

The Effect of Gender and Style Variables on Hedging Devices among Persian Speakers

Maryam Hassani¹, Pariya Razmdideh^{2*}

¹MA Graduate of Linguistics, Department of linguistics and Translation Studies, Instructor at Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan Postal Code: 7718897111, Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan, Iran

²Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Department of linguistics and Translation Studies, Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan Postal Code: 7718897111, Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan, Iran

Corresponding Author: Pariya Razmdideh, E-mail: p.razmdideh@vru.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Language as a social phenomenon is affected by different factors such as age, gender, social status, culture, etc. Hedge is also considered as a part of language and a pragmatic phenomenon, seeming to be under the influence of these factors. This paper aims at investigating the effect of gender (female and male) and style (informal and formal) on the use of hedging by Persian speakers which hasn't been considered yet. To this ends, in informal style, 8 Persian films (2012-2018) lasting for 12 hours and 54 minutes, 7 telephone conversations, each lasted for 20 minutes among genders, and some recorded daily conversations in different contexts were selected randomly. In formal style, 10 MA theses from different majors written by 5 Persian male and 5 female students were examined based on hedge taxonomies by Salager-Meyer (1997), Clemen (1996), Skelton (1988), and Jalilifar (2006). In this study, a new hedging category was added to their taxonomies. Running Chi-square analyses, it was found that, firstly, there was no significant difference between genders considering the use of hedges and no difference in the number of hedges used by them. Secondly, the hedging devices were used more in informal style. Thirdly, the used hedging categories were found with significant difference in two genders and two styles.

Key words: Persian Hedges, Hedging Devices, Gender, Style

INTRODUCTION

Hedges are linguistic items such as *perhaps, somewhat, sort of, might, to a certain degree, it is possible that,...* Such items may occur as often as once in every 15 seconds of conversation, depending on context of communication (Richards and Schmidt, 2002, p. 237). In different studies, hedges are defined differently reflecting the difficulty of pinpointing what exactly a hedge is. As Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 146) conclude: "hedging can be achieved in indefinite numbers of surface forms". These surface forms can range from a single lexical item to syntactic structures, which do not ease the task of establishing a definition. Hedges can appear alone or in clusters. They get their meaning from the context and, therefore, it is not possible to make any lists of hedges (Clemen, 1997, pp. 236-243; Nikula, 1997, p. 190). Lakoff (1972, p. 459) states that the borders of natural language concepts are not clear-cut but fuzzy. He provides a list of items he found to strengthen his theory. Those are – among others – *strictly/loosely speaking and sort of*. He uses the term to refer to words that "make things fuzzier or less fuzzy". In the original sense of the word, hedging refers only to expressions such as *kind of, sort of* or *rather* which can be used, for example, to modify a degree of membership

(Markkanen and Schröder, 1997, p. 4). An example of this would be a phrase such as *a rose is kind of a flower*, in which the hedge *kind of* modifies the relationship between roses and flowers in general. Although hedges might be around nearly as long as language itself, it was only in 1966 that they became the topic of linguistic investigation. As it was said, Weinreich (1966) examined their use, but called them "metalinguistic operators". It took until 1972 that they were called hedges by Lakoff (1972). To him, hedges denoted some lexical expressions that were used to shift the borderlines within the *Prototype Theory* of Rosch (1973). This theory states that every object belongs to a semantic category, but represents it to different degrees according to typicality and/or membership. Despite the difficulties in establishing definitions of hedges, there is some agreement in the field as to which words or expressions are often used as hedges. Several studies have been done on hedging and the effect of some social factors has been proved in writing and speech by linguistics and sociolinguistics (Mulac et al., 2013). Different researches have been conducted on hedging in academic writing and research articles (RAs) (Hyland, 1994, 1996b, 1996c, 1998, 1999; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Vande Kopple and Crismore, 1990; Varttala, 2001). They are mostly on western languages (Clyne, 1991; Crismore, Makkannen,

and Steffensen, 1993, Vassileva, 2001; Yang, 2003), in the context of casual or oral discourse (Stubbs, 1986; Coates, 1987; Hosman, 1989; Nittono, 2003), as well as in the field of literature and across languages (Crystal, 1995; Hyland, 1998). This study is important in that it contributes to the use and frequency of Persian hedging based on hedging taxonomies by Salager-Meyer (1997), Clemen (1996), and Skelton (1988) focusing on gender and different styles among Persian speakers as a non-western language. Therefore, the aims of this research is fourfold: (1) to consider any difference regarding the use and frequency of Persian hedging by Persian males and females, (2) to study any difference in frequency and using Persian hedging in different styles (formal/informal), (3) to investigate the frequency and use of hedging in different categories, and (4) to compare the frequency of hedging by Persian male and female speakers in different styles.

