



Gender Differences in the Use of Hedging Devices in the Pakistani Opinion Columns: A Corpus-Based Study

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Publication details:

Received: January 05, 2022

Accepted: February 25, 2022

Published: March 30, 2022

Abstract

This study investigates the use of hedges in the opinion columns written by Pakistani male columnists and female columnists. For this, the present study uses Hyland (2005) model interpersonal metadiscourse to recognize hedging devices. This study also investigates how or both genders show difference and similarity in the employment of hedges. The corpus was built of 580 opinion articles. The columns totaled 290 by male and 290 by female writers. For the present study, a mixed method approach was used. As for sampling, this study uses random sampling. The finding of this research reveals that both Pakistani male and female writers did not differ in the use of hedges devices in their opinion columns and concludes that the choice and distribution of hedges depend on genre of the text rather than on the gender of the text.

Keywords: gender, hedges, Hyland (2004), Pakistani English opinion columns, metadiscourse, corpus analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Metadiscourse?

Harris was the first who invented the phrase of “metadiscourse” in 1959, Williams (1989) after wards elaborated it (Vande, 1985; Crismore, 1989; Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995; Beauvais, 1989; Hyland, 2005). Metadiscourse is unusually deemed to be as ‘blurry’ notion (Crismore, Makkannen & Steffensen, 1993; Hyland, 2005). Swale (1990) argues, by and large, the phenomenon of metadiscourse is relatively simple to be accepted, however, it is relatively hard to set up its peripheries. It proves that because of its fuzziness and diversity, it is an uphill task, highly not easy to have a single definition of metadiscourse; as a result, the relevant literature caters to a variety of definitions of metadiscourse.

Metadiscourse defined as “writing about writing” (Kopple, 1985, p. 83) or correspondingly (Williams, 1989, p. 197). There are some other terms which have been used alternatively, for example, it is also referred to as “language about language” (Lyons, 1977), “non-topical linguistic material” (Lautamatti, 1978), “text about text” (Enkvist, 1978), “gambits” (Keller, 1979), “talk about talk” (Schiffin, 1980) and “signposting” (Crismore, 2004). Metadiscourse is also defined as text organizing devices by some researches (Bunton, 1999; Mauranen, 1993). Still there is an element of uncertainty associated with the definition of metadiscourse. The uncertainty associated with the description of the concept of metadiscourse because some of the discourse analysts (Mauranen, 1993; Bunton, 1999) Enkvist (1978) and Lyons (1977), employs the text about text in which the writer focuses just on the text, instead of focusing on the text decoder (Hyland, 2005). According to Hyland (2005), argues that metadiscursive practice sets up relationships between the text writers and the text readers, at the same time, it also implies communicative act between the text producers and the text consumers (p. 14).

Gender and media rapport have grabbed considerable attention from the researchers since 1970 and beyond. Much research has been carried out in this area in the present times as well. Most of the researchers investigated gender presentation, gender differences, and gender bias and gender stereotypes in the media. Media have vibrantly played a role in the construction of gender. It has carefully developed a clear understanding about gender stereotypes among the people.

1.2 Empirical Literature Review of Gendered Studies

Rafi (2008) conducted a study to explore the text language used by men and women. The study also examined the effect of SMS language on the language of media. For this study, one hundred text messages were collected from the mobile phones of 25 females and 25 females. The messages were analyzed at the lexical, morphological and syntactic levels. The findings of the study show a new and indecipherable through text messages; it also influences the language of media. This study also reveals that there is a significant difference between male and female in the choice of linguistic features for their text messages.

In the same way, Mirzapour (2016) carried out a study to analyze personal pronouns (I, me, my, we, us). Thirty research articles were collected from Chemistry and the same number from applied linguistics. These articles were written by male and female researchers to build the corpus. The results of this research show that the discipline of applied linguistics deploys a high ratio of hedging devices and pronouns as compared to the discipline of Chemistry. In addition to this, women writers tend to use more hedges in comparison with male counterparts in two domains, however, male writers use pronouns more than female writers in Chemistry and Applied linguistics.

