

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG**

**TRẦN NỮ LY NA**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO HEDGING DEVICES  
IN ACADEMIC WRITING OF VIETNAMESE  
THIRD-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DA NANG –  
UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES**

**Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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(SUMMARY)**

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. RATIONALE

In the increasingly globalized and multicultural world, acquiring a new language, especially English, as a foreign language seems to be an integral demand of any person at any age. English now occupies a unique position as a lingua franca and plays a more and more important role in the daily life of people around the world. Of four language skills, writing is considered as one of the most difficult skills for learners to achieve the proficiency in learning English process. Having been affected by the mother tongue for a very long time, Vietnamese learners mostly tend to translate exactly what they think in Vietnamese into English.

As many scholars have emphasized in their previous studies, hedging devices play an important role in writing, especially in the genre of academic writing. Although very good at grammar and rich of vocabulary, Vietnamese students hardly know how to use hedging devices properly and find it confusing to use these tools of writing. As a result, at the level of academic, their essays are often lack of hedging devices or the hedges in the essays are misused, which causes a number of errors in their papers as well as leads to the lack of academic elements.

This fact has urged the researcher to carry out the study of hedging devices in the third-year university students' academic writing with the title "*An Investigation into Hedging Devices In Academic Writing of Vietnamese Third-year University Students at the University of Da Nang – University of Foreign Language*

*Studies*". Due to the weakness in academic writing of most of Vietnamese students in general and university students of English in particular, Vietnamese as the non-native students tend to use hedges very little or improperly, which leads to the problem that their writing is not "academic". Therefore, the study aims to examine how Vietnamese students use hedges in their essays at class, as well as identify the common errors when employing hedging devices in writing.

## **1.2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.2.1. Aim of the study**

The study aims to examine the use of hedging devices in academic writing of the third-year students at University of Foreign Language Studies, the University of Danang.

Specifically, the researcher is identifying the syntactic and semantic features of hedging in students' English essays as well as the frequency of kinds of hedges in students' papers. Simultaneously, the study is also expected to point out the errors related to the use of hedging device that the writers may have in writing process. From that, the researcher would like to predict the reasons of their making errors and suggest some solutions with the hope to help students to use hedges effectively and improve their academic writing.

### **1.2.2. Objectives of the study**

The study attempts to fulfill the following objectives:

- To determine the frequency of hedging devices in the third-year students' essays as well as examine the errors related to hedging devices students may often make in academic writing

- To give out the reasons why students make these errors and suggest some solutions to help students to use hedges correctly and improve their writing skill, especially academic writing skill.

To provide Vietnamese learners of English with a practical knowledge of the field to enable them to thoroughly understand, effectively and naturally use hedging devices in learning English, especially in academic writing.

### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To accomplish the study as expected, the researcher attempts to seek the answers of these following questions:

1. What kinds of hedging devices are employed by third-year university students in academic writing from the view of syntax, semantics and pragmatics?

2. What errors related to the use of hedging devices do students often make in their essay?

3. What are the possible reasons of the errors related to hedging devices that students often make?

### **1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study mainly focuses on the use of hedging devices in academic writing of the students of English in lexical extend. Simultaneously, the researcher examined the errors that students often make in writing.

The study was carried out and the samples were collected. Because of the limited time and the basic criteria, the researcher collected 200 essays that are qualified to examine.

### **1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The analysis of the use of hedging devices in academic writing at university level is hopefully a significant contribution to learners'

awareness of the effective methods in writing skill. The study on the errors related to hedges will be certainly helpful for university students, especially the third-year university students, who will carry out writing their graduate thesis papers in the last year of the course, to avoid making errors as well as achieve the improvement in writing.

### **1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The research includes five chapters.

Chapter 1 is Introduction. Chapter 2 is Literature Review and Theoretical Background. Chapter 3 is Methods and Procedures. Chapter 4 is Findings and Discussions. Chapter 5 is Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions for further research beyond the limits of the study.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1.1. Previous studies**

Hedging devices are mainly used in many genres of writing, especially in academic writing because of their objectivity in academic discourse. As a result, many scholars have been attracted to this kind of epistemic element and there are many researches carried out in this field.

