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FORMATION DOCTORALE EN
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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF HEDGING IN
FRENCH-SPEAKING AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS'
ESSAYS:

The case of Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents: Guy KEDJOUBE and Christelle TOUTCHA.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the use of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students at Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé, Cameroon. Given the unique bilingual context of Cameroon, where both French and English serve as official languages, the study aims to analyse the differing applications of hedging strategies within the students' written discourse in the English and French sub-systems from a comparative perspective. The research begins with a comprehensive review of the theoretical frameworks surrounding hedging, highlighting its significance in academic writing as a means of expressing tentativeness, politeness, and the complexities of interpersonal communication. Through qualitative and quantitative analyses, the dissertation identifies various types of hedges the students employ and compares their frequency and function within the different linguistic backgrounds. The findings reveal distinct patterns in using hedging, suggesting that cultural and educational influences significantly shape students' writing styles. This research contributes to the understanding of hedging in a bilingual educational context and offers insights for language educators to enhance students' writing competencies. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of hedging as a pragmatic device that reflects the intricacies of identity, power dynamics, and cultural norms in communication.

Keywords: hedging, bilingualism, academic writing, discourse analysis, French-speaking students, English-speaking students, Cameroon.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire explore l'utilisation des marqueurs d'atténuation dans les productions écrites des élèves francophones et anglophones du Lycée Bilingue de Yaoundé, au Cameroun. Étant donné le contexte bilingue unique du Cameroun, où le français et l'anglais sont tous deux des langues officielles, l'étude vise à analyser les différentes applications des marqueurs d'atténuation dans le discours écrit des élèves. La recherche commence par une revue complète des cadres théoriques entourant les marqueurs d'atténuation, soulignant leur importance dans l'écriture académique comme moyen d'exprimer la prudence, la politesse et les complexités de la communication interpersonnelle. À travers des analyses qualitatives et quantitatives, ce travail identifie divers types de marqueurs d'atténuation employés par les élèves et compare leur fréquence et leur fonction au sein des différents contextes linguistiques. Les résultats révèlent des schémas distincts dans l'utilisation des marqueurs d'atténuation, suggérant que les influences culturelles et éducatives façonnent de manière significative les styles d'écriture des étudiants. Cette recherche contribue non seulement à la compréhension des marqueurs d'atténuation dans un contexte éducatif bilingue, mais offre également des perspectives aux enseignants de langues pour améliorer les compétences rédactionnelles des élèves. En fin de compte, l'étude souligne l'importance des marqueurs d'atténuation en tant qu'outil pragmatique qui reflète les subtilités de l'identité, des dynamiques de pouvoir et des normes culturelles dans la communication.

Mots-clés : marqueurs d'atténuation, bilinguisme, écriture académique, analyse du discours, étudiants francophones, étudiants anglophones, Cameroun.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFS: Attenuating figure of speech

AOD: Approximator of degree

AOF: Approximator of frequency

AOQ: Approximator of quantity

AOT: Approximator of time

AS: Attribution shield

CBA: Competency-based approach

CH: Compound hedge

CL: Corpus linguistics

ECI: Emotionally charged intensifier

HC: Hedging conditional

MADDI: Markers of the author's doubt or direct involvement

PS: Plausibility shield

SFL: Systemic Functional Linguistics

SOA: Strong opinion adverbs

ESL: English as a Second Language

GCE: General Certificate of Education

GBHS: Government Bilingual High School

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Language is a complex concept that different applied linguists have thoroughly studied. It is defined by Saussure (1916) as “the faculty of articulating words”. According to Sapir (1921), “language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires employing a system of voluntarily produced symbols.” This conceptualisation distinguishes human language from instinctual forms of communication, positioning it as a distinctly human trait. For Cook & Seidlhofer (1995), language can be understood as “genetic inheritance, a mathematical system, a social fact, the expression of individual identity, the expression of cultural identity, the outcome of dialogic interaction, a social semiotic, the intuitions of native speakers, the sum of attested data, a collection of memorised chunks, a rule-governed discrete combinatorial system, or electrical activation in a distributed network.” This definition reflects a more expansive and multifaceted understanding of language, encompassing a wide range of theoretical perspectives and underscoring the rich diversity of linguistic theories and the various lenses through which language can be examined.

As for discourse, it is described by Gee (2014) as “language in use.” For Schiffrin (1994), it is “the use of language in a social context to accomplish an action or a goal.” Both definitions highlight its function in forming and reflecting social practices. The definition of discourse is the use of language in a social setting to communicate ideas and engage with others. Discourse, either written or oral, is significant because it has the power to express meaning and negotiate power structures within a particular group. It also has the power to influence and construct social realities.

Hedging is a crucial component of discourse that entails using various linguistic techniques to convey ambiguity, uphold civility, or lessen the force of one’s words. According to researchers like Lakoff (1972) and Brown & Levinson (1978), this practice is essential for maintaining interpersonal connections, acting civilly, and abstaining from actions that can jeopardise social harmony. Speakers can better negotiate difficult situations and promote constructive social relations by softening their claims. Hedging fosters a collaborative and conversational atmosphere by enabling people to voice their opinions without coming across as unduly combative. In addition to improving communication, this sophisticated approach fosters mutual understanding and trust amongst conversational participants. In the end, the tactical

application of hedging promotes more harmonious relationships and aids in the maintenance of social cohesion.

This study compares the use of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students of Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé.

This general introduction focuses on the study's background, motivation, statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, purpose, scope, limitations, structure of the work, and conclusion.

1.1 Background to the Study

From 1884 to 1918, Cameroon was under German colonial rule. Following World War I, the territory was divided between France and Britain, both of which administered Cameroon until its independence in 1960 and 1961. In their efforts to expand their cultures, religions, and educational systems, these colonial powers imposed their languages throughout the region. French authorities regarded the use of local languages as a challenge to their assimilationist policies, prompting them to implement French as the sole language of instruction starting in 1903. In 1945, English was designated as the exclusive medium of instruction in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon and was introduced as a subject in all schools within that area (Ndille, 2016). This colonial experience led to the establishment of both French and English as the official languages of Cameroon, as stipulated in Article 1 of the 1972 Constitution (Law 3). Consequently, the Cameroonian population comprises both English-speaking and French-speaking individuals. This linguistic duality has significantly influenced the educational landscape, resulting in the development of two distinct educational sub-systems: one based on the French curriculum and the other on the English curriculum. This historical context sets the stage for our comparative analysis of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students at Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé.

This study is embedded in the framework of a bilingual Cameroon (where the policies are set to align with the state's official bilingualism), with two sub-systems of education: the French-speaking and the English-speaking sub-systems. Although each of these subsystems of education has its specificities, one common denominator is the use of writing by students. There are various peculiarities to take into account when it comes to students' written discourse. Students frequently find themselves in a learning setting where they must communicate their thoughts, feelings, and arguments. Their linguistic heritage, educational experiences, and

cultural norms are just a few of the influences on their discourse. Students at the Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé are not an exception to this. Additionally, because English- and French-speaking students come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, their use of hedging may differ.

According to Hyland (2004), the employment of meta-discourse by students is a significant way in which their essays capture the characteristics of an underlying community. As mentioned by Samaie *et al.* (2014), meta-discourse is better understood through the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework introduced by Halliday (1985). Halliday and his peers believe that the main characteristics of the immediate social context—that is, the nature of the activity taking place, the communication channel, and the interpersonal dynamics—are what mould language forms. As a result, these networks characterise a variety of connections that exist among the elements of a communicative event, such as those between an author and the subject matter, the audience, and the choices the author makes regarding the structural organisation of his or her text. These connections lead to the identification of three meta-functions for language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Continuing, he states that the ideational system is a level where the text's content is taken into account; this content is primarily representational, referential, and informative. At the interpersonal level, authors connect with readers on a human level, convey their thoughts and feelings regarding the ideational content, and assist readers in understanding overall content. Conversely, writers make decisions at the textual level to provide the discourse with depth.

As far as hedging is concerned, Nkemleke (2011), Samaie *et al.* (2014) and Liu (2020) all state that George Lakoff seems to be the first researcher who introduced the term *hedge* in Linguistic studies. Lakoff defined hedges as follows:

For me, some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness – words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. I will refer to such words as 'hedges' (1972, p. 471).

As recognised by Marziyeh *et al.* (2020), over the years, many researchers proposed various definitions of hedging. Some of these definitions sometimes appear to be conflicting. For instance, terms such as “mitigation” (Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Stubbs, 1983), “downgraders” (House and Kasper, 1981), understatement (Hubler, 1983), “tentativeness” (Holmes, 1983), “downtoners” (Quirk *et al.*, 1985), “indirectness” (Hinkel, 1997; Lakoff, 1990; Tannen, 1982), “vagueness” (Myers, 1996; Channel, 1994) and “stance marker” (Atkinson, 1999), have been used by researchers to evoke hedging. As recognised by Hyland (1998, p. 1),

“straightforward definitions of the notions are rather rare”. Although researchers seem not to agree on the exact definition of the term, their various definitions suggest that they were influenced mainly by Lakoff’s (1972) definition of hedges. His definition seems to have formed the basis of these definitions.

Unlike Lakoff (1972), who views hedges from their semantic perspective and solely concentrates on their functions, subsequent researchers studied hedges from their pragmatic perspective. Hyland (2005), for instance, mentions hedging as one of the two types of meta-discourse markers: interactive and interactional markers. He includes hedging as part of interactional markers. This is because, according to him, hedging, like other types of interactional markers, is used to focus readers’ attention, acknowledge uncertainties and caution, and guide interpretation.

Hedges are used in social interactions. They constitute the set of words which are used to “recognise the speech function, the type of offer, command statement, or question, the attitudes and judgments embodied in it, and the rhetorical features that constitute it as a symbolic act” (Halliday & Hassan, 1989, p. 45). This function of language is known as the interpersonal function of language.

Geisler (1994) points out that hedges work in establishing a double relationship; the relationship between the author and what he says in his text and the relationship between the author of the text and the reader of the text. Hedges enable writers to be cautious of their claims and the manner they present these claims in their texts. Through hedging language, writers show concern about how they present themselves to readers. In this line, Zuck & Zuck (1985, p. 172) define hedging as “the process whereby the author reduces the strength of what he is writing”. According to Markkanen & Schröder (1997, p. 48), hedging is a means of “saying less than what one means”. Crismore and Vaude Kopple (1988, p. 185) view hedges as “signal a tentative or cautious assessment of the truth of referential”. All these definitions bring forth the idea that hedges help the writer to reduce his responsibility for what he says or not being part of his utterance. This is the case, especially in case what the writer says is far from the truth. Hedges also gives a latitude to readers to interpret the text at their will, as the writer departs from all responsibilities from the claims made in the text. Holmes (1982) as cited by Atefeh *et al.* (2015) defined hedges as “rhetorical devices whose main function is taking the readers into account and providing them an opportunity to have their own ideas through reading.”

Closely linked to the double relationship of hedging is the function of hedging as a strategy of politeness in academic writing. Yule (1996) views hedges as an expression of politeness. Lakoff (1972) claims that during linguistic interactions, two fundamental areas of linguistic competence are achieved; one is achieved through the principle of clarity, and the other is achieved through the principle of politeness. This means that hedges help the speaker keep at the back of their mind how their utterance will be interpreted. The speaker, therefore, takes the responsibility of what they say and how it is said. Hedging is, therefore, an expression of politeness in communication in general, as well as in academic writing in particular.

Hedges play a crucial role in academic writing. Hyland, (1996, p. 115) defined hedging as “the expression of tentativeness and possibility and it is central to academic writing where the need to present unproven propositions with caution and precision is essential”. Gillet *et al.* (2009, p. 209) indicate that “academic writing often calls for a cautious style, and there are various ways in which caution can be expressed”. This suggests that the nature of academic writing requires the use of cautious language. Hedging is, therefore, a means of expressing caution in academic writing.

Summarily, a reading of the literature on hedging, Fraser (1980), Hübler (1983), Holmes (1990), Hyland (1998), Geisler (1994), Biber *et al.* (1998), Salager-Meyer (1994), Brown and Levinson (1987), Banks (1994), Crismore and Vaude Kopple (1988), Nkemleke (2011), appear to reveal that a writer uses hedging, cautious language, for one or all of the following reasons:

a) Writers tone down their statements in order to reduce the risk of opposition. This position associates hedges with scientific imprecision and defines them as linguistic cues of bias that avoid personal accountability for statements.

b) Writers want their readers to know they do not claim to have the final word on the subject. Expressing a lack of certainty does not necessarily show confusion or vagueness. One could consider hedges as ways of being more precise in reporting results. Hedging may present the true state of the writers’ understanding and may be used to negotiate an accurate representation of the state of the knowledge under discussion. Academic writers may well wish to reduce the strength of claims simply because stronger statements would not be justified by the data or evidence presented.

c) Writers use hedges as positive or negative politeness strategies in which they try to appear humble rather than arrogant or all-knowing. Hedging is a rational interpersonal strategy which supports the writer’s position, builds writer-reader (speaker/listener)

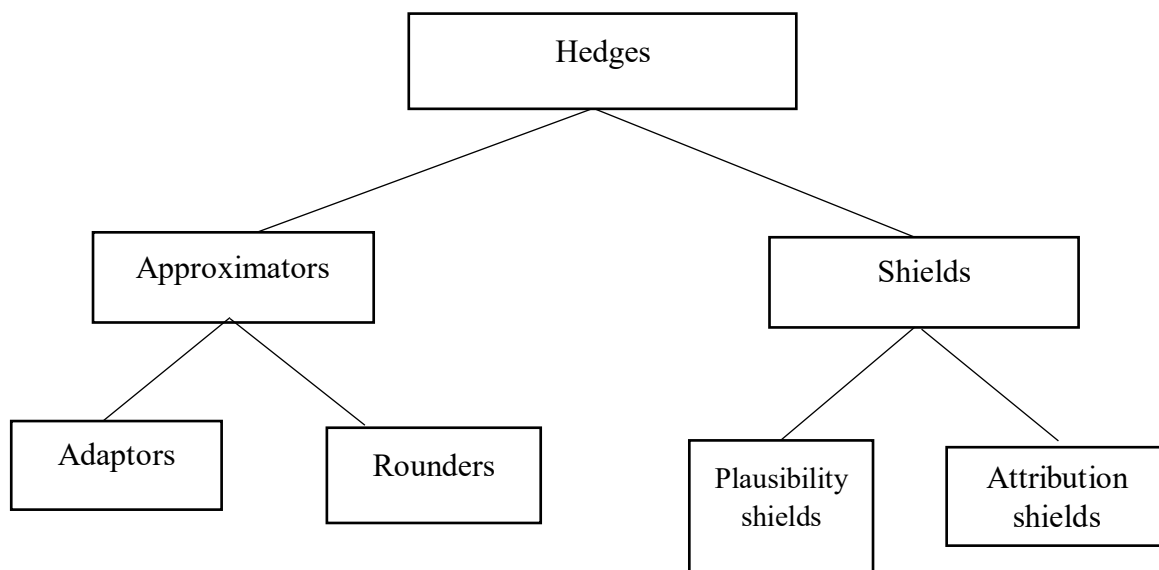
relationships and guarantees a certain level of acceptability in a community. Once a claim becomes widely accepted, it is then possible to present it without a hedge.

d) Writers use a certain degree of hedging as a way of conforming to an established writing style in English.

To reach these objectives, various lexical items are used in hedging. Writers classify these lexical items in what they make known as their taxonomies of hedges.

In 1982, Prince *et al.* proposed a taxonomy of hedges based on their functions. They classified these markers into two types: shields and approximators. A definitional approach to these categories is adopted by Markkanen & Schröder (1997); according to them, shields refer to hedges that do not affect truth conditions but reflect the speaker's degree of commitment to the truth value of the proposition (e.g. *seem, appear*); approximators, on the other hand, are hedges that affect the truth condition, by affecting the content itself (e.g. *generally, on the whole*). Hua (2011), in continuity with the work of Prince *et al.* (1982) and Markkanen & Schröder (1997), presents a classification of shields: plausibility shields and attribution shields. According to the author, plausibility shields are used to bring out "the speaker's attitude towards a proposition". Examples include: *think, believe, suppose, seem, as far as I'm concerned*. Attribution shields bring out "the degree of uncertainty of a proposition with regard to another party". Here are a few examples of attribution shields: *it is reported that, someone suggests that*. The author distinguishes between two types of approximators: rounders and adapters. Rounders are used to "indicate the inaccurate precision of the term". Examples of rounders include *approximately, essentially, about, something in between*. Adapters include examples such as: *sort of, somewhat, really, quite, almost, more or less, a little, to some extent* (Hua, 2011, p. 563-564).

Figure 1: Classification of Hedges According to Prince *et al.* (1982) cited in Mihatsch (2010, p. 127)



This breakdown by Prince *et al.* has received various criticisms, most notably by Skelton (1988) as shown by Chen & Zhang (2017). Skelton argues that Prince *et al.*'s classification seems to be possible only in abstractions since, in concrete language use, the illocutionary power of shields can cut off longer discourse segments, turning approximators into shields (Chen & Zhang, 2017, p. 5).

A few years later, Hyland (1994) then proposed the first taxonomy of attenuators based on grammatical classes. This taxonomy includes modal auxiliary verbs, modal lexical verbs, adverbs, modal adjectives and nouns, "if" clauses, passive form, impersonal sentences and temporal references. The concept of modality is central to this taxonomy. However, this taxonomy has often been criticised because it does not include all grammatical classes, such as pronouns, more specifically, assertive pronouns. In addition, Hyland's taxonomy excludes approximators.

In her taxonomy, Salager-Meyer (1994, p. 154-155) has classified different types of hedges according to form and function. These include shields, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, markers of the author's personal doubts and direct involvement, emotionally charged intensifiers and compound hedges.

Table 1: Saleger-Meyer Taxonomy of Hedges (1994, p. 149-171)

(Bensal, 2013, p. 4).

Types	Functions	Strategies
Type 1	Modal verbs expressing possibility, semi-auxiliaries, probability adverbs, epistemic verbs.	Shields
Type 2	Quantity, degree, frequency and time: <i>Approximately, about, occasionally, often...</i>	Approximators of degree, frequency, quantity and time
Type 3	<i>I think that, as far as we know, it is our point of view that...</i>	Expressions of the author's doubt and direct involvement
Type 4	<i>Extremely, with difficulty, interesting, of particular importance, unexpectedly, surprisingly</i>	Emotionally charged intensifiers
Type 5	<i>Could be suggested, would seem likely, would seem in some way</i>	Compound hedges

Shortcomings have been identified in this taxonomy, notably by Varttala (1999) in the following terms:

As we can see, there are apparent overlaps between the categories. For example, with regard to the third category of attenuators, it seems that only expressions including a direct mention of the author can be used to express his personal doubt and direct involvement. However, studies (e.g. Lachowicz, 1981) have shown that the author is not necessarily mentioned directly so that his doubt or implication is known to everyone. Thus, many expressions in category (1) "shields" (for example, seem, suggest and probably) may also fall into category (3) in certain contexts (Varttala, 1999).

In 1997, Crompton proposed a taxonomy of hedges. This is based on their form and structure. According to Chen & Zhang (2017), this taxonomy is inspired by Lyons' (1977, p. 77) definition of epistemic modality. The first corresponds to epistemic copulas, the second to epistemic modals, the third to adjectives expressing probability, and the fourth to adverbs expressing probability. Non-active verbal sentence structures make up the fifth category. This fifth category is divided into two sub-categories, the first being the structure "I/we + non-factive verb" and the second "impersonal subject + non-factive verb". The last category is the structure "Impersonal subject + non-factive verb + noun phrase".

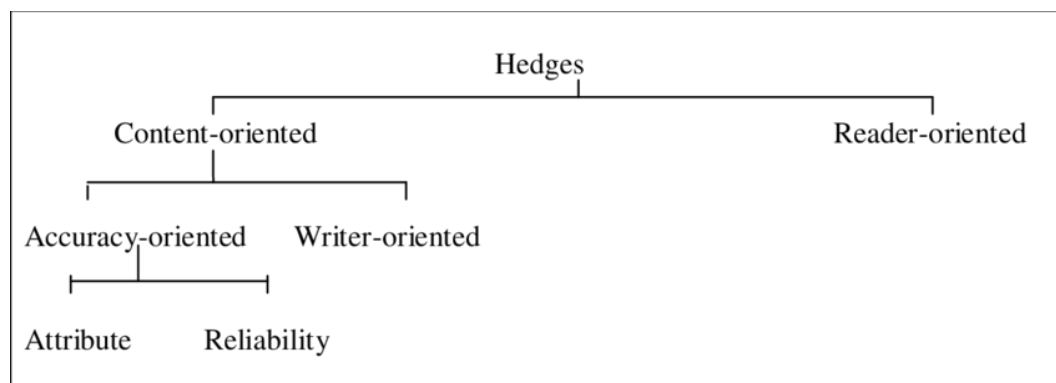
Table 2: Crompton's Taxonomy of Hedges (1997, p. 284)

Categories of hedges	Concepts	Examples
H1	Epistemic copulas	The moon <i>appears</i> to be made of cheese.
H2	Epistemic modals	The moon <i>might</i> be made of cheese.
H3	Adjectives expressing probability	It is <i>likely</i> that the moon is made of cheese.
H4	Adverbs expressing probability	The moon is <i>probably</i> made of cheese.
H5	Non-factive verb phrase structures (which fall into two sub-types)	
H5.1	I/we + non-factive verb	<i>I suggest</i> that the moon is made of cheese.
H5.2	Impersonal subject + non-factive verb	<i>It is</i> therefore <i>suggested</i> that the moon is made of cheese.
H6	Impersonal subject + non-factive verb + NP	<i>These findings suggest a cheese moon.</i>

Hyland (1998) presents another taxonomy of hedging in his Polypragmatic Model. He categorises hedges into two main categories: content-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. Hyland (1998, p. 162) claims that content-oriented hedges “serve to mitigate the relationship between propositional content and a non-linguistic mental representation of reality; they hedge the correspondence between what the writer says about the world and what the world is thought to be like”. Whereas reader-oriented hedges suggest the interpersonal interaction between readers and writers and make the reader involved, as they are to judge the truth value of the proposition made. He further divides content-oriented hedges into two categories; accuracy-oriented hedges and writer-oriented hedges. Writer-oriented hedges have to do with minimizing the writer’s involvement in the text and keeping a distance from their proposition in the text. Accuracy-oriented hedges imply the writer expressing a proposition with greater precision. The accuracy-oriented hedges are again further divided into attribute and reliability hedges. Attribute hedges help writers to specify more accurately how far their results “approximate to an idealised state” (Hyland, 1998, p. 164). Reliability hedges, however, acknowledge the writer’s certain or uncertain knowledge in a proposition. They indicate the

confidence invested in the validity of the claim. The following figure presents a model of Scientific Hedging presented by Hyland (1998, p. 156).

Figure 2: A model of Scientific Hedging. Source: (Hyland, 1996, p. 156)



In recent years, Hinkel (2005) proposed another taxonomy of hedges, which encompasses hedging functions and part of speech. This taxonomy is made up of six categories of hedges. They include; epistemic, lexical, possibility, downtoners, assertive pronouns and adverbs of frequency. Hinkel (2005, p. 39) elucidates the categories of this taxonomy thus:

1. Epistemic hedges refer to the limitations of the writer's knowledge (e.g. *potentially, probably*);
2. Lexical hedges are similar to epistemic hedges but cannot modify phrases (e.g. *many, several*);
3. Possibility hedges can also include probability (e.g. *perhaps, hopefully*);
4. Downtoners, which delimit meaning and emotive implication of nouns, verbs, and adjectives (e.g., *at all, a bit*);
5. Assertive pronouns can modify noun phrases (e.g. *anybody, somebody*); and
6. Adverbs of frequency whose vagueness makes them "ubiquitously function as hedges" (e.g. *daily, frequently*).

The present work compares the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students of Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé's essays. Based on some of the functions of hedging mentioned above, in relation to academic writing, it is possible to believe

that our study is appropriate. This is because secondary school students' essays constitute part of academic writing.

1.2 Motivation of the Study

This study was conducted for numerous reasons. The topic of this study was selected in accordance with academic research on the application of hedges in written works. Several studies have emphasised the significance of these indicators in written communication and their influence on reader perception (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the specific setting of secondary education in Cameroon, it must be acknowledged that this field has not yet been thoroughly investigated. Additionally, examinations of students' written work have not yet given enough attention to using hedges. For this reason, it is important to comprehend how students from the two backgrounds in this situation employ hedges to strengthen their written communication. Additionally, it was noted when reading student essays that they omit using hedges in their wording. We specifically took note of statements like "*I will conclude without fear that...*" and "*I will conclude without any doubt...*" This inspired us to research hedges in students' written work. Additionally, this study will help to better understand the distinctive characteristics of their hedge usage. According to Goffman (1967), the use of hedges varies depending on the linguistic and cultural context.

Additionally, we desire to test students' comprehension of how hedges function. Understanding these markers' purposes is crucial for their effective use in written communication.

Our study is also driven by the rich multilingual environment of Cameroon, where both French and English are recognised as official languages. This duality offers a singular chance to investigate the use of hedging in writing by students with varying linguistic origins. Addressing the unique educational needs within the two separate sub-systems requires an understanding of these distinctions. Additionally, examining hedging can shed light on students' cultural perspectives and communication preferences while emphasizing the interaction of language, identity, and social dynamics in a multicultural setting. By addressing a significant vacuum in the body of knowledge on pragmatics and bilingualism, this study hopes to advance more successful teaching strategies that value and benefit from linguistic diversity.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Research on the usage of hedges by students in Cameroonian secondary schools remains sparse, particularly in the context of the anglophone and francophone sub-systems. Ayuk (2022) analysed hedging among students in the English-speaking sub-system, revealing that Form Five students at GBHS Yaoundé may not have been sufficiently exposed to hedging strategies. The few instances identified seemed largely inadvertent, concluding that explicit instruction in hedging is necessary for these students. In contrast, Kedjoube (2024) examined the French-speaking sub-system and found that students possess a limited understanding of the functions of hedges in spoken discourse. Despite these individual studies, a notable gap exists in comparative research focusing on hedging practices among students in both sub-systems. While much of the existing literature has concentrated on hedging in monolingual contexts, there is a clear need for studies that address its use in bilingual environments like Cameroon. This research aims to fill that gap by conducting a formal comparative analysis of hedging in the essays of French and English-speaking students. By doing so, we seek to provide valuable empirical data that enhances understanding of hedging in a bilingual context and informs future studies in applied linguistics and education, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching practices tailored to the needs of both linguistic groups.