Like other studies, Parasibu (2017) carried out a study to examine gender variations (male and female) of textual discourse devices used in the essays by the students of Indonesia. This research collected forty essays. Twenty essays were composed by both genders of students, each male and female. The study aimed to analyze how both genders differ and similar in employing discursual devices. This investigation draws on Fraser’s classifications (1999) of discursual features. The finding of the research displayed that both genders of writers tend to use similar discursual devices.



Another study was also conducted by Pakzadian and Tootkaboni (2018) to find out male and female differences of quality used in the conversation. This research examined the role of two genders in an informal conversation. The study revealed that women acknowledge men during the conversation and in this way, they try to look more facilitative during the conversation. On the other hand, they try to dominate the topic by showing a more assertive role during the conversation.

Akhter (2014) this research was conducted in Bangladesh to investigate common differences and reasons behind variation of language use among the undergraduate male and female students of private sector universities. Fifteen questionnaires were sent to the five well-reputed private universities of the country to carry out the survey. The finding of the study revealed both genders have diverse reasons behind the variation of language use.

1.3 Studies on Hedges

Previous studies have examined the use of hedges in the media discourse. Khanbutayeva (2020) conducted a study to explore hedges used in English and Azerbaijan editorials. The findings of their study revealed that native English writers used hedges more frequently than non-native writers. Based on the results, we can infer that English editorials are more hedged than Azerbaijan ones. Similarly, Sedaghat, Biria and Amiraabadi (2015) also carried out cross-cultural study on the use of hedging and boosting devices in the Persian and English editorials. They found out that the English column writers employed more hedging devices to show politeness to their readers.

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the use of hedging devices in the Pakistani context (Takimoto, 2015; Gul, Ilyas, Lohar & Ahmed, 2020; Yasmin, Mahmood, Jabeen & Siddiqui, 2020). Most of the researchers investigated hedges or they have focused on cross cultural studies. However, the purpose of the present study is to examine Pakistani opinion columns written male and female writers.

1.4 Aim of the study

The present study aims to explore the use of hedging devices in opinion columns written by Pakistani male and female writers.

1.5 Objectives of the study

- To find the frequency of hedging devices used by Pakistani male columnists
- To find the frequency of hedging devices used by Pakistani female columnists

1.6 Research Questions

1. How frequently Pakistani male columnists use hedging devices in the opinion columns?
2. How frequently Pakistani female columnists use hedging devices in the opinion columns?

1.7 Key Terms

1.7.1 Metadiscourse

Metadiscursive practice sets up relationships between the text writers and the text readers at the same time, it also implies communicative act between the text producers and the text consumers.

1.7.2 Hedges

Hedges are words which show a writer's tentativeness and uncertainty in their arguments. Words such as 'may, might, could and seem' are some of the examples of hedging devices used in the written discourse.

1.7.3 Corpus

The word corpus refers to the huge collection of words. It is mainly used to analyze the language.

2. Literature Review

The current section scrutinizes the theoretical and analytical frameworks that informed the present study. Some literature that examined the effect of gender on the use of metadiscourse markers (Ådel, 2006; Francis, Robson & Read, 2001; Tse & Hyland, 2008) assured that male and female writers did utilize metadiscourse markers differently in their written texts.

Siddique, Ahmad and Ahmad (2020) conducted a study to analyze framing features in the editorials of Pakistani English newspapers: The Frontier, Dawn, The News, The Express Tribune. This study builds a corpus of 1000 editorials from and (250) from each newspaper. These editorials were analyzed through AntConc 3.4.4.0. This study uses an interpersonal model by Hyland (2005). This study reveals that the Frontier uses the highest frequency of framing devices than any other Pakistani newspapers. The study concludes that framing devices help in determining for the readers. Also, this study proposed a list of 121 framing devices from Hyland (2005) for future studies.