So the hedging classification of the present study consists of 12 categories. From among them, 1-7 has been proposed by Salager-Meyer (1997, p. 4); categories 8 and 10 were derived from Clemen (1996, p. 2); category 9 was suggested by Skelton (1988, p. 37); category 11 was borrowed from Jalilifar (2006); and category 12 was added to this model by the authors, as shown in Table 1.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Based on our knowledge, although some studies about hedging in some contexts have been done in Iran, no study regarding both 'gender' and 'style' has been done in this domain. In this section, some of the studies focusing hedging devices

among Iranian speakers and English speakers (in some studies as a contrastive research) are considered as below:

Samaie, Khosravani, and Boghayeri (2014) examined the types and frequency of hedges employed by Persian and English native speakers in the introduction section of 40 academic RAs in the field of literature. The results of the study indicated that English writers are more tentative in putting forward claims and in rejecting or confirming the ideas of others than Persian writers. English native writers use modal auxiliaries, evidential main verbs, adjectives, and nouns in RAs more frequently than their Persian native writers' counterparts.

Karimi, Gorjian, and Eidian (2015) analyzed the use of hedging devices in RAs from three fields of physics (165 articles), computer science (93 articles), and applied linguistics by English writers (77 articles) as well as Iranian authors (89 articles). They aimed at investigating the similarities and differences in hedging by Salager-Meyer (1997) among the English writers of Iranian writers of physics and computer science. The result revealed that computer engineering writers tended to use more hedges than the physics writers. Besides, Iranian writers of applied linguistics RAs used more hedges than their English counterparts.

Behnam, Darvishzadeh, and Naeimi (2012) studied the frequency, form and function of the multi-objective linguistic and rhetorical device of hedging by Hyland (1996) in discussion sections of 100 qualitative and quantitative research articles. The findings asserted that a statistically significant difference between qualitative and quantitative RAs with respect to both frequency and form of the employed hedge words, bearing important implications for educational

Table 1. The used hedging taxonomies

Hedges taxonomy	Example
1) Modal auxiliary verbs	may, might, can, could, would, should
2) Modal lexical verbs (or the so-called speech act verbs)	to seem, to appear, to believe, to assume, to suggest
3) Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Probability adjectives b. Nouns c. Adverbs (emotionally-charged intensifiers) 	possible, probable, un/likely assumption, claim, possibility perhaps, possibly, probably
4) Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time	roughly, approximately, often, occasionally
5) Introductory phrases which express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement	I think, I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that
6) If clause	if true, if anything
7) Compound hedges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content b. A lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective where the adverb or adjective reinforces the hedge already inherent in the lexical verb 	it would appear it seems reasonable/probable
8) Hedging by passive voice (agentless) 9) Addition of -ish to adjectives	was believed, was assumed, are suggested reddish
10) Reference to a higher authority	Widdowson (1995) maintains that...
11) Hedging by putting oneself at a distance from the text	this study seeks to..., the study aimed at...
12) Indefinite noun phrase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Numbers which can be accounted as hedge b. Quantifiers 	ten times, three or four days Something or someone

researchers and practitioners in applying appropriate hedging strategies in the academic publishing of scientific texts.

Razavi (2012) declared that hedging is a concept which has a significant role in language, especially from the cognitive aspect. His results indicated although there has not been a clear definition of hedge, from the semantic point of view, these units decrease or increase the limits of the meaning of the words or phrases which are collocated with, and from the pragmatics point of view. Hedges also show whether a sentence is true or false according to the speaker's point of view. Hedges can be studied according to a continuum of hedge on one part the semantic as well as the syntactic characteristics.

