

# Politeness in Student Academic texts from the Balkans: Hedges, Engagement Markers and Author Invisibility Forms

---

**Vincenzo Dheskali**

Sixth Semester PhD Student

Chemnitz University of Technology

[vincenzo.dheskali@s2015.tu-chemnitz.de](mailto:vincenzo.dheskali@s2015.tu-chemnitz.de)



# Politeness, face and face-threatening acts

Politeness is used by the author to either satisfy the addressees' positive or negative face. Positive face indicates a positive self-image and a desire that this self-image is approved by others. Negative face refers to freedom of action and rights of non-distractedness (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 61-62).

“FTAs [face-threatening acts] are speech acts such as complaints, criticisms, disagreements [threats to the positive face] and insults but perhaps surprisingly also apologies, invitations, advice and compliments [threats to the negative face].” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65 – 68 ; cited in Riekkinen 2009: 14).

“[...] it is normally in the interest of speakers and addressees to cooperate in maintaining each other's face, [...]” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68; cited in Riekkinen 2009: 15).

# Methodology

- A brief overview on academic writing in the Balkans
- A short quantitative analysis
- 22 academic term papers of BA, MA and PhD students from Albania, Macedonia and Serbia (48.915 Words)
- Term Papers/Essays from my CARE corpus and written for DICE, 2017 and CHEP, 2018.
- Focus on politeness strategies: Hedges, engagement markers and author invisibility forms

# My corpus and its subcorpora






CARE, SS17, SS18	
37 Papers (2013-2018):	
	Bitola & Ohrid: 8 (12.603 words)
	Skopje: 8 (15.618 words)
	Nis: 6 (12.928 words)
	Vlora: 15 (34.505 words)
-	Males: 12 (28.381 words)
-	Females: 25 (47.273 words)
	<b>Total no. of word tokens: 75.654</b>
Distribution of years	
-	2013: 7 (21.422 words)
-	2014: 1 (2.285 words)
-	2015: 1 (1.127 words)
-	2016: 0 (0 words)
-	2017: 13 (24.081 words)
-	2018: 15 (26.739 words)