Sofia Serholt [49] carries out the research of “Gender differences in essay written by Swedish advanced learners of English”. Robert Macintyre, has done the other study on “The use of hedges and boosters in argumentative essays of Japanese university students” in 2013 and states that hedges and boosters play a very important role in academic writing; however, although students use hedges in their essays they are confused about exactly how to use them. One of the great scholars who worked and contributed many researches to the field of hedges is Key Hyland. In his study titled “Hedging in Academic Writing and EAP textbooks” [27], Hyland investigates into the interaction in writing discourse and the role of hedging devices in academic writing. In 1997, he wrote the book of “Hedging in Scientific Research Articles” in which he states that hedging is central to scientific argument, individual scientists and, ultimately, science itself. Wiltrud Mihatsch and Stefan Schneider

[42] has edited and released the book “New approaches to hedging”. The study offers new theoretical and descriptive perspectives on the context-dependent nature and multifunctionality of hedges.

There are many studies on gender differences concerning the use of different politeness strategies in spoken and/or written discourse (Coates [10]); Holmes [23]) or studies done concerning hedges and boosters in academic writing for both professional researchers as well as second language students of English.

Bonyadi et al. [3] carries out a study comparing and contrasting the frequency and types of hedges in Discussion sections of Environmental Sciences Research Articles written in English by English writers and in Farsi by Iranian writers.

In Vietnam, a number of researchers have paid attention to study epistemic modality and hedges. Cao Xuan Hao [61] studies performative verbs and their signals of illocutionary force in “Tiếng Việt Sơ Khảo Ngữ Pháp chức năng”. Regarding hedges, M.A.Thesis by Tran Thi Phuong Thao [54] studies “Hedging and Boosting in Academic Writing”. Nguyen Duong Nguyen Trinh [46] examined a wide range of hedging device in the representative speech act in English and Vietnamese in her M.A. Thesis.

### **2.1.2. Studies on L2 students**

It may be difficult to distinguish between the effects that the students’ first language may have on their English writing versus their individual proficiency level if this is not investigated. Yet, there seem to be noted differences between native and non-native speakers

of English, although their nationalities are not specified.

That L2 students might lack an understanding of hedging has also been mentioned by Markkanen and Schröder [40], who suggest that the difficulties experienced by both L1 and L2 students might result from the lack of teaching of hedging.

## **2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.2.1. Hedging**

#### ***a. Definition of Hedging***

According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the words hedge and hedging can be defined as a barrier, limit, defense, or the act or means of protection or defense. As some researchers have claimed, it is not easy to give out the exact definition of hedging because it has been viewed from different perspectives by different researchers for ages. Lakoff, Hyland, Markkanen and Schroder and many other scholars have introduced their definitions from their view of hedging's functions.

#### ***b. Epistemic Modality and Hedging***

Since there are many different definitions of the concept hedge, there naturally comes other terms that are close to it. One of the most important concepts that cut across the area of hedges is that of modality.

### **2.2.2. Taxonomies of hedges**

#### **2.2.3. Hedges in Academic writing**

In academic writing, different writers have different use of hedges according to the field the writers represent.

### **2.2.4. Errors related to Hedging devices in Academic writing**

According to Fiona Kwai Peng (2014), there are five types of hedging errors identified:

1. Errors involving the wrong form of the verb appearing after an epistemic modal;
2. Errors exclusively pertaining to an epistemic modal;
3. Attaching an inappropriate hedge to an item that should be hedged;
4. Not attaching a hedge to an item that should be hedged;
5. Attaching a hedge to an item that cannot or should not be hedged.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD AND PROCEDURES

#### 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.2. RESEARCH METHODS

Depending on the set goals of the thesis quantitative methods are chosen as the dominant ones which are most frequently used in the thesis.

#### 3.3. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

The subjects of the study include 200 third-year university students from English Department at UFLS, UD. Students have been studying at the college for 2 years now so that they are expectedly skillful enough in writing.

Students were asked to write an essay including 230-260 words in genre of academic writing. The time limit is 50 minutes.

