

Negotiating Caution in a Bilingual Setting: A Comparative Study of Hedging in Essays by French-Speaking and English-Speaking Students in Cameroon

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of hedging devices in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students at Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé, Cameroon. In a sociolinguistic landscape characterised by official bilingualism, this research examines how linguistic and educational backgrounds influence the pragmatic expression of tentativeness, politeness, and epistemic caution in student writing. Drawing on theories of genre, corpus linguistics, and hedging taxonomies, the study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse student essays from both sub-systems. Key findings reveal that while both groups employ a range of hedging strategies, their preferences and frequency differ significantly. English-speaking students exhibit a wider range of epistemic markers and discourse-level hedges, whereas French-speaking students favour modal constructions and approximators. The study attributes these differences to linguistic transfer and rhetorical conventions inherited from each linguistic tradition. The research contributes to our understanding of hedging in multilingual academic contexts and offers pedagogical recommendations to improve metadiscursive awareness and writing proficiency. In doing so, it highlights the intersection of language, identity, and educational policy in shaping student discourse in Cameroon.

1 Introduction

In academic writing, precision, politeness, and a cautious tone are essential rhetorical tools, primarily when authors aim to express opinions, propose arguments, or interpret evidence. Among these tools, hedging occupies a central role. Hedging refers to linguistic strategies used to express tentativeness or mitigate the strength of assertions, often reflecting the author's attitude toward the truth value of a proposition. It enables writers to qualify their statements,

manage face-threatening acts, and align their discourse with the conventions of their discipline. Within educational settings, hedging also reflects the extent to which students have acquired the pragmatic competence expected in formal academic writing.

This paper examines the use of hedging in a unique bilingual educational context: the Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Cameroon presents a linguistically complex landscape where both English and French serve as official languages, each corresponding to distinct educational sub-systems with divergent linguistic, cultural, and pedagogic heritages. While both sub-systems aim to cultivate academic writing skills, how students negotiate rhetorical caution in their essays can differ considerably. This study, therefore, explores the types, frequencies, and functions of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students, shedding light on how linguistic background, curriculum, and cultural norms influence written discourse.

Existing research on hedging has been extensive in monolingual academic contexts but remains limited in bilingual and contrastive educational environments. Although some work has focused on either English-speaking or French-speaking students in Cameroon, few studies have attempted a systematic comparative analysis. By adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study makes significant contributions to discourse pragmatics, academic writing pedagogy, and bilingual education policy. It aims to inform language instruction by identifying specific tendencies and needs within each group, thus enhancing pedagogical approaches to academic literacy in multilingual settings.

2 Statement of the 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. 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.

3 Aim 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.

- 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.

3 Literature Review

Since the late twentieth century, hedging has attracted sustained scholarly interest across various linguistic disciplines. Lakoff (1972) laid the foundation for contemporary studies by describing hedges as expressions that render statements less categorical, thereby introducing fuzziness into propositional content. This notion has been instrumental in understanding how speakers and writers express caution, tentativeness, and politeness. Subsequently, Kleiber and Riegel (1978) revisited the concept under the term “enclosure,” encompassing both softening expressions (e.g., in a broad sense) and strengthening ones (e.g., in a *strict sense*). Mihatsch (2010) further expanded this perspective by exploring the role of such markers in the flexible categorisation of concepts.

Numerous French-language studies have analysed syntactic and lexical strategies used to mitigate assertions. Haillet (2004), for example, examined

modal verb forms as tools for producing “flattened” assertions, which differ from their assertive counterparts primarily in terms of tense and mode, within a polyphonic framework. Leeman (2004) investigated the adverb “just,” demonstrating its capacity to attenuate or reinforce a statement depending on the enunciative context. Borillo (2004), focusing on expressions such as “in my opinion” and “according to me,” highlighted their role as both markers of subjectivity and mitigators. Further research by Lindemann (2012) explored the “rumour conditional” and mitigating conditional forms as markers of evidentiality and speaker detachment. These constructions allow writers to report information while avoiding full epistemic commitment. Barbet and De Saussure (2012) contributed to this field by distinguishing between modality and evidentiality, particularly in relation to verb tenses and modal auxiliaries in French. Vassiliadou and Lammert (2008) offered a similar analysis for English, examining the discourse marker *on the whole* as a tool for softening evaluations.

