regards the most commonly used boosters (i.e. *indeed*, *must*, *the fact that*, *strongly* and *surely* for NNS; *must*, *the fact that*, *clearly*, *indeed*, and *always* for expert writers).

To provide a more qualitative analysis, I also focused my attention on one hedge and one booster, namely *according to* (which was frequently used by NNS and not present in the five most commonly used hedges by expert writers) and *clearly* (which, on the other hand, was present among the most commonly used boosters by expert writers but absent among the five most commonly used boosters by NNS). I have made a comparison between the learners' corpus and the expert writers' corpus by dividing examples of *according to* and *clearly* in the NNS corpus into three categories: examples of *according to* and *clearly* exactly used in the same ways of expert writers; examples of *according to* and *clearly* that are actually mistakes; and examples of *according to* and *clearly* differently used than expert writers but not grammatically incorrect.

As regards *according to*, my analysis has revealed that most examples are used in the same way as expert writers, that there were three mistakes in the use of this hedge, and that, while there were no examples of *according to* used differently from expert writers, most examples of this hedge in the expert writers' corpus looked more complex from those of the NNS corpus. As regards *clearly*, I have noticed that some of the examples of this booster in the NNS corpus came from quotations: this may be the reason why they are less numerous than in the expert writers' corpus. In any case, my analysis revealed that there were eight examples of this booster used in the same way as expert writers, that one student wrote *\*a clearly* instead of *a clear*, and that expert writers sometimes used *clearly* at the beginning of their sentences, which I did not see in the students' sentences. After this analysis, I looked at the common patterns of two hedges, that is *could* and *should*, in both the NNS corpus and the expert writers' corpus, and compared their use. The analysis has revealed some similarities in both cases (i.e. in

the case of *could* and *should*), but generally more differences since I have found patterns that were used by NNS and not by expert writers and vice versa.

As concerns the research questions 3a+3b, I have already partially addressed them above when I have affirmed that the total of hedges found in the NNS corpus was more than the double of that found in the expert writers' corpus. I have advanced some hypotheses about this result, namely that there could be cross-cultural differences in expressing doubt and certainty, that is, while academic writing in German, for instance, seems to be more direct than in English (as suggested by Hyland 2000), Italian students generally tend to be more cautious. Moreover, it may well be that, by being university third-year-students, these students are more aware of the rules that regulate academic writing, including the use of hedges and boosters. All of these are just hypotheses, as I stated above, and further research is needed to confirm or contradict these opinions.

In my thesis I also have contradicted the results of other scholars as well, for instance those Hyland and Milton (1997), who stated that L2 writers appeared to depend far more heavily on modal verbs than NS: this appears not to be entirely true since the Table of the five most commonly used hedges by NNS included four modal verbs, but that of expert writers included all modal verbs. Finally, I have suggested some implications for teaching academic writing related to hedges and boosters. I talked about the difficulties in finding academic text books that devote space to the use of these epistemic devices, and I pointed out that teachers should introduce these topics when they teach how to write in academic English. In any case, I concluded chapter 3 with the note that, in my opinion, even an overuse of hedges could be deleterious because it could give the idea that the writer is not sure about anything he/she states. Consequently, I believe that hedges and boosters should be equally treated when teaching them to university students, and I would suggest that, in the future, more studies should be devoted also to the use of boosters (as I have mentioned above, most of the studies I found focused on hedges). Nevertheless, I hope that, with this thesis, I have contributed to a greater understanding of the use of hedges and boosters by learners and by expert writers.

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## RIASSUNTO DELLA TESI

Questa tesi si occupa della modalità e dei verbi modali e, specialmente, della modalità nella scrittura accademica. Gli obiettivi di questa tesi sono: fornire una panoramica della modalità e degli ausiliari modali (capitolo 1); porre l'attenzione sulla modalità nella scrittura accademica e, in particolare, sui concetti di *hedges* e *boosters* (ovvero due categorie della modalità epistemica, capitolo 2); infine, indagare su come gli *hedges* e i *boosters* sono usati dai non-nativi inglesi e confrontare questo uso con quello degli scrittori esperti.