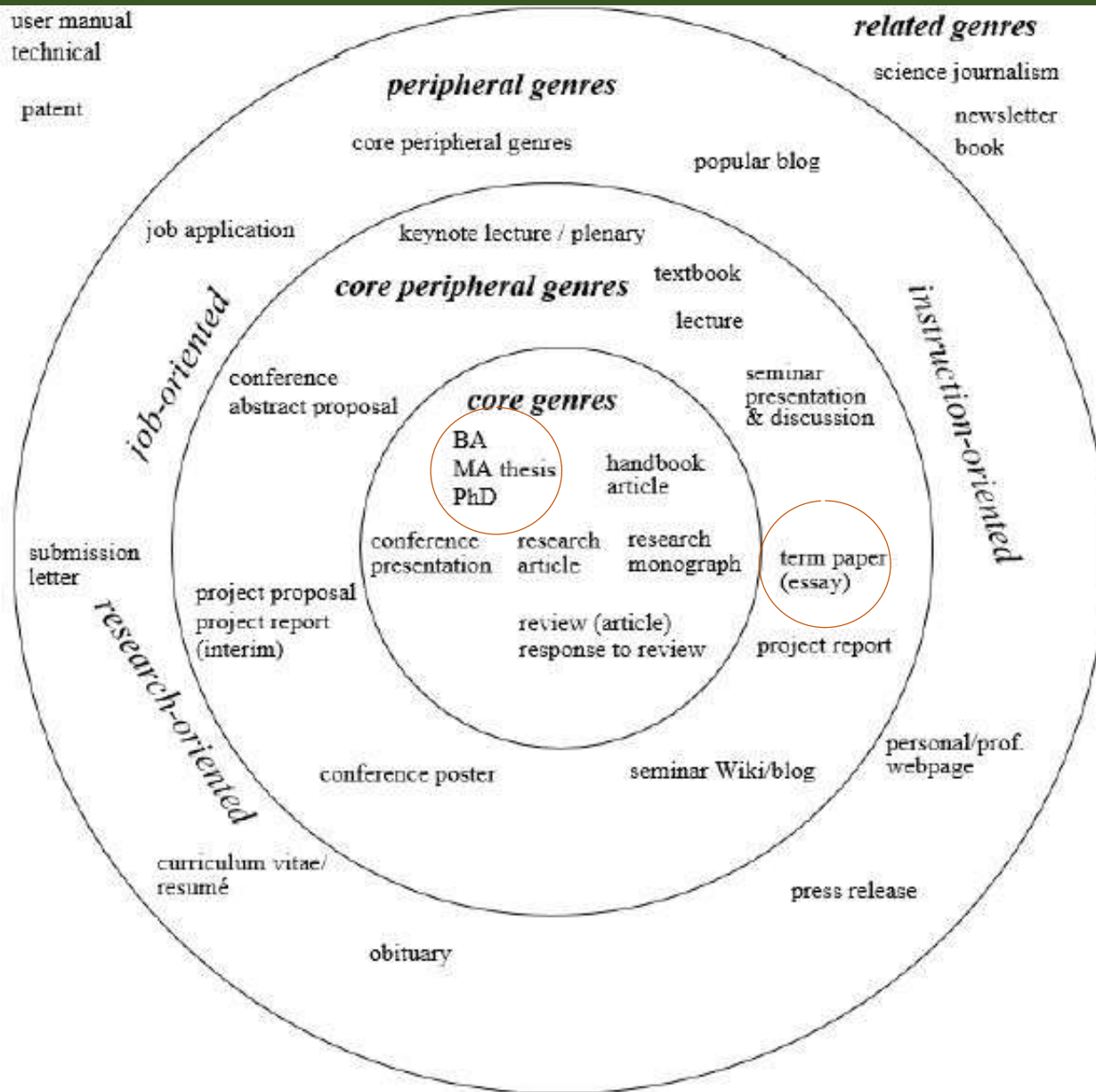
Table 1: My joint corpus of student academic writings from the Balkans including respective word totals according to AntConc

# My file names

SS18NMT_AB		CARE13FMTL_14	
letter/nr.	explanation	letter/nr.	explanation
SS	summer school	CARE	Corpus of Albanian Research in English
18	handed in: 2018	13	handed in: 2013
N	The University of Nis	F	female
M	male	M	Master studies
T	term paper (essay)	T	term paper
AB	Andrej Blagojevic	L	Language and Literature
-	-	14	numerical sequence

Table 2: Real examples with all the included variables within my file names

# A model of academic writing



Picture 1: A prototype approach to academic writing (Schmied 2014:11)

# Positive vs. Negative politeness strategies

While criticizing, the author can satisfy the positive face of the addressee by implying that he or she will still be appreciated, despite the criticism (positive politeness). An author can also soften the given content so that the addressee is in theory offered the option to ignore it and retain his/her freedom (negative politeness). (cf. Riekkinen 2009: 15).

## Positive politeness strategies

- Seek agreement-Avoid disagreement (H)
- Presuppose/establish/assert common ground (E)
- Include both author and audience in the activity (E)

## Negative politeness strategies

- Appear conventionally indirect (I)
- Employ questions, hedges (H)
- Impersonalize author and audience (avoid / forms) (I) (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987; Khan and Anwar 2016: 704).