These studies are grounded in theoretical insights from contrastive linguistics. Robert Lado’s seminal work (1957) introduced a systematic approach to cross-linguistic comparison aimed at predicting learner difficulties, particularly in pragmatics. Although his structuralist model has been critiqued for its limited predictive capabilities and narrow focus, it remains valuable for identifying structural and rhetorical differences, such as those related to hedging, across languages. Building on this foundation, James E. Alatis (1970) highlighted the importance of incorporating pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and cultural dimensions into contrastive analysis. His approach is especially relevant in bilingual contexts, as it recognises that hedging practices are influenced not just by linguistic structures but also by communicative norms and cultural expectations. Together, the contributions of Lado and Alatis provide a multidimensional framework through which this study examines the use of hedging in the writing of Cameroonian students.

Empirical research into hedging spans academic, educational, and professional domains. Liu (2020), working with a corpus of Chinese learners of English, found significant variation in the use of shields according to gender and proficiency, highlighting the pedagogical relevance of pragmatic instruction. In the Cameroonian context, Ayuk (2022) examined hedging in the essays of English-speaking secondary school students and identified several of Salager-Meyer’s (1994) hedging categories. However, compound hedges were absent,

suggesting possible gaps in instructional emphasis. Similarly, Kum (2016) observed that Cameroonian trainee teachers underutilised epistemic hedges, reinforcing the need for targeted pedagogical intervention.

Several cross-cultural studies have compared hedging in native and non-native academic writing. Demirel (2019), Samaie et al. (2014), and Bonyadi et al. (2012) found that native English speakers typically employ hedging more frequently and strategically than non-native authors. This has been attributed to more profound familiarity with Anglo-American rhetorical norms, which privilege caution and reader engagement. Musa (2014) and Demir (2018) further examined hedging across disciplinary contexts, showing that usage patterns vary according to field and writing purpose. Research by Ningtyas (2015), Marielka (2015) also confirmed that L2 writers often struggle to apply hedging appropriately, due to socio-cultural factors and a lack of explicit instruction.

Within the Cameroonian bilingual context, Kédjoubé (2024) offers a focused analysis of hedging in the essays of French-speaking students. Using frameworks developed by Salager-Meyer (1994) and Hyland (1998), the study revealed that students employed various hedging strategies, including shields, approximators, and the passive voice, but often applied them mechanically, with limited rhetorical awareness. However, this study did not compare usage between the two language groups. The current research builds on Kédjoubé's findings by adopting a contrastive approach, analysing both French-speaking and English-speaking students within the same institutional setting. It aims to examine not only the frequency and variety of hedging strategies but also the influence of linguistic background, pedagogical traditions, and cultural norms.

Together, these studies demonstrate that hedging is not a neutral grammatical choice but a complex rhetorical strategy shaped by language, culture, and education. Yet, little empirical work has addressed hedging in bilingual academic settings. This article aims to fill that gap by offering a comparative, theory-driven analysis of hedging practices in student writing within a Cameroonian bilingual high school.

4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical approaches: Genre Theory, Corpus Linguistics, and Hedge Taxonomies.

4.1 Genre Theory (Halliday, 1985; Martin, 1992)

Genre Theory, as developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics, considers language as a social semiotic system. Genres are defined as “staged, goal-oriented social processes” (Martin, 1983), shaped by the context of situation (field, tenor, and mode). Academic essays, as a genre, are governed by specific rhetorical expectations, including the appropriate use of hedging to demonstrate awareness of audience, uncertainty, and scholarly modesty.

In this framework, student writing is not merely assessed on grammatical accuracy, but also on how well it conforms to the communicative norms of the academic community. The divergence in hedging strategies between French- and English-speaking students may thus reflect differences in how each group has been socialised into the essay genre through their respective educational sub-systems.