La tesi inizia con un'introduzione ai vari capitoli, mentre nel capitolo 1 si parla della classificazione della modalità secondo autori come Palmer (2001) e poi la si confronta con quella di Coates (1983). Palmer (2001) sostiene che ci siano due tipi di modalità: la modalità proposizionale e la modalità evento. Ognuna di queste può essere suddivisa in due ulteriori categorie: epistemica e probatoria per quanto riguarda la prima; deontica e dinamica per quanto riguarda la seconda. Riguardo alla modalità epistemica, Palmer (2001) spiega che ci sono tre tipi di giudizio comuni nelle lingue: il primo esprime incertezza, il secondo indica una deduzione da prove osservabili, e il terzo indica deduzione da ciò che è generalmente noto (ovvero, rispettivamente: giudizio speculativo, deduttivo e ipotetico). Per quanto riguarda la modalità probatoria, l'autore sostiene che vi siano solo due tipi di vere e proprie categorie probatorie, ovvero "riferito" e "sensoriale". La categoria sensoriale riguarda lingue diverse dall'inglese, come il tuyuca (Brasile e Colombia), dove troviamo categorie etichettate come "visivo", "non visivo", "apparente", "di seconda mano" e "presunto". Per quanto concerne il "riferito", Palmer (2001) spiega che, per alcune lingue, è necessario riconoscere tre sottocategorie: prova di seconda mano (colui che parla dice di aver sentito della situazione descritta da qualcuno che ne è stato testimone diretto); prova di terza mano (colui che parla dice di aver sentito della situazione descritta ma non da un testimone diretto) e prova dal folklore (colui che parla dice che la situazione descritta fa parte della storia orale ufficiale).

Passando alla modalità evento e alle sue sottocategorie, per Palmer (2001) la modalità deontica si collega all'obbligo o al permesso che viene dato da una fonte esterna, mentre la modalità dinamica si collega all'abilità o alla volontà che deriva dall'individuo in questione. I più comuni tipi di modalità deontica sono le "direttive", cioè "dove cerchiamo di far fare delle cose agli altri" (Searle 1983:166, citato in Palmer 2001) e le "commissive", "dove ci impegniamo a fare delle cose" (Searle 1983:166,

citato in Palmer 2001). Infine, tornando alla modalità dinamica, come già visto abbiamo due tipi che esprimono abilità e volontà e che, in inglese, sono espresse rispettivamente da *can* e *will*. Va sottolineato, in ultima istanza, che, secondo Palmer (2001), vi sono altri tipi di modalità, come il passato usato come un verbo modale: infatti l'autore sottolinea che le forme passate possono essere usate per esprimere irrealtà, incertezza, potenzialità ecc.

Come già detto sopra, Coates (1983) propone una classificazione della modalità alternativa a quella di Palmer (2001), distinguendo tra modalità epistemica e non-epistemica. Epistemico è un termine che deriva dal greco *episteme* (“conoscenza”) ed ha a che fare con questioni di conoscenza e di “credo”, mentre la modalità non-epistemica si occupa di obbligo, permesso, abilità ecc. Secondo Coates (1983) e anche Palmer (2001), la modalità epistemica indica la fiducia (o la mancanza di fiducia) di colui che parla nella verità della proposizione espressa. Coates (1983) spiega anche che i verbi modali relativi alle ipotesi sono *must*, *should* e *ought*, mentre quelli relativi ad una determinazione delle possibilità sono *may*, *might* e *could*. Per quanto riguarda la modalità non-epistemica, Coates (1983) chiama questa modalità “root” e non adotta il termine “deontico” che le appare inappropriato dato che si riferisce alla logica dell'obbligo e del permesso, mentre – aggiunge lei – tipici verbi modali come *must* e *may* coprono una gamma di significati, dei quali obbligo e permesso rappresentano solo il nocciolo.

Prima di analizzare gli ausiliari modali, Coates (1983) ne evidenzia le seguenti caratteristiche: prendono la negazione direttamente (*can't*, *mustn't*); fanno l'inversione senza l'ausiliare *do* (*can I? must I?*); “Codice” (*John can swim and so can Bill*); Enfasi (*Ann COULD solve the problem*); non prendono la *s* alla terza persona singolare (*\*cans*, *\*musts*); non hanno forme infinite (*\*to can*, *\*musting*), e, infine, non co-occorrono.

Nonostante la distinzione tra modalità epistemica e non-epistemica, per motivi di comodità l'autrice suddivide i vari verbi modali in categorie riguardanti il loro significato: i modali di obbligo (*must*, *need*, *should* e *ought*); i modali di abilità e possibilità (*can* e *could*); i modali di possibilità epistemica (*may*, *might* e *could* epistemico); i modali di volontà e predizione (*will* e *shall*) e, infine, i modali ipotetici (*would* e *should* e suo significato epistemico).