Jalilifar (2011) mentioned that hedging is one tactful strategy in political rhetoric associated with vagueness and innuendos. To this aim, four political interviews were selected from CNN and BBC websites on the basis of the diversity of topics and the popularity of the interviewees which were analyzed following a combination of the existing taxonomies of hedges. The findings of this study, notwithstanding its limitations, provided evidence for the relationship between hedging and the degree of political power. It also shed some light on the relationship between hedging patterns, politeness, and face. Both the quantitative and qualitative parts of this study pointed to an inverse relationship between the frequency of downtowners employed and the degree of political power.

Tahririan and Shahzamani (2009) examined the hedging phenomenon, an important linguistic feature which is concerned with the expression of tentativeness and possibility, in journalistic English. It specifically aimed at examining English and Persian social, economic and political newspaper editorials to describe the similarities and differences in the frequency of hedging devices in the two languages. The analysis of the English and Persian editorials confirmed that the English editorials are more heavily hedged than the Persian ones. This might be explained by language and topic variations which can be attributed to cultural differences between the two communities

Jalilifar (2007b) attempted to capitalize on hedges in English academic abstracts written by 3 groups of researchers, namely native speakers of English, native speakers of Persian and native speakers of other languages. To this end, a corpus of 552 theses and dissertation abstracts from 9 disciplines was selected and their hedges were computed. Results of the analysis demonstrated that conventional hedges, hedges by passive voice, and hedges by putting oneself at a distance from the data are the predominant types of hedges employed in the abstracts. The analysis can hardly show disciplinary and group variations in terms of the incorporation of hedging devices.

METHODOLOGY

Corpus/Participants

The data of this study consisted of two smaller corpora components: informal and formal materials. The informal materials consisted of the data which were gathered from 8 Persian movie films. These Persian movie films were chosen randomly including:

- bitabiye bita (Bita is restless) (2012) directed by Mehrdad Farid

- hoze naGGaḡī (the Painting Pool) (2013) directed by Maziar Miri
- gines (Guinness) (2015) directed by Mohsen Tanabandeh
- ed carpet (Red Carpet) (2014) directed by Reza Attaran
- ḡasre yaxbandan (Ice Age) (2015) directed by Mostafa Kiayi
- barcode (Barcode) (2016) directed by Mostafa Kiayi
- ḡabado yec ruz (Life and a Day) (2016) directed by Saeid Roustayi
- xafeji (Asphyxia) (2017) directed by Fereydoun Jeyrani

Totally the films lasted for 12 hours and 54 minutes in which the conversations were between male and female actors and actresses.

Seven telephone conversations and the daily conversations between male and female Persian speakers in different social contexts such as campus of university, street, classroom, bus station, etc. These telephone conversations lasted for 2 hours and 20 minutes. Three of the conversations were between male and male speakers, three of them between female and female, and one of them was between male and female ones. They all talked about different subjects in different contexts and each conversation lasted for 20 minutes. In order to find the data for formal style, 10 MA scientific theses written by 5 male and 5 female university students from applied linguistics were chosen as the corpus.

Data Collection Procedure

One of the main objectives of this study was to identify and classify the linguistic devices which acted as hedges. In order to meet these goals, epistemic expressions such as main verbs, adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and modal auxiliaries that showed uncertainty, tentativeness and vagueness in the gathered data were identified. The list of items expressing doubt and uncertainty are based on Salager-Meyer (1997), Clemen (1996), Skelton (1988), and Jalilifar (2006). Their hedge taxonomies were used as the research framework. The selected films were used to investigate the difference between hedging by Persian male and female speakers, for informal style of this study. After watching the films, all hedging structures were extracted.

The next corpus of this study through which the data were gathered was the social context. Some telephone conversations were recorded regarding ethics and the hedges used by the speakers were found and written as an informal style. Several hedges were found in different places such as university, classroom, street, shops, and bus stations.