Memon, Pathan and Memon (2021) investigated the use of interactive metadiscursive devices in engineering articles written by Pakistani British writers. The study aimed to compare interactive features used in the two corpora. They drew on Hyland's (2004) model of metadiscourse in their study. The corpus was built by 100 articles from each writer, namely they constructed a corpus of 200 engineering articles by Pakistani and British engineers. Research journals having X category were the basic criterion for the Pakistani engineering articles on the other hand the British articles were collected from the British repository published from 2010 to 2016. The words totaled 1087091 in the articles of Pakistani and British writers. As for research methods, the researchers used quantitative and qualitative methods in their examination of the interactive metadiscourse. Then, they gleaned interactive metadiscourse features in line with a taxonomy of Hyland (2005). It was found that Pakistani writers used a high frequency of endophoric, code glosses, and framing devices in their articles, by contrast, the British writers preferred to use more transition markers and evidential devices in their engineering articles. To conclude, the British writers used more interactive devices across their articles than the Pakistani writers.

Shafqat, Memon and Khan (2022) conducted corpus-based research to compare hedging devices and related linguistic elements in the language articles written by Pakistani writers (non-native) and native English writers. They collected 20 research articles on linguistics by Pakistani authors and 20 research articles by native English writers. The numerical analysis revealed that both writers showed the same behavior in using hedging devices in their linguistics articles. Surprisingly, it was found that both writers banked heavily on hedging devices to reduce the force of their claims. Moreover, both factions were hesitant in using hedging devices such as adverbial frequencies. In the same vein, both writers remained hesitant to make the most frequent use of epistemic and possibility hedging devices. However, both Pakistani English writers and English native writers showed marked differences in the employment of linguistic forms of hedges. The study

concludes that Pakistani English writers show more commitment to their opinion through appealing and persuasive behavior and partly because of the influence of their native language and culture.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Although many models of metadiscourse are available to analyze the text such as the model of Kopple (1985), classification of Crismore et al. (1993), model of Mauranen's (1993) classification, and Ädel's (2006) classification about metadiscourse. However, the researcher has used Hyland's framework. Nonetheless, all these are the revisited models that reflect considerable overlaps and repetitions in the sub-categories. As a consequence, I have preferably selected which is more comprehensive, extensively used and unerring.

2.3 Hyland's (2005) Classification of Metadiscourse

These earlier models of metadiscourse have been classified into two categories: textual and interpersonal. Hyland (2005) classification revolves around the functional approach. It is based on the notion that the metadiscourse features can be comprehended more explicitly when they are realized in the context in which they appear. This model involves two categories: interactive dimension and interactional dimension. Most of his work offers the analysis of academic writing. His classification is as under:

Table 1. Hyland's (2005) Metadiscourse Classification

Category	Examples	Function
Interactive Metadiscourse		
Transitions	But, in addition	Express relations between main clauses
Frame markers	To conclude, finally	Refer to discourse acts
Endophoric markers	See Fig. noted above	Refer to information in other parts of the text
Evidential	Z states that, according to x	Refer to information from other texts
Code glosses	Such as, namely	Elaborate propositional meaning
Interactional Metadiscourse		
Hedges	Perhaps, might	Show doubt and hesitation, open space negation
Boosters	Definitely, In fact	Show certainty and confidence close space for negations
Attitude markers	I agree, unfortunately	Express writer's attitude to proposition
Self-mentions	I, we	Explicit reference to author
Engagement makers	Note, Consider, You can see that	Explicitly build relationship with reader

Yet, the researcher is focusing on interactive metadiscourse features.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Development of corpus

The present study extracted Pakistani opinion columns from their official online websites. A random sample of 580 newspaper columns has been selected from Pakistani English newspapers I have selected 290 opinion columns written by male writers and 290 by female writers. The sample size consists of five lac words (500,000)

A total of 580 newspaper columns have been taken from the 1st of January, 2020 to the 31st of December 2021. More accurately, the chosen opinion/columns are scripted on the web and are likewise available in the printed structure. All extra commentaries, dates, advertisements on the text and letters to the editorial were excluded from the opinion columns. The opinion columns totaled 580 taken from Pakistani newspapers. The Pakistani newspapers: Dawn, Daily Times, The Express Tribune, and The News International.