(H)-hedging; (E)-engagement; (I)-impersonalization

## Socio-semiotic processes: tenor (students' perspective)

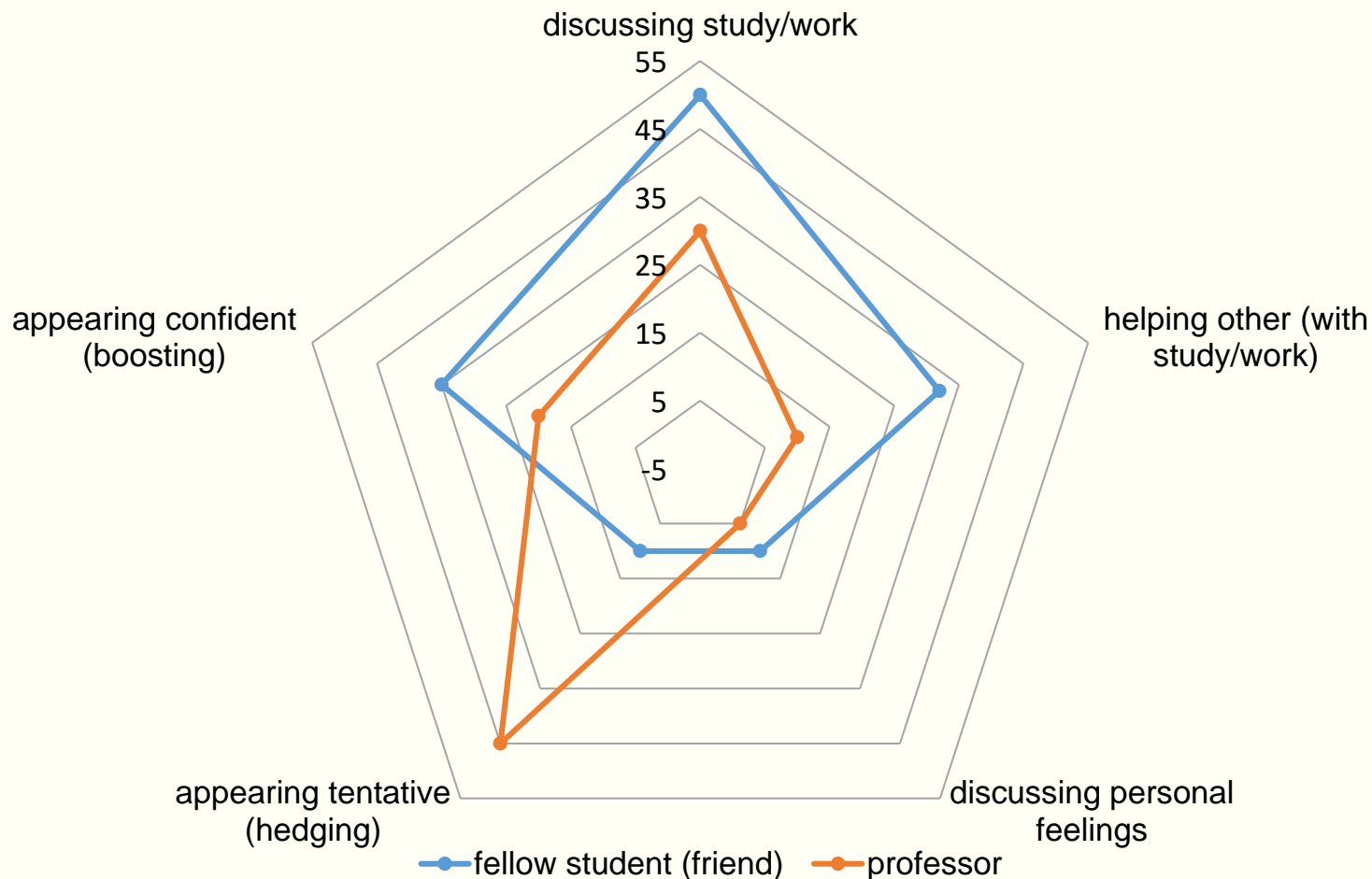


Figure 1: My model of tenor relations in the academia and its influence on various (linguistic) activities

### Influencing Variables

Social distance

Relative power

Culture (cf. Riekkinen 2009: 17).

# percentages

(cf. Argyle 1984; Matthiessen 2010; Pulcini & Furiassi 2004; Riekkinen 2009)



# Hedges as politeness strategies

Hedges such as *possibly*, *probably* and *I think* represent “devices which withhold complete commitment to a proposition, allowing information to be presented as an opinion rather than fact” (Hyland, 1998; Hyland 2011: 199). They are divided into approximators (proposition-related) and shields (author-related) (cf. Prince et al 1982: 4; Lafuente 2008: 72).