For formal style of this study, 10 MA theses (5 of them written by men and 5 of them by women) were chosen randomly from applied linguistics. For investigating the difference between the hedges in formal style, the chapters regarding data analysis and conclusions of these scientific theses were studied. The reason of choosing these chapters was that they were mostly written by the researcher and were his/her own words.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study quantitatively and qualitatively analyzes first, the use and frequency of hedging in genders. Second, the difference between the use of hedges in formal and informal

styles by Persian speakers has been accounted. Finally, the research hedge categories by genders and in different styles are analyzed. To investigate the data, Pearson Chi-square analyses were conducted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To analyze the data, the descriptive statistics and the frequencies of hedging were investigated concentrating on Persian genders, different styles (formal and informal), different hedging categories, and the use of hedging among different genders and styles by Persian speakers as follows:

Hedging by different Genders

The present investigation took 500 cases of hedges into account among which, 49.4% were used by females and the remaining 50.6% were applied by males. Although there was no difference in the number of hedges used by the different genders, it seems that certainly, there is specific difference in the kinds of hedges used by different genders. Also, there is an important point that, there are some hedges used only by males, such as *yaru*/(a guy), while the hedge like *ye sare suzan*/(a little) is used only by females. The frequency of the use of hedges according to the gender has been shown in Table 2.

Accordingly, out of 500 hedges used in this study, 247 ones were used by females and the remaining 253 ones were applied by males. The frequency of the use of hedges based on the gender has been shown in Figure 1.

Hedging in Two Styles (Formal and Informal)

Another variable of this study is style. The hedges in formal and informal styles were analyzed in different formal and informal contexts. The result of the effect of style on the use of hedge is shown in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Based on Table 3, out of 500 hedges in this study, 40 ones belonged to formal category of style and the remaining 460 ones fell into the informal category. The results of this study showed that, hedges in different styles were different both in frequency of the use of the hedges and in kind of the hedges. The frequency of the use of hedges according to the style has been shown in Figure 2.

As Figure 2 indicates, among the 500 hedges considered in this study, 8 % belonged to formal category of style and 92 % fell into the informal category.

Hedging in different Categories

The 500 hedges dealt with in this study belonged to 12 distinctive categories. The frequency of each category has been presented in Table 4.

As Table 3 shows, categories 8, 10, and 11 were not found in this study. Category 12 which contained two sub-categories was added to the whole classification. It included indefinite noun phrase such as numbers (e.g., *ten times*, *three or four days*) and quantifiers (e.g., *something*, *someone*). The frequency of all categories is shown in Figure 3.

Accordingly, 20 hedges (4%) fell into category 1, 44 ones (8.8%) belonged to category 2, 44 (8.8%) to category 3, 262 (52.4%) to category 4, 9 (1.8%) to category 5, 15 (3%) to category 6, 1 (0.2%) to category 7, 26 (5.2%) to category 9, and 79 (15.8%) to category 12. Categories 8, 10, and 11 were not found in this study. Among 12 categories, three categories have some subcategories. These categories are categories 3, 7, and 12. Table 4 shows the distribution of each subcategory in the main category.

According to Table 5, out of 43 hedges belonging to category 3, 2 ones fell into subcategory A, and 41 into subcate-