1.4 Research Questions

Considering that the use of hedges in students' essays has not yet been given sufficient attention from a contrastive perspective, we ask ourselves the following questions:

- What types of hedges are used by French-speaking and English-speaking students of GBHS Yaoundé in their essays?
- What are the numbers of hedges used by French-speaking and English-speaking students of GBHS Yaoundé in their essays?
- How do French-speaking and English-speaking students of GBHS Yaoundé differ in their use of hedges in essays?
- What are the implications of these results from a pedagogic and social perspective?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to compare how students from the English-speaking and French-speaking subsystems at Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé who speak French and English

employ hedging. By examining the discourse produced by these two groups, it will be possible to identify any differences or similarities in their use of hedging strategies. The findings will contribute to our understanding of how students from different linguistic backgrounds employ hedging in their academic discourse and shed light on potential areas for improvement in language teaching.

1.6 Research Objectives

This study, which has to do with comparing the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students of Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé's essays, has some objectives that are meant to guide the research process. These research objectives are the following:

- First, compare and contrast the use of hedging in the discourse of students from the two backgrounds in terms of types and numbers,
- Identify how French-speaking and English-speaking students of GBHS Yaoundé differ in their use of hedges in essays,
- Provide insights and recommendations for language educators to enhance students' awareness and appropriate use of hedging.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Geographically, this study has been carried out in the city of Yaoundé, the headquarters of the Centre region, Cameroon. It is also the capital of Cameroon with a very large population. This study is carried out in Yaoundé urban, which involves mainly the Mfoundi division. The Mfoundi division is made up of seven sub-divisions. From the Yaoundé V sub-division, a secondary school has been selected for this study: GBHS Yaoundé. Since this school offers both the francophone and the anglophone sub-systems of education, students from *Terminale* A4 and Upper Sixth Arts are included in this study. We selected students from the finishing classes of both sub-systems because we believe they have acquired a wide range of competencies and knowledge regarding language skills since 6e and Form 1, respectively. Additionally, we selected arts-oriented students because they are required to write essays as part of their academic programs.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be multifaceted and far-reaching.

One key aspect of the study's significance lies in its potential to foster cross-cultural understanding. By examining the differences in the use of hedging between French-speaking and English-speaking students, the research can provide valuable insights into the cultural and linguistic nuances that shape discourse practices. Hedging, as a pragmatic device, is often deeply rooted in cultural norms and conventions, and understanding these disparities can enhance mutual comprehension and communication between individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings of this study can have significant implications for language instructors. Educators can develop more effective teaching approaches and materials by understanding the distinctive hedging strategies employed by students from French-speaking and English-speaking contexts. This knowledge can help students, particularly those learning a second language, to better navigate the appropriate use of hedging devices in their written academic discourse, which is crucial for effective communication and successful academic performance.

The study can also contribute to the broader field of discourse analysis by expanding the understanding of how hedging is utilised in the written academic discourse of different language groups. This can shed light on the pragmatic functions of hedges and their cultural-linguistic underpinnings, further enriching the scholarly discourse on the role of language in shaping communication and meaning-making.

Additionally, the study's findings may have implications for second language acquisition research. By examining the challenges French-speaking and English-speaking students face in acquiring and applying hedging devices in their second language writing, the study can inform more targeted and effective strategies for second language teaching and learning. This can ultimately enhance students' linguistic competence and their ability to engage in cross-cultural communication.

Furthermore, the study's exploration of the relationship between language, thought, and behaviour may contribute to the broader discussion on linguistic relativity. The differences observed in the use of hedges between the two language groups may reveal the influence of the

French and English linguistic and cultural systems on the students' hedging practices, providing empirical support for the notion that language shapes cognition and behaviour.

Finally, the study may also uncover potential disciplinary differences in the use of hedges, offering insights into the discipline-specific conventions and rhetorical strategies students employ. This knowledge can inform pedagogical approaches and curriculum design, ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary linguistic tools to navigate the unique discourse requirements of their academic fields.

This study will be of great significance, particularly to students, secondary school teachers, syllabi and curricula designers, textbook writers, and the general public.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

There are various potential limitations to our study that could impact the results and how they are interpreted.

One significant limitation may lie in the narrow scope of the study. The research is confined to a specific institutional context, GBHS Yaoundé, which may not represent the broader French-speaking and English-speaking student populations. This limited focus could undermine the ability to generalise the findings beyond the immediate setting. Additionally, the analysis is restricted to essay writing alone, neglecting other genres of academic writing where hedging practices may differ substantially. This narrow lens could overlook important nuances in the students' use of hedging devices across various written discourse types. Furthermore, the study focuses solely on the use of hedges without considering other linguistic features or discourse strategies that could also shape the students' writing, thereby providing an incomplete picture of their rhetorical and communicative practices.

Methodological limitations also pose a significant challenge. The study relies on a limited sample size of student essays, which could affect the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Identifying and categorizing hedges may also be subjective, leading to potential inconsistencies or biases in the analysis. Moreover, the study may lack a longitudinal perspective, capturing only a snapshot of the students' hedging practices at a specific time, rather than tracking potential changes over time. This cross-sectional approach may fail to account for the dynamic nature of language use and the evolving rhetorical strategies employed by the students.

Resource limitations can also constrain the scope and depth of the study. The time given for this research was limited. So, we just limited ourselves to the city of Yaoundé and especially to GBHS Yaoundé, where access was easy for the researcher. Also, collecting data was not easy due to time constraints related to the class chosen for our study. Consequently, we limited our study to Terminale A4 and Upper Sixth Arts students of GBHS Yaoundé. Moreover, having the students write the essays was not easy either. We had to come several days in order to collect the essays. Financial constraints are not to be left out. The researcher lives far away from the school, so getting to the school every single day to be granted permission and later to collect the essays was not without difficulties as well. These constrained us not to widen our sample population for the study.

Finally, the generalizability of the study's findings may be a key limitation. The results may be highly context-specific, making it difficult to extrapolate them to broader populations of French-speaking and English-speaking students in different educational settings or geographical regions. The study may not account for individual variations in students' writing styles, language proficiency, or educational backgrounds, which could influence their use of hedging devices. Furthermore, the study may neglect the potential impact of other factors, such as disciplinary differences, gender, or socioeconomic status, on the students' hedging practices, limiting the ability to generalise the findings to more diverse student populations.

1.10 Structure of the Work

This work is organised into five separate chapters, each focusing on a different area of study.

Chapter one is the general introduction. It consists of an introduction, background to the study, motivation for the choice of topic, statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, purpose of the study, scope of the study, limitations, structure of the work and conclusion.

Chapter two is entitled "theoretical framework and literature review." As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, this study is guided by three main theoretical frameworks: genre theory, corpus linguistics, and taxonomies of hedges. As for the literature review, works on hedges in academic writing are reviewed.

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology. It includes the research design, population area, population of study, sampling techniques, instrument of data collection, sources of data collection, validity of data, method of data analysis, and difficulties encountered.

Chapter four is titled “data analysis and discussion of findings.” In this chapter, the categories and numbers of hedges present in our corpora are identified. This chapter also carries out a linguistic description of the use of hedging in the corpora. Furthermore, the findings are interpreted.

Chapter five, titled "General conclusion," concludes this work. It summarises the work done in this study, presents its pedagogical implications, and offers recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

1.11 Conclusion

Although several studies on the use of hedging by students in Cameroonian secondary schools, separately in the anglophone and francophone sub-systems of Cameroon, have been carried out, no study has been carried out on the same population from a comparative perspective. That is why our study was focused on a comparative analysis of the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students’ essays. In chapter two, a presentation of the theoretical frameworks and a literature review will be made.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter concerns the theoretical frameworks, the literature review, and the contributions of this study to knowledge. The theories that guide our study are the Genre theory as proposed by Halliday (1985), taxonomies of hedges, and corpus linguistics. The literature review is based on previous studies on hedging and relevant literature to our study. The chapter ends with the contribution of this study and a conclusion.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

As earlier said, this section of this chapter focuses on the theoretical frameworks that guide our study. These frameworks are Genre theory, as proposed by Halliday (1985), taxonomies of hedges, and corpus linguistics.

2.1.1 Genre Theory

Etymologically, genre derives from the French term (originally Latin) for “kind,” “type,” and “class.” Genre has long been employed in literature, as demonstrated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and was traditionally limited to literary works. According to Imtihani (2010, p. 90), the concept of genre has long been debated in a variety of fields, including literature, sociology, folklore studies, linguistic anthropology, ethnography of speaking, conversation analysis, rhetoric, literary theory, and linguistics. The Russian scholar Brahmin was the first to apply genre to non-literary works. Subsequently, various genre hypotheses emerged.

Swales (1990) states that a genre is “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes.” As each genre is socially focused and maintains its structural integrity, he defines it as having “a set of communicative purposes.”

This goes along with Martin’s (1992) definition of genre, in which he refers to genre as a “stage, goal-oriented social purpose. “Stage refers to the appropriate structure and organisation and language according to each genre while getting in line with its (the academic genre’s) “goal-oriented social purpose.”

Linked to genre-based approach is the notion of a discourse community. Many researchers advanced some definitions of a discourse community, which cut across. Swales (1990) defines discourse community as “groups that have goals or purposes and use communication to achieve these goals”. Porter (1992) argues that “A discourse community is a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels.” According to Thomas Deans (2003), a discourse community is a group of people who share common characteristics with regard to knowledge and habits of interpretation. These definitions present the fact that the discourse community is an important aspect which is taken into consideration in academic writing. Bizzell (1992) claims that “Producing text within a discourse community cannot take place unless the writer can define her goals in terms of the community’s interpretative conventions.” Her argument brings out the overall function of a discourse community in academic writing. Consequently, in academic writing, the genre and the discourse community act as guides to produce an academic work which respects its structure, organisation, appropriate language, and social purpose.

According to Hyon (1996), as mentioned by Hyejong (2012) in Kum (2016), there are three genre approaches. These approaches are the English for Specific Purpose (ESP), with Swales (1990) as its proponent, who proposes genre analysis; the Sydney school, as described by Halliday (1985), which is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL); and the New Rhetoric Group (NRG), which was influenced by poststructuralism in North America.

In our study, we will use Halliday’s perspective of genre theory based on Systemic functional linguistics (SFL).

• Halliday’s genre analysis

To understand language use well, we must understand what it tries to achieve. Part of this understanding comes from the fact that the genre is socially motivated and oriented.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between text, context, and social purpose. At the core of Halliday’s conceptualisation of genre is the notion that language is a social semiotic system where linguistic choices are shaped by the context of the situation and the broader context of culture. In this view, genre refers to a “staged, goal-oriented social process” (Martin, 1983) that is recognised and shared within a particular discourse community.

Halliday's SFL model posits that the "context of situation" can be described in terms of three key variables: field, tenor, and mode. The field refers to the topic or subject matter of the text, as well as the social action being performed. The tenor encompasses the role relationships between the participants, including their relative status, degree of familiarity, and the level of formality. The mode refers to the channel of communication (written, spoken, visual, etc.) and the level of interactivity. These contextual variables, in turn, influence the linguistic features and rhetorical choices that writers or speakers make in constructing a text. Genres, then, are recognised as distinctive text types associated with particular configurations of these situational variables.

From this perspective, we could apply genre theory to your study of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students' essays in the following ways. First, we could analyse how the academic subject matter and the communicative purpose of the essay genre (e.g., to present an argument, to describe a process, to analyse a concept) shape the students' use of hedging devices. Second, we could examine how the students' negotiation of their academic persona and relationship with the anticipated audience (e.g., their teacher) influence their choices in deploying hedging language. Finally, we could consider how the written mode of the essay genre, with its emphasis on formal and academic register, affects the students' employment of hedging strategies compared to more interactive or spoken discourse.

By situating your analysis of hedging within the broader SFL framework of genre theory, we can gain deeper insights into how the contextual variables of the essay genre shape the French-speaking and English-speaking students' linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies. This approach can help us identify patterns and differences in the students' use of hedging tied to the specific socio-cultural and institutional context of the Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé, as well as their understanding and negotiation of the expectations and conventions associated with the academic essay genre.

2.1.2 Taxonomies of Hedges

Various hedge taxonomies were presented as background to our work. These taxonomies were developed by Prince et al. (1982), Crompton (1997), Hyland (1996 & 1998), Salager-Meyer (1994 & 1997), and Hinkel (2005). The many hedge taxonomies offered by the researchers each has distinct characteristics. Some supplement others, while others adopt new perspectives and take a fresh look at discourse hedges.

We have to select and summarise the various categories of hedges that will be used in our comparative analysis of the use of hedges by students at GBHS Yaoundé. Using the various taxonomies of hedges described above, we have identified the following nine categories: Shields, which include plausibility shields and attribution shields; approximators of quantity, degree, frequency, and time; markers of the author's doubt and direct involvement; emotionally charged intensifiers, compound hedges; figures of speech such as the euphemism and litotes; specific verbal tenses and modes such as the conditional and passive; and punctuation, specifically inverted commas (“...”).

Shields

Du (2021, p. 2) defines shields as “attenuating expressions that may express the speaker's attitude toward the proposition but do not alter the truth value of a proposition.” We can supplement this definition with Markkanen & Schröder's (1997), which describes shields as attenuating devices that represent the speaker's level of commitment to the proposition's truth value (e.g. *I think, seem, appear*) without altering the truth conditions. We differentiate between attribution, shields and plausibility shields based on the two mentioned sources. A degree of uncertainty or probability is added to a statement using plausibility shields. They function as a suggestive indicator, implying that the claim is tenable but not absolute. Thus, it is in this category that the concept of (epistemic) modality is preponderant. Epistemic modality concerns our assessment of the certainty or probability of a proposition or assertion. It is linked to our knowledge, beliefs and ability to assess the truth or probability of a piece of information (Coates, 1983; Lyons, 1995). When we use plausibility shields such as “it's possible that”, or “probably”, we introduce a certain measure of subjective evaluation into our discourse. These expressions indicate that the assertion being made is plausible but without guaranteeing its absolute certainty. The use of these expressions indicates that we cannot assert with absolute certainty, as there may be other aspects or information that are not considered. Based on Saleger-Meyer's taxonomy (1994), we can include in plausibility shields modal verbs (Barbet, 2015) expressing possibility as well as semi-auxiliaries (e.g. *may, seem, appear, be able to*), adverbs of probability (*probably, maybe*). Using Crompton's taxonomy (1997), we can add to these adjectives expressing possibility (such as *possible*).

Attribution shields indicate that the stated information or assertion comes from an external source or is attributed to a person without necessarily confirming its veracity. They introduce a certain distance between the author of the statement and its content (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997). They refer to mediators or evidential markers, according to the terminology

of Dendale & Tasmowski (1994), and Barbet & Saussure (2012). These facilitate relativisation in relation to an item of information or an assertion. They signal that the statement is not directly attributed to the enunciator himself. However, rather to an external source or collective perception. Attribution shields play an important role in communication by providing indications of the provenance or validity of the information reported, ensuring the speaker's indication of the source of the information conveyed by his or her utterance and, in a broader sense, the indication of the reliability of the information communicated (Barbet & Saussure, 2012). For example, in the sentence "*According to experts, it's best to exercise regularly*", the use of "*according to experts*" indicates that the information is based on the opinion or knowledge of experts, not on a direct assertion by the enunciator. Another example of an attribution shield is the use of indirect discourse introducer verbs, such as "*assert*", "*support*", "*report*" or "*claim*". For example, "*She asserts that the project will be completed on time.*" In this case, the verb "*assert*" indicates that the speaker is reporting someone else's words rather than presenting the information as a personal certainty. Expressions such as "*it is said that*", "*it is said that*", "*it is whispered that*" are also attribution shields that signal that the information is being transmitted from an unidentifiable source or rumour. For example, "*It is rumoured that there will be changes in the organisation.*" The use of such formulations suggests that the enunciator cannot guarantee the veracity of the information but reports it nonetheless. Attribution shields are also used to introduce divergent opinions or contradictory points of view, as in the example "*Some people think social networks have a positive impact, while others claim the opposite.*" In this case, the use of "*some think*" and "*others claim*" indicates a variety of perspectives and underlines the subjective nature of the opinion.

In short, attribution shields are mainly made up of discourse markers. These include verbs introducing indirect discourse or quotations, expressions introducing references or sources, and epistemic verbs or non-active verbs (Saleger-Meyer, 1994; Crompton, 1997) such as *suggest*, *speculate*, *think*, and *estimate*.

Approximators

Approximators are hedges used to express an imprecise estimate, approximation or quantification. They are used to qualify or relativise numerical information or exact measurements by acknowledging the uncertainty or imprecision inherent in certain data. According to Mihatsch (2010, p. 126), Prince *et al.* (1982) define approximators as opposed to shields. They are expressions that "blur the categorical limits of another expression". According

to Vassiliadou & Lammert (2008, p. 2173), approximators, like “on the *whole*”, allow us to present a blunted version of statements, as presented by Haillet (2004, p. 15).

Thus, approximators play an important role in communication by acknowledging the limits of our knowledge or offering a wider margin of interpretation. As Mihatsch (2010, p. 126) shows, several hedging theorists have mentioned approximators, notwithstanding certain divergences in conceptualisation and terminology. For example, Quirk et al. (1985, p. 597-602) refers to “downtoners,” while C. Caffi (2007) uses the term “*bushes*” (a term that corresponds to approximators in Prince *et al.* (1982)).

Approximators can take various forms, including adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, or whole sentences. According to Saleger-Meyer (1994), we distinguish between degree, frequency, quantity, and time approximators.

Approximators of degree (AOD) are used to express an estimate or rough assessment of the intensity or magnitude of a phenomenon. Common examples include adverbs such as “almost”, “about” or “more or less”. For example, “*It’s almost certain that the meeting will take place tomorrow.*” The use of “almost” indicates an approximation of certainty, leaving a small margin of uncertainty.

Approximators of frequency (AOF) are used to express a rough estimate of the recurrence or regularity of an event. They indicate that an action occurs with a certain frequency without specifying an exact number. Examples of frequency approximators include adverbs such as “sometimes”, “occasionally”, “regularly” or “frequently”. For example, “*I go to the gym regularly.*” “regularly” indicates an approximate frequency without giving precise details about the number of times.

Approximators of quantity (AOQ) express an imprecise estimate or vague quantification. They indicate that a measurement, number or quantity is not precisely defined. Examples of quantity approximators include adjectives such as “*some*”, “*several*”, “*some*” or “*many*”. For example, “*There were a few people present at the meeting.*” The use of “*a few*” indicates a quantity not precisely specified but limited.

Approximators of time (AOT) are used to express an approximate or vague indication of the duration, due date or moment of an event. They are used to indicate that an action is taking place within an imprecise time interval. Examples of time approximators include adverbs such

as “soon”, “shortly”, “in a while” or “shortly”. For example, “I’ll finish the project shortly.” The use of “soon” indicates an approximate period without specifying a precise date.

Markers of the author’s doubt or direct involvement (MADDI)

This refers to the third type of hedges in Saleger-Meyer’s (1994) taxonomy. Expressions of the author’s doubt or direct involvement express uncertainty, reservation or questioning of a statement or assertion. These expressions reflect the author’s subjective point of view and indicate that he or she is not totally convinced of the truth or validity of what he or she is saying. This category is mainly composed of strong opinion adverbs, as presented by Andrée Borillo (2004). According to her, the strong opinion adverbs have two essential values.

Certains laissent transparaître quelque doute de la part du locuteur, c’est le cas de *peut-être, sans doute, probablement, à ce qu’il me semble, à ce que j’imagine*. C’est aussi le cas de certaines expressions de type négatif, telles que *sauf erreur (de ma part), si je ne me trompe, si je ne m’abuse*, ou même *indubitablement*, etc. qui, sous une telle formulation, traduisent déjà le sentiment mitigé ou peu affermi qu’a le locuteur de la vérité de la proposition qu’il émet ; d’autres traduisent une prise en charge plus nette, plus ferme, comme *assurément, selon moi, à mon sens, de mon point de vue*, etc. qui expriment un degré de conviction assez comparable à celui de certains verbes ou prédicats employés à la 1^{re} personne, tels que : *j’ai la conviction que, je suis persuadé que, je suis convaincu que, je pense que*, etc. (see. Borillo, 1976) Borillo (2004, p. 12).

Borillo’s categories of strong opinion adverbs include prepositional strong opinion adverbs (SOA) such as “*according to me, for me, in my eyes, in my opinion, in my sense, in my feeling, from my point of view to my knowledge, according to what I know, to what I believe, to what I think,*” and adverbs marking a universe of discourse such as “*personally, as far as I’m concerned, for my part, and for me*”. We also note that “the role of the first-person element is essential if SOA is to be considered a direct-use epistemic.” (p.18).

To the SOA, we can add adjectives such as “doubtful”, “uncertain”, “questionable” or “debatable”, which are used to qualify the information or opinions presented by the author, thus emphasizing their subjective nature and the possibility of questioning.

In addition, idiomatic expressions such as “*to be taken with a pinch of salt*”, “*I’m not one hundred percent sure*”, or “*I take the liberty of expressing reservations*” are used to make it clear that the author has doubts or reservations about what he or she is saying, and invites readers or interlocutors to be cautious in their interpretation.

Emotionally charged intensifiers

Mihatsch (2010, p. 126) presents us with Quirk *et al.*'s (1985, p. 583-589) definition of these intensifiers under the terminology "*emphasisers*". These are expressions such as "*indeed, really, certainly*", which "reinforce the truth of a proposition by emphasising the categorical validity of an expression".

Emotionally charged intensifiers (ECI) are used to soften a statement or evaluation by adding a strong emotional connotation. These intensifiers are intended to express a vivid impression, an intense emotional reaction or a strong subjective judgment. While providing some attenuation, they add an emotional colouration that can influence the perception of the message. These emotionally charged intensifiers often take the form of adverbs, adjectives or adverbial phrases. They are used to reinforce the emotional impact of a statement while at the same time signalling a certain reserve or relativity with regard to its content. These markers can create a distance between the statement and the author's position, emphasising that the author adopts a subjective and passionate perspective.

For example, commonly used emotionally charged intensifiers include adverbs such as "*extremely*", "*incredibly*", "*absolutely*", "*terribly*" or "*madly*". These adverbs add emotional intensity to the statement, suggesting a strong impression of the author while indicating that this impression may be open to interpretation. In addition, adjectives such as "*extraordinary*", "*incomparable*", "*brehtaking*", "*frightening*" or "*marvelous*" are used to qualify the subject in a way that evokes intense emotions. These emotionally charged adjectives underline the subjectivity of the evaluation while drawing attention to the emotional impact of the statement. In addition, adverbial phrases such as "I'm *deeply* convinced that", "I'm *madly* in love with", "I'm *absolutely* horrified by" or "I'm *passionately* attached to" are used to express strong emotions and highlight the author's personal involvement. These emotionally charged adverbial phrases underline the subjectivity of the statement and invite readers or interlocutors to consider the emotional aspect of the assertion. These markers underline the subjectivity of the statement and invite recipients to consider both the emotional aspect and the relativity of the assertion.

Compound hedges

According to Salager-Meyer (1994), compound hedges are formed by combining several linguistic elements to express more subtle and detailed attenuation. These markers are distinguished from simple attenuation hedges by their composite nature, resulting from the combination of several linguistic elements to express a more detailed and precise attenuation. These compound hedges can take a variety of forms, including adverbial phrases, fixed

expressions and specific constructions. Their purpose is to provide more subtle attenuation by introducing nuances, qualifications or conditions to the utterance, enabling more precise and nuanced communication. For example, adverbial phrases such as “*to some extent*”, “*in some respects*”, “*in part*”, or “*nevertheless*” are commonly used to indicate that the statement is true to some extent, but that there are limitations or exceptions. On the other hand, fixed expressions, such as “*without wishing to generalise*”, “*in most cases*” or “*not necessarily*”, are used to introduce mitigation by emphasizing that the statement is not absolutely applicable but that there are specific circumstances that need to be taken into account. These complex constructions offer more detailed mitigation by specifying the specific circumstances in which the statement is valid or by acknowledging possible exceptions.

Attenuating figures of speech (AFS)

Based on the discourse of Molinié (2011), some figures of speech are used to soften or moderate the expression of an idea or assertion to reduce its scope, force or impact. They are used to nuance a proposition or make it less direct. According to www.projet-voltaire.fr, there are three main types: irony, euphemism and litotes. For our study, however, we will be focusing on the last two.

Euphemism is a figure of speech that consists in using a softer, more attenuated or less direct term or expression to soften an unpleasant, shocking or taboo reality.

Euphemism literally means “to speak kindly”, from the Greek *eu*, “well”, and *phèmi*, “to say”. The aim? To soften an expression that could shock by its crudeness, brutality or sadness. In the theater, the process was used by Molière in *Le Médecin malgré lui*. When Sganarelle modestly asks “*La matière est-elle louable?*” (Is the matter commendable), he means “*Les selles sont-elles bien formées?*” (Are the stools well-formed?). (<https://www.projet-voltaire.fr/culture-generale/antiphrase-euphemisme-litote-figures-style-attenuation/>)

For example, use the expression “*to be at the end of life*” instead of “*to be dying*,” and say “*he’s a little round*” to avoid saying “*he’s overweight*.”

Litotes is a figure of speech that consists in saying less to suggest more. It is based on a negative statement or deliberate underestimation of a reality to create an effect of attenuation or irony. The name “litotes” comes from the Greek *litotès*, from *litos*, “simple in appearance, unpretentious”. Litotes, therefore, consist in saying less to suggest more. The best-known litotes is found in Corneille’s *Le Cid*. In Act III, Scene IV, Chimène addresses Rodrigue as follows: “*Go, I do not hate you!*”, to indicate that she still loves him.

Even though litotes is very similar to the negation of a marked term (“statements of negative polarity”), Litli (2004, p. 7) stresses the importance of not confusing these two processes. To explain this, she invokes Anscombe and Ducrot’s (1983, p. 26) definition, according to which a statement in which negation is combined with a marked term must have a different literal meaning from the equivalent positive assertion to be considered a litotes. She takes as an example “*not to hate*”, whose literal meaning differs from “*to love*”. One can neither love nor hate. Likewise, one can be neither stupid nor intelligent, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither short nor tall. So, when in this type of statement, the meaning is the same as the equivalent positive assertion, we can’t speak of an understatement. For example, “To say that something is not impossible or that a criticism is not unfounded is to say that the thing is possible or that the criticism is founded” Litli (2004, p. 33).

Conditional form

Several authors have studied the conditional of attenuation under different names: conditional of rumour (Vatrican, 2010), conditional of quotation (Korzen & Nølke, 1990), conditional of allusion to the discourse of the other (Ducrot, 1984), conditional of enunciative otherness (Haillet, 2002) or conditional of non-assumption (Abouda, 2001). It is a verbal form that attenuates an assertion or proposition by expressing a hypothesis, condition or possibility rather than absolute certainty. It is commonly used to introduce a distance between the statement and its degree of veracity, implying that the assertion is not absolutely guaranteed but depends on certain circumstances or conditions.

The primary means of constructing the mitigating conditional in English is through the use of the modal auxiliary verb “would.” For instance, a speaker might say, “I would suggest that we postpone the meeting.” This formulation is more tentative and less direct than a simple declarative statement such as, “We *should* postpone the meeting.” The inclusion of “would” serves to convey a degree of uncertainty and conditionality, making the suggestion more polite and less imposing.