#### 3.4. DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected from the essays of 200 students selected.

#### 3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the samples are analyzed through the frameworks suggested in term of syntactic features.

*Table 3.1. The Classification Of Hedging Devices Examined In This Study*

<b>Words/Structure of Hedges</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Epistemic modals	may, might, could, would
Verbal hedging involving main verbs	appear, seem, suggest, indicate, assume

<b>Words/Structure of Hedges</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Non-verbal hedges	
Nouns	suggestion, claim, possibility,
Adjectives	likely, probable, possible
Adverbs	perhaps, probably, possibly,
Words/phrases expressing degree, quantity, frequency	approximately, roughly, , generally, in general, some of, many of, a few of
Introductory phrases	in our opinion/view, we feel/believe that
If clauses	if true
Passive voice (reporting verbs)	be regarded as, be viewed as

### **3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

Collecting precise data by recording can enhance the validity of the data from the interviews. In addition, the data collected from the book are a reliable source of data. The textbook has been used by nurse students in many colleges.

### **3.7. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

Since the samples of words and phrases related to hedging devices collected from written materials for this study are a totally authentic source of data is quite reliable. Additionally, in this study, the researcher sets out her work from the analysis of evidence,

statistics, frequencies, then comes to conclusion, so he is not driven by some set results. In other words, the objectivity of study is assured.

The results of study, on the one hand, provide some theoretical background for enhancing writing skill, on the other hand, make a contribution to the learning and teaching English in particular and foreign languages in general. Thus, the research result is significant not only in theory and but also in actual practice.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**4.1. HEDGING DEVICES IN STUDENTS' WRITING**

**4.1.1. Taxonomy of hedges**

**4.1.2. The frequency of using hedges in students' writing**

*Table 4.2. The Use of Hedges in Students' Writing*

<b>Hedging devices</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Percentage of hedging devices</b>
Epistemic modals	528	17.61
Verbal verbs	876	29.22
Non-verbal hedges		
Nouns	98	3.27
Adjectives	428	14.28
Adverbs	332	11.07
Words of degree, quantity, frequency	513	17.11
Introductory phrases	73	2.43
If clauses	0	0
Passive	150	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,998</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen from the table 4.2, students prefer to use hedging devices in form of verbal hedging. It accounts for 29.22% with 876 words. The epistemic modals and words/phrases expressing degree, quantity and frequency are used at the same rate. Of two, the epistemic modals make up the slightly higher rate with 17.61% while words/phrases expressing degree, quantity and frequency are at

17.11%. On the contrary, students use Introductory phrases less than hedging nouns with the proportion respectively of 2.43% and 3.27%. It is clearly from the table that none of the students use the structure of If clause as hedges in their writing

*Table 4.3. Most Frequent Hedges*

<b>Hedges</b>	<b>Items total</b>	<b>% of total</b>
believe	527	25.93
think	517	25.44
argue	352	17.32
may/might	326	16.04
can	310	15.27
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,032</b>	<b>57.24</b>

The high frequency of modals signals their fairly easy acquisition by non-native speakers. The two frequent modals can and may are unlikely to cause problems for Vietnamese students of English. One possible reason for that could be that can and may are rendered in Vietnamese as one word. Also the process is facilitated by the language feature that the use of the above modals in English and Vietnamese is accomplished through the same grammatical pattern (can/ may + Infinitive). Another interesting point is that students sometimes find it rather difficult to discriminate between can and may. The other two hedges believe and think, are synonymous. If taken together, the two English hedges make up a fairly high proportion of the corpus of hedges in the students' papers: believe – 25.93% and think – 25.44%.