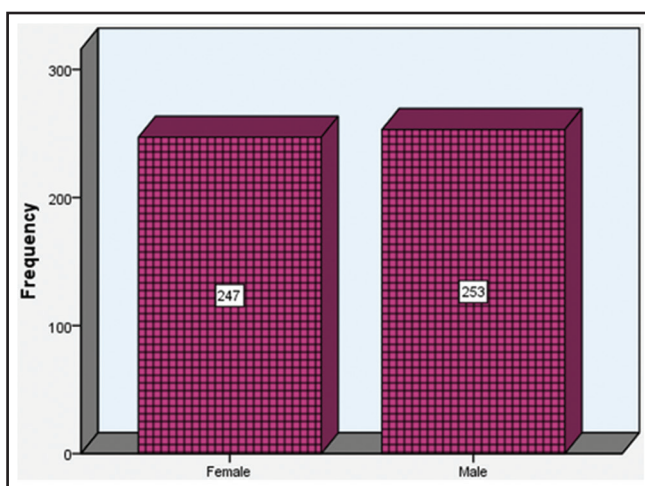


Figure 1. The frequency of hedging by different genders

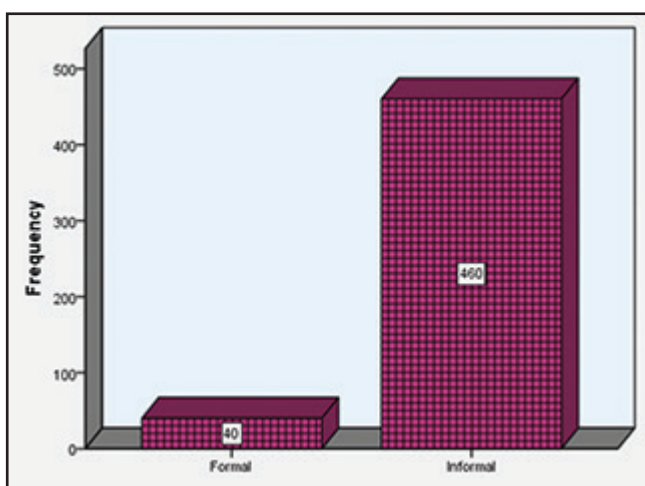


Figure 2. The frequency of hedge in different styles

Table 2. The frequency and use of hedge by different genders

Cumulative percent	Valid percent	Percent	Frequency		
49.4	49.4	49.4	247	Female	Valid
100.0	50.6	50.6	253	Male	
	100.0	100.0	500	Total	

gory C, hedges belonging with category B were not found in the present investigation. The only hedge being in category 7 fell into the subcategory B. Finally, out of 79 hedges of category 12, 20 fell into subcategory A, and 59 ones were of the subcategory B type. The whole are summarized in Figure 4.

To consider the difference between the use of hedging categories in male and female Persian speakers, a Pearson Chi-square analysis was launched, according to Table 6.

As indicated in Table 6, since p value is not less than the alpha level of.05 ($p = .162$), the Chi-square test was not significant. Therefore, there was not a significant difference

between males and females regarding the use of hedges according to 12 categories. In the present investigation, out of 500 hedges, 247 ones were used by females and 253 by males. In category 1 and 6, hedges belonged to the female group and 14 ones were used by males. In category 2, 25 hedges were used by females and 19 ones were used by males. Category 3 had 20 hedges used by females and 24 used by males. In category 4, 137 hedges were used by females and 125 ones by males. Category 5 had 4 instances used by females and 5 ones by males. In category 6, 9 ones belonged to females and 6 ones to males. The only hedge

Table 3. The frequency and use of hedge in different style

Cumulative percent	Valid percent	Percent	Frequency		
8.0	8.0	8.0	40	Formal	Valid
100.0	92.0	92.0	460	Informal	
	100.0	100.0	500	Total	

Table 4. The frequency and use of hedge in different categories

Cumulative percent	Valid percent	Percent	Frequency		
4.0	4.0	4.0	20	Category 1	Valid
12.8	8.8	8.8	44	Category 2	
21.6	8.8	8.8	44	Category 3	
74.0	52.4	52.4	262	Category 4	
75.8	1.8	1.8	9	Category 5	
78.8	3.0	3.0	15	Category 6	
79.0	0.2	0.2	1	Category 7	
84.2	5.2	5.2	26	Category 9	
100.0	15.8	15.8	79	Category 12	
	100.0	100.0	500	Total	

Table 5. Subcategories of three hedge categories

Total	Hedge Category				Category
	Category 12	Category 7	Category 3		
22	20	0	2	Subcategory A	
60	59	1	0	Subcategory B	
41	0	0	41	Subcategory C	
123	79	1	43	Total	

Table 6. Chi-square test for hedge category and genders

Sig.	Pearson Chi-square value	df	Total	Female	Male		
0.162	11.757	8	20	14	6	Category 1	Hedge Category
			44	19	25	Category 2	
			44	24	20	Category 3	
			262	125	137	Category 4	
			9	5	4	Category 5	
			15	6	9	Category 6	
			1	0	1	Category 7	
			26	11	15	Category 9	
			79	49	30	Category 12	
			500	253	247	Total	