However, the conditional of mitigation in English is not limited solely to the use of “would.” Other modal auxiliaries can also be leveraged to achieve a similar attenuating effect. These include “could”, as in the example: “This *could* be dangerous for your health” instead of “This is dangerous for your health”; “might” as in “Possibly, we *might* be able to discuss this matter further”, and “may” as in “The deadline *may* need to be extended if the team encounters any unexpected delays.”

By employing these various modal expressions, speakers and writers are able to frame their assertions, requests, or propositions in a more tentative and uncertain manner, thereby creating a more cooperative and considerate tone in their communication. This linguistic strategy is particularly important in academic and professional settings, where maintaining positive interpersonal dynamics and avoiding potential face threats is crucial. The conditional of mitigation allows communicators to navigate delicate social situations with greater tact and diplomacy, fostering an environment of mutual understanding and collaboration.

Passive voice

The passive voice appears in Hyland's (1994) first taxonomy of hedges. It is a verbal construction used to attenuate an assertion or proposition by focusing on the action or event rather than the agent who carried it out. It reduces the impact or responsibility of the action by presenting it in a more neutral or impersonal way. The mitigating passive is formed by using the verb conjugated in the passive, generally with the auxiliary "to be" followed by the past participle of the main verb. For example, instead of saying, "He made a mistake", we could use the mitigating passive by saying, "*A mistake was made*", thus putting the emphasis on the mistake itself rather than on the person who made it. This construction softens the statement by avoiding blaming or highlighting the agent responsible for the action. It is often used in contexts where we wish to minimise responsibility or avoid explicitly naming a specific person. The mitigating passive is also used to introduce a certain objectivity or a more neutral perspective into the discourse. It allows you to focus on the action rather than the agent who carried it out, which can be useful in scientific, academic or professional contexts. For example, we might say "*Studies have been conducted to examine the efficacy of the treatment*" rather than "*We have conducted studies to examine the efficacy of the treatment*", to give a more impartial tone to the statement.

Punctuation (quotation marks)

Quotation marks ("") can also be used as hedging markers in certain contexts. They can be used to highlight words or expressions whose meaning is to be toned down or to emphasise that they are being used with care. When quotation marks are used in this way, they indicate that the author is quoting or using an expression that may be interpreted in different ways or that is open to debate. Quotation marks signal to readers that they should take these words with some reserve or that they may be considered relative or uncertain. For example, suppose someone says: *He was "mean" to me*. The quotation marks around the word "mean" suggest

that the author is using the term in an ironic or dubious way. They indicate that although the person has been described as “mean”, there is a nuance or qualification to be considered. Quotation marks can also be used to indicate an unusual or non-standard use of a word or phrase.

To sum up, the nine categories of hedges mentioned above will be the ones we focus on throughout our analysis of the student’s written productions. They will serve as the basis for classifying and describing these markers.

2.1.3 Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguistics (CL) is a robust empirical approach to the study of language that is centred on the analysis of large, structured collections of naturally occurring language data, known as corpora (Lüdelling & Kytö, 2008, p. 1). This methodology represents a significant shift away from the traditional, introspective approaches to language study that have historically dominated the field.

Rather than relying solely on intuitions or constructed examples, corpus linguists emphasise the importance of basing linguistic analysis on observable, real-world language use. By systematically examining the patterns, frequencies, and distributions of linguistic features within large datasets of naturally occurring language, corpus linguists are able to gain comprehensive and more objective insights into the complexities of human language in action.

The defining feature of corpus linguistics is its focus on corpora - these large, structured collections of language data can take the form of digital or analogue (physical) materials, depending on the research context and the availability of the data (Lüdelling & Kytö, 2008, p. 1). Digital corpora, facilitated by advancements in computational processing, have become increasingly prevalent in contemporary linguistic research. However, analogue or physical corpora, such as historical manuscripts, handwritten texts, or specialised collections of printed materials, can also serve as invaluable sources of language data, particularly for research on historical language use or specialised linguistic phenomena.

Corpus linguistics is often associated with the application of computational tools and statistical methods to process and analyse the vast volumes of language data contained within corpora. These sophisticated analytical techniques allow researchers to identify patterns, trends, and relationships that may not be readily apparent through manual inspection alone, thereby

providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how language functions in real-world contexts (Lüdelling & Kytö, 2008, p. 1).

The pioneering work of several influential scholars has shaped corpus linguistics. These proponents have played a crucial role in establishing corpus linguistics as a distinct field of linguistic inquiry and demonstrating the value of using large, structured collections of naturally occurring language data to gain insights into the complexities of human language use.

One of the most widely recognised pioneers of corpus linguistics is Geoffrey Leech. Leech's work in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly his involvement in the development of the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) Corpus, helped lay the groundwork for the field. Leech's research demonstrated the value of using large, representative language corpora to study linguistic phenomena, paving the way for more extensive corpus-based investigations.

Another influential figure in corpus linguistics is John Sinclair, who played a pivotal role in the creation of the Birmingham Collection of English Text (BCET) and the Bank of English corpus. Sinclair's work emphasised the importance of studying language in its natural context rather than relying solely on intuitions or constructed examples. His insights into the patterns and idioms of language usage, as revealed through corpus analysis, have had a lasting impact on the field.

Randolph Quirk, renowned for his comprehensive grammar of the English language, also made significant contributions to corpus linguistics. Quirk's work involved analyzing the Survey of English Usage corpus, which he used to develop a more descriptive and empirically grounded understanding of English grammar and usage.

Susan Hunston has been a prolific scholar in corpus linguistics, particularly in grammar, lexis, and discourse analysis. Her research has demonstrated the value of corpus-based approaches in revealing the nuances and complexities of language in use and has influenced the integration of corpus methods into various subfields of linguistics.

Another notable figure is Douglas Biber, whose work on multi-dimensional analysis of linguistic variation has profoundly impacted corpus linguistics. Biber's research has shown how corpus-based techniques can be used to identify and characterise the distinctive linguistic features of different registers, genres, and styles of language.

These scholars, along with many others, have been instrumental in the development and advancement of corpus linguistics as a robust and influential approach to the study of language.

Through their pioneering research, corpus-based methodologies have become increasingly integrated into the broader field of linguistics, providing valuable insights and new perspectives on the complexities of human language.

At the heart of corpus linguistics is the principle of empiricism, which emphasises the importance of basing linguistic analysis on observable and verifiable data rather than intuition or hypothetical examples. Corpus linguists rely on large collections of naturally occurring language, known as corpora, to study linguistic phenomena. This approach allows for the investigation of language as it is used rather than as it is imagined to be used (Biber *et al.*, 1998; McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

Corpus linguistics employs quantitative methods to identify and analyse patterns in language use. By examining the frequency, distribution, and co-occurrence of linguistic features within corpora, corpus linguists are able to uncover insights about language that may not be apparent through qualitative analysis alone. This quantitative approach allows for systematically investigating linguistic hypotheses and identifying trends and variations in language use (McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Sinclair, 1991).

Corpus linguistics emphasises the importance of studying language in its natural context. Corpus data provides researchers with the opportunity to examine how linguistic features are used in authentic communicative settings, rather than in isolation. This contextual analysis enables corpus linguists to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how language is employed in real-world situations (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Hunston, 2002).

It seeks to develop corpora that represent the language variety or genre being studied. By compiling large, balanced, and diverse collections of texts, corpus linguists aim to ensure that their findings are generalisable and can be applied to the broader language community. This focus on representativeness is crucial for drawing reliable conclusions about language use (Biber, 1993; McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

CL is an inherently interdisciplinary field, drawing on methods and insights from various disciplines, such as linguistics, computer science, statistics, and the social sciences. This openness to interdisciplinary collaboration allows corpus linguists to explore language from multiple perspectives and to develop innovative approaches to the study of language (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

In summary, corpus linguistics offers a robust theoretical foundation for our research project. This approach emphasises the systematic collection and analysis of large, representative samples of language data. This aligns perfectly with our goal of comparing the use of hedging devices in French-speaking and English-speaking student essays. By examining these two corpora of student writing, we can identify the recurring patterns and distributions of hedging features, revealing potential similarities, differences, and variations in how writers from these linguistic backgrounds employ such linguistic strategies. Importantly, corpus linguistics also acknowledges the significance of the social, cultural, and institutional contexts that shape language use. This allows us to situate our findings within the broader academic writing conventions and expectations of the French-speaking and English-speaking student populations. Ultimately, the corpus-based insights we uncover can inform the development of genre-based or corpus-informed instructional materials to help students, particularly those navigating cross-linguistic academic writing tasks, effectively utilise hedging devices.

2.2 Literature Review

Since the end of the XXth century, the use of hedging has aroused the interest of many linguistic researchers. In our research, we will look at the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students of Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé's essays. To do this, we need to undertake an analysis of previous work on the use of hedging in order to understand how linguistic researchers have treated this notion in the past and how it is currently approached. This analysis will also enable us to identify areas that have been little studied to date and to define the research directions we will explore in our work.

2.2.1 Conceptual literature

As was previously indicated, Georges Lakoff (1972) appears to have been the first scholar to discuss hedging in linguistics in his article "Hedges: A study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts," according to Nkemleke (2011), Samaie *et al.* (2014), and Liu (2020).

Years later, Kleiber & Riegel (1978) took up this concept under the terminology "enclosure". Mihatsch (2010, p. 126) mentions that the term "enclosure" as seen by Kleiber & Riegel refers not only to enclosures that make categories fuzzier such as: *a species of, in the*

broad sense, about, but also those that make them more rigid such as: *in the strict sense*. In this way, he attempts to define a context for the conceptualisation of attenuation markers.

A number of studies have been carried out on the syntactic and lexical processes used to convey an attenuating value to discourse.

Thus, Haillet (2004), in “Nature et fonction des représentations discursives: le cas de la “stratégie de la version bémolisée” (Nature and function of discourse representations: the case of the “strategy of the flattened version”)), interpreting statements in French such as “*Il me fallait de la menthe*” or “*J’aurais besoin d’un coup de main*”, within the theoretical framework of polyphony, observes that the choice of these specific verb forms conveys an attenuated, or “flattened” version of the assertion corresponding to the present tense, which could have been produced in the same circumstances. This attenuation can be seen in the relations between the “flattened” (A) and “unflattened” (B) statements. B is compatible with A’s discourse environment, and the two statements are identical except for the verbal form. So, in his article, Haillet presents a mitigation strategy.

Danielle Leeman (2004), in “L’emploi de *juste* comme adverbe d’énonciation” (The use of *just* as an adverb of enunciation), highlights the attenuative scope that this word can have when used adverbially. The author argues that “just” is often used to attenuate or reinforce the assertion of the statement, depending on the context and the intention of the enunciator. She also suggests that the adverb may be used in an attenuative way, to minimise the significance of the statement in the eyes of the interlocutor, in order to lead him or her to a positive conclusion by means of an “argumentative inversion”. She also points out that its use can have social and cultural implications, depending on the cultural context in which it is used. Furthermore, the article shows that the use of this adverb is an example of polyphony in language, where the meaning of the utterance is influenced by the context and intention of the enunciator. Finally, the author proposes an approach that attempts to interpret the links that arise between syntactic and semantic properties, so as to explain unexpected formal behaviours in relation to existing classifications. This approach enables a finer, more nuanced analysis of the use of “just” in utterances. In sum, Danielle Leeman’s article offers an in-depth analysis of the use of “just” as an adverb of enunciation, highlighting its use to attenuate or reinforce the statement’s assertion, as well as its social and cultural implications.

For her part, Andrée Borillo (2004), in “Strong opinion adverbs *according to me, in my eyes, in my opinion....*: subjective point of view and hedging effect”, distinguishes among a

dozen adverbial structures what she calls “strong opinion adverbs”. This category is likely to have a hedging effect.

Anne-Marie Lilti (2004), in “Négation d’un terme marqué et procédés de modalisation”, presents negation as a process of attenuation, as in the example “*je ne te hais point*” (“I don’t hate you”). She points out that these negative statements, while provoking an “impression of attenuation” perceived by the speaking subjects, do not function as litotes since they possess the same force and argumentative orientation as their equivalents. The strategy of the negative statement must be placed in a polyphonic perspective, as it distances the equivalent positive assertion in “question-answer” type interactions.

Numerous scholars have examined the use of the conditional as a hedging tool. This conditional has been referred to by different names by different authors: quotation conditional (Korzen & Nølke, 1990), conditional of non-assumption (Abouda, 2004), conditional of enunciative otherness (Haillet, 2002), conditional of allusion to the discourse of the other (Ducrot, 1984), conditional of rumour (Vatrican, 2010), or conditional of non-assumption (Abouda, 2004). Axelle Vatrican (2010) addresses two questions in her article, “La modalité et le “conditionnel de rumeur” en français et en espagnol” (Modality and the “rumour conditional” in French and Spanish): How does the rumour conditional differ from other types of conditional? Her definition of the rumour conditional is that it cannot be replaced by the periphrasis “allait (would)+ infinitive”; rather, it can be paraphrased as “paraît-il” (it looks like) /passé composé, and it may even imply a conditional subordinate (assuming the current rumours are confirmed). The author draws the conclusion that, when viewed from a modal perspective, the rumour conditional in both Spanish and French conveys an “epistemic” reading, wherein the speaker adopts a stance by declining to declare whether the statement is true or false. Because the rumour conditional permits the information to be presented as borrowed from a second speaker, it adds an “evidential” value to the “epistemic” value presented.

Lindemann (2012), in her article “Mitigating circumstances - A contrastive analysis of the mitigating conditional”, examines this form of conditional from a comparative perspective, providing a better understanding of its meaning effects and verifying the impact of the frequent and very explicit attenuation in Danish. The study shows that this conditional performs primarily pragmatic functions of a discursive and interactional nature. In this case, it acts as a distancing marker that operates on the distance between the speaker and the addressee. The attenuation effect occurs by creating “empty space” where the speaker indicates that his or her utterance is valid only in a hypothetical enunciation situation where it is permissible not to

assume responsibility for propositional content. Consequently, the study also suggests that it is possible to consider this form of conditional as a subcategory of the hypothetical conditional.

Cécile Barbet & Louis De Saussure (2012) develop the notions of modality and evidentiality, and more specifically the relationship between these two concepts. They produce definitions for these concepts and describe them. In particular, they discuss evidentiality and French modal verbs, evidentiality and French verb tenses, and evidentiality and modality in diachrony.

Helène Vassiliadou & Marie Lammert (2008) discuss the role of the attenuation marker “*on the whole*” in discourse in their article entitled “On the whole: attenuation marker”. The authors begin by highlighting the importance of attenuation markers in everyday communication, as they help nuance or moderate what is said. They then focus on the specific analysis of the marker “on the whole”. According to their study, “on the whole” is often used to introduce a general assessment or conclusion on a given topic. It attenuates the judgment or opinion expressed, making it less categorical or absolute. The authors point out that this marker is often used to soften criticism or negative judgments. They also examine the different syntactic constructions in which “on the whole” can be used, notably with verbs such as “think”, “believe” or “find”. They point out that this expression can also be used with adjectives to express an overall opinion on a subject. This study thus contributes to a better understanding of the linguistic mechanisms used in everyday communication.

2.2.2 Theoretical literature

To adequately frame this analysis, it is essential to draw upon established theoretical foundations in contrastive linguistics, which provide tools for systematically comparing language use across different linguistic backgrounds. In this regard, Robert Lado’s pioneering work in contrastive linguistics remains highly relevant, as it laid the groundwork for understanding how structural differences between languages influence language learning and usage.

Robert Lado, often regarded as the father of contrastive linguistics, introduced a systematic method for comparing languages with the aim of predicting and explaining learner difficulties. His influential book, *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957), articulates the principle that by analysing the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic differences between two

languages, language teachers and researchers can identify potential areas of interference. Lado argued that this contrastive approach could significantly improve language teaching by helping educators anticipate errors resulting from negative transfer and design more effective pedagogical strategies.

In the context of this dissertation, Lado's framework is particularly pertinent because it encourages a structured comparison of linguistic features, such as hedges, which are subtle markers of meaning and politeness often used differently across languages. Examining the ways French-speaking and English-speaking students employ hedges in their essays can reveal underlying contrasts in language structure and cultural communication styles, insights that Lado's theory helps illuminate.

However, Lado's contrastive analysis has been subject to critique. Critics argue that his model tends to overemphasise negative transfer as the main source of learner errors, neglecting other influential factors such as universal language acquisition patterns, individual learner differences, and sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, the binary comparison of languages may oversimplify the dynamic and complex nature of bilingual language use. Despite these limitations, Lado's work continues to provide a foundational theoretical base for comparative studies like this one, particularly when investigating structural and pragmatic differences between languages.

Moreover, Lado's later contributions underscored the importance of cultural context in language learning, advocating for the integration of cultural awareness alongside linguistic comparison. This dimension is especially relevant in bilingual settings such as the Government Bilingual High School of Yaoundé, where students navigate not only two languages but also two cultural paradigms that influence their language production, including their use of hedges.

In sum, while more recent second language acquisition theories have expanded and nuanced our understanding of language learning, Robert Lado's contrastive linguistics remains an essential theoretical tool for this study. It provides a rigorous framework to explore the comparative use of hedges by students of different language backgrounds, ultimately enriching the analysis of their written productions in a bilingual educational context.

Another significant scholar whose work informs this study is James E. Alatis, a prominent figure in applied linguistics and bilingual education. Building upon Lado's foundations, Alatis expanded the scope of contrastive linguistics by emphasizing the pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of language use, particularly in bilingual and multicultural contexts. In his

influential works, such as *Contrastive Linguistics and the Language Teacher* (1970), Alatis argued that contrastive analysis should not be limited to structural comparison but must also consider language functions, discourse patterns, and cultural norms that shape communication. This broader perspective is crucial for understanding phenomena like hedging, which often serve interpersonal and pragmatic functions beyond mere grammatical structure.

Alatis's approach is especially relevant to the comparative analysis of French-speaking and English-speaking students' essays, as hedging devices frequently reflect cultural attitudes toward politeness, uncertainty, and interpersonal distance. His emphasis on sociolinguistic context helps explain why students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may use hedges differently, even when writing in similar academic settings. Furthermore, Alatis advocated for bilingual education policies that recognize the complexity of language contact situations, which is particularly pertinent to the Government Bilingual High School of Yaoundé, where students navigate dual linguistic and cultural identities.

While Alatis's work broadens the contrastive linguistics framework, some critiques note that integrating sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors makes contrastive analysis more complex and less predictive than Lado's original model. Nonetheless, this complexity better reflects real language use and enriches analyses of cross-linguistic phenomena such as hedging. Therefore, Alatis's contributions provide a valuable complement to Lado's structural focus, offering a more nuanced theoretical lens for this dissertation's investigation.

2.2.3 Empirical literature

A number of studies have examined the use of attenuation concepts in the didactics of English, as well as in foreign languages.

Liu's (2020) study, "A Corpus-based Study of Shields in Conversations of Chinese EFL Learners" explores the use of attenuation markers, specifically shields in the everyday spoken language of Chinese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Based on the MSECCL-SEM (Chinese Learners-Science & Engineering Majors) corpus, the study examines the frequency of use of six frequently used shield types in spoken English, such as "*I think*" and "*maybe*". It analyses the data using Wordsmith 6.0 and SPSS 25.0. The results reveal significant differences in shield use as a function of gender, language proficiency and the type of shield used. The study concludes that shields play a crucial role in communication and

suggests that teaching spoken English should focus on the appropriate use of attenuation markers to improve students' pragmatic ability.

Ayuk (2022) looks at the use of attenuators in English-speaking students' essays. Her study attempts to show how Form 5 secondary school students at Yaoundé's bilingual Lycée use attenuators in their essays. The data collection method used for the investigation is test production. A random sample of fifty student essays was therefore taken. Swales' (1990) genre analysis, Salager-Meyer's (1997) taxonomy of hedges and content analysis were the main theoretical frameworks used to analyse the data. The results show that six of the seven categories found in Salager-Meyer's (1997) taxonomy were identified in the students' essays. The categories identified were approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time; introductory phrases; modal auxiliary verbs; modal adjectival, adverbial and nominal phrases; modal lexical phrases; and "if" phrases. Compound hedges are absent. It was concluded that students may not have been exposed to hedges. The few occurrences observed could be accidental. Therefore, this linguistic element should be taught to students. It should also be included in the English curriculum and in English textbooks.

From a more practical point of view, several studies have been carried out on the use of hedges in various contexts and with various objectives. One of these contexts is academic writing, where studies have looked at the use of attenuation markers, either specifically or contrastively.

The article "The Use of Hedging Strategies in Research Articles: A Corpus Comparison of Native and Non-Native Researchers" by Elif Demirel (2019) explores the use of linguistic hedging strategies in research articles. The study compares the use of these strategies between native English-speaking researchers and non-native Turkish researchers writing in English. Through the quantitative analysis of two sub-corpus of 100 articles each, drawn respectively from the AAC (American) and TAC (Turkish) corpora, the study reveals a similarity in the use of attenuation strategies, suggesting that non-native researchers adopt the rhetorical conventions of English when writing academically. This research highlights the importance of non-native researchers mastering these strategies for effective scientific communication in a second language.

In his study entitled "The Frequency and Types of Hedges in Research Article Introductions by Persian and English Native Authors", Mahmoud Samaie *et al.* (2014) examine the types and frequency of attenuation markers used by Persian and English native authors in

literature research article introductions. The study reveals that English-speaking authors are more cautious in their assertions and in refuting or confirming the ideas of others compared to Persian authors. English-speaking authors make more frequent use of modal auxiliaries, evidential main verbs, adjectives and nouns in their articles. These results may help in designing tasks and teaching materials for teaching academic writing, with an emphasis on rhetorical structures and different writing genres.

Alireza Bonyadi, Javad Gholam and Sina Nasiri (2012) carried out “A Contrastive Study of Hedges in Environmental Sciences Research Articles.” The purpose of the study was to compare and contrast the frequency and types of hedges in the Discussion sections of Environmental Sciences Research Articles written by English Research Writers, Iranian Research Writers who write in English, and Iran Research Writers who write in Farsi. To this end, sixty research articles in the targeted field were selected leading journals (20 for each group), and then the used hedges were analysed based on Salager-Meyer (1994) taxonomy. With regard to the use of hedges in English, this study did not find any significant differences between English and Iranian authors’ writings. However, their findings revealed significant differences between English and Farsi written articles. This discrepancy was reportedly attributed to the nature of the Farsi language, which might have considered less hedged texts as highly validated ones. However, this is opposed to the credibility of using hedges in this field in the international academic discourse community.

On his part, Musa (2014) researched “A Pragmatic Analysis of English and Chemistry Masters’ Theses in a Ghanaian University”. The study investigates the discourse functions of hedges in English and Chemistry Masters’ Theses at the University of Cape. It further explores the differences regarding the discourse functions hedges perform in both disciplines. The study, which is both qualitative and quantitative in nature, reveals that hedging in English and Chemistry Masters’ Theses perform three pragmatic functions and that the preference for these functions, to some extent, varies in both disciplines due to a number of factors.

Another researcher, Demir (2018) investigated academic texts of native writers and non-native writers of English with purpose of revealing the differences between them in terms of hedging strategies while composing an academic text, detecting lexical hedges used by native writers and non-native writers of English and diversity of these hedges through some analyses, creating a list of lexical hedges, and offering some suggestions regarding the use of lexical hedges in academic writing.

Ratna Ika Ningtyas (2015), in the study titled “Hedging found in students’ academic writing of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang”, studied twenty-three academic papers of psycholinguistic class which were written by the sixth-semester students of English Language and Letters Department of the university. These students are non-native speakers of English. Ratna Ika Ningtyas used Hyland’s (1996) theory of hedging in academic writing, which includes; reliability hedge, attribute-oriented hedge, writer-oriented hedge and reader- oriented hedge. The findings of this study show that the students of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang apply the forms of hedging proposed by Hyland (1996). The functions of hedging used by these students mostly look into three matters; to express the writer’s opinion with appropriate caution, to reduce the possibility of being criticised and to build a good relationship between writers and the readers. Ningtyas concluded that the students of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang who are ESL learners apply hedging in their writing as a strategy to express their arguments in a proper way. As this study is only concerned with the identification of hedging of explicit functions without including the writer’s view, the researcher suggests further research to look into the writer’s view. Also making a comparison of how native and non-native speakers use hedging in their academic papers can be conducted.

Kum (2016) in his research titled “A discourse analysis of students’ essays in Cameroon English”, studied hedging in the essays of students of the Higher Teacher Training College, Yaoundé. His study of these students’ essays was based on Hyland’s (1994) classification of hedging. He focuses on epistemic forms. At the end of the analysis, he realised that students of the Higher Teacher Training College Yaoundé underuse epistemic hedges in their essays. Out of the six categories of epistemic hedges, only some examples of epistemic adjectives and epistemic nouns are overused, while the four categories of epistemic hedging remaining are underused, irrespective of the examples.

Alberta Marielka (2015) conducted a study entitled “The use of hedging in EFL academic writing”. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Language and Literature of Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga. Based on Hyland’s (1994) assumption that L2 learners are more likely to have problems using hedging in their academic writing, the researcher studied and analysed nineteen drafts of students’ academic writing based on their use of hedging, following Salager-Meyer’s (1997) taxonomy of hedges. These students have already taken course on academic writing. The results indicate that these students were able to use four types of hedges based on Salager-Meyer’s (1997) taxonomy. However, more than half of the courses had

problems with the use of hedging. The researcher suggests that hedges should be introduced to courses other than academic writing.

In their study “Hedging in Academic Writing - A Pedagogically-Motivated Qualitative Study”, Loi Chek Kima & Jason Miin-Hwa Limb (2015) undertake a study of hedging in thirty randomly-selected research article discussions, which were published between 2010 and 2014, from the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. This study is based on academic writing based on the use of hedges in academic writing as proposed by Hyland (1996) in his pragmatic framework of hedging orientations. It further presents the view of specialist informants on the use of hedges in academic writing. The result stipulates that some words have been used to realise the hedging orientations proposed by Hyland (1994). However, according to informants, second language learners have problems in using hedges in their academic writings. This inability to use hedges could be due to socio-cultural factors, classroom instruction, disciplinary culture and disciplinary appeals.

“Hedges and Boosters in Academic Writing. A Study of Gender Differences in Essays Written by Swedish Advanced Learners of English”, is a study conducted by Sofia Serholt (2012). In this work, she investigates how and at what frequency Swedish advanced learners use hedges and boosters available English language in their academic writing, focusing on gender-related differences. Apart from studying the overall frequency of hedging and boosters in their academic writing, she also finds out if the frequency of hedges and boosters occur in varying degrees in the different sections of their academic essays, which are; Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion and Conclusions. At the end of the analysis which was done with the use of twenty randomly selected essays written by Swedish students of English at several universities, it was found out that “females were more inclined than males to offer stronger commitments to the propositional information they supplied.” However, both male and female students used more hedges than boosters. Furthermore, the frequency of the use of hedges was higher in their academic essays’ Introduction and Discussion sections, than in any other sections of their academic essays. She, therefore, concluded that gender does not seem to be a determining factor for Swedish L2 learners when it comes to the use of hedges and boosters in their academic writing.

