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

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Modality (and its subcategory modalization) builds an area of uncertainty. It is an intermediate point between positive polarity *it is* and negative polarity *it is not* which has various degrees of indeterminacy (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). This indeterminacy includes probability and is expressed through items that Holmes (1990) and Hyland (1998) termed hedges and boosters. Through the use of hedges and boosters, writers achieve approval by finding the right balance between the investment of their statements with the confidence of reliable knowledge and the tentativeness to convey doubt and adequate social interrelations (Hyland 1998). The aim of this comparative study is to investigate the usage of hedges and boosters in Italian and Albanian student academic writings in L1 and L2 (English). I analyze author-related and proposition-related hedges (e.g. *possibly, approximately*) and boosters (e.g. *show, completely*) as well as interrelated aspects such as their positioning, orientation, manifestation, and prosody of modalization. My paper will interweave a pragmatic categorization (cf. Prince et al. 1980), a semantic division (cf. Lafuente Millán 2008) and the Systemic Functional Theory (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014), in an innovative combination. I have compiled two corpora of Italian student writings, respectively in Italian and English, with 3 million words each. A similar amount of words for males and females, academic level and number of words for each discipline is presented in both Italian corpora, with disciplines from soft and hard sciences (Social Sciences, Languages and Literature, Medicine, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Informatics). Additionally, I have collected 40 papers written by Albanian students in English with a total amount of around 700.000 words. Lastly, I compiled an Albanian L1 corpus of circa 2.2 million words. As Toska (2015) stated, very little research has been conducted on academic writing in Albania. Thus, it is essential to initiate research in this field. Results show that Italians use hedges and boosters significantly more than Albanians. Additionally, the same hedge (*probably*) and booster (*significantly*) appeared as author-related (shield) and proposition-related (approximator). This demonstrates the importance of the context in ranking these items and suggests relevant modifications to the original division by Prince et al. (1980). Lastly, the neutral position (right next to the finite operator: verb) of hedges and boosters was more frequently found in my data, followed by the thematic (at the beginning of the clause) position. I conclude that Italians show more commitment in an explicit manner than Albanians in their writings.

Keywords: corpus analysis, academic writing, modalization, hedge, booster, Italian learner corpora, Albanian learner corpora

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