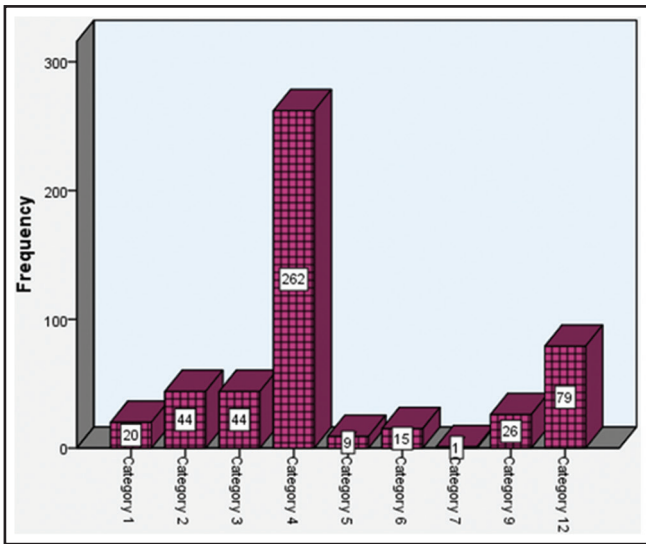


Figure 3. The frequency of hedge in different categories

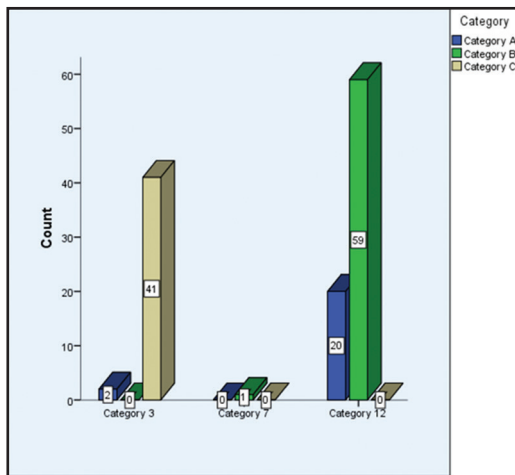


Figure 4. Subcategories of three hedge categories

found in category 7 was for female Persian speaker. In category 9, 15 hedges fell in female group and 11 ones were in male group. Figure 5 visualizes such a finding.

Besides, to evaluate the difference between the use of hedging in formal and informal styles by Persian speakers, a Pearson Chi-square analysis was conducted, as shown in Table 7.

As Table 7 shows, the Chi-square test was significant ($p = 0.000$) with the Chi-square value of 42.895. Therefore, there was a significant difference between the use of hedges in formal and informal styles based on 12 categories. Out of 500 hedges considered in this study, 460 ones belonged to informal category of style, and the remaining 40 ones were formal uses of hedge by Persian speakers. Out of 20 hedges belonging to category 1, 4 were formal and 15 were informal. Category 2 had 2 formal and 42 informal hedges. In category 3, 11 were formal and 33 were informal. In category 4, 9 were formal and 253 ones were informal. All hedges in category 5 belonged to informal style. Category 6 had one instance of formal type and 14 examples of informal type. The only hedge found in category 7 fell in informal type. Category 9 had 7 formal and 19 informal hedges. Finally, category 12 had 6 formals and 73 informal uses of hedge.