Nang (2013) posits that students in Malaysia do not learn academic writing explicitly in secondary schools, adding that these skills must be taught directly, extensively and explicitly prior to their tertiary education. Nang also appears to posit in this study that, the lack of academic writing skills may be that, ESL learners are taught more for communicative purposes

than for a preparation of ESL learners for higher academic settings. Students are not sufficiently taught English as an academic language in secondary schools.

Lorena Llosa, Sarah W. Beck and Celilia Guanfang Zhao (2011) carried out an investigation on academic writing in secondary schools to inform the development of diagnostic classroom assessments. To address the challenges students face when composing in academic contexts, they designed studies that aimed to identify and describe the most prevalent types of academic writing at the secondary school level in the context of New York City schools. They also characterised the challenges that English Language learners and non-English Language learners experience with academic writing. Their findings revealed that exposition/argument is the most prevalent genre assigned as an academic writing task in secondary schools' classrooms in the New York City context. A further finding revealed that English Language learners and non-English Language learners appeared to have different challenges or problems. This led them to suggest several new approaches to classroom diagnostic assessment of academic writing. A reading of this work was very interesting and a relevant review of our present study in that it concords with our observation that expository and argumentative essays are the most prevalent forms of academic writing in secondary schools, even in the Cameroon context.

Sandra L. Shannon (2011), in a discursive and didactic approach, joins the discussion on academic and scholarly writing with a twofold purpose. Firstly, to aid students in understanding the distinction between academic and scholarly writing. Secondly, it provides professionals with a resource for maintaining and improving their skills in crafting scholarly discourse. In fact, Sandra L. Shannon's (2011) contention that academic writing is usually geared towards students demonstrating their mastery of content and the analytical and writing processes in either expository or argumentative prose is in consonance with our view on academic writing in this present study. Shannon's further contention that scholarly writing is for the advancement of knowledge within a specific field; it is writing produced to add to the body of knowledge, extending, challenging or expanding what is known or believed within the field is not our view of ESL writing in secondary schools. That is why Shannon's claim that "while all scholarly writing is academic writing, not all academic writing is scholarly writing." (Shannon, 2011, p. 2) is very important and central to our motivation to study the academic writing of ESL learners in secondary schools. It puts up the argument that academic writing is also prevalent in ESL learners' writings in secondary schools.

A study that directly relates to the present research is that of Kédjoubé (2024), which explores the use of hedging, referred to as *marqueurs d'atténuation*, in the written productions

of Terminale A4 students at the Government Bilingual High School of Yaoundé. This work is particularly significant because it focuses on a similar context and learner profile. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study identifies the main types of hedging devices used by French-speaking students and discusses the frequency and pragmatic functions of these markers in their essays. It draws on well-established models such as those of Salager-Meyer (1994), Prince et al. (1982), and Hyland (1998), providing a solid theoretical framework. The results show that although students do make use of various hedging strategies including shields, approximators, passive forms, and figures of speech; their usage often appears inconsistent or mechanical, suggesting a limited awareness of the rhetorical purpose these devices serve. While Kédjoubé's study offers valuable insights into how French-speaking students employ hedges in written French, it remains focused on a single linguistic group and does not consider how English-speaking students in the same school context might approach hedging differently. This is where the present research comes in. By adopting a contrastive perspective, this dissertation seeks to compare the use of hedging between French-speaking and English-speaking students, something that has not yet been addressed in existing research. Moreover, while Kédjoubé's work presents a strong descriptive analysis, it leaves room for further exploration regarding cross-linguistic influence, pedagogical implications, and the role of cultural norms in shaping learners' use of mitigation. This dissertation aims to respond to those gaps by applying contrastive linguistics, particularly Lado's theoretical model to shed light on how language background influences students' choices of hedging strategies in academic writing. In doing so, it complements and extends the findings of Kédjoubé's study, offering a more comprehensive understanding of hedging in a bilingual educational context.

In the context of business, other researchers, Siwei Yue & Xuefei Wang (2014), based on a corpus of 296 authentic business emails produced in computer-mediated business communication from seven Chinese international trade enterprises, addressing the language strategy applied in CMC (Computer-mediated Communication) by examining the use of hedges. They found out that with the emergence of internet, a wider range of hedges are applied extensively in four types of business emails: marketing email, inquiry email, quotation email, follow-up email. Marketing emails have the most hedges, while follow-up emails, and quotation emails have the least, and inquiry emails are in between. As plausible shields, modal verbs are massively adopted in four types of business emails to show politeness and eagerness for business partnership. Marketing emails employ adaptors and rounders to soften the exaggerated expressions in the introduction to the company and its products so as to make a convincing

promotion. Both inquiry emails and quotation emails use adaptors and rounders very often when figures concerning products and prices are deliberately offered in a modest way for further negotiation. Follow-up emails use rounders, adaptors and attribute shields extensively in negotiating and reaching an agreement.

With regard to political discourse, Al-Rashady (2012) conducted research entitled “Determining the role of hedging devices in the political discourse of two American presidential candidates in 2008”. The study investigated how hedging devices function as a discourse strategy that analysed three presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 election. His finding appeared to show that when some hedging was used, the arguments of the speaker seemed more effective.

All these relevant studies are important in making us see the pertinence of our present research study.

2.3 Contribution of the Study

Since the first studies on the subject, it has become clear that hedging is a complex notion that can be approached from different angles. Indeed, hedges have an important function in communication, as they can be used to nuance or moderate speech. This review shows that their use in language is an important and well-studied research topic. Previous work has examined the use of these markers from different perspectives: from a taxonomic point of view, from a practical point of view; in different contexts, such as social interactions, political speeches, academic writing and everyday conversations. Several studies have also examined the use of these markers by second-language learners and in scientific discourse. However, there is little research on the use of hedging markers by students in the specific context of secondary education in the Cameroonian setting and from a cross-linguistic perspective. The proposed study seeks to fill this gap by comparing the use of these markers by students in the francophone subsystem and the anglophone sub-systems of GBHS Yaoundé. In addition, the study proposes an innovative approach using a mixed methodology. This approach will enable a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of students’ use of hedges.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the theoretical frameworks on which this study is based. These theoretical frameworks are Genre theory, as proposed by Halliday (1985), taxonomies of hedges

and Corpus linguistics. Beside the theoretical frameworks, a review of literature related to the issue under study has been made. The chapter ends with the contribution of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.0 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapters, this study compares the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students of Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé's essays. To undertake this research work, we were guided by theoretical frameworks as well as a research methodology. Kothari (2004) presents research methodology as the various techniques and methods used in the research process. Research methodology makes a research work scientific. This chapter presents the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing data. Thus, this chapter is subdivided into sections; research design, area of the study, sample population, data collection (data collection tools, data sources, ethical clearance, justification of data, data selection, language of data), method of data analysis, and challenges in data collection.

3.1 Research Design

Creswell (2009) indicated that research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. In other words, "a research design is a procedural plan that is adopted by the researcher to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately and economically." (Kumar, 2011).

The research design for this study is the mixed method research design (MMR), which is a type of research that combines both quantitative and qualitative datasets to be analysed and interpreted for an in-depth understanding of the research problem, (Leavy, 2017). This research design will combine both descriptive and explanatory elements. This design was selected to provide a comprehensive examination of students' use of hedging strategies in the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé.

The descriptive component of the research design will focus on identifying the types and quantifying the numbers of hedging devices used by students in their written essays across the two language subsystems. This will involve a content analysis of student essays to catalogue the frequency and distribution of various hedging techniques. The goal is to establish a baseline understanding of the "what" - the specific hedging strategies students employ in each subsystem.

The explanatory aspect of the research design will then delve into a linguistic analysis of the hedges used by students, as well as the reasons behind the observed patterns of hedging usage. This qualitative data will provide contextual insights into the factors and considerations that shape the students' hedging practices, such as cultural influences, educational background, language proficiency, and writing conventions.

By adopting a mixed-method approach, this study will offer a comprehensive understanding of students' use of hedging in the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé. The combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis will allow for the identification of observable trends as well as the exploration of the underlying reasons and explanations for those trends. This holistic perspective will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex linguistic and socio-cultural dynamics in the students' academic writing practices.

3.2 Area of the Study

The study was carried out at Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) Yaoundé, located in Yaoundé. Also known as the city of seven hills, Yaoundé is the headquarters of the Centre region and the capital of Cameroon. With a population of about 5 million people (2020 census), Yaoundé is found in the Mfoundi division which is made up of seven sub-divisions: Yaoundé I with headquarters Nlongkak; Yaoundé II, Tsinga; Yaoundé III, Efoulan; Yaoundé IV, Kondengui; Yaoundé, V Essos; Yaoundé VI, Biyem-Assi; and Yaoundé VII, Nkolbisson. It is in the Centre region, Mfoundi division, Yaoundé V subdivision. It is situated in the quarter called Essos. GBHS Yaoundé was created in 1973. It is the first bilingual secondary school in the city of Yaoundé. GBHS Yaoundé was created to promote bilingualism in Cameroon.

The students of GBHS Yaoundé are mostly Cameroonians and have either English or French as a second language and either English or French as a foreign language. In the Anglophone sub-system of education, English is a second language for the students, whereas French is a foreign language. However, in the Francophone sub-system of education, French is the student's second language, and English is their foreign language. GBHS Yaoundé does not only limit its students to those of Cameroonian nationality; some of its students are foreigners. This choice was motivated by the fact that carrying out this study in this school ensured easy access for the researcher, who lives in Yaoundé and did his teaching practice in GBHS Yaoundé.

3.3 Sample Population

The population of this study comprised students of *Upper Sixth Arts* and *Terminale A4* from GBHS Yaoundé. These two classes are the final year classes respectively in the Anglophone and the Francophone sub-systems of education in Cameroon. Choosing outgoing students for this study was deemed necessary for this study in that the students have gone through seven years of education. Also, we believe they have acquired a wide range of competencies and knowledge regarding language skills since 6e and Form 1, respectively. Additionally, we selected arts-oriented students because they are required to write essays as part of their academic programs.

Students from the English-speaking sub-system (Upper Sixth students) have the English language as a second language; they are ESL learners. Consequently, all the subjects taught to the students are being done in English language, with the exception of the subject known as French. They have been taught how to write essays. Moreover, they are in an examination class, so they already have a good mastery of essay writing and all its constituents. Writing has the highest score in their examination. It accounts for 40 per cent of the English Language. English Language is one of their compulsory subjects at the level of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination, improving the motivation to put in extra effort. Furthermore, these students are used to writing essays, not only in English Language but in most of their subjects. So, essay writing and all its various types are parts and parcels of their school activities.

As for students from the French-speaking sub-system, almost the same parameters apply, but with the French language.

For this study, we collected essays in all four Terminale A4 classrooms and three Upper Sixth Classrooms of GBHS Yaoundé.

The total number of students whose essays were selected is one hundred twenty (120), and the total number of students whose essays were selected at random for this study is one hundred, comprising fifty-five (55) essays from students of the French-speaking subsystem and forty-five (45) from students of the English-speaking subsystem. The sample population, therefore, comprises one hundred (100) respondents.

Table 3: Respondents' Repartition

	Number of classrooms	Number on roll
Terminale A4	04	204
Upper Sixth Arts	03	128
Total	07	332

3.4 Data Collection

This part focuses on the tools or devices used to collect data for the study. In the course of research, the instruments used for data collection, the sources, and the validation of data collection must be mentioned. This part of the work is then concerned with these factors.

3.4.1 Data Collection Tools

Data collected for this study was done through the use of a production test. Some of their collected writings are based on topics we have asked them to write. The topics are the following:

- What justifies the defeat of the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon in their friendly match against the Teranga Lions of Senegal on October 16?
- The impact of social media on contemporary society: Analyse the positive and negative effects of social networks on human relations, privacy and civic engagement.
- The perception of the military: is it fair to consider the military as malicious individuals?

The other part of the written output comes from the students' essays and commentaries in Sequential Assessment N°2. Upper Sixth students, in particular, provided us with their past essays, even from the first sequence evaluation in English language, History and Citizenship education.

3.4.2 Data Sources

Data can be either primary or secondary (Taherdoost, 2021). Primary data refers to first-hand information which is collected by the researcher himself and not changed by any individual. On the other hand, secondary data are data earlier collected and manipulated by

others. Primary data are collected through different sources, such as experiments, surveys, interviews, and questionnaires.

The data for this study was gathered from essays written by students of GBHS Yaoundé. As data was collected directly from students' essays, it constitutes a primary source.

3.4.3 Validity of Data Collection

To confirm the legitimacy of the research tool, the essay topics were given to a panel of specialists who approved them. The topic was thought to be current, and the students would be eager to write on it. The students were then given a topic to write on.

3.5 Ethical Clearance

Our research endeavour was granted ethical clearance from multiple stakeholders to ensure the protection of all participants and the integrity of the study.

Firstly, the research proposal was reviewed and approved by the Head of the Department of Bilingual Studies within the Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences at the University of Yaoundé I, the institution from which the researcher originates. The Head of the Department carefully scrutinised the study design, data collection methods, and potential ethical considerations to ensure compliance with the university's research ethics guidelines.

Secondly, the research supervisor provided guidance and oversight throughout the ethical clearance process. He reviewed the research methodology, data collection protocols, and ethical considerations to ensure adherence to the highest academic and professional standards.

Thirdly, the researcher obtained written permission from the Vice Principals of both the Upper Sixth and Terminale levels at GBHS Yaoundé, the research site. The Vice Principals were briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and the role of the student participants. They provided their endorsement, acknowledging the potential educational and academic benefits that the research could bring to the school community.

Lastly, informed consent was obtained from all student participants who were to be the primary informants for this study. The researcher met with the students, individually and in groups, to explain the purpose of the research, the data collection methods, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Students were allowed to ask questions and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Only those students who provided their verbal consent were included in the study.

The multi-layered ethical clearance process involving the university's academic leadership, the research supervisor, the school administration, and the student participants, ensured that this research endeavour upheld the highest standards of ethical conduct. This comprehensive approach safeguarded the rights, well-being, and privacy of all individuals involved in the study while also fostering a collaborative and transparent research environment.

3.6 Justification of Data

The data collected for this comparative analysis of hedging use by students in the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé is drawn from a primary source – the students' own written essays and academic writings. This approach ensures the authenticity and reliability of the data, as it is directly obtained from the target population, providing a comprehensive and representative sample for the study.

The data collection process involved two main components. Firstly, a production test was administered, wherein students were asked to write essays on specific topics relevant to their academic and social experiences. The topics covered included the defeat of the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon in a friendly match against the Teranga Lions of Senegal, the impact of social media on contemporary society, and the perception of the military. These prompts were designed to elicit a range of responses and encourage the students to engage in critical thinking and self-expression, thereby providing valuable insights into their use of hedging strategies.

The likelihood informed the choice of these specific essay topics of students employing hedging devices in their responses. Essays on sports and athletic events, such as the defeat of the Indomitable Lions, often involve the expression of opinions, predictions, and evaluations, typically accompanied by hedging to mitigate the level of certainty or commitment. Similarly, essays addressing the impact of social networks on society and the perception of the military are likely to prompt the students to engage in more subjective and evaluative writing, where hedging can play a crucial role in conveying their perspectives.

Secondly, the researcher also collected a portion of the data from the students' essays and commentaries produced during the Sequential Assessment N°2, as well as past essays from the first sequence evaluation in subjects such as English language, History, and Citizenship education. This approach ensures that the data reflects the students' natural writing styles and hedging patterns within the context of their academic work rather than being limited to the production test scenarios.

The inclusion of the students' own academic writings, particularly in subjects such as the English language and the humanities, is justified by the probability of these genres eliciting more extensive use of hedging. Essays and commentaries in these disciplines often involve the presentation of arguments, the evaluation of claims, and the exploration of complex ideas, all of which are typically accompanied by the strategic use of hedging devices to qualify, temper, or mitigate the students' assertions.

By drawing from these two primary data sources – the production test essays and the students' existing academic writings – the researcher is able to obtain a comprehensive and representative sample that captures the nuances of hedging use across different academic genres and writing styles. This multi-faceted approach strengthens the validity and reliability of the data, providing a solid foundation for the comparative analysis of hedging strategies between the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé.

3.7 Language of the Data

The data collected for this study consists of written essays and academic texts produced by students enrolled in the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé. The language of the data reflects the linguistic composition of the target population and the educational environment in which they are situated.

For the francophone subsystem, the data was collected from students in the Terminale class, which is the final year of the French-speaking secondary education system. The essays and academic writings obtained from these students were naturally composed in French, as it is the primary language of instruction in the francophone subsystem.

In contrast, the data for the anglophone subsystem was collected from students in the Upper Sixth class, the final year of the English-speaking secondary education system. The essays and academic texts obtained from these students were written in English, the predominant language of instruction in the anglophone subsystem.

This distinction in the language of the data is a crucial aspect of the study, as it allows for a comparative and cross-linguistic examination of students' use of hedging in the two educational subsystems. By analysing the hedging strategies employed by francophone students in their French essays and the hedging used by anglophone students in their English essays, the researcher can gain valuable insights into the potential influence of the students' language of education on their hedging practices.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the French and English writings provides a more comprehensive understanding of hedging within the broader educational context of GBHS Yaoundé. Comparing hedging strategies across the two language systems offers the opportunity to explore any potential cross-linguistic differences or similarities, which may be influenced by factors such as educational policies, pedagogical approaches, and cultural norms.

In summary, the language of the data collected for this study is aligned with the linguistic composition of the target population. The francophone students' essays are in French, while the anglophone students' essays are in English, enabling a comparative and cross-linguistic analysis of hedging strategies employed by students in the two educational subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé.

3.8 Data Selection

The data for this study was carefully selected to ensure a balanced and representative sample from the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé.

The total number of student essays selected for this study was 120, with 75 from the Terminale classes and 45 from the Upper Sixth classes. However, in order to maintain a more balanced representation between the two subsystems, the researcher randomly selected a total of 100 essays for the final analysis, comprising 55 essays from the French-speaking subsystem and 45 essays from the English-speaking subsystem.

The decision to randomly select a subset of 55 essays from the 75 collected in the Terminale class was made to match the number of essays obtained from the anglophone subsystem. This approach ensured that the comparative analysis between the two subsystems was conducted more equally, with a similar number of essays representing each linguistic group.

The researcher's rationale for targeting Terminale and Upper Sixth students was to capture the writing proficiency and hedging strategies of students at the advanced level of secondary education in both the francophone and anglophone subsystems. These students were expected to have a well-developed command of their respective languages and sophisticated academic writing skills, enabling a nuanced examination of their hedging practices.

Standardizing the essay characteristics, such as length, topic, and genre, further facilitated the comparative analysis between the francophone and anglophone subsystems. This approach allowed the researcher to focus on the differences in hedging strategies attributed to the

students' linguistic backgrounds rather than confounding factors related to the essay format or content.

Table 4: Repartition of Essays

	Number of essays collected	Number of essays selected
Terminale A4	75	55
Upper Sixth Arts	45	45
Total	120	100

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

The present study used content analysis and descriptive statistics as a method of data analysis. To be more precise, the data was analysed using conceptual content analysis and the manifest content methodological approach, as concerns content analysis. With regard to descriptive statistics, frequency studies were used. The research analysis strictly followed the steps of conceptual content analysis. These steps include:

The text has to be read. All the students' essays were read from the introduction, body and conclusion. The essays are 100 in number and collected at random. They were read to reach two objectives; to identify the frequency occurrence of hedging in their essays and identify the hedging categories which appeared most. Identification was done manually. The next step is coding. The researcher coded the hedges in students' essays based on the categories. Coding was done based on the first letters and the initials of each letter. Furthermore, simple percentages and frequency tables were used to identify the frequency of categories of hedges found in the essays and their occurrences.

Qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed to conduct the comparative and cross-linguistic analysis of hedging strategies used by students in the francophone and anglophone subsystems of GBHS Yaoundé.

3.9.1 Quantitative Analysis:

A quantitative analysis of the hedging instances identified in the student essays has been conducted. This has included calculating hedging frequency, distributing different hedging

types, and determining the relative prevalence of hedging strategies across the francophone and anglophone subsystems.

3.9.2 Qualitative Analysis:

To complement the quantitative insights, a close reading of the selected essays from both subsystems has been undertaken. This qualitative approach has involved identifying patterns in the students' usage of various hedging devices and describing this usage linguistically. The contextual and pragmatic factors that influence the students' use of hedging, such as the specific rhetorical purpose, the level of uncertainty expressed, and the overall academic writing style, have also been examined.

Presentation is the step that follows. The hedges based on the coding system adopted are presented in tables and bar charts. These tables and bar charts express the frequency distribution and simple percentage of each hedging category used by students. The conclusion is the last step. Based on the research questions and the analysis, conclusions are arrived at and put forth.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has allowed for a multifaceted perspective on the hedging practices of francophone and anglophone students. The qualitative analysis has provided in-depth insights into the nuances and contextual factors surrounding the students' use of hedging. In contrast, the quantitative analysis has offered a more systematic and generalised understanding of the patterns and differences in hedging strategies across the two linguistic subsystems.

3.10 Challenges in Data Collection

Several challenges were encountered during the data collection and analysis process for this study on hedging strategies in the academic writings of GBHS Yaoundé students.

One significant issue was the poor handwriting of some students, particularly in the Terminale class. This made it difficult to accurately decipher and transcribe certain portions of the essays, requiring the researcher to review and cross-check the handwritten texts meticulously.

Also, the challenge of reading and re-reading all the essays carefully to ensure no relevant details were missed further added to the time and effort required during the data preparation phase.

Additionally, the researcher faced difficulties in motivating students, especially those in the Upper Sixth class, to actively engage in the essay writing task. This nonchalance on the part of the students resulted in a disparity in the number of essays collected from the two linguistic subsystems, with 75 essays obtained from the Terminale class and only 45 from the Upper Sixth class.

The researcher was compelled to adapt the data selection process to address this imbalance and maintain a more balanced representation. Instead of analysing all 120 collected essays, a random subset of 100 essays was selected for the final analysis, comprising 55 essays from the French-speaking subsystem and 45 from the English-speaking subsystem.

This adaptation in the data selection methodology was necessary to ensure a more equitable comparison between the two linguistic groups, as the researcher recognised the potential for skewed findings if the analysis had been conducted on the initial unbalanced dataset.

Despite these challenges, the researcher remained committed to upholding the integrity of the research and employed various strategies to overcome the obstacles encountered. The meticulous review of handwritten texts, the persistence in engaging students, and the careful curation of the final dataset all contributed to the successful execution of the comparative and cross-linguistic analysis of hedging strategies in the academic writings of GBHS Yaoundé students.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter was concerned with the research methodology adopted for this study. Thus, discussions were made on the research design, study area, sample population, data collection (data collection tools, data sources, ethical clearance, justification of data, data selection, language of data,), method of data analysis, and challenges in data collection. The strict compliance of this chapter to the data collection procedures makes this work scientifically correct, thereby assuring that the next chapter has also been carried out scientifically. The next chapter of our work is concerned with the presentation, analysis and discussion of findings. By leveraging this multifaceted methodological approach, the researcher has laid a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of the findings, aiming to contribute to the broader understanding of cross-linguistic variations in hedging strategies within the academic context of GBHS Yaoundé.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses the data and discusses the results. First, it presents the numbers and types of hedges used by each group, then linguistically describes how each group of students used hedges in their essays.

4.1 Presentation of Findings

This section presents the results of the analysis of hedges used in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students. The findings are organised into statistical results and a linguistic description, highlighting the types and frequency of hedges identified in both groups.

4.1.1 Statistical Results

This subsection provides a quantitative analysis of the hedges used by French-speaking and English-speaking students. It outlines the types and frequency of hedges found in each group's essays, offering insights into the patterns of hedge usage.

4.1.1.1 Types and Number of Hedges in French-speaking Students' Essays

This part examines the hedging strategies used by French-speaking students, categorising them into different types. The results reveal the preferred hedging techniques and their distribution in academic writing.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution of the Use of Hedges in French-Speaking Students' Essays.

CATEGORIES OF HEDGES		HEDGES	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
SHIELDS	Plausibility shields (PS)	<i>Peut-être (maybe)</i>	02
		The verb "pouvoir" (can) in all its forms	125
	Attribution shields (AS)	<i>L'expérience de la vie nous montre que... (Life</i>	07

		<i>experience shows us that...)</i>	
		<i>Certains sociologues pensent que (Some sociologists believe that)</i>	01
		<i>La vie quotidienne nous montre que (Daily life shows us that)</i>	01
		<i>D'après... (According to...)</i>	04
		<i>Le public camerounais estime que (The Cameroonian public considers)</i>	01
		<i>Selon... (According to...)</i>	02
		<i>De multiples études ont montré que (Numerous studies have shown that)</i>	02
		<i>Pour eux (For them)</i>	01
		<i>Comme le dit... (As... says)</i>	01
		<i>C'est ce que défendent les experts (That's what the experts say)</i>	02
		<i>D'autres affirment (Others claim that)</i>	01
		<i>Tout porte à croire que (Everything suggests that)</i>	01
		<i>Les recherches démontrent que (Studies show that)</i>	01
			25
<i>Total</i>			152

Approximators	AOD	<i>Plus ou moins (more or less)</i>	01
		<i>Un peu (a bit)</i>	01
		<i>Totalement (Totally)</i>	01
			03
	AOF	<i>Toujours (Always)</i>	11
		<i>Le plus souvent (More often than not)</i>	04
		<i>La plupart du temps (Most of the time)</i>	02
		<i>Souvent (Often)</i>	04
		<i>Parfois (Sometimes)</i>	01
		<i>Généralement (Generally)</i>	02
		<i>En general (In general)</i>	01
			25
	AOQ	<i>Nombreux (Many)</i>	05
		<i>Tous (All)</i>	01
		<i>Certains (Some)</i>	09
		<i>Plusieurs (Many)</i>	04
		<i>La majeure partie de (most of the)</i>	01
		<i>La plupart (most)</i>	01
			21
	AOT	-	-
<i>Total</i>			49
MADDI		<i>Pour moi (For me)</i>	01
<i>Total</i>			01
ECI		<i>Plutôt (instead)</i>	04
		<i>Réellement (really, actually)</i>	06

		<i>Forcément(necessarily)</i>	01
		<i>Vraiment (truly, really, actually)</i>	07
		<i>Largement(largely)</i>	04
<i>Total</i>			22
Compound hedges		<i>D'une part (On the one hand)</i>	01
		<i>Dans la mesure où (Insofar as)</i>	01
		<i>Dans une certaine mesure (To a certain extent)</i>	01
		<i>À première vue (At first view)</i>	01
		<i>Se présente comme (Presented as)</i>	01
		<i>Est perceptible (Is perceptible)</i>	17
		<i>Laisse entendre que (Implies that)</i>	04
		<i>Quand même (still, even so)</i>	01
		<i>En quelques sortes (In some ways)</i>	01
<i>Total</i>			28
AFS	Euphemism	<i>Les lions indomptables se sont inclinés (The indomitable lions bowed out)</i>	01
	Litotes	-	-
<i>Total</i>			01
Verb tenses and modes	Conditional form	<i>Faudrait (should)</i>	5
		<i>Ne seraient (would not be)</i>	14

		<i>Pourrait (could)</i>	5
		<i>N'auraient (would not have)</i>	5
		<i>Devrait (should)</i>	4
		<i>Résiderait (could reside)</i>	1
		<i>Reviendrait (could come back)</i>	1
		<i>Voudrait (would want)</i>	1
		<i>Ferait (could do)</i>	1
	Imperfect	<i>Pouvait (could)</i>	01
<i>Total</i>			38
Passive voice		<i>Peuvent être dissimulés (Can be concealed)</i>	01
		<i>Ont été proposés (were proposed)</i>	01
		<i>Les militaires sont accusés (The military are accused)</i>	01
		<i>Ont été tués (have been killed)</i>	01
		<i>Ont été faits (have been done)</i>	01
<i>Total</i>			05
Punctuation marks	Quotation marks		01
<i>Total</i>			01
Total number of hedges: 297			

Table 5 above shows the frequency of appearance of the categories of hedges found in the essays of Terminale students of GBHS Yaoundé. This table shows that the total number of hedges, all categories combined, is 297. The categories of hedges found in this taxonomy are shields (of plausibility and attribution); approximators of quantity, degree, frequency and time; marks of the author's doubt and direct involvement; emotionally charged intensifiers; compound hedges; figures of speech (essentially euphemism); verbal tenses and modes such as

the attenuating conditional and the attenuating imperfect; the passive; and punctuation: more specifically, quotation marks (“...”).