## 4.2. HEDGING ERRORS

### 4.2.1. Classification of hedging errors

### 4.2.2. Errors in students' writing

*Table 4.5. The Common Errors Related To Hedging Devices In Students' Writing*

<b>Errors</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Errors involving an incorrect form of the verb appearing after an epistemic modal	91	76.47
Errors exclusive pertaining to an epistemic modal	5	4.2
Errors arising from attaching an inappropriate hedge to an item that should be hedged	7	5.88
Errors arising from not attaching a hedge to an item that should be hedged	16	13.45
Errors arising from attaching a hedge to an item that cannot or should not be hedged	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Depending on the types of errors mentioned above, the researcher classified and analyzed the data as the table 4.4. Most students tend to make errors by using incorrect form of the verb after an epistemic modal. Moreover, this kind of errors appears not only in third-year university students' essays, but in many lower grade students' writing papers. The most reasonable explanations for this kind of error are that students may not be aware of the use of singular

tense of verbs due to the differences between their L1 and L2 as well as the difficulties within L2 learning process. The kinds of errors were shown in the table 4.4. The most frequent type of hedging errors appeared in using the wrong form of the verb appearing after an epistemic modal (76.47%); the second most frequent type of error was errors arising from not attaching a hedge to an item that should be hedged (13.45%). Errors arising from attaching an inappropriate hedge to an item that should be hedged constituted the third most frequent type of hedging errors (5.88%). The least frequent hedging errors that students often make are the type of errors exclusive pertaining to an epistemic modal. The type of errors arising from attaching a hedge to an item that cannot or should not be hedged was not made.

### **4.3. SOURCES OF HEDGING ERRORS**

The sources of hedging errors might be the consequences of the two following:

- The differences between L1 and L2 make it difficult for learners to achieve proficiency in learning language.
- the errors are likely to result from the students' unawareness of hedging and its role in the academic writing

In general, the types of errors appearing in the students' essays are typical and noticeable. Although the number of errors accounts for a small proportion when compared to the total words, phrases and structures related to hedging devices, the types of errors seems to be systematic. The two possible explanations for the students' making errors are that the students suffer from the interference of their mother tongue and that the students are unaware of the use of hedging devices in academic writing.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **5.1. CONCLUSIONS**

This paper conducted as a quantitative study has given the facts about the use of hedging devices of students in writing. With the aim to examine the use of hedging devices in academic writing of third-year students at University of Foreign Language Studies in Danang, the study attempts to fulfill the three questions:

1. What kinds of hedging devices are employed by third-year university students in academic writing from the view of syntax, semantics and pragmatics?
2. What errors related to the use of hedging devices do students often make in their essay?
3. What are the possible reasons of the errors related to hedging devices that students often make?

The quantitative method was used to assist the data collecting process. All the data was illustrated in tables and figures. Based on the framework of the categories of hedges, the data of the words, phrases and structures related to hedging devices were collected properly and exactly. Thanks to that, the study found what errors related to hedging devices and provided some possible sources of hedging errors. This study highlights the important role of modal markers in argumentative writing and in developing a successful piece of writing. From the errors that students often make or the lack of hedges in their writing, we can see that the writers' tendency to use strong language to show commitment imply the need for the inclusion of lessons on hedging in

the academic writing subjects as well as the need for students to be more exposed to the conventions of research writing. It might be helpful to raise awareness among students of the usefulness of various devices, especially reader-friendly hedges, in mitigating claims no matter how controversial or how much their topics affect them. Hedging is an important discourse feature that students must learn if they want their ideas to be taken seriously in the academic community. Training students to be “confidently uncertain” (Skelton [51] in Swales & Feak, [53, p. 125] could prepare them for communicative situations that mostly require politeness. It could be a good preparation for writing research articles intended for publishing should the writers later on embark on graduate studies.

The study was carried out step by step to solve the two main issues: firstly, examine the employment of hedging devices in students’ paper and secondly, gives out the errors students easily make when writing a piece of academic writing. The errors that they make belong to the typical errors of grammatical aspect. Based on the result of the study, both teachers and learners of English, especially those who have the demand for taking part in academic community, can find out their own strategies in learning and teaching English writing skill.

Interestingly, students prefer short hedges and stick to conventional ways of hedging, trying to use modal verbs, markers of indefiniteness, quantifiers (quite, little), structures with seem to, tend to etc. An awareness of academic conventions also involves the awareness of register, which for some students seems to be difficult to attain. Therefore elements from spoken language sometimes find their way into the students’ written discourse, e.g. as if, kind of, more or

less etc. These elements usually serve as hedges; however, cases of inappropriate register in my corpus were rather rare. Another interesting feature is concerned with individual preferences. Table 4.1 shows that the majority of students in the collected corpus tend to use from 1 to 1.5 hedges per 100 words.