3.2 Corpus Compilation

With respect to the collection of data, the sample concerned, the data were assembled and gone through many phases. In the main phase of extraction, the opinion/columns were collected physically in the notepad file records from online sources as referenced previously. The second phase included putting together metadata in excel for ease including the name of the author, the total number of files taken, and the year of publication. The third stage was about cleansing the data by removing publication dates, the authors' names, and some unknown words like advertisements. The fourth stage was the merging of data into two files of Pakistani males and Pakistani Females for the process of analysis in the software MetaPak (2017). After the procedure of analysis in software, the resulting notepad files were saved and renamed. In the fifth stage, the data tables were made manually in excel for reporting the results of the present research.

3.3 Sample Techniques

The main sampling techniques used for selecting the opinion columns are random and purposive sampling. The choice of the random sampling technique helps in selecting representations from each of the newspapers. Purposive sampling technique against others helps to identify specific data that leads to the achievement of the set objectives of the study.

3.4 Research Instrument

Research instruments are measurement tools intended to attain data on a topic of interest from research subjects (Creswell, 2014). The instrument utilized for gathering data was an opinion/column text from a Pakistani English Newspaper. It involves both male and female columns/opinions from 2020 and 2021. As the normal length of the single segment of the column was from (1000) to (1200) words. On the whole, the corpus of the exploration study consisted of 500,000 words. Moreover, the instrument that this study utilized for the research purpose is software named Metapak which is specially designed for metadiscourse analysis.

3.5 Data Analyzing Procedures

The research is a contrastive study of gender-based variations and interactive metadiscourse devices in Pakistani opinion/column text. Corpora of 580 Pakistani English opinion columns has been analyzed through MetaPak (2017). MetaPak is an exclusive corpus tool for metadiscourse analysis. MetaPak software (2017) has been used to identify gender variations in the use of metadiscursive practices in Pakistani English newspapers.

4. Results and Discussion

After collecting the data and counting all transition markers used in opinion columns, the researcher used frequency and statistics to analyze the data and to provide answers for the research questions.

4.1 Hedges

4.1.1 Pakistani Column Writers

Hedges are words which indicate a writer's tentativeness and uncertainty in their arguments. Words such as "may, might, could" are considered hedging devices used in the written discourse. Hedges are devices used to provide alternative voices and viewpoints in the written texts (Bhatia, Garzone & Degano, 2012). According to Hyland (2005), "hedges allow the writer to provide information as an opinion not as a fact, thus space for argument kept open for the readers (p. 52)." I found both male and female column writers made a heavy use of hedges in their opinion columns. However, the quantitative results showed that male exploited less hedges than female writers. More precisely, male columnists used 2535 hedges while female columnists used hedges 2842 times in the Pakistani columns.

In addition, both male and female writers made most frequent use of (would, may). These were used by Pakistani male writers 546, 249 times respectively. On the other hand, Pakistani female writers used 498, 337 times in the Pakistani corpus. Similarly, both Pakistani male and female columnists used the second highest frequency of (about, around.) These were used 443, 180 times by male writers and 417 and 129 times by female writers. In the same way, both Pakistani male and female authors used (possible) least frequently. Male writers used this hedging device 80 times and female writers used 89 times. It is surprising to note that both male and female writers showed no intent to use epistemic discourse phrases in their texts. After applying the Chi Square test showed test statistic 0.628 with degree of freedom 2 and $\alpha = 0.05$. The test stat 0.628 was employed to find p-value that is 0.729. The findings of the Chi Square showed that there was no significant difference between two Pakistani male and male and female writers in using hedging.