Il capitolo 2, come già menzionato, si occupa specificamente della modalità nella scrittura accademica. Per quanto riguarda la modalità nella scrittura accademica degli esperti, Piqué-Angordans e altri (2001) hanno scoperto, analizzando il linguaggio

di tre diversi contesti accademici e professionali, che discipline diverse prediligono diversi tipi di modalità, mentre Candlin, Crompton e Hatim (2016) si sono soffermati sull'uso dei verbi modali per indicare diversi gradi di certezza e sull'importanza dell'*hedging*, concludendo che “ i ricercatori usano l' *hedging* per mostrare che le loro affermazioni non sono basate sulla conoscenza certa ma sul ragionamento che deriva dalle prove che hanno” (Candlin, Crompton e Hatim 2016: 8); infine Gruber (2005) ha affermato che “l'interpretazione di modelli certi di uso delle costruzioni modali deve tener conto della cultura disciplinare” (Gruber 2005: 47).

In seguito, vengono spiegati i concetti di *hedges* e *boosters*. Questi concetti sono collegati alla modalità epistemica e sono centrali nella scrittura accademica. Infatti, in sintesi, gli *hedges* sono usati quando gli autori hanno bisogno di esprimere indeterminazione, rendere le frasi più accettabili per il lettore e, quindi, aumentare la loro possibilità di ratifica, mentre i *boosters*, come afferma Hyland (1998), “permettono agli scrittori di esprimere convinzione e sostenere una proposizione con fiducia, rappresentando una forte dichiarazione riguardo uno stato d'affari” (Hyland 1998: 2).

Nel secondo capitolo viene fornita anche la revisione della letteratura relativa ai più recenti (e meno recenti) articoli collegati agli *hedges* e ai *boosters* nella scrittura accademica dei discenti e in quella degli inglesi parlanti nativi. A titolo d'esempio, sia Hyland (2000) che Hyland e Milton (1997) sottolineano il fatto che gli studenti di inglese L2 hanno difficoltà ad utilizzare questi espedienti epistemici, e anche Hinkel (2005) sottolinea come, dal suo studio, risulti che la prosa accademica dei non-parlanti nativi contenga meno *hedges* rispetto a quella dei parlanti nativi. Hsin-I (2010), invece, ha scoperto che, con la crescita delle loro conoscenze, i non-parlanti nativi hanno una performance più simile ai parlanti nativi per quanto riguarda l'uso degli espedienti epistemici. Serholt (2012), d'altra parte, ha analizzato la frequenza complessiva in cui degli studenti svedesi che imparano l'inglese utilizzano la modalità epistemica per esprimere dubbio (*hedges*) e certezza (*boosters*) nella loro scrittura accademica e si è chiesta se ci sono differenze collegate al genere degli studenti. L'analisi ha rivelato che questi studenti utilizzano gli *hedges* con più frequenza dei *boosters* indipendentemente dal genere e che questi ultimi non sono usati in maniera eccessiva.

Per quanto riguarda, invece, l'uso degli *hedges* e dei *boosters* nella scrittura accademica dei parlanti nativi, Hyland (2001) ha esaminato il loro uso in un corpus di articoli relativi a discipline diverse e ha riportato che le scienze “soft” usano più *hedges* rispetto alle scienze “hard”, e questo perché i settori della conoscenza “soft” sono più

interpretativi e meno astratti e, perciò, i dati vanno espressi con più cautela usando più *hedges*. Vázquez e Giner (2009), invece, si sono concentrati specificamente sui *boosters* analizzando articoli selezionati da tre discipline (marketing, biologia e ingegneria meccanica). Il loro studio ha provato che la quantità di *boosters* nell'area marketing sembra essere il doppio di quella trovata nella biologia e nell'ingegneria meccanica. I due autori hanno spiegato questo risultato argomentando che i dati inclusi negli articoli di marketing non sono molto precisi, ma piuttosto basati sulla speculazione. Di conseguenza, vi è la necessità dell'uso dei *boosters* per rafforzare quanto affermato. Infine, Kim e Lim (2015) hanno esplorato le realizzazioni linguistiche degli *hedges* nella scrittura accademica e concluso che l'*hedging* è una caratteristica saliente del discorso accademico e che il suo uso appropriato è centrale nel processo di valutazione dei fatti e delle stime, che è il fulcro della scrittura accademica.