From the above presentation of results, we observe that the shield category is the most recurrent, with a total number of 152 occurrences. The second-highest category is approximators. This category has a total number of 49 occurrences. The third most recurrent category is the tenses and modes. This category appears with a total number of 38 occurrences. In fourth place come compound hedges with a total of 28 occurrences. Emotionally charged intensifiers appear next, with 22 occurrences in the French-speaking students’ essays. The sixth category is the passive, with 05 occurrences. Punctuation, hedging figures of speech, marks of the author’s personal doubt, and direct involvement are the least present categories, with only 01 occurrence for each category in our corpus. To visually represent the frequencies of use of the different categories of hedges, we present the following diagram.

Figure 3: Statistical Representation of Hedges Categories in French-Speaking Students’ Essays

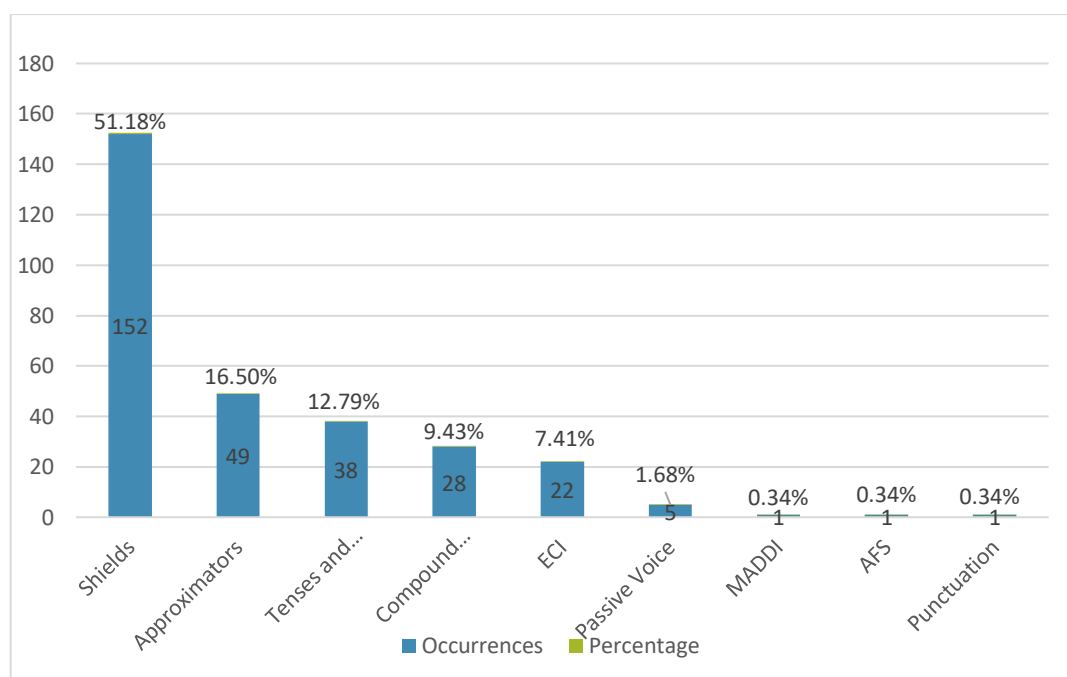


Figure 3 above plots the frequency of occurrence of hedges by category in the French-speaking students’ written work. From this histogram, we can see that the category with the highest percentage is shielded with 51.2%. This is followed by approximators with 16.4%. Next comes the verbal tense category, with 12.7%. Compound hedges come next with 9.4%. Emotionally charged intensifiers account for 7.4%. Next comes the passive with 1.6%.

Punctuation, figures of speech and marks of the author's doubt and direct involvement each account for 0.3% of the hedges used in our corpus.

From these figures, we can see a significant preponderance of shields among these markers. Indeed, shields account for more than half of the hedges used by these Terminale A4 students.

❖ Shields

This is the most represented category in The French-speaking students' essays sub-corpus, with 152 occurrences. Here are a few examples of sentences from the essays in which we find shields:

(1) On **peut** définir les réseaux sociaux comme étant des plateformes mondiales de communication, d'information et d'interaction entre les individus. (C 3).

(2) Que **peuvent** être ses effets positifs ? (C 5)

(3) Les réseaux sociaux **peuvent** être bénéfiques pour notre société. (C 12)

(4) On **peut** aussi prendre un intérêt littéraire, dans la mesure où le poète épouse les normes esthétiques. (C 13)

(5) Ceci **peut** se traduire dans le texte à travers l'utilisation du champ lexical de la beauté. (C 14)

(6) **Les recherchent démontrent que** les élèves qui passent trop de temps sur les réseaux **peuvent** souffrir de troubles du sommeil, de fatigue oculaire, d'une image corporelle négative... (C 15)

(7) **Nombreuses personnes pensent que** les réseaux sociaux contribuent à améliorer la recherche. (C 12)

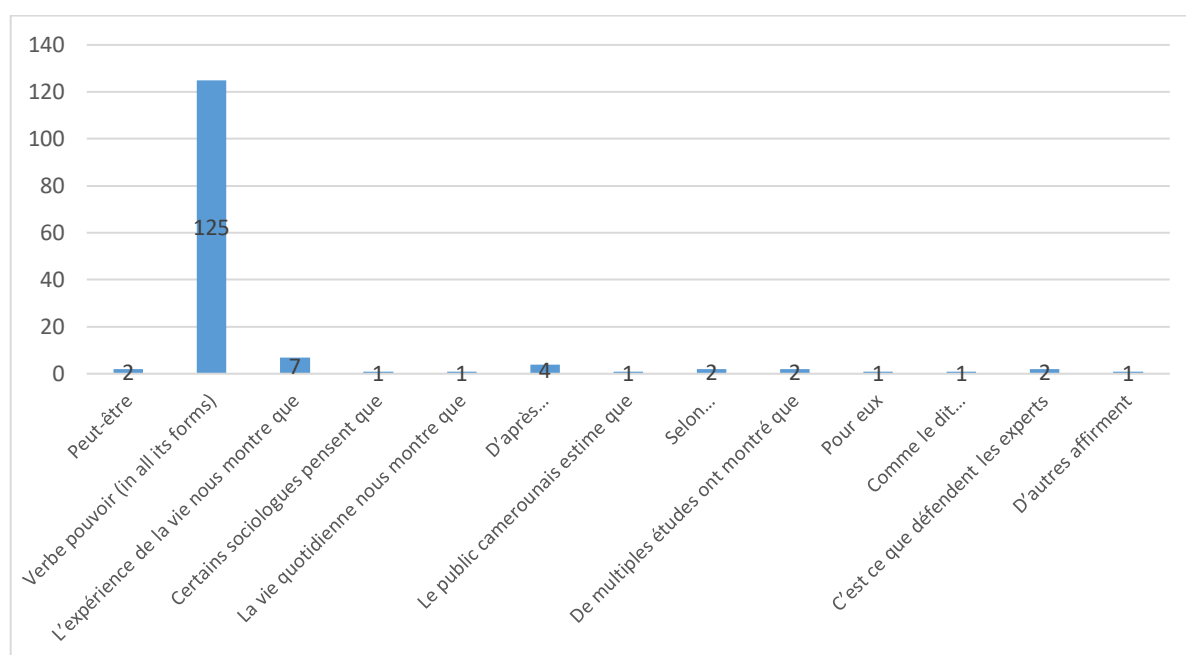
(8) **Le public camerounais estime que** l'ancien capitaine des lions indomptables n'est plus l'homme de la situation. (C 16)

(9) **Certains sociologues pensent que** ces réseaux sociaux jouent un rôle important dans la société. (C 1)

(10) **D'après les journaux,** ce n'est ni la faute des joueurs, ni celle de l'entraîneur. (C 30)

In the examples above, sentences (1) to (5) essentially contain plausibility shields, mainly the modal auxiliary “*pouvoir*” (can). Sentences (7) to (10) illustrate attribution shields. In sentence (6), we have an attribution shield (6) “*Les recherchent démontrent que* (research shows that)”, and a plausibility shield “*peuvent*” (can).

Figure 4: Shields in French-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Approximators

Approximators follow shields in terms of the number of occurrences in French-speaking students' written productions, with 49 occurrences. Some examples are:

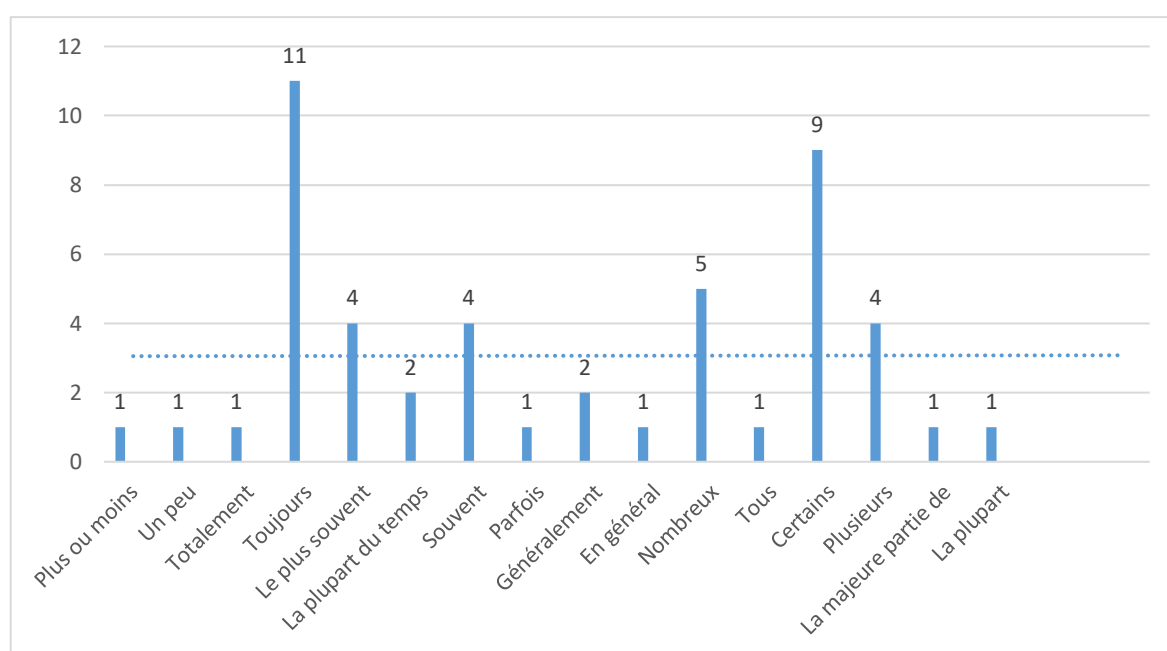
- (11) *Tout ceci peut être **plus ou moins** chargé intellectuellement. (C 8)*
- (12) *Ceci parce que la source d'information n'est pas **toujours** vérifiée. (C 11)*
- (13) *Ces informations sont **presque toujours** utilisées comme sujets de causeries entre les personnes vivant au sein d'une même communauté. (C 11)*
- (14) *Les utilisateurs des réseaux sociaux font, **la plupart du temps** des actes qui sont contraires aux lois. (C 11)*
- (15) ***Certaines** personnes sont **souvent** éloignées de leurs proches et à cause des réseaux sociaux. (C 3)*
- (16) ***En général**, les jeunes n'usent pas bien des bienfaits des réseaux sociaux. (C 34)*
- (17) *De nos jours, **nombreux** sont ces jeunes-là qui utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour le divertissement. (C 2)*
- (18) ***La majeure partie** des jeunes exposent leur nudité sur les réseaux sociaux. (C 17)*

(19) ***La plupart des** activités auxquelles s'adonnent les jeunes sont inutiles. (C 7)*

(20) *Aussi, nous avons remarqué que ceux-ci n'avaient pas **tous** le même sens. (C 18)*

Example (11) contains the degree approximator “*plus ou moins* (more or less)”. Examples (12) to (15) contain the frequency approximators “*toujours* (always)” and “*la plupart du temps* (most of the time)”. In example (15), the frequency approximator “*souvent* (often)” and the quantity approximator “*certaines* (some)” are present. From (17) to (18), we find the quantity approximators “*la majeure partie des* (most of)”, “*la plupart des* (most of)”, and “*tous* (all)”.

Figure 5: Approximators in French-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Verb Tenses and Modes

Verbal hedges were used 38 times in the Terminale students' written productions. We have the following examples:

(21) *L'influence de nos jeunes **résiderait** donc dans le vestimentaire et la photographie de grand luxe. (C 19)*

(22) *Les réseaux sociaux **n'auraient-ils** pas un impact négatif? (C 4)*

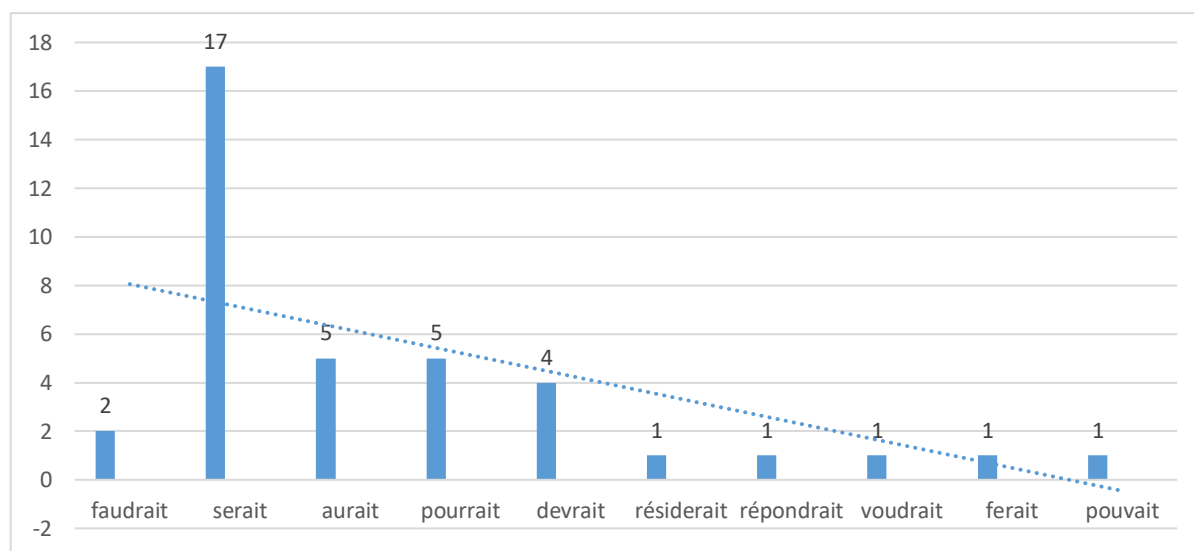
(23) *La beauté de Gala ne **serait-elle** pas une source de sa fragilité et de sa délicatesse? (C 3/B)*

(24) *...Dès lors, ne **ferait-elle** pas transparaître un autre intérêt? (C 10)*

(25) *La défaite des lions indomptables **pouvait** s'expliquer par leur manque de préparation adéquate.*

Examples (21) to (24) contain the mitigating conditional. Example 25 contains the mitigating imperfect tense.

Figure 6: Hedging Verbal Tenses and Modes in French-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Compound Hedges

Compound hedges have been used 28 times in total in the French sub-corpus, notably in the following examples:

(26) *À **première vue**, les réseaux sociaux ont un impact positif sur les sociétés contemporaines. (C 20)*

(27) *Gala **se présente comme** une femme belle au regard du poète. (C 9)*

(28) ***Dans une certaine mesure**, les réseaux sociaux renforcent les relations humaines. (C 5)*

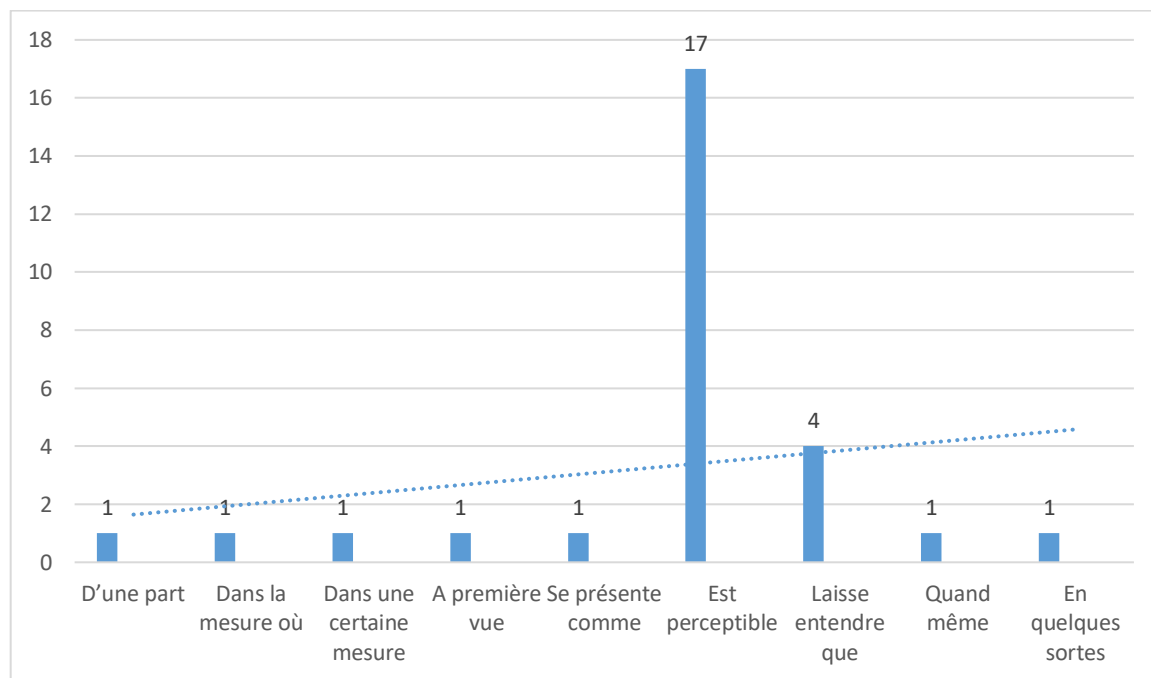
(29) *L'utilisation de la personnification... décrit **en quelques sortes** le physique de Gala. (C 21)*

(30) *Malgré le fait que Paul Eluard aime Gala, il y a **quand même** une certaine trahison entre eux. (C 22)*

(31) *L'anaphore **laisse entendre qu'**elle passe sur tout. (C 23)*

Examples (26) to (31) contain the compound hedges: “à première vue (at first sight)”, “se présente comme (looks like)”, “to some extent”, “dans une certaine mesure (in some ways)”, “quand même (nevertheless)” and “laisse entendre que (suggests that)”.

Figure 7: Compound Hedges in French-Speaking Students’ Essays



❖ Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers

These are present 22 times in the students’ written productions. We have the following examples:

(32) Ne faut-il pas **plutôt** dire que les réseaux sociaux n’ont pas d’impact sur la société contemporaine ? (C 15)

(33) Les réseaux sociaux sont-ils **réellement** importants ? (C19)

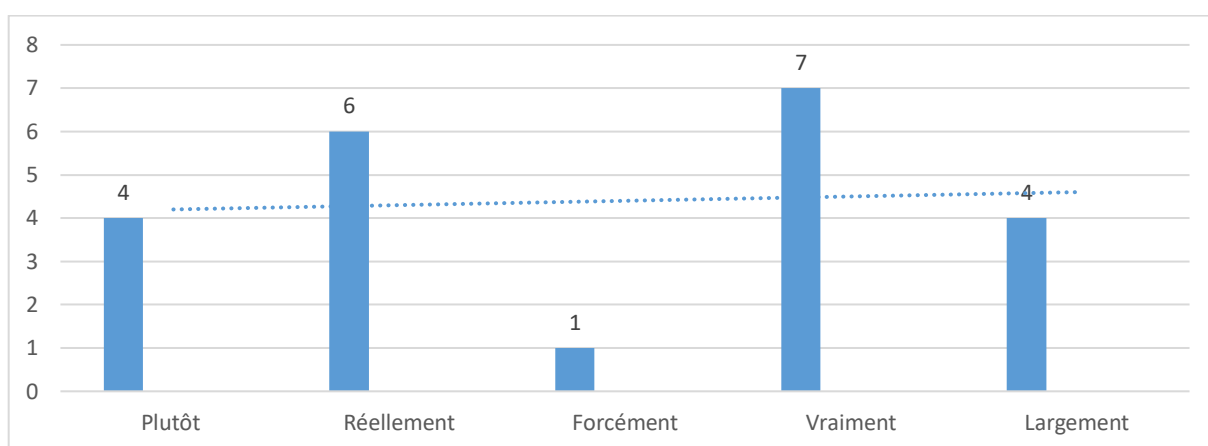
(34) Le militaire n’est pas **forcément** un être malveillant. (C 6)

(35) Les réseaux sociaux ont-ils **vraiment** un impact négatif ? (C 26)

(36) Tout porte à croire que les réseaux sociaux contribuent **largement** à l’égarement massif des jeunes. (C 19)

These examples contain the ECIs “*plutôt* (rather) “, “*réellement* (really)”, “*forcément* (necessarily) “, “*vraiment* (really) “ et “*largement* (largely)”.

Figure 8: Emotionally Charged Intensifiers in French-Speaking Students’ Essays



❖ Passive Voice

Passive voice is the next category, being present 5 times in the students' written productions. We can list the following occurrences:

(37) *Les fausses informations qui **peuvent être divulguées** peuvent être problématiques.* (C 8)

(38) *En effet, plusieurs occasions de but **ont été manquées** par des joueurs tels que Vincent Aboubakar et Bryan Mbeumo.* (C 16)

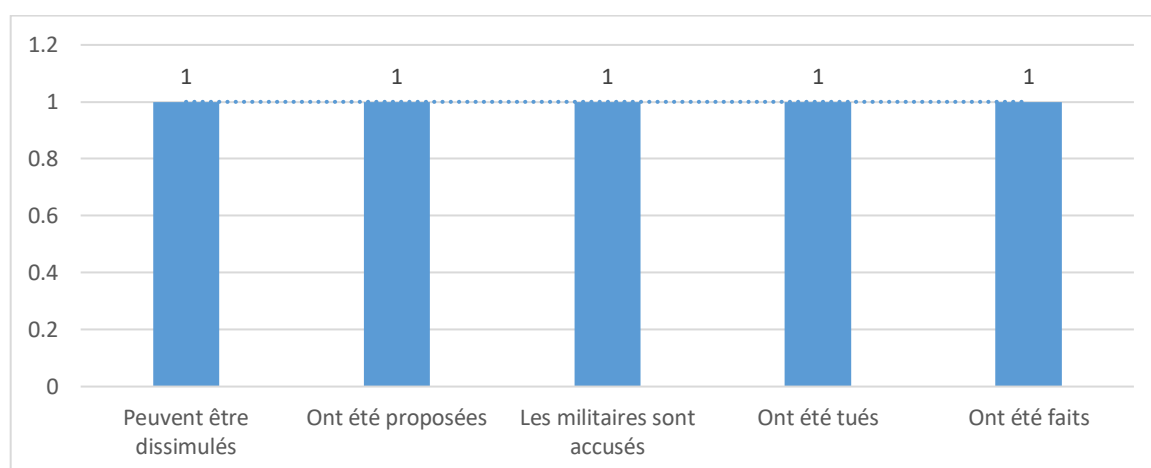
(39) *A titre d'illustration, les militaires **sont souvent accusés** d'atteinte à l'intégrité physique d'autrui.* (C 27)

(40) *L'année dernière encore, plus de vingt enseignants **ont été tués** au Cameroun.* (C 7)

(41) *Pour plusieurs camerounais, il manque d'expérience pour diriger une équipe de football et plusieurs constats **ont été faits** à ce propos.* (C 28)

These examples show the presence of hedging passive voice in the students' written productions.

Figure 9: Passive Voice in French-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Markers of the Author's Doubt or Direct Involvement

There is only one such occurrence in the French sub-corpus, and it is the following:

(42) ***Pour moi**, les réseaux sociaux sont la pire menace pour la société.* (C 29)

Figure 10: MADDI in French-Speaking Students' Essays

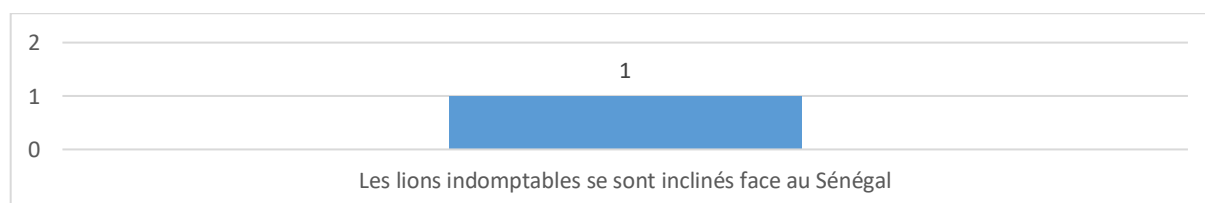


❖ Attenuating figure of speech: Euphemism

For euphemism, too, we have a single occurrence in this sub-corpus.