Hedges represent modal choices that convey the judgements, attitudes, or political beliefs of the speakers/writers (cf. Richardson 2007: 62).

*It may also be presumed that in the local media, the focus will be on unauthorized taking over, while [...]* (SS18NFT\_IM)

“[...] in the case of criticisms, hedging softens the impact of the criticism thus making it easier for the addressee to take in” (Riekkinen 2009: 16).

# Engagement markers as part of appraisal and politeness

## Appraisal:

“ [...] semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgments and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations.” (Martin 2000: 145)

## Engagement Markers:

are linguistic items that help writer or speaker to engage in a dialogue with the reader (address and/or involve reader explicitly)

deal with sourcing **attitudes** and the play around opinions in discourse

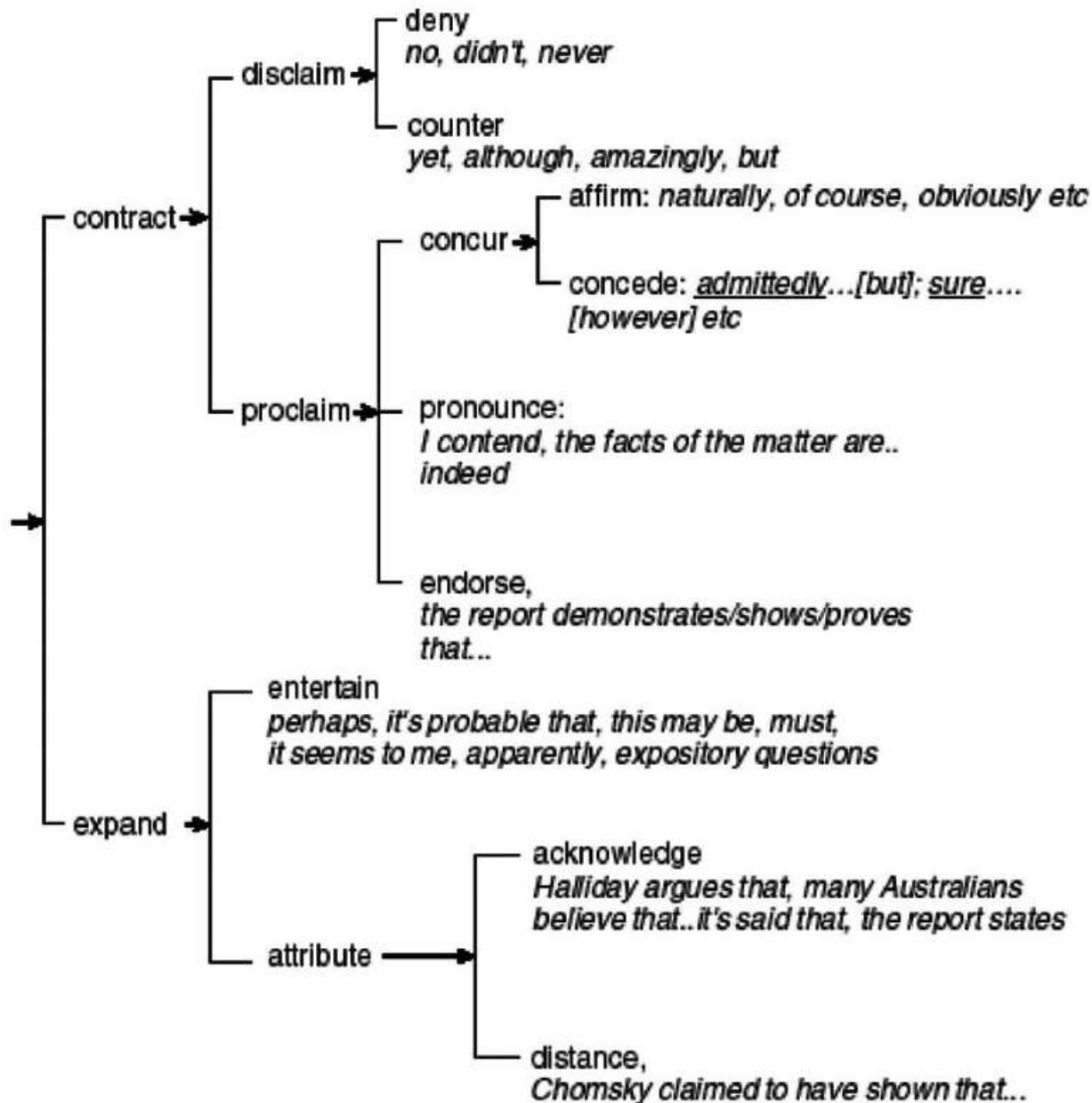
examples: *you can see that, note that, consider, must, obviously*