Table 2. Frequencies of Hedges studied across Pakistani Column Writers

Hedges in Pakistani Column Writers					
Word	Type	Pakistani Male	Stat.	Pakistani Female	Stat.
would		546	8.73	498	7.97
may		249	3.98	337	5.39
Could		229	3.66	254	4.06
Seems		52	0.83	106	1.70
Feel		19	0.30	35	0.56
Appears		13	0.21	33	0.53
Might		38	0.61	31	0.50
Felt		16	0.26	26	0.42
Claim		22	0.35	25	0.40
Supposed		16	0.26	22	0.35
Appear		16	0.26	20	0.32
Claims		20	0.32	17	0.27
Suggested		14	0.22	17	0.27
tend to		11	0.18	15	0.24
Estimated		26	0.42	15	0.24
Claimed		13	0.21	13	0.21
Suggest		17	0.27	11	0.18
Argued		1	0.02	10	0.16
Feels		9	0.14	10	0.16
Appeared		5	0.08	9	0.14
Argue	Epistemic Verbs	5	0.08	8	0.13
Assumed		3	0.05	8	0.13
tends to		0	0.00	7	0.11
Estimate		4	0.06	6	0.10
Suggests		11	0.18	6	0.10
Ought		9	0.14	6	0.10
Indicates		3	0.05	6	0.10
Indicate		0	0.00	6	0.10
Argues		1	0.02	5	0.08
Assume		4	0.06	5	0.08
Suspects		1	0.02	4	0.06
Indicated		5	0.08	3	0.05
Guess		1	0.02	2	0.03
Postulated		0	0.00	2	0.03
Suspect		3	0.05	2	0.03
Supposes		0	0.00	1	0.02
Suppose		0	0.00	1	0.02
Postulate		0	0.00	0	0.00
tended to		1	0.02	0	0.00
couldn't		1	0.02	0	0.00
Postulates	0	0.00	0	0.00	
wouldn't	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Total		1384	22.13	1582	25.31
About	Probability Adverbs	443	7.08	417	6.67
Around		180	2.88	129	2.06
Likely		47	0.75	83	1.33
Perhaps		39	0.62	78	1.25
Often		39	0.62	62	0.99
Almost		80	1.28	45	0.72
Quite	40	0.64	43	0.69	

Usually	5	0.08	38	0.61
Largely	25	0.40	37	0.59
Mostly	17	0.27	30	0.48
Mainly	12	0.19	20	0.32
Unlikely	6	0.10	18	0.29
Sometimes	14	0.22	18	0.29
Probably	1	0.02	17	0.27
Generally	16	0.26	17	0.27
in general	5	0.08	16	0.26
Maybe	6	0.10	15	0.24
Relatively	27	0.43	14	0.22
Apparently	12	0.19	13	0.21
Essentially	10	0.16	11	0.18
approximately	4	0.06	9	0.14
Roughly	4	0.06	8	0.13
Frequently	4	0.06	8	0.13
Somewhat	7	0.11	8	0.13
Possibly	7	0.11	7	0.11
Typically	1	0.02	4	0.06
Fairly	9	0.14	2	0.03
Broadly	9	0.14	2	0.03
Presumably	1	0.02	2	0.03
on the whole	1	0.02	0	0.00
Plausibly	0	0.00	0	0.00
Uncertainly	0	0.00	0	0.00
Unclearly	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	1071	17.12	1171	18.73
Possible	40	0.64	52	0.83
Typical	3	0.05	7	0.11
Doubt	15	0.24	7	0.11
Uncertain	4	0.06	7	0.11
Probable	1	0.02	0	0.00
Apparent	9	0.14	6	0.10
Plausible	4	0.06	5	0.08
Unclear	3	0.05	3	0.05
Doubtful	1	0.02	1	0.02
Presumable	0	0.00	0	0.00
rather x	0	0.00	0	0.00
certain level	0	0.00	1	0.02
Total	80	1.28	89	1.42
Accumulated total	2535	40.53	2842	45.47