(43) *Les lions indomptables se sont inclinés face au Sénégal.* (C 16)

Figure 11: Euphemism in French-Speaking Students' Essays

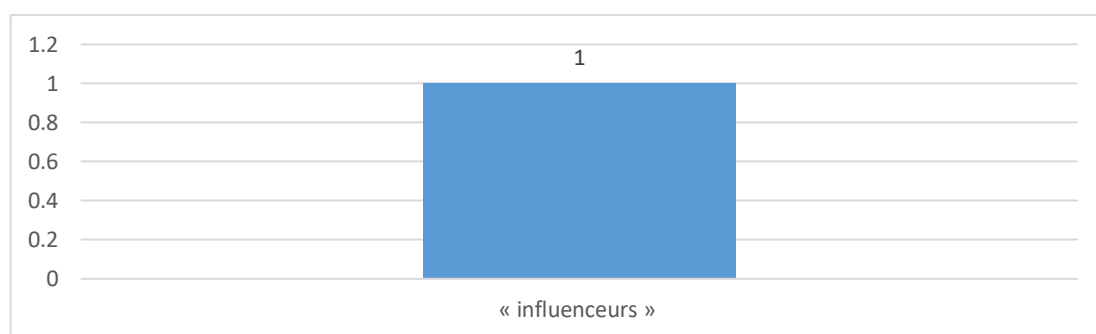


❖ Punctuation: Quotation Marks (“”)

For quotation marks, too, we found only one occurrence in the sub-corpus.

(44) *Les réseaux sociaux permettent également aux “influenceurs” de gagner leur pain quotidien. (C10)*

Figure 12: Quotation Marks in French-Speaking Students’ Essays



4.1.1.2 Types and Number of Hedges in English-Speaking Students’ Essays

Similar to the previous section, this part analyses the hedging strategies used by English-speaking students, identifying common patterns and their frequency in academic writing.

Table 6: Frequency Distribution of the Use of Hedges in English-Speaking Students’ Essays

CATEGORIES OF HEDGES		HEDGES	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
Shields	Plausibility shields (PS)	<i>Can</i>	13
		<i>Seem</i>	07
		<i>Probably</i>	04
		<i>Possibly</i>	01
	Attribution shields (AS)		
		<i>According to article...</i>	01
		<i>From the above analyses</i>	01

Total			27
Approximators	AOD	Partially	01
		Almost	03
	AOF	Sometimes	07
		Most of the times	01
		(Not) always	03
	AOQ	Some	15
		Many	05
		Most	03
		Few	02
	AOT	Not long	01
Total			41
MADDI		We feel that	01
		In my/our opinion	02
Total			03
ECI		(Not) necessarily	01
Total			01
Compound hedges		To a certain extent	03
		At first glance	01
Total			04
Euphemism		Collateral damage (civilian deaths)	01
		Interrogation techniques (torture)	01
Total			02
Conditional form		Could	11
		Should	05
Total			16
Passive voice		Is defined as	01
		Was used	01
		Was held	01

	<i>Is considered</i>		07
	<i>Is seen</i>		03
	<i>Were relinquished</i>		01
	<i>Was carried out</i>		01
	<i>Were been forced</i>		01
	<i>Were been left</i>		01
	<i>Was founded</i>		01
	<i>Was considered</i>		01
	<i>Was created</i>		04
	<i>Was fought</i>		01
	<i>Were not considered</i>		02
	<i>Are not allowed</i>		01
	<i>Was brought</i>		01
	<i>Were forced</i>		02
	<i>Was influenced</i>		01
<i>Total</i>			31
Punctuation marks	Quotation marks	<i>Cameroon’s loss was “unexpected”</i>	01
<i>Total</i>			01
Total number of hedges: 126			

Table 6 above shows the frequency of appearance of the categories of hedges found in the essays of Upper Sixth students of GBHS Yaoundé. This table shows that the total number of hedges, all categories combined, is 126. The categories of hedges found in this taxonomy are: shields (of plausibility and attribution); approximators of quantity, degree, frequency and time, marks of the author's personal doubt and direct involvement; emotionally charged intensifiers; compound hedges; euphemism; conditional form; the passive; and punctuation: more specifically, quotation marks (“”).

From the above presentation of results, we observe that the approximators category is the most recurrent, with a total number of 41 occurrences. The second-highest category is passive voice. This category has a total number of 31 occurrences. The third most recurrent category is

shields. This category appears with a total number of 27 occurrences. In fourth place comes the use of the conditional form with a total of 16 occurrences. Compound hedges appear next, with 04 occurrences in the English-speaking students' essays. The sixth category is made up of markers of the author's personal doubt and direct involvement, with 03 occurrences. Euphemism comes next with 02 occurrences. Punctuation and emotionally charged intensifiers are the least present categories, with only 01 occurrences for each category in the English sub-corpus.

To visually represent the frequencies of use of the different categories of hedges, we present the following diagram.

Figure 13: Statistical Representation of Hedges Categories in English-Speaking Students' Essays

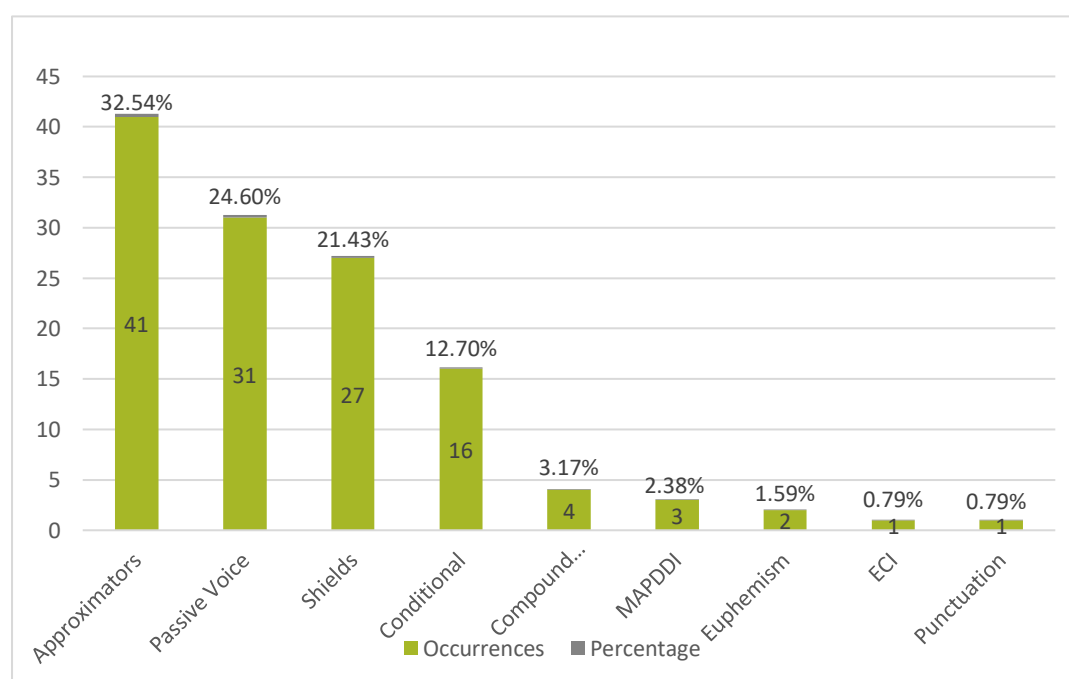


Figure 13 above plots the frequency of occurrence of hedges by category in the English-speaking students' written work. From this histogram, we can see that the category with the highest percentage is Approximators with 32.5%. This is followed by passive voice with 24.6%. Next comes the shields category with 21.43%. Conditional comes next with 12.7%. Compound hedges account for 3.1%. Next comes the marks of the author's personal doubt and direct involvement with 2.3%. Punctuation and emotionally charged intensifiers account for 0.7% of the hedges used in the English-speaking students' essays.

❖ Approximators

This is the most represented category of hedges in the English-speaking students' essays with 41 occurrences. Some examples of sentences from students' essays classified under this category include:

[1] *The Indomitable Lions' defeat is **partially** due to their lack of focus in the second half.* (P 25)

[2] ***Almost** everyone in contemporary society uses social media in some form.* (P 31)

[3] ***Sometimes**, social media platforms can be used to spread misinformation and harmful content.* (P 27)

[4] ***Most of the time**, the team that scores first in a match has a psychological advantage.* (P 44)

[5] *Social media is **not always** a negative force; it can also be used to promote positive social change.* (P 38)

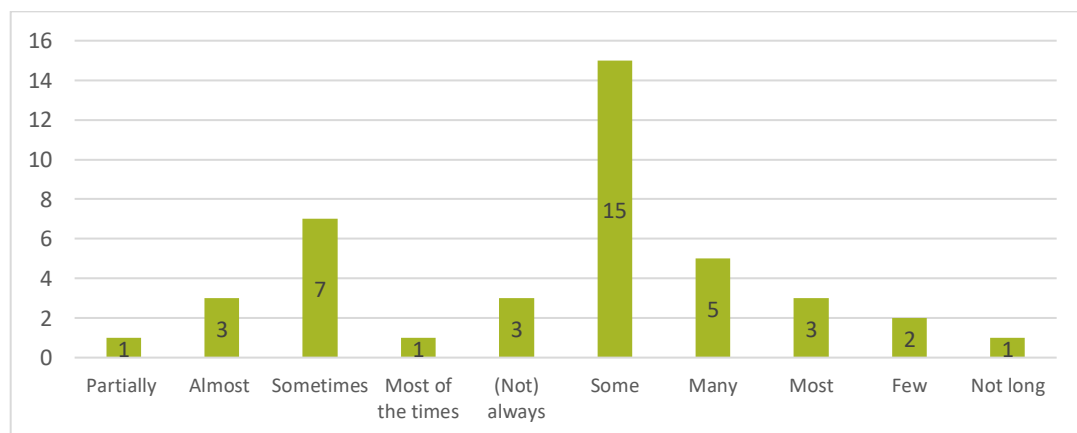
[6] ***Some** groups migrated upward to the Mandara mountain.* (P 20)

[7] ***Many** people have a negative perception of the military due to its association with war.* (P 30)

[8] *It was **not long** ago that social media was a niche phenomenon.* (P 27)

In the examples above, sentences [1] and [2] essentially contain the approximators of degree “*partially*” and “*almost*”. Sentences [3] to [5] illustrate the approximators of frequency “*sometimes*”, “*most of the times*” and “*always*”. In sentence [6] to [7], we have the approximators of quantity “*Some*” and “*many*”. In sentence [8], we have the approximator of time “*not long ago*”.

Figure 14: Approximators in English-speaking students' essays



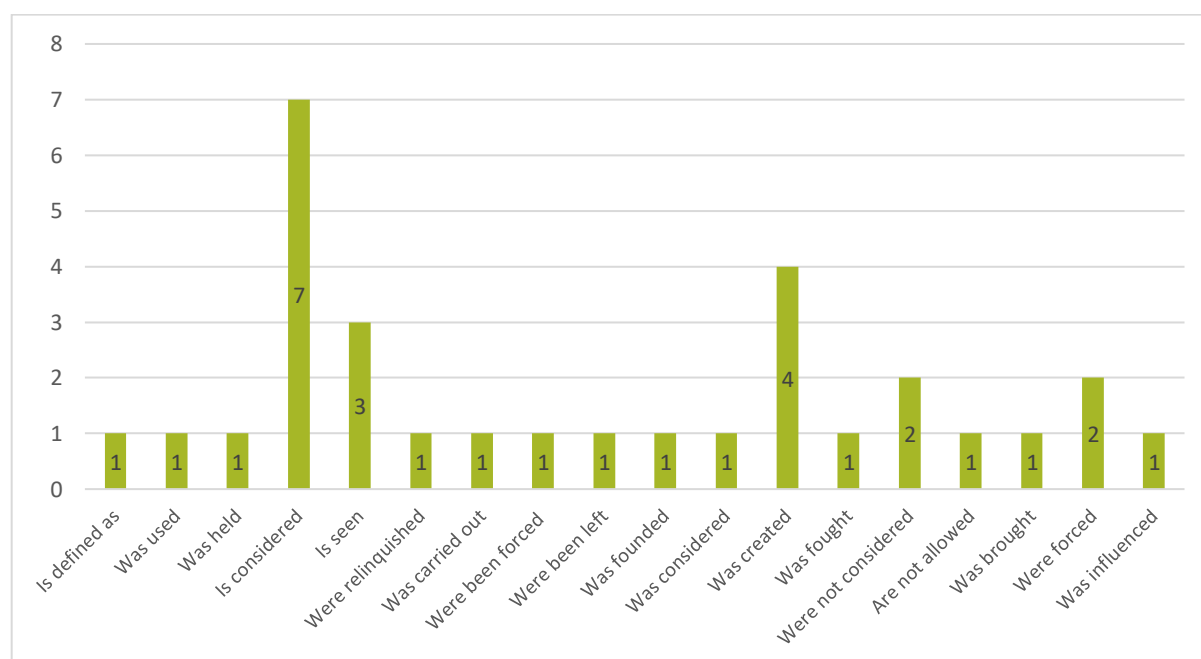
❖ Passive Voice

The passive voice comes after approximators regarding the number of occurrences in English-speaking students' written productions, with 31 occurrences. Here are a few examples of sentences from the essays in which we find hedging passive voice:

- [9] *The commonwealth **is considered** as neocolonialist because of many factors. (P 12)*
- [10] *The war **was fought** in Africa. (P 11)*
- [11] *The Second World War **was considered** the most frightful. (P 10)*
- [12] *All her properties **were relinquished** to Great Britain. (P 1)*
- [13] *Slave trade **was carried out** along the 15th century. (P 3)*
- [14] *The conference **was held** to discuss the structure. (P 1)*
- [15] *The UNO **was created** and mandated territories of the League of nations **were now placed** under the UNO as trust territories. (P 10)*

In the examples, we can see occurrences of the passive voice as a hedging strategy.

Figure 15: Hedging Passive Voice in English-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Shields

After the hedging passive voice, the category of shields is the next most frequent category in English-speaking students' essays, with 28 occurrences. Here are some examples from the sub-corpus:

[16] Pollution **can** have serious consequences on the well-being of the population. (P 5)

[17] The commonwealth **can** be considered neocolonialist. (P 1)

[18] Social media platforms **seem** to be increasingly influential in shaping public opinion. (P 38)

[19] The Teranga Lions **probably** benefited from the home advantage, as the match was played in Senegal.

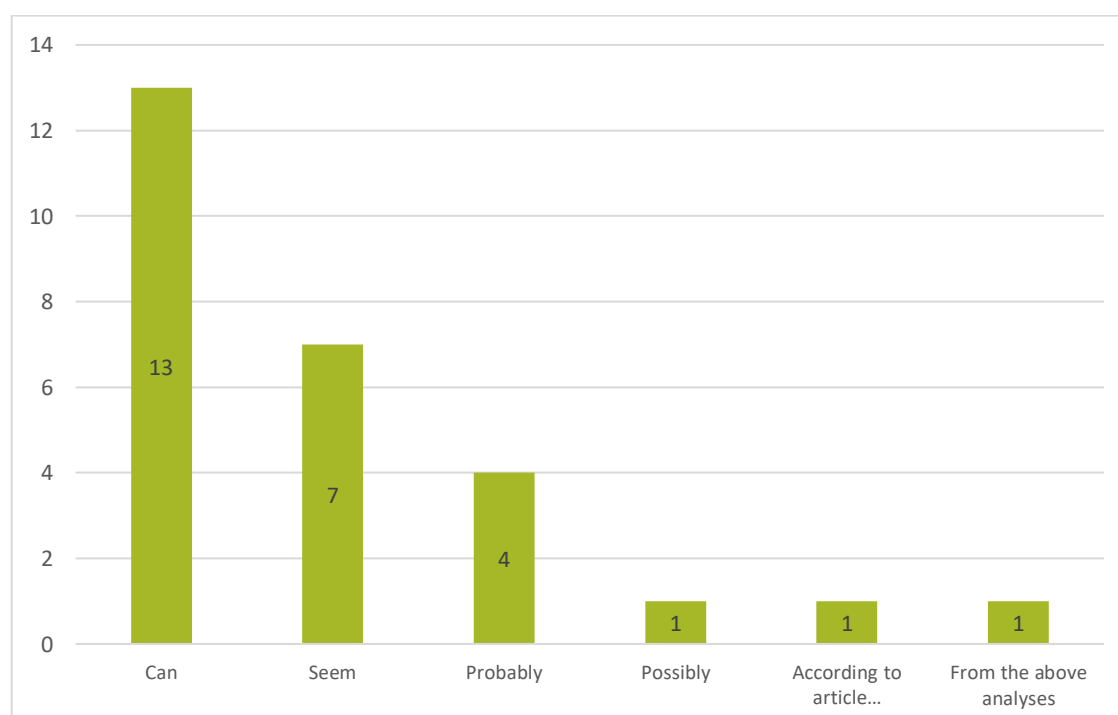
[20] The Indomitable Lions' defeat **possibly** reflects a need for more strategic training and team cohesion. (P25)

[21] **From the above analysis**, there were also other factors that lead to the English revolution. (P 7)

[22] **According to** article 76(B) and 5(A) of the United Nations, the colonial masters were compelled to grant independence to her colonies. (P 17)

In the examples above, sentences [16] to [20] essentially contain plausibility shields. These plausibility shields are: the modal auxiliary verb “can”, “seem”, “probably” and “possibly”. Sentences [21] and [22] illustrate the attribution shields “From the above analysis”, and “According to the article”.

Figure 16: Shields in English-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Conditional

The conditional form is the next most used hedging strategy by English-speaking students in their essays. It appears 16 times in total in the sub-corpus. Some examples include:

[23] Love **could** be seen each time when they went farming. (P 22)

[24] Social media **could** potentially be used to promote greater political awareness and participation among citizens. (P 31)

[25] The public perception of the military **would** likely be more positive if there were greater transparency and accountability in its operations. (P 39)

In the examples, we can see the use of the conditional form as a hedging strategy by anglophone students.

Figure 17: Hedging Conditional in English-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Compound Hedges

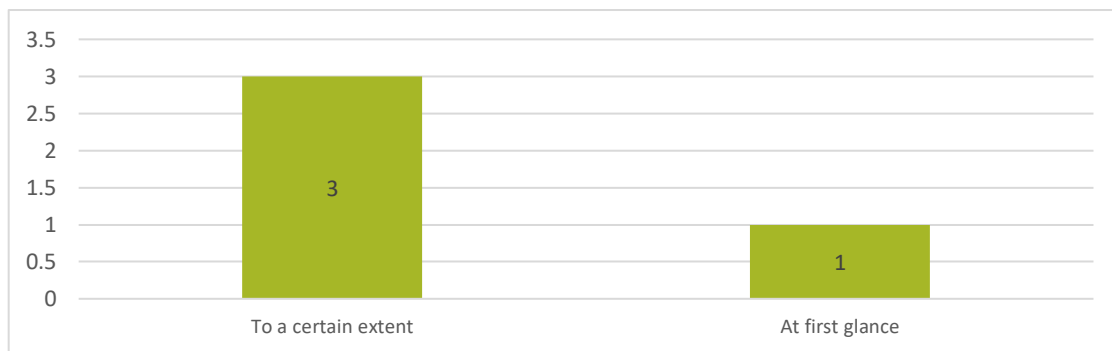
Compound hedges are less frequently represented in English-speaking students' essays. We found just 04 occurrences of this category. Here are some examples:

[26] The commonwealth was neocolonialist **to a certain extent**. (P 15)

[27] **At first glance**, the military might appear to be a powerful and intimidating force, but its members are often ordinary people who are serving their country. (P 29)

In the example [26], we can see the CH “to a certain extent”; In the example [27], we can see the CH “At first glance”.

Figure 18: Compound Hedges in English-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Markers of the Author's Doubt or Direct Involvement

MADDI are present in the sub-corpus with 03 occurrences. They are the following:

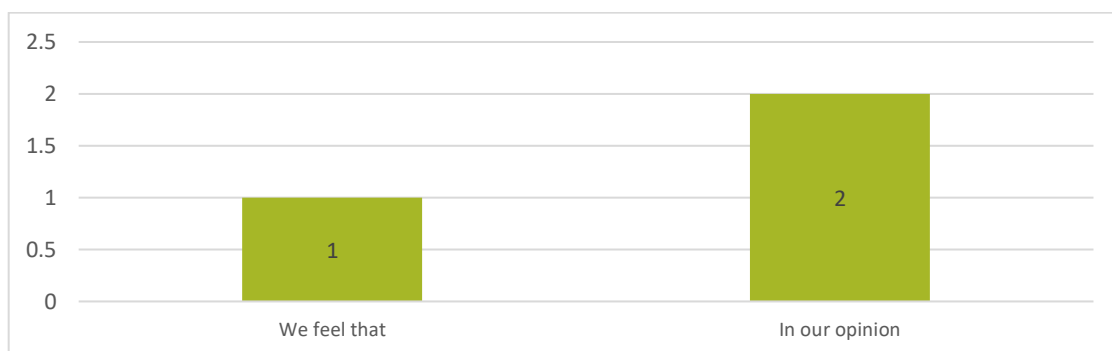
[28] ***We feel that** it is unfair to generalise about the military as a whole based on the actions of a few individuals. (P 29)*

[29] ***In my opinion,** it is not fair to consider the military as malicious individuals. (P 32)*

[30] ***In our opinion,** the military plays a vital role in protecting national security and should be recognised for its service. (P 30)*

In the sentences above, we can see the MADDI “*We feel that*” in [28] and “*In my/our opinion*” in [29] and [30].

Figure 19: MADDI in English-Speaking Students' Essays



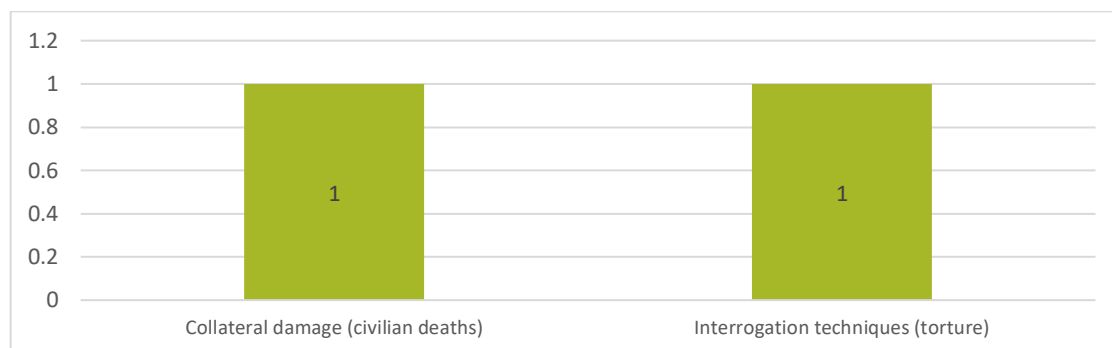
❖ Euphemism

This hedging figure of speech is used only twice in the sub-corpus. The instances noted are the following:

[31] *The use of **certain interrogation techniques** by some military personnel has raised serious ethical concerns and damaged the public's trust in the armed forces. (P 29)*

[32] *The occurrence of **collateral damage** in military operations raises questions about the effectiveness of strategies. (P 32)*

Figure 20: Euphemism in English-Speaking Students' Essays

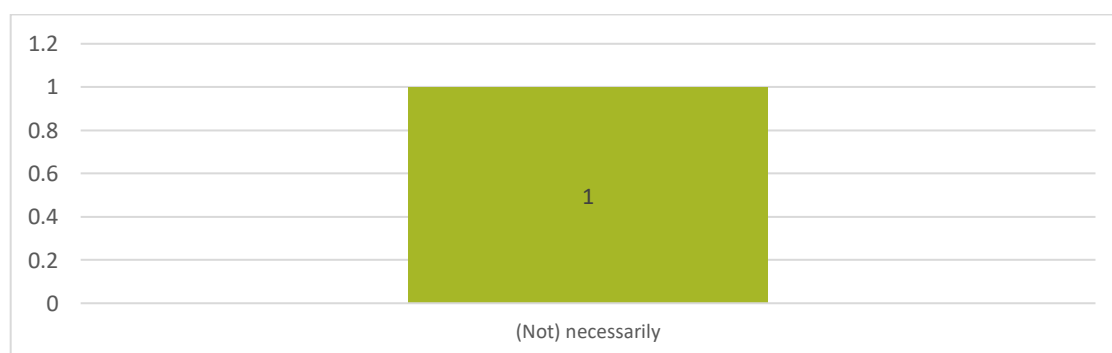


❖ Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers

This category has just one occurrence in English-speaking students' essays. It is the following:

[33] *Social media is **not necessarily** a negative force; it can be a powerful tool for connecting people and promoting social change. (P 28)*

Figure 21: ECI in English-Speaking Students' Essays



❖ Quotation Marks

Just like the category of ECI, there is only one occurrence of quotation marks in the sub-corpus. It is the following:

[34] *While many considered the Indomitable Lions the favourites, Cameroon's loss was **"unexpected"**. (P 26)*

Figure 22: Quotation Marks in English-Speaking Students' Essays



4.1.2 Linguistic Description

At this level, we will analyse how hedges are used in students' written productions varies from one subsystem to another. We will, therefore, provide a linguistic description of students' use of hedges. We will analyse their position in sentences, examining whether they are used at the beginning of sentences, at the end of sentences, or in other specific contexts. The various effects created by the use of hedges by the two groups will also be analysed. We will illustrate our points with concrete examples from the students' essays.

4.1.2.1 Position of Hedges in Sentences

The placement of hedges within a sentence can influence how uncertainty, politeness, or emphasis is conveyed. This subsection explores whether hedges appear at the beginning, middle, or end of sentences and how their positioning affects the overall tone and clarity of the students' writing.

4.1.2.1.1 The Use of Hedges by French-Speaking Students

French-speaking students exhibit distinct patterns in their use of hedges, influenced by linguistic and rhetorical traditions. This subsection analyses the specific ways in which hedges are positioned in their essays,

- **Shields**

For shields, their position in the sentences of our French sub-corpus varies according to the type of shield.

As for plausibility shields, their positions in sentences vary widely. The modal verb “*Pouvoir* (can)” is placed in different places in the sentences in our corpus.

In interrogative sentences, it is placed at the beginning of the sentence, immediately after the interrogative word, as in examples (2) *Que **peuvent** être ses effets positifs? Que **peut** être totalement son importance dans notre communauté ?* (C 5)

In the case of negative interrogation, it is placed after the negative adverb “ne”, as in the example *Ne **peut-il** pas avoir de bons côtés?* (C15)

This median position of the verb “*pouvoir* (can)” draws attention to the uncertainty surrounding the positive effects, suggesting different possibilities or perspectives to consider.