Nel capitolo terzo, il più importante della tesi, vengono confrontati due corpora, ovvero un corpus di 136 saggi brevi scritti in inglese da non-parlanti nativi e un corpus di 20 articoli accademici scritti in inglese da scrittori esperti. Il tema di questi corpora è il bilinguismo. Più specificamente, il mio obiettivo, tra gli altri, era quello di rispondere alle seguenti domande di ricerca: 1a+1b) gli studenti di una lingua straniera (nel nostro caso, studenti italiani che studiano l'inglese) usano più *hedges* o *boosters* nella scrittura accademica? E in confronto con gli scrittori inglesi esperti?; 2a+2b+2c+2d) quali sono i cinque *hedges* più usati da questi studenti nella scrittura accademica? quali sono i cinque *boosters* più usati da questi studenti nella scrittura accademica? quali sono i cinque *hedges* più usati dagli scrittori esperti nella scrittura accademica? quali sono i cinque *boosters* più usati dagli scrittori esperti nella scrittura accademica?; e 3a+3b) come Hyland e Milton (1997) sostengono, le espressioni di dubbio e di certezza (gli *hedges* e i *boosters*, rispettivamente) sono difficili da padroneggiare per i non-parlanti nativi di inglese? E se sì, è un fenomeno collegato alla cultura?

Ovviamente ho preparato, rispettivamente, una lista degli *hedges* e dei *boosters* da utilizzare nella mia analisi. La lista degli *hedges* include i seguenti elementi: *may, would, possible/possibly, the possibility that, could, might, can, try, attempt, think, believe, according to, normally, essentially, hypothesize, speculate, assume, suggest, indicate, propose, seem, assumption, about, probable, probably, presumably, usually, rarely, virtually, as much as, it is unlikely/likely, perhaps, it appears that, apparently, should, partially, one implication of my research, it is unclear, approximately,*

*generally, quite, e maybe* (per un totale di 44 hedges esaminati). La lista dei boosters, invece, include: *must, the fact that, research shows that, it is clear, clearly, surely, definitely, strongly, actually, it is evident that, indeed, always, obviously, one obvious implication, of course, demonstrate, highly, it is generally believed, and it is undoubtedly* (per un totale di 19 boosters esaminati). Il totale degli *hedges* trovati nel corpus degli studenti è 1579 mentre quello dei *boosters* è 193; il totale degli *hedges* trovati nei primi undici articoli del corpus degli scrittori esperti è 782 mentre quello dei *boosters* è 140.

Per l'analisi di entrambi i corpora ho usato il software per le concordanze AntConc che è scaricabile gratuitamente dal sito del Professore Laurence Anthony (<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc>). Ho usato il pulsante delle concordanze per vedere ogni *hedge* e *booster* nel suo contesto, in modo da decidere se quell'elemento fosse veramente un *hedge* o un *booster* (ad es. nel corpus degli studenti l'*hedge about* è usato 129 volte ma solo 1 volta con il significato di "circa", e ho considerato questo unico esempio come vero *hedge* in quanto approssimatore, mentre le altre volte *about* era usato per introdurre un complemento di specificazione); inoltre, ho controllato che questi *hedges* e *boosters* non fossero inseriti nelle citazioni di altri autori in modo da fornire solo esempi relativi agli studenti italiani, nel caso del primo corpus, o agli scrittori esperti, nel caso del secondo.

Tornando alle domande di ricerca, la risposta alla prima domanda è che sembra che questi studenti usino molti più *hedges* che *boosters* nella scrittura accademica (come abbiamo visto qui sopra quando ho riportato i rispettivi totali dei due corpora), mentre per quanto riguarda le risposte alle domande 2a e 2b si può dire che i cinque *hedges* più usati da questi studenti sono i seguenti: *can, may, could, according to e should*, mentre i cinque *boosters* più usati sono: *indeed, must, the fact that, strong e surely*. La risposta alle domande 2c e 2d è che i cinque *hedges* e i cinque *boosters* più usati dagli scrittori esperti sono, rispettivamente: *can, may, would, could e should* (*hedges*); *must, the fact that, clearly, indeed e always* (*boosters*).