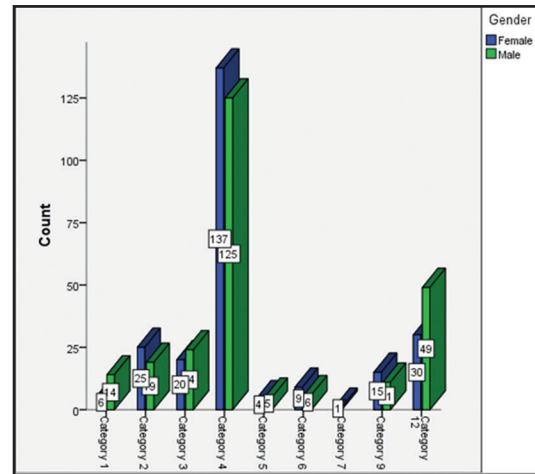


Figure 5. Hedge categories in genders

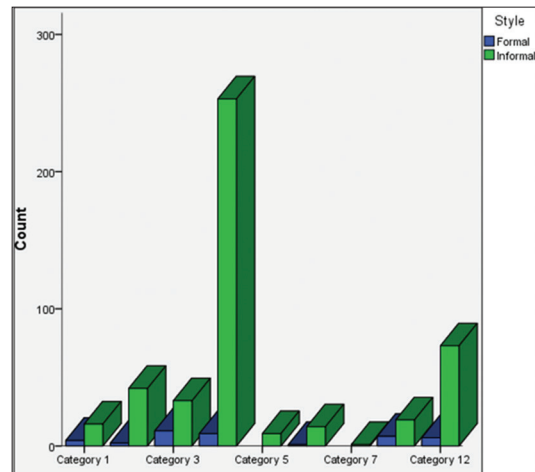


Figure 6. Hedge categories in different styles

So, it can be concluded that Persian speakers would mostly prefer informal uses of hedge with keeping in mind that informal type outnumbered the formal style in the present investigation. Figure 6 pictures the above finding.

Hedging among Persian Genders in Two Styles

To study the difference between males and female speakers, the use of hedges in two styles, a Pearson Chi-square analysis was launched, as shown in Table 8.

As indicated in Table 8, since p value was not less than the alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.683$), the Chi-square test was not significant. Therefore, there was not a significant difference between males and females regarding the style of hedges they use. Out of 500 hedges in this study, 274 ones were used by Persian speakers among which 21 hedges were formal and the remaining 226 ones were informal ones. Males used 253 hedges out of which 19 belonged to the formal style and 234 ones were informal uses of hedge by Persian speakers, as shown in Figure 7.

CONCLUSION

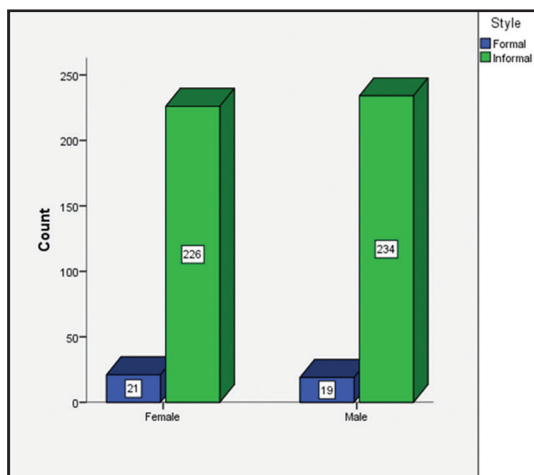
This study discussed a descriptive analysis of gender and style on hedging among Persian speakers. In doing so, 500

Table 7. Chi-square test for hedge category in different styles

Sig.	Pearson Chi-square value	df	Total	Style		Hedge Category
				Informal	Formal	
0.000	42.895	8	20	16	4	Category 1
			44	42	2	Category 2
			44	33	11	Category 3
			262	253	9	Category 4
			9	9	0	Category 5
			15	14	1	Category 6
			1	1	0	Category 7
			26	19	7	Category 9
			79	73	6	Category 12
			500	460	40	Total

Table 8. Chi-square test for the use of hedge among genders in different styles

Sig.	Pearson Chi-square value	df	Total	Style		Gender
				Informal	Formal	
0.683	0.167	8	247	226	21	Female
			253	234	19	Male
			500	460	40	Total

**Figure 7.** The use of hedge among Persian genders in different styles

hedges were investigated considering the social variables gender and style. To compare and analyze the use of hedging among Persian speakers, Chi-square analyses were conducted. The findings revealed that there wasn't a significant difference between the use of hedging by male and female speakers, 49.4% of hedges were used by females and 50.6% of hedges were applied by males. The differences were mostly in the types of hedging the two genders used. In contrast, a significant difference can be found between the use of hedging in formal and informal style. The difference was in frequency of the use of hedging as well as in the kind of hedges. It showed that 8% of hedges belonged to the formal style while 92% belonged to the informal style. The Persian speakers mostly preferred to use hedging in informal style than that in formal one. From among the used hedging taxonomies, categories 8, 10, and

11 were not found in the corpus of this study. Besides, 3 categories including category 3, 7, and 12 contained some hedging subcategories. Among the 12 categories, most of the considered hedges (52.4%) were from category 4 and the least (0.2%) were from category 7. Hedging made no difference among female and male Persian speakers based on the research hedging categories, but our findings were different in two styles in hedging categories with having more hedges in informal one. The final results showed similar types of hedging among genders and different uses of hedging by Persian speakers in both styles.

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