

A corpus-based Comparison of Albanian and Italian Student Papers in L1 and L2: the Case of Hedges and Boosters

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Abstract

The conveyance of certainty and uncertainty is crucial to the interactive and rhetorical nature of academic writing. It is relevant because scholars achieve approval by finding the right balance between the investment of statements with the confidence of reliable knowledge and the tentativeness to convey doubt and adequate social interrelations (cf. Hyland 1998: 1). Holmes (1983, 1984, 1990), and Hyland (1998: 1) referred to this as hedges and boosters. The major aim of this comparative study is to investigate the differences and similarities in the usage of hedges and boosters between Albanian and Italian students expressed in their academic writings. Firstly, a separate analysis L1-L2 within the two samples will show the impact of their L1 on their L2. Secondly, a comparison between the two nationalities will reflect the differences and similarities between them. I have compiled two corpora of Italian student writings, respectively in Italian and English, with 3 million words each. Additionally, I have created two corpora of Albanian student writings in Albanian (2.2 million words) and in English (550.000 words). A similar amount of males and females, academic level (for Master and PhD theses) and number of words for each discipline is presented in all corpora with disciplines from soft and hard sciences (Social Sciences, Languages and Literature, Medicine, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Informatics). My mixed-method study will be grounded in the field of epistemic modality. As Toska (2015: 164) stated, very little research (e.g. Toska, Panajoti, Edusei 2015) has been conducted on academic writing by Albanian scholarly circles. That is why it is essential to initiate research in this field and to analyze (culture-) specific features of these two language groups more deeply. First results indicate that Italian students show a higher use of hedges and boosters in their L2 writings compared to the Albanian students.