4.2 Corpus Linguistics

Corpus Linguistics provides the tools for identifying, categorising, and quantifying hedging expressions in naturally occurring data. By systematically analysing student essays, this method allows for both frequency-based comparisons and discourse-level interpretations. It ensures that observed differences are not based on anecdotal impressions but on replicable empirical evidence.

Rather than relying solely on intuitions or constructed examples, corpus linguists emphasize 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.

This approach emphasizes 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.

4.3 Hedge Taxonomies

This study draws from multiple hedge classification systems, synthesised into a pragmatic-structural typology. Salager-Meyer (1994) proposes five major types of hedges:

- **Shields** (e.g., “it seems that”, “may”)
- **Approximators** (e.g., “almost”, “generally”)
- **Markers of Author’s Doubt or Direct Involvement** (e.g., “I believe”, “I think”)
- **Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers** (e.g., “surprisingly”, “particularly”)
- **Compound Hedges** (e.g., “it could be suggested that...”)

Crompton (1997) and Hyland (1998) supplement this by distinguishing between content-oriented hedges (which reflect uncertainty in propositional content) and reader-oriented hedges (which manage interpersonal relationships and politeness).

This typology was adapted for the present study to reflect the particularities of student writing in Cameroon. Additional categories, such as passive constructions, quotation marks, and euphemisms, were also considered, as they play a hedging role in the students’ essays.

5 Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The primary aim is to compare the use of hedging in academic essays written by students from two distinct educational sub-systems within a bilingual context. Quantitative analysis identifies the frequency and distribution of hedging devices, while qualitative interpretation focuses on their pragmatic and rhetorical functions. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of both the structural and interpersonal dimensions of hedging in student writing.

The study was conducted at Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) Yaoundé, a secondary school situated in the Yaoundé V subdivision of Cameroon’s Centre Region. The institution offers both the French-speaking and English-speaking educational sub-systems, making it a suitable site for comparative linguistic analysis. The target population comprised students in the final year of secondary education: Terminale A4 (French-speaking) and Upper

Sixth Arts (English-speaking). These groups were selected due to their advanced exposure to academic writing and their preparedness for national examinations that include essay composition.

Data were collected from written essays produced by students during a structured academic exercise. A total of 100 essays were selected, split between the two groups (55 French-speaking and 45 English-speaking students). Students were given comparable essay prompts designed to elicit argumentative or expository writing, genres where hedging is commonly employed. The topics were 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 language used in the data collection for this study was aligned with the linguistic composition of the target population. The francophone students' essays were in French, while the anglophone students' essays were in English. The data were anonymised and transcribed for analysis.

6 Analytical Framework

The analysis employed a categorisation model adapted from Salager-Meyer (1994), Hyland (1998), and Crompton (1997), focusing on nine main types of hedging devices:

- **Shields** (plausibility and attribution)
- **Approximators** (of degree, frequency, quantity, and time)
- **Markers of doubt or direct involvement** (e.g., "I think", "according to me")
- **Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers** (e.g., "surprisingly", "particularly")
- **Compound Hedges**
- **Passive Voice** (used to obscure agency or reduce directness)
- **Conditional Constructions**
- **Figures of Speech** (e.g., euphemism)
- **Punctuation as Hedge** (notably quotation marks)

Each occurrence of a hedge was identified, coded, and tabulated. Quantitative data were analysed using basic frequency counts and percentages,

while qualitative observations examined how hedges functioned in context, as well as their positions within sentences.

Informed consent was obtained from school authorities, and participation was voluntary. Students' identities were protected through anonymisation, and no identifying information was used in reporting. The study respected institutional ethical guidelines and prioritised minimal disruption to the academic routine of participants.