The high frequency of epistemic modals and the varied hedging modals used in writing papers indicate the preference of students in this kind of hedge. To some extent, epistemic modals contribute to the certainty as well as the convincing of a piece of academic writing. In the process of acquiring a language, students are supposed to have the proper and effective strategies. One of the significant approaches is using hedging devices in their writing.

## **5.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There are several limitations to this study:

Firstly, the number of students who are available for the study is not sufficiently representative for the whole students who follow the course of academic writing. Besides, there are 200 written essays qualified enough for the researcher to study. Secondly, the judgment of the appropriateness of a hedge appeared to be based upon a subjective decision. However, the identification and judgment of the appropriateness of a hedge seems to be inherently subjective. As Grabe and Kaplan [17] point out, even deciding whether a linguistic device falls into the category of a hedge or an emphatic appears to be “a fairly subjective decision in a number of cases” (p.155).

Another possible factor further contributing to subjectivity in the data analysis was that only the researcher was engaged in the process. In view of this factor, extra measures were taken to ensure

intra-marker reliability: the researcher analyzed the essays a total of five times at an interval of two days to one week to ensure that the same framework of analysis was applied. For example, the phrase “would discuss” in the statement “I would discuss the problem below” was not included in the pool of errors in the first round of analysis, but it was decided that it should be included in the second round, so all the essays that had already been analyzed were re-analyzed. During the re-reading, some hedges that had been overlooked were included. The third limitation results from the exclusive use of epistemic modals in deciding on whether a hedge had been used inappropriately; other hedging devices shown in Table 4.2 – that is, neither verbal hedging involving main verbs and nor non-verbal hedging devices – were included in the analysis. For example, whether the use of the reporting verb argued or the use of the adverb usually should be considered inappropriate in the context was not examined because of constraints on time and on manpower available in this small-scale research study. It takes a great deal of time to examine the appropriateness of hedges using contextual clues. In addition, the difficulty in the identification of hedges had also been raised by Mauranen [41]. She pointed out the crucial role textual context plays in the process of identifying hedges: “expressions which are typically used as hedges, have also other uses, and their potential for acting as hedges is only realized in some contexts, in interaction with other linguistic features” (p.119). Perhaps, a comprehensive analysis of all hedging devices could constitute an area for future research. As a consequence of the third limitation that only modal verbs were judged in terms of the appropriateness in the context, three possibilities remained unexplored: First, it is not certain

whether other types of hedges used by the authors were appropriate. Second, even regarding a modal verb appearing in an essay, whether the use of the modal is appropriate is merely speculative. The modal will was found out in some essays; however, the present researcher took the use of will in the context of the essays as inappropriate because no evidence supporting the claim was available. This limitation seems to find support in Mauranen's study. Each of the revisers in her study commented "hedging is above all a matter of the writer's choice. It is up to the writer to decide the level of certainly he or she believes in appropriate" (p.124). Third, the subjects might not know the meaning of the hedges they used. Lewin [37] found that the choices of hedges made by the authors in her study did not coincide with definitions that were previously reported in the literature. Further, she found that the authors did not regard politeness as constituting the primary reason for using hedges. Because of possible uncertainty about the meaning of hedges among EFL learners, future researchers might wish to develop some measures to ascertain the intent of student writers when they use particular hedges. Requiring participants to write a reflective piece of writing explaining his/her use of hedges might serve to ascertain the subjects' meanings. A less demanding task might be to construct a list of typical hedges (extracted from a random sample of texts) and to ask subjects briefly to define the intent of the examples.