(Wang & An 2013: 1249, Martin & White 2005: 35)

*Essentially metadiscourse refers to how **we** use language out of consideration for **our** readers or hearers based on **our** estimation of how best **we** can help them process and comprehend what **we** are saying.* (Hyland 2017: 17).

# Heteroglossia within

E  
N  
G  
A  
G  
E  
M  
E  
N  
T



Picture 1: Heteroglossia in discourse within the system of Engagemet (White 2002: 10)

## The authors' invisibility (impersonal forms) within the authorial self

Regarding the 'authorial self', [...] "the presence of impersonal forms to address or approach one's study should suggest hesitation to commitment." (Panajoti 2015: 185).

Passive Constructions avoid responsibility of acts and foreground the passivity of someone or something in a certain situation (cf. Fairclough 1995: 110; Richardson 2006: 57)

While considering objectivity, researchers traditionally claimed that writers "don't have to say *I think* or *My opinion is* in the paper. (. . .)" (Spencer and Arbon, 1996: 26). [...] "academic writing aims at being 'objective' in its expression of ideas, and thus tries to avoid specific reference to personal opinions." (Arnaudet and Barrett, 1984: 73).

Recently, Panajoti explained how the use of personal forms (by Albanian PhD candidates) "shows a tendency [...] to project and represent themselves more confidently to their audience." (Panajoti 2015: 185). Similarly, Hyland advocated the use of explicit forms by referring to academic writing as "an act of identity" (2002: 1092) and the writing process a "representation of self" (Hyland 2002: 1091).

## Frequency of hedges

categories	hedges	raw freq.	relat. freq.
modal auxiliaries	<i>would</i>	159	<b>210.17</b>
	<i>could</i>	70	92.53
	<i>may</i>	68	<b>89.88</b>
	<i>might</i>	41	54.19
epistemic adjectives	<i>possible</i>	14	<b>18.51</b>
	<i>probable</i>	3	<b>3.97</b>
epistemic nouns	<i>possibility</i>	2	2.64
	<i>probability</i>	0	<b>0.00</b>
lexical epist. verbs	<i>believe*</i>	47	<b>62.12</b>
	<i>suggest*</i>	21	27.76
epistemic adverbs	<i>possibly</i>	3	<b>3.97</b>
	<i>probably</i>	18	<b>23.79</b>

Table 3: The frequency of hedges in my corpus per 100.000 words

## Frequency of engagement markers

engagement categories	engagement markers	raw freq.	relat. freq.
affirm	<i>obvious</i>	10	13,22
affirm	<i>clear</i>	23	<b>30,40</b>
affirm	<i>undoubtedly</i>	2	2,64
acknowledge	<i>argue*</i>	9	11,90
deny	<i>never</i>	16	<b>21,15</b>
deny	<i>neglect*</i> (1 adj)	4	<b>5,29</b>
endorse	<i>show*</i>	67	<b>88,56</b>
endorse	<i>prove*</i>	13	<b>17,18</b>
concede	<i>sure</i>	15	19,83
pronounce	<i>really</i>	21	27,76
- ideational	<i>consider*</i>	63	<b>83,27</b>

Table 4: The frequency of engagement markers in my corpus per 100.000 words

## Frequency of im/personal forms

im/personal forms	raw frequency	relative frequency
<i>It</i> (passive)	<b>666</b>	<b>8.28</b>
<i>we</i>	276	4.42
<i>I</i>	284	5.13