7 Analysis

This section presents a comparative analysis of hedging in the essays of French-speaking and English-speaking students from the Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) in Yaoundé. The findings derive from a corpus of essays written by Terminale A4 (francophone) and Upper Sixth Arts (anglophone) students. The analysis identifies and quantifies the hedging devices used, based on a hybrid classification system derived from hedge taxonomies. A total of 297 hedges were found in French-speaking students' essays and 126 in those of English-speaking students.

Frequency Distribution of Hedges

Table 1: Frequency of Hedge Types in French-Speaking Students' Essays

Hedge Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Shields	152	51.2%
Approximators	49	16.5%
Verb Tenses and Modes (Conditional, etc.)	38	12.8%
Compound Hedges	28	9.4%
Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers	22	7.4%
Passive Voice	5	1.7%
MADDI (Markers of Doubt/Direct Involvement)	1	0.3%
Euphemism	1	0.3%

Hedge Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Quotation Marks	1	0.3%
Total	297	100%

Table 2: Frequency of Hedge Types in English-Speaking Students' Essays

Hedge Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Approximators	41	32.5%
Passive Voice	31	24.6%
Shields	27	21.4%
Conditional Forms	16	12.7%
Compound Hedges	4	3.2%
MADDI (Markers of Doubt/Direct Involvement)	3	2.4%
Euphemism	1	0.8%
Emotionally-Charged Intensifiers	1	0.8%
Quotation Marks	1	0.8%
Total	126	100%

Key Observations

Overall Hedge Usage

French-speaking students used **more than double** the number of hedges (297) than English-speaking students (126). This result is counterintuitive, as previous research suggests Anglophone academic writing tends to favour greater

epistemic caution. However, the distribution shows that the **types** and **rhetorical purposes** of hedges differ significantly between the two groups.

Dominance of Shields in French-Speaking Essays

The most frequent hedges in the French-speaking corpus were **shields** (152 occurrences, 51.2%), which include plausibility markers (*seem, may, probably*) and attribution shields (*it is believed that, they say that*). This can be seen in the examples below :

* *Les réseaux sociaux **peuvent** être bénéfiques pour notre société.*

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

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

Their prominence suggests a tendency to present ideas with an indirect stance, albeit often formulaic.

In contrast, shields in English-speaking essays numbered only 27 (21.4%). The anglophone students appeared to use other forms of mitigation more frequently, particularly approximators and passive constructions.

Approximators and Passive Voice Dominate in English Essays

English-speaking students relied more heavily on:

• **Approximators** (32.5%): e.g., *often, somewhat, usually.*

• **Passive voice** (24.6%): e.g., *It is believed..., The issue is debated...*

This can be seen in the examples below:

* ***Almost** everyone in contemporary society uses social media in some form.*

* ***Sometimes**, social media platforms can be used to spread misinformation and harmful content.*

* *Social media is **not always** a negative force; it can also be used to promote positive social change.*

* ***Some** groups migrated upward to the Mandara mountain.*

These devices helped to achieve impersonality and rhetorical caution without overt authorial presence. French-speaking students used approximators less frequently (16.5%) and rarely employed the passive voice (1.7%).

Use of Verb Tenses and Modes

Verb tenses and moods were a distinct hedging strategy in French-speaking essays (38 cases, 12.8%), often via conditional or imperfect forms. This suggests that French-speaking students, shaped by the structure of French academic discourse, tend to embed hedging in grammatical modality rather than lexical choice.

This category was not distinctly highlighted in the English-speaking data, where verb tense played a secondary role to lexical hedges.

Compound Hedges

Compound hedges, phrases combining multiple hedging elements (e.g., *it might be suggested that...*), were more frequent among French-speaking students ($n = 28$) than in the English-speaking group ($n = 4$). This may suggest that francophone students relied more on set phrases learned in formulaic academic models, while anglophone students preferred syntactic variety.

Minimal use of MADDI, Euphemism, and Quotation Marks

Markers of doubt and direct involvement (e.g., *I think, in my opinion*) were almost absent in both corpora: 1 occurrence in the French group and 3 in the English group. This likely reflects students' caution about taking a personal stance in formal essays, or possibly limited instruction on the meta-discursive function of such phrases.

