


Chapter 8

The Role of Hedging in Shaping Rhetorical Structure of Research Papers in Economics: A Comparative Bulgarian– English Study

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ABSTRACT

In the context of economic research, where hypotheses are validated or disproven, it is common for authors to employ various strategies of hedging to either distance themselves or express solidarity with their claims. The exploration of the author's ethos can be achieved through an analysis of the epistemic markers that indicate their persuasive intent and confidence. This study conducts both quantitative and qualitative analyses of economic research articles, focusing on their objectification strategies and the relationship between rhetorical structure and hedging. The analysis categorizes hedging into three main strategies—Indetermination, Subjectivization, and Objectivization—drawing on Martin-Martin's research. The findings reveal significant differences in the hedging tools employed in Bulgarian and English economic research articles within the selected corpora.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF HEDGING. SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS.

In linguistics, the word “hedge” has the meaning of “mitigating”, “reducing the power of expression”. It was Brown and Levinson (1987), who, based on Goffman's work (1967), introduced the concepts of “Positive Face” and “Negative Face”. The latter is the need for an individual not to be interrupted, while the former is the desire to be liked and approved by others (Goffman, 1967). Hedging, from a theoretical point of view, is a form of the author's ethos and identity, their degree of presence in the text. It also suggests that there may be factors in language interaction that make it possible for the sender's message to be perceived as a “threat”. Given that scientific hypotheses are proven or refuted in research articles in economics, it is quite natural for the authors to resort to different strategies of distancing or expressing solidarity (Meyers, 1989). Objectification strategies of expression also determine the authorial place in the scientific discourse in the socializing community. The author's ethos can be explored by analyzing the different epistemic markers associated with their drive for persuasion and confidence.

The impact of socio-cultural factors on hedging practices across different academic communities is evident in various forms, shaped by the core values, communication styles, and conventions tied to specific cultural contexts. In the Anglo-American academic tradition, hedging is particularly prominent, functioning as a tool for constructing persuasive and rational scholarly arguments. In his postdoctoral research Kafes demonstrated that American and Turkish academic writers exhibit distinct meta-discourse characteristics, with Anglo-American authors frequently utilizing hedges to critique established knowledge and foster constructive discussions. This approach not only strengthens the persuasiveness of their arguments within their respective discourse communities but also embodies the cultural principles of skepticism and open dialogue rooted in the Socratic tradition (Kafes, 2017).

Moreover, the concept of trust, which is crucial in scholarly communication, heavily interacts with the deployment of hedging strategies. The work by Haider and Åström elucidates how the dynamics of trust within peer review processes and the increasing competitiveness of academia shape the necessity for cautious claims in scholarly writings (Haider & Åström, 2016). The role of institutions and cultural practices provides a backdrop against which authors assess the acceptability of hedging within their specific contexts, highlighting the interplay between cultural expectations and personal writing strategies (Sayah & Hashemi, 2014). In fact, research indicates that engagement with hedging can vary significantly, as suggested by Mokhtar et al., who emphasized how different interpersonal strategies can manifest in academic writing contexts (Mokhtar et al., 2021).

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