### **5.3. IMPLICATIONS**

The study is carried out with the purpose to have an overall look to the use of hedges of the second language students of English in academic writing. The survey in students' essays indicates how

students use hedges to make their writing more academic. Simultaneously, the frequency of hedging devices in their papers is examined, which show students' ability to apply hedges in writing. Consequently, the strengths and weakness of the students in using hedges could be pointed out. The results of the research are hoped to be a useful material for teachers and learners of academic writing. Teachers possibly have effective methods in teaching to encourage students to use hedging devices effectively and correctly in their writing. Besides, students may conceive their weakness in order to avoid mistakes and improve their skills.

To the educators, the findings of this study have important implications to the study of academic writing as one of the compulsory courses taught in Vietnamese universities. It has been indicated earlier that writers' awareness of the use of hedging in writing is essential because the ability to use hedging appropriately helps writers craft their statements to produce credible, rational, and convincing claims.

Following are three arguments that explain why hedging should be taught to students of academic writing. First, knowledge on hedges enables writers to express propositions with greater accuracy in areas often characterized by reformulation and reinterpretation such as in academic writing.

Second, as has been indicated earlier, writers' awareness of the use of hedging in writing is essential because the ability to use hedging appropriately helps writers soften their statements to avoid overstated claims. Novice writers tend to make "big claims" while they are not aware of the effect of their claims.

Hedging is important because writers need to maintain

academic credibility. This study has proven that hedges can assist writers to shun personal responsibility for statements in order to protect their reputations as scholars and limit the damage which may result from errors. This usage is associated with Lakoff's perspective that considered hedges as similar to "fuzziness" (Hyland 1998). Third, hedges can contribute to the development of the writer-reader relationship, addressing the need for deference and cooperation in gaining reader approval of the subjects' claims. This finding is in line with Hyland's [29, p.35] idea that "hedges appeal to readers as intelligent colleague, capable of deciding the issues, and indicate that statements are provisional, pending acceptance by one's peers."

To students, foreign students generally find the expressions of commitment and detachment to their propositions problematic. L2 writers, even those with a good command of English grammar and lexis are likely to fail to hedge statements adequately. This fact can badly impede a student's participation in a research world dominated by the international lingua franca of English.

A Non Native Speaker who wishes to function in the international research world must be familiar with its conventions and be able to recognize and use hedging devices appropriately. Therefore, the study of hedges can assist non-native students to participate more fully and successfully in the world of academic research. In order to sharpen their writing skills, students should start to learn to recognize and use hedging in their writing. This way would boost their confidence in their productive skills in both written and spoken English.

## 5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Based on the findings and implications emerging from the present study, there would be the need for further investigation that would interrogate some issues as follows:

First, there could be a study that would investigate whether there exist of any linguistic means of hedging that would be uniquely Vietnamese and would be different from the various lexicogrammatical forms of hedging that the literature mentions. A sociolinguistic study of this kind would provide a clue as to how innovative Vietnamese academics could be when it comes to exploring the linguistic resources available to suit the purpose for which they write.

Second, there could be a study that would investigate whether writers are conscious of the hedging devices that they employ in the claims they make. This study, which would more qualitative in nature, should, among other things, be interested in investigating whether the underlying reasons for which such hedging devices are employed are achieved.

Finally, there should be a study that would investigate whether or not a researcher could be said to have over hedged or under hedged. Like the previous recommendation, such a study should be interested in finding out the underlying reasons for the use of such quantity of hedges and more importantly their effect on readers' acceptability of the claims made. The study should again attempt to explore the possibility of hedging devices making more impact than many other means of syntax and semantics.

As Chen [7] observes, the awareness of L2 learners'

acquisitional processes cannot be overlooked and should be explicitly stressed by language teachers in real language classrooms. Therefore, in keeping with the importance of knowing the function of modal markers in developing an appropriate piece of writing, the findings of this study revealed that EFL learners need more assistance:

1) To be able to distinguish the meaning and functions of hedging elements.

2) To carefully select the correct epistemic device and place it in combination with their arguments to fulfill the rhetorical purpose of the intended speech act.

3) To be able to mitigate the illocutionary force of their writing

4) To be aware of the pragmatic differences of the modal auxiliaries, and the semi-modals, and the modal idiom

5) To learn about the co-occurring devices also known as modal harmonic phrases.