Prima di rispondere alla terza domanda di ricerca ho fornito un'analisi più qualitativa guardando a come un *hedge* e un *booster* (rispettivamente, *according to e clearly*) sono usati nei due corpora. Più specificamente, ho cercato nel corpus degli studenti: esempi di *according to* (e poi di *clearly*) che rappresentano esempi usati allo stesso modo degli scrittori esperti; esempi di *according to* (e poi di *clearly*) che sono errori; infine, esempi di *according to* (e poi di *clearly*) usati diversamente dagli

scrittori esperti ma che non rappresentano errori. Per quanto riguarda *according to*, l'analisi ha rilevato che: la maggior parte degli esempi sono usati allo stesso modo degli scrittori esperti; vi sono due errori nell'uso di *according to*, ovvero l'uso di *\*according to me* e di *\*according to my point of view*; non vi sono esempi di *according to* usati diversamente dagli scrittori esperti, e così ho deciso di riportare esempi tratti dal corpus degli scrittori esperti che sembrano più complessi di quelli degli studenti. Nel caso di *clearly*, l'analisi ha rilevato che: anche in questo caso, buona parte degli esempi rispecchiano il modo di scrivere degli scrittori esperti; vi è un unico errore (*\*a clearly* anziché *a clear*); e che gli scrittori esperti, a volte, usano *clearly* all'inizio delle loro frasi, cosa che non ho notato nelle frasi degli studenti. Inoltre, sia per *according to* che per *clearly*, ho riportato le rispettive definizioni tratte sia da dizionari cartacei che online e da una grammatica.

Dopo questa procedura, ho anche trovato i modelli comuni di due *hedges* (*could* e *should*) in entrambi i corpora per confrontare il loro uso. Ne è risultato che vi sono alcune similarità ma, generalmente, più differenze tra i due corpora, ad esempio vi sono modelli che sono usati dagli studenti e non dagli scrittori esperti, e viceversa (nel caso di *could*, ad es., troviamo *could affect*, *could cause*, *could face*, *could feel*, *could find*, *could lead* e *could not* comuni tra gli studenti; *could explain*, *could indicate*, *one could use*, *some/it could well* comuni tra gli scrittori esperti).

Per quanto riguarda la terza domanda di ricerca, possiamo rispondere che, in genere, questi studenti hanno poche difficoltà nel padroneggiare gli *hedges* e i *boosters*, sebbene a volte questi studenti hanno commesso errori nell'uso di questi espedienti epistemici (anche se l'uso di *\*a clearly* rappresenta più una svista che un errore vero e proprio). Ciò è quindi in contrasto con quanto riportato da Hyland e Milton (1997), ovvero che le espressioni di dubbio e di certezza sono difficili da padroneggiare per i non parlanti nativi. Inoltre, a mio parere, ci potrebbero essere delle differenze interculturali nell'esprimere dubbio e certezza, ovvero che mentre, per esempio, la scrittura accademica tedesca sembra essere più diretta che in inglese (come suggerito da Hyland 2000), gli studenti italiani generalmente tendono ad essere più cauti. Può darsi anche che, essendo studenti universitari al loro terzo anno di studi, essi siano più consapevoli delle regole riguardanti la scrittura accademica, compreso l'uso degli *hedges* e dei *boosters*. Ovviamente, ulteriori ricerche sarebbero necessarie per confermare queste ipotesi.

Il capitolo terzo termina con delle implicazioni sull'insegnamento della scrittura accademica collegate agli *hedges* e ai *boosters*. La prima è più un dato di fatto che un'implicazione, ovvero si collega al fatto che ho avuto difficoltà a trovare testi accademici che spiegassero come usare questi espedienti epistemici e, vista la loro importanza, mi auguro che, in futuro, aumenti il numero di testi che parlino di questi argomenti, e che anche gli insegnanti presentino questi argomenti, magari con l'ausilio dei suddetti testi, quando introducono la scrittura accademica ai discenti. La seconda implicazione è che, a mio parere, sebbene gli *hedges* siano importanti (e lo dimostra, tra l'altro, l'alto numero di articoli accademici che si soffermano sul loro uso, che sono in numero superiore a quello degli articoli sui *boosters*), un loro sovra utilizzo potrebbe essere deleterio dato che darebbe l'idea che chi scrive non è sicuro di nulla e che, quindi, probabilmente non possiede dati affidabili o vuole evitare qualsiasi responsabilità riguardo quanto afferma. Tutto ciò nuocerebbe gravemente all'argomentazione di chi scrive. Per questo motivo credo che gli insegnanti, quando presentano la scrittura accademica, dovrebbero soffermarsi su entrambi gli espedienti epistemici e dedicar loro ugual tempo.

La tesi si conclude con un capitolo conclusivo che riassume la discussione dei vari capitoli, ripresenta gli obiettivi della tesi e fornisce implicazioni per la ricerca e la pratica.