Similarly, **euphemisms**, **emotionally charged intensifiers**, and **quotation marks** were rare in both sets of essays. Each appeared only once per category in the English essays and once each in the French corpus (except MADDI, which appeared three times in the English group).

Summary of Comparative Findings

Aspect	French-Speaking Students	English-Speaking Students
Total Hedges	297	126
Most Frequent Hedge Type	Shields (51.2%)	Approximators (32.5%)
Use of Passive Voice	Minimal (1.7%)	Prominent (24.6%)
Use of Verb Tenses/Modes	Strong (12.8%)	Not prominent

Aspect	French-Speaking Students	English-Speaking Students
Compound Hedges	Moderate (9.4%)	Rare (3.2%)
Authorial Markers (MADDI)	Extremely rare	Very rare
Overall Style	Formulaic, grammatically hedged	More varied, lexically and syntactically hedged

8 Discussion

This section interprets the findings presented above, linking them to the research questions and existing literature. The analysis reveals significant differences in the frequency, type, and rhetorical functions of hedging between French-speaking and English-speaking students at GBHS Yaoundé. These differences are interpreted in terms of linguistic traditions, educational practices, and cultural attitudes toward authority and the representation of knowledge in writing.

9 Interpretation of Results

9.1 Total Hedge Usage and Unexpected Asymmetry

Contrary to expectations from global English for Academic Purposes (EAP) research, which often portrays anglophone academic writing as more hedged (Hyland, 1998; Hinkel, 2005), this study found that French-speaking students used more hedges overall (297) than their English-speaking peers (126). This initially surprising result may reflect curriculum-driven or pedagogically modelled differences, where francophone learners are trained to use complex, formulaic structures that embed hedging in grammar (e.g., conditionals and passive forms). In contrast, anglophone students may favour clearer, more concise assertions.

It also suggests that while Anglophone students may understand hedging lexically (via approximators and modal verbs), French-speaking students engage with hedging more through structural and syntactic strategies.

9.2 Hedging Preferences Reflect Rhetorical Norms

French-speaking students displayed a strong preference for **shields** and **compound hedges**, often drawn from memorised academic phrases such as “il

est possible que...". This aligns with Hyland's (1996) observation that hedging in EFL contexts often takes the form of set constructions.

English-speaking students, in contrast, favoured **approximators** (e.g., "almost", "many") and **passive voice**, consistent with native-English academic norms where impersonality and lexical mitigation are central to argumentation.

These tendencies align with Hyland's (1998) distinction between content-oriented and reader-oriented hedges. English-speaking students used hedging to manage reader engagement and soften claims, while French-speaking students used hedging more to distance themselves from epistemic responsibility.

9.3 Role of Tense and Mode in Francophone Writing

The prominent use of verb forms (particularly the conditional and imperfect) in French-speaking essays reflects rhetorical conventions inherited from French academic writing. This supports Halliday's (1985) SFL theory, in which grammatical mood is integral to managing interpersonal stance.

In the French sub-system, students are often encouraged to use abstract, third-person constructions and speculative modes of expression. This tendency to embed hedging in grammar rather than lexis may limit learners' development of pragmatic awareness about audience engagement, one of the defining features of hedging as a discourse strategy.

9.4 Cultural and Educational Underpinnings

These divergences may be attributed in part to differences in the **French and Anglo-Saxon academic traditions**. The French system often emphasises abstract reasoning, rhetorical elegance, and formalism, while the Anglo-Saxon tradition values clarity, concision, and critical engagement. These cultural and educational differences manifest in how students are taught to write, and therefore in how they hedge.

Moreover, French-speaking students are more likely to rely on indirectness and modal constructions as markers of intellectual modesty. English-speaking students, meanwhile, learn to manage reader expectations through more interactional metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005).

9.5 Pedagogical and Linguistic Implications: Need for Explicit Instruction on Hedging

Both groups would benefit from explicit instruction in the **pragmatic and rhetorical functions of hedging**. Rather than merely teaching hedging as a grammatical feature, educators should frame it as a tool for:

- expressing uncertainty appropriately,
- managing politeness and academic face,
- acknowledging alternative viewpoints,
- and guiding the reader's interpretation.