Figure 1. Visual Representation of the Use of Hedges by Pakistani Males and Females' Writers

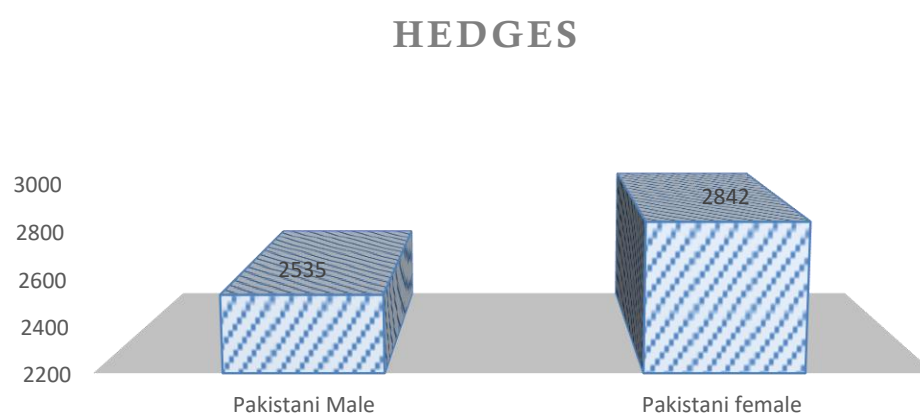


Table 3. Overall Frequency Distribution of Hedges in Pakistani Male and Female Columns Writers

Hedges	Pakistani Male	Stat.	F per 4000 words	Pakistani Female	Stat.	F per 4000 words
Epistemic Verbs	1384	22.13	21.55	1582	25.31	25.31
Probability Adverbs	1071	17.12	17.123	1171	18.73	18.73
Probability Adjectives	80	1.28	1.279	89	1.42	1.42
Epistemic Discourse phrases	0	0.00	0	0	0.00	0.00
Total	2535	40.53	39.95	2842	45.47	45.47

Figure 2. Visual Representation of the Categories Studied across Pakistani Male and Female Writers