In declarative sentences, the modal verb “*pouvoir*” can occupy different positions. It can be placed at the start of the sentence to soften the assertion from the outset, introducing a certain reserve or conditionality. For example : (1) *On **peut** définir les réseaux sociaux comme étant des plateformes mondiales de communication, d’information et d’interaction entre les individus.* (5) *Ceci **peut** se traduire dans le texte à travers l’utilisation du champ lexical de la beauté.*

The modal verb “*pouvoir*” is also found in mid-sentence to soften a specific statement. This underlines the uncertainty or possibility of variations in the given context. For example: (3) *Les réseaux sociaux **peuvent** être bénéfiques pour notre société.*

In our sub-corpus, we found no instances where the modal verb “*pouvoir*” was placed at the end of a sentence. This may mean that this construction is much less frequent.

As for the compound plausibility shield “*peut-être* (maybe)”, in our sub-corpus it is mainly placed in the middle of the sentence. This can be seen in the example: *Le coach des lions indomptables serait **peut-être** à l’origine de leur défaite face au Sénégal à cause de ses pauvres choix tactiques.* (C21).

As for attribution shields, their position remains essentially the same in the sentences in our corpus: the initial position. Indeed, all occurrences of plausibility shields are always at the beginning of the sentence. Consider the following examples:

(6) ***Les recherchent démontrent que** les élèves qui passent trop de temps sur les réseaux peuvent souffrir de troubles du sommeil, de fatigue oculaire, d’une image corporelle négative ...* (C 15)

In this example, the attribution shield “*Les recherches démontrent que* (research shows that)” is placed at the beginning of the sentence, introducing the information that the research supports the assertion.

(7) ***Nombreuses personnes pensent que*** les réseaux sociaux contribuent à améliorer la recherche.

Here, the attribution shield “*nombreuses personnes pensent que* (many people think that)” is also positioned at the beginning of the sentence, indicating that this is the opinion or belief of a group of people.

(8) ***Le public camerounais estime que*** l’ancien capitaine des lions indomptables n’est plus l’homme de la situation. (C 16)

In this example, the attribution shield “*le public camerounais estime que*” is placed at the beginning of the sentence, presenting the point of view or evaluation of the Cameroonian public.

(9) ***Certains sociologues pensent que*** ces réseaux sociaux jouent un rôle important dans la société.

Here, the attribution shield “*Certains sociologues pensent que*” is in the initial position, introducing the opinion of some sociologists regarding the role of social networks.

(10) ***D’après les journaux,*** ce n’est ni la faute des joueurs, ni celle de l’entraîneur. (C 30)

In this example, “*d’après les journaux*” shows the origin of the information (the newspapers).

D’autres affirment que les militaires œuvrent pour la sécurité du pays et de ses citoyens. (C 27)

The attribution shield “*d’autres affirment que*” introduces another perspective or opinion.

In summary, the attribution shields in our corpus are always positioned at the beginning of a sentence, making it possible to attribute a piece of information, an opinion or a belief to a specific group or a particular source.

- **Approximators**

Like shields, approximators are also present at different positions in sentences.

Some approximators are placed in the initial position in sentences. These are mainly frequency approximators and quantity approximators. Consider the following examples:

(15) **Certaines** personnes sont souvent éloignées de leurs proches et à cause des réseaux sociaux. (C 3)

(16) **En général**, les jeunes n'usent pas bien des bienfaits des réseaux sociaux. (C 34)

(17) De nos jours, **nombreux** sont ces jeunes-là qui utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour le divertissement. (C 2)

(18) **La majeure partie des** jeunes exposent leur nudité sur les réseaux sociaux. (C 17)

(19) **La plupart des** activités auxquelles s'adonnent les jeunes sont inutiles. (C 7)

In these examples, we see that the frequency approximator “*en général*” and the quantity approximators “*certaines*”, “*nombreux*”, “*la majeure partie de*”, “*la plupart des*” are placed at the beginning of sentences.

Other approximators are placed in the middle of sentences. In our corpus, these are degree approximators, frequency approximators and quantity approximators. Consider the following examples:

(11) Tout ceci peut être **plus ou moins** chargé intellectuellement. (C 8)

(12) Ceci parce que la source d'information n'est pas **toujours** vérifiée. (C 11)

(13) Ces informations sont **presque toujours** utilisées comme sujets de causeries entre les personnes vivant au sein d'une même communauté. (C 11)

(14) Les utilisateurs des réseaux sociaux font, **la plupart du temps** des actes qui sont contraires aux lois. (C 11)

(15) Certaines personnes sont **souvent** éloignées de leurs proches et à cause des réseaux sociaux. (C 3)

(20) Aussi, nous avons constaté que ceux-ci n'avaient pas **tous** le même sens.

Les réseaux sociaux... désinforment **parfois** sur certains faits. (C19)

In these examples, the degree approximator “*more or less*”, the frequency approximators “*toujours*”, “*presque toujours*”, “*la plupart du temps*”, “*souvent*”, and the quantity approximator “*tous*” are placed in the middle of the sentence.

- **Tenses and Modes**

The conditional and imperfect tense in the French-speaking students’ essays is mainly found in the middle of sentences. This can be seen in the following examples:

(21) *L’influence de nos jeunes **résiderait** donc dans le vestimentaire et la photographie de grand luxe. (C 19)*

(22) *Les réseaux sociaux n’**auraient**-ils pas un impact négatif ? (C 4)*

(23) *La beauté de Gala ne **serait**-elle pas une source de sa fragilité et de sa délicatesse? (C 3/ B)*

(24) *...Dès lors, ne **ferait**-elle pas transparaître un autre intérêt ? (C 10)*

(25) *La défaite des lions indomptables **pouvait** s’expliquer par leur manque de préparation adéquate...*

In these examples, we can clearly see that all the occurrences of the attenuating verb tenses mentioned occupy a median position in the sentences.

- **Compound Hedges**

Compound Hedges are also present in different positions in sentences. Some compound hedges are placed at the beginning of sentences. Others are placed in the middle of sentences. Consider the following examples:

(26) ***À première vue**, les réseaux sociaux ont un impact positif sur les sociétés contemporaines. (C 20)*

(27) *Gala **se présente comme** une femme belle au regard du poète. (C 9)*

(28) ***Dans une certaine mesure**, les réseaux sociaux renforcent les relations humaines. (C 5)*

(29) *L’utilisation de la personnification... décrit **en quelques sortes** le physique de Gala. (C 21)*

(30) *Malgré le fait que Paul Eluard aime Gala, il y a **quand même** une certaine trahison entre eux. (C 22)*

(31) *L'anaphore **laisse entendre qu'**elle passe sur tout. (C 23)*

We can see that the MACs “à première vue” and “dans une certaine mesure” are placed at the beginning of the sentence. The MACs “se présente comme” “en quelques sortes”, “quand même” and “laisse entendre que...” are placed in the middle of the sentence.

• Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers

As for emotionally-charged intensifiers, this sub-corpus shows that they are mainly placed in the middle of sentences. Consider the following examples:

(32) *Ne faut-il pas **plutôt** dire que les réseaux sociaux n'ont pas d'impact sur la société contemporaine ? (C 15)*

(33) *Les réseaux sociaux sont-ils **réellement** importants ? (C19)*

(34) *Le militaire n'est pas **forcément** un être malveillant. (C 6)*

(35) *Les réseaux sociaux ont-ils **vraiment** un impact négatif ? (C 26)*

(36) *Tout porte à croire que les réseaux sociaux contribuent **largement** à l'égarement massif des jeunes. (C 19)*

In these examples, the ECIs “plutôt”, “réellement”, “forcément”, “vraiment” and “largement” are all placed in the middle of sentences. This can be justified by the fact that they are adverbs that modify the meaning of verbs, so they are placed after them in sentences.

• Passive Voice

As a verbal construction, the attenuating passive is placed in the middle of the sentence. This is due to its formation, which requires it to occupy this position. We can see this in the following examples:

(37) *Les fausses informations qui **peuvent être divulguées** peuvent être problématiques. (C 8)*

(38) *En effet, plusieurs occasions de but **ont été manquées** par des joueurs tels que Vincent Aboubakar et Bryan Mbeumo. (C 16)*

(39) *A titre d'illustration, les militaires **sont souvent accusés** d'atteinte à l'intégrité physique d'autrui. (C 27)*

(40) *L'année dernière encore, plus de vingt enseignants **ont été tués** au Cameroun. (C 7)*

(41) *Pour plusieurs camerounais, il manque d'expérience pour diriger une équipe de football et plusieurs constats **ont été faits** à ce propos. (C 28)*

These examples show the median position of passive verb forms in sentences.

- **Markers of the Author's Doubt or Direct Involvement**

The only occurrence of MADDI in our corpus is at the beginning of a sentence.

(42) ***Pour moi**, les réseaux sociaux sont la pire menace pour la société.*

Here, “*pour moi*” is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

- **Attenuating Figures of Speech**

As for euphemism, which is the only attenuating figure of speech present in one instance in our corpus, it is difficult to identify it in a specific position in the sentence. This stylistic device applies to the whole sentence. This can be seen in the example:

(43) *Les lions indomptables se sont inclinés face au Sénégal. (C 16)*

- **Punctuation**

In our corpus, the only use of quotation marks is in the middle of a sentence.

(44) *Les réseaux sociaux permettent également “aux influenceurs” de gagner leur pain quotidien. (C10)*

All in all, our analysis of the linguistic description of hedges in the French sub-corpus revealed that their positioning in sentences is concentrated mainly at the beginning and middle of sentences. We observed no occurrences of hedges in the final position.

4.1.2.1.2 The Use of Hedges by English-Speaking Students

This subsection analyses the positioning of hedges in the essays of English-speaking students, examining whether they appear at the beginning, middle, or end of sentences. The distribution of hedges across these positions provides insights into how students structure their arguments and convey uncertainty.

- **Approximators**

Looking at the sub-corpus of English-speaking students, approximators occupy different positions in the sentences. They mainly occupy the initial position or the median position in the sentence. This can be seen in the following examples:

[1] *The Indomitable Lions' defeat is **partially** due to their lack of focus in the second half.* (P 25)

[2] ***Almost** everyone in contemporary society uses social media in some form.* (P 31)

[3] ***Sometimes**, social media platforms can be used to spread misinformation and harmful content.* (P 27)

[4] ***Most of the times**, the team that scores first in a match has a psychological advantage.* (P 44)

[5] *Social media is **not always** a negative force; it can also be used to promote positive social change.* (P 38)

[6] ***Some** groups migrated upward to the Mandara mountain.* (P 20)

[7] ***Many** people have a negative perception of the military due to its association with war.* (P 30)

[8] *It was **not long** ago that social media was a niche phenomenon.* (P 27)

In the examples [2] to [4] and [6] to [7], it can be seen that approximators “*almost, sometimes, most of the times, some and many*” occupy the initial position in the sentences. In examples [1], [5], and [8], the approximators “*partially*”, “*not always*” and “*not long*” are in the middle of the sentence.

- **Passive Voice**

Concerning passive voice as a hedging device, in this sub-corpus, it is placed in the middle of sentences. This is due to its formation, which requires it to occupy this position. We can see this in the following examples:

[9] *The commonwealth **is considered** as neocolonialist because of many factors.* (P 12)

- [10] *The war **was fought** in Africa. (P 11)*
- [11] *The Second World War **was considered** the most frightful. (P 10)*
- [12] *All her properties **were relinquished** to Great Britain. (P 1)*
- [13] *Slave trade **was carried out** along the 15th century. (P 3)*
- [14] *The conference **was held** to discuss the structure. (P 1)*
- [15] *The UNO **was created** and mandated territories of the League of nations **were now placed** under the UNO as trust territories. (P 10)*

In these examples, we can clearly see the median position of passive constructions.

• Shields

With regard to shields, in the English sub-corpus, we notice that their positions in sentences depends on their types. Plausibility shields are mainly found in the middle of sentences. Meanwhile attribution shields occupy the initial position in sentences. Let's consider the following examples:

- [16] *Pollution **can** have serious consequences on the well-being of the population. (P 5)*
- [17] *The commonwealth **can** be considered neocolonialist. (P 1)*
- [18] *Social media platforms **seem** to be increasingly influential in shaping public opinion. (P 38)*
- [19] *The Teranga Lions **probably** benefited from the home advantage, as the match was played in Senegal.*
- [20] *The Indomitable Lions' defeat **possibly** reflects a need for more strategic training and team cohesion. (P25)*
- [21] ***From the above analysis**, there were also other factors that lead to the English revolution. (P 7)*
- [22] ***According to** article 76(B) and 5(A) of the United Nations, the colonial masters were compelled to grant independence to her colonies. (P 17)*

In the examples [16] to [20], The highlighted plausibility shields have a median position in the sentences. In examples [21] to [22], attribution shields occupy the initial position.

• Conditional

Similarly to passive voice, due to their verbal nature, conditional constructions also occupy median positions in the examples:

[23] Love **could** be seen each time when they went farming. (P 22)

[24] Social media **could** potentially be used to promote greater political awareness and participation among citizens. (P 31)

[25] The public perception of the military **would** likely be more positive if there were greater transparency and accountability in its operations. (P 39)

In the examples, we can see that conditional constructions are in the middle of sentences.

- **Compound Hedges**

Looking at compound hedges in this sub-corpus, we notice that some occurrences are at the initial position in sentences and others at the final position. Consider the following examples:

[26] The commonwealth was neocolonialist **to a certain extent**. (P 15)

[27] **At first glance**, the military might appear to be a powerful and intimidating force, but its members are often ordinary people who are serving their country. (P 29)

In the example [26], we can see the CH “to a certain extent” is at the final position; In the example [27], we can see that the CH “At first glance” occupies the initial position.

- **Markers of the Author’s Doubt or Direct Involvement**

As far as MAPPDI are concerned, they mainly occupy the initial position in sentences. We can see this in the following examples:

[28] **We feel that** it is unfair to generalise about the military as a whole based on the actions of a few individuals. (P 29)

[29] **In my opinion**, it is not fair to consider the military as malicious individuals. (P 32)

[30] **In our opinion**, the military plays a vital role in protecting national security and should be recognised for its service. (P 30)

In the sentences above, we can see that the MADDI “We feel that” in [28] and “In my/our opinion” in [29] and [30] all occupy the initial position.

- **Euphemism**

In the instances of euphemism noted in the sub-corpus, we see that they mainly occupy a median position, as these examples show:

[31] *The use of **certain interrogation techniques** by some military personnel has raised serious ethical concerns and damaged the public's trust in the armed forces. (P 29)*

[32] *The occurrence of **collateral damage** in military operations raises questions about the effectiveness of strategies. (P 32)*

- **Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers**

The only occurrence of ECI in English-speaking students' essays is positioned in the middle of the sentence:

[33] *Social media is **not necessarily** a negative force; it can be a powerful tool for connecting people and promoting social change. (P 28)*

- **Quotation Marks**

The only occurrence of quotation mark as a hedging device the sub-corpus is found at the end of the sentence:

[34] *While many considered the Indomitable Lions the favourites, Cameroon's loss was **"unexpected"**. (P 26)*

4.1.2.2 Functions of Hedges in Students' Writing

In this section, we will examine the functions of hedges in each sub-corpus, analysing their role in shaping students' arguments and conveying meaning. This analysis will highlight the specific effects created by hedging strategies in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students. Finally, a comparative discussion will be provided to identify key similarities and differences in their use of hedges.

4.1.2.2.1 Effects Created by Hedges in French-Speaking Students' Essays

Hedges play a crucial role in shaping the argumentative structure and rhetorical stance of French-speaking students' essays. Their use influences how arguments are perceived, making statements appear more cautious, nuanced, or diplomatic. The key effects created by hedging in these essays are discussed below.

One of the primary effects of hedging in French-speaking students' essays is the mitigation of claims. By frequently using shields such as "*peut-être*" (maybe) or modal verbs

like “*pouvoir*” (can), students introduce an element of doubt and reduce the force of their assertions. This softening of statements suggests an awareness of the complexity of issues discussed, which aligns with the norms of academic discourse that value critical thinking and open-ended discussion. For example: “*Les réseaux sociaux peuvent être bénéfiques pour notre société.*” (Social media can be beneficial for our society.)

Here, the modal verb “*peuvent*” (can) prevents an absolute claim, leaving room for alternative perspectives. Such hedging strategies make arguments appear less dogmatic and more open to interpretation.

French-speaking students also frequently employ attribution shields, such as “*selon...*” (according to...) or “*les recherches démontrent que...*” (research shows that...), to enhance the credibility of their statements. These hedges lend weight to arguments by invoking external sources, even when no direct citation is provided. This strategy suggests an attempt to integrate their perspectives into broader academic or societal discourse.

This can be seen in the following example : “*Les recherches démontrent que les élèves qui passent trop de temps sur les réseaux sociaux peuvent souffrir de troubles du sommeil.*” (Research shows that students who spend too much time on social media can suffer from sleep disorders.) This use of attribution shields allows students to position their arguments within an authoritative framework, reinforcing their validity while reducing personal accountability for the claims made.

Another significant effect of hedging in these essays is the creation of vagueness and approximation. Approximators such as “*généralement*” (generally), “*la plupart du temps*” (most of the time), and “*quelques*” (some) enable students to make claims that are broadly applicable without the risk of overgeneralisation. For example: “*Généralement, les jeunes n’usent pas bien des bienfaits des réseaux sociaux.*” (Generally, young people do not make good use of the benefits of social media.)

This use of approximators allows students to make claims without presenting them as universally applicable, thus reducing the likelihood of contradiction or challenge.

Depersonalisation and Objectivity is also a significant effect of the use of hedges in this sub-corpus. The use of passive voice contributes to a sense of objectivity in French-speaking students’ essays. By avoiding direct subject responsibility, passive constructions make statements appear neutral and detached. For example: “*Plusieurs constats ont été faits à ce propos*”. (Several observations have been made on this matter.)

This rhetorical strategy helps students maintain a formal tone, which is often valued in academic writing. However, overuse of the passive voice can sometimes lead to a lack of clarity regarding agency, making it difficult for readers to determine who is responsible for an action.

Some hedging devices in the French-speaking students' essays serve to maintain politeness and avoid direct confrontation. Euphemisms such as "*les lions indomptables se sont inclinés*" (the Indomitable Lions bowed out) instead of "*ont perdu*" (lost) help soften the impact of statements, making them more socially acceptable. This reflects a tendency towards indirectness, which aligns with cultural norms favouring politeness in formal discourse.

4.1.2.2.2 Effects Created by Hedges in English-Speaking Students' Essays

English-speaking students use hedging differently, often focusing on strategic detachment and analytical precision. The key effects of hedging in their essays are discussed below.

A dominant effect of hedging in English-speaking students' essays is the expression of probability rather than certainty. This is achieved through plausibility shields such as "can", "seem", "probably", and "possibly", which allow students to present arguments without making definitive claims. For example: "*Social media platforms seem to be increasingly influential in shaping public opinion.*"

The use of "seem" suggests that the claim is based on observation rather than absolute fact, allowing for multiple interpretations.

Unlike their French-speaking counterparts, English-speaking students rarely use attribution shields. Instead, they frequently employ passive voice to create a sense of detachment. This suggests a preference for an impersonal, analytical style that distances the writer from the argument. For example: "*The war was fought in Africa.*" "*The UNO was created to regulate international relations.*"

These constructions shift focus from the agent (who fought the war or who created the UNO) to the action itself, reinforcing an objective stance.

English-speaking students rely heavily on approximators such as "some", "many", and "often" to introduce flexibility into their claims. This use of approximators makes arguments appear more data-driven and measured. For example: "*Many people have a negative perception of the military due to its association with war.*" This technique ensures that the claim remains defensible, as it avoids absolute statements that might be challenged.

The use of the conditional tense is more frequent in English-speaking students' essays than in those of their French-speaking peers. Conditionals such as "could", "should", and

"would" allow students to introduce hypothetical scenarios, reflecting a critical and exploratory approach to argumentation. For example: *"Social media could potentially be used to promote greater political awareness."* This phrasing leaves room for debate, suggesting that the argument is one possibility among many.

Unlike French-speaking students, English-speaking students rarely use emotionally charged intensifiers, but when they do, these markers function to reinforce a point rather than to hedge. For example: *"Social media is not necessarily a negative force; it can be a powerful tool for connecting people."* Here, *"not necessarily"* introduces some uncertainty, but the second clause reaffirms the statement with conviction.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

This part discusses the findings from the analysis of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students at Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé. The discussion is organised according to the research questions guiding this study.

4.2.1 Types of Hedges Used

The analysis revealed that French-speaking students predominantly employed shields, particularly those of plausibility and attribution, with a total of 152 occurrences. This suggests a strong tendency to express uncertainty or to present information as being supported by external sources. The use of modal verbs like *"pouvoir"* (can) exemplifies this trend, allowing students to soften their assertions and frame their arguments within a broader discourse. Other categories, such as approximators (49 occurrences) and verb tenses and modes (38 occurrences), also featured prominently. This indicates that French-speaking students often utilise approximators of degree, frequency, and quantity, reflecting a nuanced approach to expressing certainty and doubt in their writing. The presence of emotionally charged intensifiers and compound hedges, while less frequent, suggests an awareness of the emotive power of language.

In contrast, English-speaking students exhibited a slightly different pattern. The most frequent category was approximators, with 41 occurrences, followed by passive voice (31 occurrences) and shields (27 occurrences). The dominance of approximators indicates that English-speaking students might prioritise expressing degrees of certainty and frequency over attributing information to external sources.

The use of passive voice suggests a preference for depersonalizing statements, which can be interpreted as a strategy to present arguments more objectively. This contrasts with the French-speaking students, who tend to rely on more personal attribution in their hedging.

4.2.2 Numbers of Hedges Used

The total number of hedges used in French-speaking students' essays was 297, significantly higher than the 126 found in English-speaking students' essays. This disparity raises questions about the differing rhetorical strategies employed by the two groups.

French-speaking students' greater reliance on hedging may be justified by fundamental distinctions in linguistic structure and cultural communication styles in the two languages. The French language inherently emphasises nuance and mitigation, reflecting a cultural preference for indirectness and politeness. In contrast, English is characterised as a more direct language, where speakers often assert their viewpoints with clarity and confidence, minimizing the use of qualifiers. This tendency towards directness in English can lead to more straightforward arguments, while French-speaking students, influenced by their linguistic norms, may feel compelled to hedge their statements more frequently. Consequently, it can be hypothesised that the greater use of hedges among French-speaking students stems not only from stylistic choices but also from the structural and cultural predispositions that prioritise subtlety and mitigation over the assertive expressions more common in English discourse.

Moreover, French-speaking students' greater use of hedging may also reflect a cultural tendency towards cautiousness in academic writing, where uncertainty and mitigation are more openly pronounced. Conversely, the lower frequency of hedges in English-speaking students' essays may indicate a more assertive writing style, where students feel confident in their assertions or prefer brevity in expressing their ideas.

4.2.3 Differences in Use of Hedges

While both groups use hedging to moderate their statements, key differences emerge in their approaches and the effects created:

French-speaking students demonstrate a clear focus on fostering a sense of dialogue in their essays, which is prominently reflected in their predominant use of attribution shields. This approach positions their arguments within a framework of communal knowledge and shared beliefs, inviting readers into a collaborative discourse. By employing phrases such as "*selon...*"

(according to) or “*Certains pensent que*” (some believe that...), they effectively link their assertions to recognised authorities or collective understandings, thereby reinforcing the validity of their claims and promoting a sense of collective engagement.

In contrast, English-speaking students tend to emphasise objectivity and detachment in their writing, primarily through the use of approximators and passive constructions. Approximators like “some,” “many,” and “often” allow them to express uncertainty while maintaining a sense of authority, which distances the author from the argument. This strategy cultivates an impression of analytical rigor, as their statements appear less personal and more grounded in objective analysis. Additionally, the use of passive voice shifts focus away from the author and onto the subject matter, further enhancing the sense of detachment.

French-speaking students rely more on attribution shields, which position their arguments within external sources. This aligns with a rhetorical tradition that values communal knowledge and indirectness. In contrast, English-speaking students favour passive voice and conditional structures, which lend an analytical, detached quality to their writing.

English-speaking students use hedging as a strategic tool to maintain objectivity and suggest probability, whereas French-speaking students employ hedging to engage in a more interpersonal, discursive style that integrates external perspectives.

French-speaking students use euphemisms and emotionally charged intensifiers more frequently, indicating a sensitivity to politeness and rhetorical impact, whereas English-speaking students hedge through modal verbs and passive constructions, which focus on logical precision.

Overall, these findings suggest that the two groups have different rhetorical traditions and expectations regarding academic argumentation. While French-speaking students hedge to align with social and authoritative discourse, English-speaking students hedge to structure analytical and objective reasoning; while French-speaking students prioritise dialogue and communal engagement in their writing, English-speaking students adopt a more objective and detached stance, reflecting their distinct cultural and linguistic approaches to hedging. These differences highlight the importance of understanding cultural and linguistic influences in academic writing.

4.2.4 Implications for Writing Style

The style of hedging reflected in the essays may indicate broader differences in educational approaches or cultural attitudes towards knowledge and authority. French-speaking students' essays, characterised by a higher frequency of hedges, may convey a more exploratory and less dogmatic view of knowledge. In contrast, the English-speaking students' essays may reflect an educational environment that encourages assertiveness and a more definitive stance on arguments.

4.3 Conclusion

Chapter Four provided a comprehensive analysis of hedges in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students at GBHS Yaoundé. The findings revealed that French-speaking students used a total of 297 hedges, with shields—particularly plausibility and attribution shields—being the most frequent, indicating a strong tendency to express caution and uncertainty in their claims. Conversely, English-speaking students utilised 126 hedges, with approximators as the most prominent category, suggesting a preference for quantifying statements. The analysis highlighted the diverse functions of hedges, with French students employing various strategies, including verb tenses and compound hedges, while English students relied heavily on passive voice and conditional forms. Additionally, the positioning of hedges varied between groups; French-speaking students often placed shields at the beginning of sentences to emphasise sources, while English-speaking students demonstrated flexibility, using approximators and passive constructions in various positions. Overall, this chapter underscores the significance of hedging as a crucial linguistic tool in academic writing, reflecting distinct approaches to argumentation and expression. The findings suggest important implications for teaching writing skills, highlighting the need to address these differences to enhance rhetorical strategies across linguistic backgrounds.

CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The present chapter makes an overview of the chapters of this study. It further discusses the pedagogic and social implications of the study; it makes recommendations and suggestions for future research.

5.1 Overview of the Study and Summary of Findings

This research endeavour sought to do a comparative analysis of the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students' essays. A case study was made in Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé, with the analysis of one hundred sampled essays of Students of Terminale A4 and Upper Sixth Arts. The study focused Genre theory as proposed by Halliday (1985), taxonomies of hedges and corpus linguistics as main theoretical frameworks.

In order to carry out this research, we used a mixed method research design which combines both descriptive and explanatory elements. It consisted of an analysis of the types and numbers of hedges in the students' essays and a linguistic analysis of these hedges.