This would align with a genre-based approach to academic writing (Martin, 1992), which views language as purposeful and socially situated.

9.6 Revisiting Curriculum Design

The divergence in hedging strategies reflects broader differences in curriculum and teaching focus. The **French-speaking sub-system** might benefit from greater emphasis on audience awareness and reader engagement. The **English-speaking sub-system** could expand its instruction on formal academic phrasing and syntactic variety, particularly compound and embedded hedges.

Curriculum designers should aim to harmonise pragmatic competence across both sub-systems, especially in contexts where students are expected to perform in national or international examinations with shared assessment standards.

9.7 Training Teachers on Pragmatic Competence

Many teachers may themselves lack formal training in the rhetorical dimensions of academic writing, particularly in pragmatics. Incorporating metadiscourse, hedging, and stance-marking into teacher training could equip them to support student development better.

Workshops and example-based teaching materials, including annotated student essays, could be practical tools in this regard.

9.8 Limitations and Considerations

- The study's corpus was drawn from a single school. While GBHS Yaoundé represents a typical bilingual institution, future research should expand to other schools and regions.

- Essay topics were controlled but may still have influenced hedging behaviour based on theme familiarity.
- The classification of hedges, while comprehensive, remains subject to some interpretive variation, especially in compound or overlapping categories.

10 Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the use of hedging devices in academic essays written by French-speaking and English-speaking students in a bilingual Cameroonian secondary school, using a mixed-methods approach informed by genre theory, corpus linguistics, and hedge taxonomy. The results revealed both quantitative and qualitative differences in hedging practices across the two groups. French-speaking students produced significantly more hedges overall, with a strong preference for shields, grammatical tense and modal constructions, and compound hedges. In contrast, English-speaking students favoured approximators, passive constructions, and reader-oriented hedging strategies. Both groups demonstrated limited use of explicit authorial stance markers such as MADDI, euphemisms, and metadiscursive punctuation, suggesting a general lack of pragmatic instruction in this area. These findings indicate that hedging practices are influenced not only by language proficiency but also by deeper cultural and pedagogical traditions embedded within each educational sub-system.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are considerable. First, there is a need to raise awareness of hedging as a pragmatic and rhetorical skill, going beyond its treatment as a grammatical feature. Teachers should incorporate explicit instruction on how hedging functions to convey caution, signal uncertainty, and foster academic politeness. Second, a genre-based approach to writing instruction would better equip students to meet academic expectations by helping them recognise the communicative purpose of hedging within specific disciplines. Third, the findings call for more balanced writing pedagogy across both sub-systems. French-speaking students, who tend to rely heavily on formal and impersonal styles, could benefit from training in reader-sensitive strategies and lexical hedging. English-speaking students, meanwhile, may require more support in developing syntactic sophistication and mastering formal hedging structures.

To realise these goals, teacher training is essential. Educators should be provided with resources and professional development opportunities that deepen their understanding of hedging and its rhetorical role. Workshops,

practical materials, and curriculum adjustments could empower teachers to guide students more effectively.

In terms of policy, Cameroon's shared examination standards and official bilingualism underscore the need to standardise academic writing objectives across both sub-systems. Curriculum developers should promote shared frameworks for teaching metadiscourse and encourage contrastive rhetorical awareness through cross-linguistic comparisons.

Ultimately, further research is necessary to build upon these findings. Larger-scale studies across diverse schools and regions would enhance the generalisability of the results. Investigations into teachers' attitudes towards hedging and students' perceptions of effective academic writing could yield valuable insights for instruction. Longitudinal studies could also help track the development of hedging competence over time. Ultimately, promoting awareness of hedging in bilingual academic writing is not only a matter of linguistic accuracy but also a step toward fostering critical thinking, equitable education, and communicative competence in Cameroon's complex educational landscape.

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