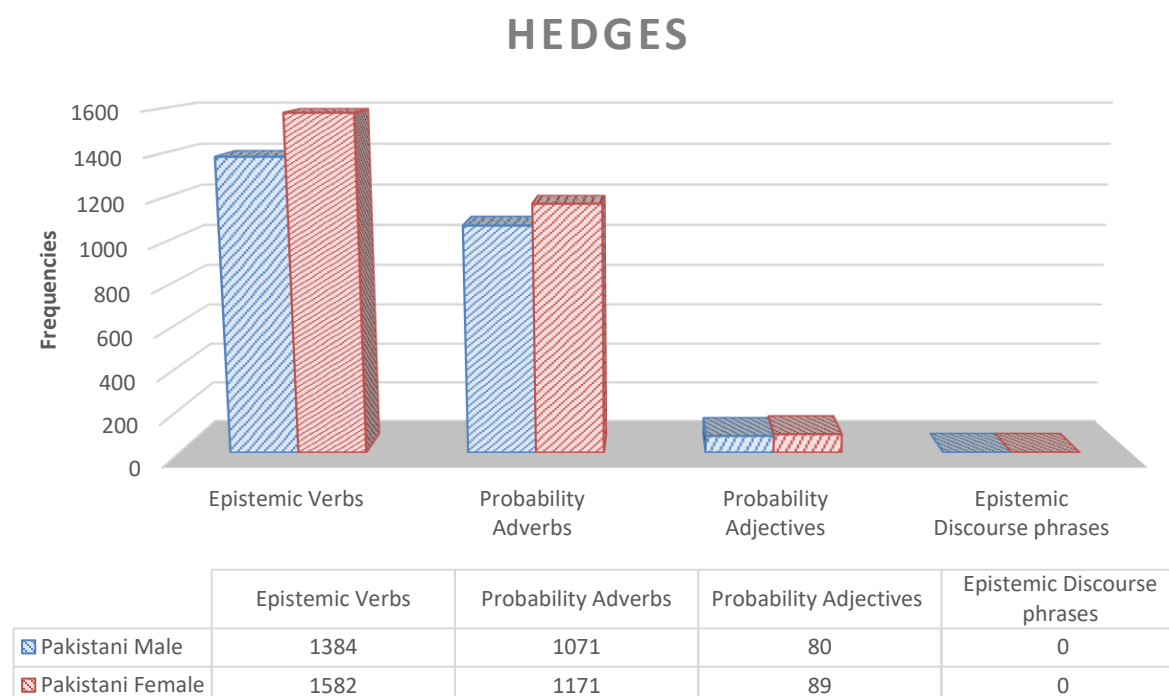


Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Hedges in Pakistani Male and Female Column Writers

P	Difference	Test Stat.	P-value
0.05	2	0.6284	0.72931
No. of valid Cases		5377	

The Chi Square test showed test statistic 0.628 with degree of freedom 2 and $\alpha = 0.05$. The test stat 0.628 was employed to find p-value that is 0.729. The findings of the Chi Square showed that there was no significant difference between two Pakistani writers in using hedging.

4.2 Discussion

The writers use hedging devices to soften their claims by suggesting that these claims are not proven or true (Aull, 2015). Writers use this strategy to inform the readers that they are sharing opinion not facts (Hyland, 1998). The results revealed that there were variations in the frequency of the instances of hedges in female and male newspaper opinion articles with females showing higher frequencies than males. However, the Chi-square test showed no significant difference between female and male use of hedges which implies that there are more similarities than differences in the use of hedges between females and males.

The finding of this study reveals that Pakistani female writers used slightly more hedging devices than their male counterparts. The finding of the study is in line with (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997) who reported that women writers use more hedging devices as compared to male writers and that hedging devices indicate “powerless language”. This study is also in accordance with Lakoff (1975) who argued that hedges and tag questions are used more frequently by women than men. The results of the present study are also in keeping with Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015) and D’Angelo (2008) who found that females used more hedges than males in their writing. Thus, the present study seems to confirm the widespread belief that women use more hedges than males in their discourse. However, the findings of the present study are not in line with other studies, such as Chipeta (2021); Alsubhi (2016); Tse and Hyland (2008) Crismore et al. (1993), who found that male writers used more hedges than their female counterparts. The possible explanation for the similarities between two genders may be that both the writers followed the conventions of the opinion discourse and that the choice of hedges depends on the genre of the text rather than on the gender of the writers. It cannot be attributed to the lack of confidence and inferiority of the writers.

As for the functions, the hedges performing functions studied within the corpus have been exemplified below.

1. . . . Sunday night’s results **could** have been very different, not just because people **would** have voted differently but because more effort **could** have been made to neutralize the PTI vote.
2. One **can** say that many times physics works with reverse-engineering like, if mass is not an intrinsic property of the subatomic particles, and **perhaps** if it **appears** with some sort of interaction with something else, . . . then **perhaps** that something should be a field, spread throughout.
3. Indeed, I don’t **feel** at home in a room unless I’ve stabbed two or three people, ideally more. I have seen the complaints: “Stabbing **may** make you **feel** comfortable, Jack, but it doesn’t make anyone else in the room **feel** comfortable! . . . what I meant by it! I honestly **feel** sorry for people like that. . . .

5. Conclusion

Interactional metadiscourse markers help the researchers to interact with the readers and engage them in the text. This study reveals that there are no significant differences between Pakistani male and female authors in the use of hedging devices. The present study also reveals that both Pakistani male and female column writers tend to employ similar frequency of hedges in the opinion discourse. Hence, it is possible to conclude that it is the genre of text is more important than the gender of the writer.

Funding: This study was not funded in any shape or form by any party.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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