At the end of the analysis, the findings revealed significant differences in the use of hedges between French-speaking and English-speaking students at GBHS Yaoundé. In the 55 essays of French-speaking students, a total of 297 hedges were identified across various categories. The most frequently used category was shields, which accounted for 152 occurrences, representing 51.2% of the total hedges. Within this category, plausibility and attribution shields were predominant. Following shields, approximators appeared 49 times (16.4%), indicating degrees of certainty or frequency, while verb tenses and modes were used 38 times (12.7%), primarily to express conditionality. Other notable categories included compound hedges with 28 occurrences (9.4%) and emotionally charged intensifiers with 22 occurrences (7.4%). The use of passive voice was minimal, with only 5 occurrences (1.6%).

In contrast, the 45 essays of English-speaking students contained a total of 126 hedges. The most prevalent category among this group was approximators, which appeared 41 times (32.5%), indicating a preference for expressing degrees of certainty. The passive voice was also notably frequent, with 31 occurrences (24.6%), followed by shields with 27 occurrences (21.43%). The conditional forms category was used 16 times (12.7%), while compound hedges were less common, appearing only 4 times (3.1%).

Beyond the numerical analysis, as far as positions of hedges within sentences across both sub-corpora are concerned, for French-speaking students, the placement of hedges varied significantly depending on the type. For example, plausibility shields, such as the modal verb “*pouvoir*” (can), were placed flexibly within sentences, often appearing at the beginning or immediately after interrogative phrases. In contrast, English-speaking students demonstrated a more structured approach, with hedges frequently appearing at the beginning of sentences or in prominent positions to underscore uncertainty or caution.

With regards to the usage of hedges, results showed that French-speaking students employed hedges primarily to express uncertainty and caution in their arguments, particularly through the use of plausibility shields. On the other hand, English-speaking students utilised hedges to suggest variability and to mitigate claims, with a notable reliance on approximators and passive constructions. This divergence in hedging strategies not only reflects different linguistic preferences but also suggests varying rhetorical styles in academic writing across the two language backgrounds.

Overall, these findings provide valuable insights into the linguistic features of hedging in academic writing, emphasizing the role of context and structure in shaping students’ arguments.

5.2 Pedagogic and Social Implications

The findings have significant pedagogic implications. Educators should consider integrating explicit instruction on the use of hedging in writing curricula. For French-speaking students, training could focus on balancing hedging with assertiveness in academic writing, helping students to express confidence in their arguments while still acknowledging uncertainty.

For English-speaking students, strategies to incorporate more hedging could enhance their ability to engage with complex ideas and to present arguments that acknowledge alternative viewpoints. This could foster a more nuanced understanding of academic discourse.

Socially, the observed differences in hedging strategies may reflect broader cultural attitudes towards discourse and authority. The French-speaking students’ frequent use of hedges may indicate a cultural value placed on humility and the recognition of multiple perspectives, which could be beneficial in collaborative environments.

On the other hand, the English-speaking students’ style may promote a more individualistic approach to argumentation, potentially leading to more polarised viewpoints.

Encouraging awareness of these differences can foster greater cross-cultural understanding and effective communication in diverse contexts.

5.2.1 Sample lesson plans

This section provides illustrative lesson plans that translate the theoretical insights of this study into practical classroom activities. Designed within the Competency-Based Approach, these plans target Terminale A4 learners and demonstrate how specific language features, such as hedges, can be effectively taught to enhance communicative competence.

5.2.1.1 Sample lesson plan for French-speaking students

In order to illustrate the teaching of hedges to students, we can propose a French language lesson for a Terminale A4. Following the CBA model, the lesson could look as follows:

❖ Preamble

Établissement : Lycée bilingue De Yaoundé

Classe : Terminale A4

Effectif : 50

Durée : 50 minutes

Nature de la Leçon : Langue française

Titre De La Leçon : Les marqueurs d'atténuation

Objectifs : À la fin de la leçon, l'apprenant doit être capable de :

- Identifier les marqueurs d'atténuation et les utiliser correctement dans les productions écrites.

Prérequis :

- L'apprenant utilise inconsciemment ou consciemment ces homophones en conversation ou dans ses productions écrites.

- L'apprenant est capable rédiger des textes en français de manière structurée (introduction, développement, conclusion)

Corpus

Le mariage forcé en Afrique est une pratique encore trop répandue dans de nombreuses régions du continent. Selon certaines estimations, environ 15 millions de filles sont mariées de force chaque année, souvent dès l'âge de 12 ans. Ces mariages forcés sont généralement organisés par les familles des jeunes filles, qui cherchent à renforcer leurs liens sociaux ou économiques. D'après plusieurs études, ces mariages forcés ont des conséquences désastreuses sur la vie des jeunes filles. Elles sont souvent contraintes d'abandonner leur éducation et leur autonomie pour se conformer aux attentes de leur famille. De plus, ces mariages peuvent entraîner des complications médicales graves, notamment lorsqu'ils sont suivis de grossesses précoces. Selon les défenseurs des droits des femmes, le mariage forcé est une violation flagrante des droits humains fondamentaux. Pour eux, il est impératif que les gouvernements africains prennent des mesures concrètes pour mettre fin à cette pratique qui n'est pas la plus saine. Malheureusement, malgré les efforts déployés par certaines organisations internationales, le mariage forcé reste une réalité quotidienne pour de nombreuses jeunes filles en Afrique. Pour moi, il est crucial que la communauté internationale intensifie ses actions pour protéger les droits des femmes et mettre un terme à cette violation insoutenable de leur dignité. Probablement que seule une mobilisation collective et une sensibilisation accrue pourront permettre d'éradiquer définitivement le fléau du mariage forcé en Afrique.

Texte créé

❖ **Lesson plan**

	Étapes	Durée	Contenus	Supports	Activités d'apprentissage
1	Découverte de la Situation Problème	05 minutes	- Il est attendu de nous que nous identifions les marqueurs d'atténuation et les utilisons correctement dans les productions écrites. - L'enseignant distribue le texte aux apprenants et leur demande de le lire silencieusement.	- Titre de la leçon - Objectifs de la leçon	- Qu'attend-on de vous ? - Lisez attentivement le texte.
2	Traitement de la Situation Problème	15 minutes	L'enseignant met les élèves en groupes de 5 et leur demande de travailler dans ces groupes pour répondre aux questions. Les élèves travaillent dans leurs groupes pour répondre aux questions.	- Questions de manipulation du corpus. - Corpus	Questions 1. Identifiez dans le texte, les éléments qui permettent à l'auteur de nuancer ses propos. 2. À quel procédé cela vous fait-il penser ? 3. Classez ces éléments linguistiques et stylistiques en différentes catégories, en fonction de leurs natures et de leurs effets atténuatifs.
3	Confrontation des résultats	10 minutes	1. Pour nuancer ses propos, l'auteur utilise les termes tels que : selon, environ, généralement, d'après, peuvent, souvent, pour moi, probablement. Il utilise aussi des figures de style comme la litote. Aussi, il utilise les guillemets.	- Questions - Corpus - Différences trouvailles /répo	- Que pensez-vous des réponses de vos camarades ? - Êtes-vous d'accord ? - Quelqu'un peut-il proposer autre chose ?

			2. Il s'agit de l'atténuation linguistique. 3. Nous pouvons opter pour ce classement : - Les boucliers : selon, d'après, peuvent, probablement. - Les approximateurs : environ, souvent, généralement. - Les expressions d'opinion de l'auteur : pour moi. - Les figures de style : la litote. - La ponctuation : les guillemets.	nses des apprenants .	
4	Formulation de la règle	15 minutes	Retenons : Les marqueurs d'atténuation sont des procédés utilisés par un locuteur pour nuancer ses propos. On distingue plusieurs catégories de marqueurs d'atténuation selon leurs fonctions : -Les boucliers permettent d'exprimer la modalité épistémique ou les sources de ce que l'on dit ; par exemple des expressions comme : <i>selon, d'après, probablement</i>, le verbe modal <i>pouvoir</i>. -Les approximateurs permettent d'exprimer une approximation en termes de temps, de quantité, de degré ou de fréquence. Par exemple, des termes comme : <i>plus ou moins, un peu, toujours, parfois, généralement, certains, en partie</i>.	- Réponses obtenues après la synthèse. Hyland, K. (1994). « Hedging in academic writing and EAP textbooks ». - Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). « Hedges and textual communicative function	- Qu'avez-vous compris ? - Que peut-on retenir ?

			-Les expressions d'opinion de l'auteur permettent de signaler, qu'il s'agit de l'opinion personnelle du locuteur. Par exemple, des expressions comme : <i>pour moi, à mon avis.</i> Les figures de style d'atténuation sont principalement l'euphémisme et la litote. Enfin, les signes de ponctuation comme les guillemets peuvent également être utilisés pour atténuer une expression.	in medical English written discourse »	
5	Consolidation	05 mins	L'enseignant donne la consigne de l'exercice et demande aux élèves de travailler individuellement à la maison.	- Consigne - Règle.	Sujet : pensez-vous que la colonisation européenne ait eu un impact significatif sur la disparition des langues africaines ? Consigne : - Rédiger sur une production écrite de 600 mots environs sur ce sujet. - Classifiez les marqueurs d'atténuation que vous avez utilisés et donner leurs valeurs.

5.2.1.2 Sample lesson plan for English-speaking students

In order to illustrate the teaching of hedges to students, we can also propose an English language lesson for a Upper Sixth Arts. Following the CBA model, the lesson could look as follows:

Preamble

School: Bilingual High School of Yaoundé.

Class: Upper Sixth Arts

Number of Students: 50

Duration: 50 minutes

Type of Lesson: English Language

Lesson Title: Hedges

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, the learner should be able to:

Identify hedges and use them correctly in written production.

Prerequisites:

The learner unconsciously or consciously uses these hedges in conversation or written work.

The learner is capable of writing texts in English in a structured manner (introduction, body, conclusion).

Lesson Plan:

Lesson Step	Content	Objective	Learning Activities
Lead-in	Two sentences on the board: ‘You are wrong.’ and ‘I think you might be wrong.’	Spark interest and connect to prior knowledge.	Class discussion on politeness and directness in speech.
Discovery	Read the dialogue below: ATEBA: I suppose gender equality might be improving, but progress is still quite slow, don’t you think? KEGNE: Yes, I tend to agree . There’s probably been some change— especially in education—but it’s not entirely clear if it’s real or just surface-level.	Let students notice hedges in context.	Students read and underline hedge expressions in pairs.

	ATEBA: Some people say women are more visible in politics now, but it seems they're often given symbolic roles. And when they speak up, they're kind of labeled as "too emotional." KEGNE: True. It could be argued that some men might feel threatened by equality. Still, change is possible—slowly, maybe. ATEBA: Policies like gender quotas have been introduced, but their real impact is yet to be seen. Honestly, it's sort of frustrating—like planting a tree in dry soil. KEGNE: I personally believe education is key. But even then, I'm not sure current teaching materials really help. There seems to be some progress, but rural areas might still be behind. ATEBA: Yes, and figures suggest things are better, but in reality, experiences often say otherwise.		
Research	Can you find expressions in the dialogue that show uncertainty, doubt, or politeness? List them. Which of these expressions suggest that the speaker is unsure or protecting themselves from being too direct? Group the hedge expressions you found into categories.	Guide students to identify how hedges work and generate examples.	Group discussion to find more hedge expressions and explain their use.

	What is the effect of these hedge expressions on the tone of the conversation?		
Comparison and Validation	<i>This leads students to identify hedge expressions (e.g., «might», «it seems», «I suppose»).</i> <i>Encourages focus on shields and markers of doubt.</i> 3. Shields (e.g., <i>I think, I suppose</i>) Approximators (e.g., <i>sort of, maybe</i>) Modal verbs or passive constructions (e.g., <i>might be, could be argued</i>) Compound hedges (e.g., <i>It could be argued that</i>) Emotionally-charged intensifiers (e.g., <i>honestly, truly</i>) Figures of speech (e.g., <i>like planting a tree in dry soil</i>) Author's involvement/doubt (e.g., <i>In my view, I tend to think</i>) Passive voice (e.g., <i>have been introduced</i>)	Compare findings and correct misconceptions.	Groups present; teacher confirms and adds examples.
Institutionalisation & Formulation of new knowledge	Definition and functions of hedges: - Express uncertainty - Soften statements - Show politeness Types: modal verbs, adverbs, verbs, phrases	Consolidate knowledge and systematise learning.	Teacher gives structured explanation. Students take notes.

Consolidation	Topic: “Gender equality is necessary for the development of modern societies.” Instructions: Write a short argumentative essay of 200–250 words on the topic above. In your essay, you must: 1. Clearly state your opinion, while using hedges to express uncertainty, politeness, or moderation. 2. Use at least six different types of hedges, including: ○ Shields (e.g., <i>I think, I believe</i>) ○ Approximators (e.g., <i>sort of, maybe</i>) ○ Modal verbs (e.g., <i>might, could</i>) ○ Compound hedges (e.g., <i>It could be argued that</i>) ○ Emotionally-charged intensifiers (e.g., <i>honestly, clearly</i>) ○ Passive voice (e.g., <i>It is believed that</i>) 3. Try to include one figure of speech (e.g., metaphor or analogy) to make your argument more persuasive and nuanced.	Reinforce knowledge through use.	Sentence transformation + pair role-play. Homework: write a paragraph using 3 hedges.
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5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Future research on the use of hedging in French-speaking and English-speaking students' essays can take several promising directions. First, expanding the demographic scope of studies to include students from various educational institutions across different regions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of hedging practices. This broader approach could reveal how hedging strategies differ not only between language groups but also among students with varying educational backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural influences, thus highlighting regional or institutional trends in the use of hedges.

Another valuable avenue for future research involves investigating the impact of targeted instructional interventions on students' use of hedges. By implementing specific teaching strategies designed to enhance hedging skills in both French and English speakers, researchers could assess the effectiveness of these interventions through pre- and post-analysis of student essays. Such studies would contribute to identifying best practices for teaching hedging in academic writing, ultimately improving student writing outcomes.

Longitudinal studies tracking the development of hedging strategies over time would also be beneficial. By analysing essays from the same students at different educational stages, researchers could explore how exposure to academic discourse and writing instruction influences the sophistication and frequency of hedging in their work. This approach would offer insights into the natural progression of hedging skills throughout students' academic journeys.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students at Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé reveals distinct patterns in the types and frequency of hedges used. These findings not only illuminate the linguistic strategies employed by students but also underscore the pedagogical and social implications of their writing styles. Addressing these differences in educational settings could enhance students' writing proficiency and foster a more inclusive academic discourse.

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APPENDICES

Some essays of French-Speaking Students:

C1 Sujet : L'impact des réseaux sociaux dans la société. Analyser l'impact positif et négatif des réseaux sociaux.

Un réseau social peut être défini comme une plateforme numérique qui permet au individu de s'informer. La société quant à elle désigne la compagnie que forment entre eux les habitants d'une ville. De ces définitions il se pose la question de savoir si les réseaux sociaux sont amélioratif ou péjoratif et de la société. De cette question découle le problème de l'impact des réseaux sociaux dans la société. Mais les réseaux sociaux sont-ils toujours bénéfique à la société ? Ne représente-t-il pas un problème pour elle ? Quel est donc l'impact des réseaux sociaux dans la société ? Les réponses à ses questions feront l'objet de notre argumentation.

Dans la société contemporaine, nous avons eu une période de l'histoire l'avènement des réseaux

un rôle important dans la société car ils facilitent la communication. En effet les réseaux sociaux permettent d'appeler et recevoir ceci étant dans n'importe quel pays du monde. Parmi ceux là, on peut citer entre autres Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram.

Toujours pour montrer l'impact positif des réseaux sociaux dans la société, il faut mettre en exergue leur caractère informatif. Les réseaux sociaux permettent d'informer dans la mesure où toute l'actualité y sont publiés pour que vous soyez au courant des rébellions dans la société ou sur un sujet précis. À titre d'illustration certaines personnes se servent des réseaux pour suivre la vie de leur artiste préféré.

Comme dit plus haut les réseaux sociaux ont un rôle positif. Mais ne nuisent-ils pas aussi la société ?

De nos jours, de plus en plus de personnes se rendent compte que les réseaux sociaux sont aussi négatifs à la société. Cela se justifie par le développement de la cybercriminalité. En effet, de plus en plus de personnes utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour voler et arnaquer

C1 servir par la présence des escrocs qui escroquent les gens dans les réseaux.

Insistant sur l'impact négatif des réseaux sociaux dans la société il faut aussi ajouter à ce qui a été précédemment cité les fausses nouvelles. En effet la fausse information gangrène la société car elle favorise les révoltes populaires à cause de la mauvaise distribution de l'information. À titre d'illustration pour les résultats du référendum 2022-2023 il a été informé qu'il ne sortirait qu'à la rentrée de l'année scolaire 2023-2024.

En conclusion, il était question pour nous d'argumenter autour du problème de l'impact des réseaux sociaux dans la société. Nous avons montré d'abord qu'ils sont avantageux pour la société et ensuite qu'il son négatifs pour elle. Tirant parti de tout cela, nous pensons que les réseaux sociaux sont utiles à la société à condition d'être bien utilisés.

allons montrer de prime abord, l'impact positif des réseaux sociaux et de second abord son aspect négatif dans la société

C2

d'évolution scientifique à favorisé le développement économique du pays. En effet, la modernisation des moyens de communication, d'information et de recherche tels que les réseaux sociaux (Whatsapp, Facebook, Google Chrome) la télévision, l'ordinateur ont permis de communiquer à distance, de s'informer et de faire des recherches. Mais également en milieu scolaire on note la digitalisation des cours en ligne appelé E-learning créé par le ministre M. Nalova Tawline pour faciliter la diffusion des cours

à distance. De l'analyse qui précède, les réseaux sociaux ont un impact positif sur le plan intellectuel de la société. Cependant, ils négocient de multiples dangers.

d'expérience quotidienne, l'on voit que les réseaux sociaux ont une influence négative sur la société notamment la jeunesse. En effet, de nos jours nombreux sont les jeunes qui utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour le divertissement. Cela rend la jeunesse permissive à travers les scènes pornographiques, les fake news, etc. C'est peut-être la raison pour laquelle Paul Cuvillier affirme: « de livre à l'inspire, la télévision l'aspire ». En d'autres termes elle rend l'homme dépendant voir même

C3

L'impact des réseaux sociaux sur la société contemporaine. Analyser les effets positifs et négatifs des réseaux sociaux sur les relations humaines, la vie privée et l'engagement citoyen.

On peut définir les réseaux sociaux comme étant des plates formes numériques de communication, d'information et d'interactions entre les individus. Ces réseaux sociaux peuvent influencer la société contemporaine de manière positive comme négative. De cela découle le problème de l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur la société contemporaine. Dès lors, quels sont les effets positifs et négatifs des réseaux sociaux sur la société moderne?

De nos jours, les réseaux sociaux occupent une grande place dans nos sociétés. En effet, les réseaux sont positifs car ils renforcent les relations humaines à travers la communication entre les proches. Certaines personnes sont souvent éloignées de leurs proches et grâce aux réseaux sociaux ils peuvent communiquer comme s'ils étaient proches les uns des autres. A titre illustratif, des personnes

résident aux Etats Unis peuvent communiquer avec leurs proches du Cameroun par réseaux sociaux comme exemple via whatsapp, telegram.

De plus, les réseaux sociaux jouent un rôle dans l'engagement citoyen. De ce fait, les citoyens peuvent utiliser les réseaux sociaux pour débattre sur des sujets politiques, économiques et sanitaires concernant leurs Etats respectifs. En donnant leurs points de vue, les citoyens remplissent pleinement leur engagement citoyen. A titre illustratif, la pandémie COVID-19 a soulevé plusieurs débats sur les réseaux sociaux dont les citoyens prenaient plaisir à discuter.

Après avoir montré les effets positifs des réseaux sociaux sur la société moderne. Que pouvons nous dire des effets négatifs de ces réseaux toujours sur la société moderne?

Bien que les réseaux sociaux soient positifs, ils peuvent aussi être négatifs dans la mesure où par rapport à la vie privée des humains, certaines personnes diffusent de fausses informations pouvant nuire à leur réputation et leur honneur, ce qui dévalorise l'usage des réseaux sociaux.

En outre, dans les relations humaines, les réseaux sociaux peuvent être utilisés pour des comportements incivils comme

les injures à l'égard d'autres personnes, des querelles verbales entre plusieurs personnes.

Tarvenus au terme de cette réflexion, il s'agit question pour nous du problème de l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur la société contemporaine de démentir les effets positifs dans la mesure où ils renforcent les relations humaines et ils permettent aux citoyens de participer au développement de leur pays à travers des débats sur tous les plans. D'une part, D'autres parts, les effets négatifs car ils bafouent l'honneur des citoyens et ils sont des sources de comportements déviants pour certains. Toutefois, que pouvons nous dire de ces réseaux sociaux dans la vie des jeunes?

C3

Autre exemple : cas d'une ingénieuse camerounaise qui a envoyé les photos nues d'un blème d'où se démarque expose les photos aux yeux du monde

Toujours dans cette logique qui est de montrer les aspects négatifs des réseaux sociaux, il en ressort que les internautes haïlent, trompent et diffusent des fausses informations exemple : les internautes dans les années 2000 ont diffusé la mort du président de la République Paul Biya ce qui a entraîné un trouble dans le pays.

En somme il était question pour nous de parler des du rôle des réseaux sociaux, il en ressort qu'il jouent d'un ~~part~~ un rôle positif et d'une autre part un rôle négatif.

C4

Sujet : l'impact des réseaux sociaux dans la société. Analyser l'impact positif et négatif des réseaux sociaux.

un réseau social est un ensemble de plateforme numérique qui permet à un ou plusieurs individus de s'échanger les informations. La société quant à elle est un ensemble de personnes réunies dans une région donnée. De ces deux définitions jaillit donc le problème du rôle des réseaux sociaux dans la société. Des lors la question qui se pose est de savoir si les réseaux sociaux jouent ils réellement un rôle positif dans la société ? Ne seraient-ils pas plutôt négatif ?

Condi

Quelle est vraiment le rôle des réseaux sociaux ? Tout au long la réponse à ces questions sera à l'engue de notre réflexion.

Dans ce monde, les réseaux sociaux jouent un rôle très important dans la société car, ils de communiquer avec les personnes proches et éloignées. Toujours dans cette même idée les réseaux sociaux réunissent les personnes qui sont séparées c'est à dire que permet de garder contact avec les proches exemple : de nos jours, les familles éloignées gardent contact avec leurs proches grâce à l'usage des réseaux sociaux.

Toujours dans la même logique qui est de connaître le rôle des réseaux sociaux dans le sens positif. Dans les établissements scolaires de

C4

nombreux enseignants font usage de des réseaux sociaux pour envoyer les cours aux élèves. Cela n'est pas que de la part des enseignants mais également pour les élèves qui utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour faire des recherches exemple : le e-learning qui est une application mise sur pied par le gouvernement.

Au delà de ce qui nous précède, nous constatons que les réseaux sociaux jouent un rôle très important dans la société. Mais ~~montrant~~ ils pas un aspect négatif ?

Nombreux sont des personnes qui font usage aux réseaux sociaux pour se distraire. C'est à dire de nombreux internautes livrent leurs aux yeux du monde pour se faire de l'argent c'est plus

Some essays of English-Speaking Students:

1- Trace the origins of either the Commonwealth of Nations or "La Francophonie" and evaluate the extent to which the organization is neo-colonialist (25 marks).

Commonwealth of Nations is defined as the voluntary association of countries which were once part of the British empire. It is also defined as the social, economic, political and cultural Assembly which often use and consider English as their official language just like the Francophonie which is one of the international Conference / Assembly use in the modern times. Commonwealth is made up of 56 members states like Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone just to name a few. In 1917, the phrase Commonwealth of Nations was used for the very first time. Its aims was to fight against drug trafficking and diseases, fight for the equality of women and their education, to maintain a close link between Britain and her former colonies, to (easy) transport and communication.

Some of the origins of the Comm

wealth include the following;

It is seen ~~when~~ in 1776 when the Americans gained their independence and ~~emerged~~ Britain in the war, followed by the Canadian in 1739 and that of Australian in 1747.
~~he~~ In 1926, a conference was held to discuss on the structure and finally in 1931 it was established at the West-Minster Abbey which definitely began work effectively. The Commonwealth of Nations can also be trace from Queen Elizabeth and the 13 Northern American Colonies.

Part B:

The paragraph below will be talking about the various ways which the Commonwealth can be consider as a Neo-Colonialist.

The Commonwealth is consider as a Neo-Colonialist because the language spoken is English which is a borrowed language from Britain.

It is also considered as the 9 Neo-Colonialist tool because of the figure head which is being recognised by all the members and which give Britain a standing position or a right hand in the world.

Equally, it can be considered as
Stop making lesson notes; Part B.

✓ a Neo-colonialist because Britain pays 30% of the contribution which makes her power dominant among others.

✓ Despite the fact that Commonwealth is considered as a Neo-colonialist tool it can also be said that it is not a Neo-colonialist tool because the sanctions are no longer imposed but elected. And the head quarter is no longer only in London.

13/25

Average on the

11

Origins, neo and non-neo-colonialist aspects of the Commonwealth.

Southern 'Cameroon' Joint Administration with Nigeria.

After the West Africa expeditionary force defeated Germany in 1916 all her ^{properties were} relinquished to Britain and France. Britain and France then decided to partition the territories. But before that the French came with an idea of joint administration known as the Condominium which later failed. During the partition Britain took 1/5 of the territory under Oluferant and French took 4/5 of the territory under George poot. British Cameroon decided to partition her portion into Northern and Southern British Cameroon and integrate it to Nigeria. Our preoccupation here is to bring out the reasons why Britain decided to integrate part of her portion to Nigeria and their effects.

Firstly British Nigeria was a British Colony and British Southern Cameroon was a mandatory territory under the League of Nations. The British knew that one day the League of Nations was going to discontinue the Colony since it was not for them. They saw that it was not necessary to carry out any serious investment as a separate entity. This is why they decided to joint administration with Nigeria.

Again Southern Cameroon decided to integrate with Nigeria because They saw that

Slave trade led to the introduction of new crops such as tea, coffee which were very benefits for the Africans.

Slave trade led to ~~involuntary~~ involuntary migration and the death of many Africans. As they migrated to the New world those who were sick and were no more able to work were been leaved aside and later dead.

Slave trade led to the proper gender of African culture. Those who were been take to other place of the world led to the easy spread of African culture. (Afro-American)

Slave trade led in reducing illiteracy among the Africans. As they were been carry to Europe they learn moral and some gain knowledge of the white.

Slave trade led to the annexation and Colonisation of Africa. As they were no more young to carry out arms and fight against the European.

All those factors was the ^{re}percussion of the trans-Atlantic slave on the least African community. The unhuman practice of the white toward African affect us still now. We can see in that most African countries are low develop due to the fact that they deprived African of it young peoples.