Table 5: The frequency of im/personal forms in my corpus per 100.000 words

## Frequency of excluded instances

word	excluded categories/examples	raw freq.: excluded/total
<i>suggest*</i>	<i>Suggestopedia</i> (2), <i>suggestion/s</i> (5)	7/28
<i>believe*</i>	<i>believable</i> , strongly <i>believe</i> , <i>believe IN</i> , <i>make one believe something</i>	4/46
<i>would</i>	not a hedge: <i>if</i> clause	1/3 of 159
<i>could</i>	not a hedge: past of can/able to, objective possibility	1/3 of 70
<i>may</i>	<i>May</i> (month), allowance, <i>may or may not</i>	<b>10/78</b>
<i>possible</i>	objective possibility, <i>as soon as possible</i> , <i>make something possible</i> etc.	<b>16/19</b>
<i>possibility</i>	<i>have/provide a possibility</i> (chance)	<b>17/19</b>
<i>clear</i>	not engagement	5/28
<i>prove*</i>	not engagement, <i>proverb</i>	3/16
<i>we</i>	royal/modest <i>we</i> : referring to oneself in plural	1/3 of 276
<i>show*</i>	included a direct quote “ “, noun	2/69

Table 6: The raw frequencies of the excluded semantic categories and examples in comparison to the total frequencies of the words



## Discussion of example sentences

*This is the part that definitely strikes me the most because all the theories mentioned above **prove** that some dishonest political activities are taking place.*  
(SS17FAMTM\_10)

*Misguided, the people are led to **believe** that the problem is in them, when in fact, the Balkan people are a peaceful folk and wish no ill upon other nations.*  
(SS17FMMTM\_05)

*This means that the author **believes** that the Plenum members are nothing like fighters for freedom.* (SS17FMMTM\_07)

***It is recommended** that further research be conducted with larger and random samples selected by different schools to find the preferences of pupils.*  
(CARE13MRTL\_11)

*You **may** call this a reasonable thought* (CARE13MRTL\_11)

## Discussion of example sentences

*We have asked 50 participants of an elementary school in Berat. (CARE14MMTL\_17)*

*I hope I managed to show that this criticism is only partially valid because by means of detailed metaphoric mappings **we can** explain many subtle differences in meaning at the linguistic level. I also suggested [...] (SS18NFT\_TK)*

*This method **is suggested** to be used to all new teachers. (CARE13MMTL\_16)*

*I also **suggested** in this connection that quantitative metaphor analysis needs to be supplemented by intuitive qualitative analysis. (SS18NFT\_TK)*

***as we all know** [...] (SS17BOFT\_HK), **think** vs. think about someone*

# Bibliography

- Halliday, M. A. K., Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. (2014). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar. 4th edition.* Oxon: Routledge.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Authority and invisibility: authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 1091–1112.
- Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2004). Meta-discourse in academic writing: A reappraisal. *Applied Linguistics*, 25(2), 156-177.
- Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies* 7. 173-191.
- Hyland, K. (2017). Metadiscourse: What is it and where is it going? *Journal of Pragmatics* 113. 16-29.
- Maqbool Khan, Z., & Nadeem Anwar, M. (2016). Analysis of positive and negative strategies in Trump's interview to New York Times. Lahore: *Sci. Int.*, 28 (4), 703-708.
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Panajoti, A. (2015). Authorial Identity in PhD Theses in Albania(n). In Schmied, J. (Eds.). *Academic Writing for South Eastern Europe: Practical and Theoretical Perspectives.* Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag. 177-187.
- Schmied, J. (2013). Academic Knowledge Presentation in MA theses: from Corpus Compilation to Case Studies of Disciplinary Conventions. *Brno Studies in English* (38), 149-164.

# Politeness in Student Academic texts from the Balkans: Hedges, Engagement Markers and Author Invisibility Forms

**Vincenzo Dheskali**  
Sixth Semester PhD Student  
Chemnitz University of Technology  
[vincenzo.dheskali@s2015.tu-chemnitz.de](mailto:vincenzo.dheskali@s2015.tu-chemnitz.de)

