

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION:
ENGLISH VS SPANISH MEDICAL RESEARCH PAPERS**

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Abstract

Some authors believe that there are considerable differences in styles of writing in particular cultures (e.g., see Mauranen 1993b) and, in fact, some others see non-native speakers fail to modulate their writing (Bloor & Bloor 1991 and Hyland 2001). The appropriate use of hedging in scientific discourse is a vital skill for writers presenting their knowledge in the discourse community, as it both qualifies categorical commitment and facilitates discussion with the audience. In our presentation we will examine this rhetorical device from a crossgeneric (Case Report/Research Paper) and a crosslinguistic (Spanish/English) point of view. The results of this study seem to indicate that hedging may vary across these two languages and cultures. Key words: Scientific Communication, Cross Cultural Studies and Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP).

Text

Introduction

“Hedges are words or phrases whose job is to make things fuzzier”(Lakoff, 1972)

The earliest definition of the term was by Lakoff in 1972 and since then many other authors have been studying this rhetorical phenomenon in different languages and genres (Salager-Meyer 1994 and Piqué et al. 2002 among others). However, after reviewing the literature available on the topic we have observed that most of the studies have been focused on the way scientific writers modulate their discourse in English. A possible explanation could be that nowadays there is a dominance of English in scientific research publications hence the need of non natives to publish in this language.

The aim of this study is to explore the hedging differences and similarities in medical RPs and CRs in English and Spanish. Therefore, in this paper I will examine the range of expressions that are commonly known as “hedging”: expressions whose aim is either i) to allow scientists to present their knowledge cautiously, ii) to be “vague”, iii) to encourage dialogue with the audience or iv) to follow genre conventions.

Methodology

So as to achieve our goal a Spanish corpus of 20 RAs (Research Articles) was selected from six different Spanish medical journals: 10 original RP (Research Papers) and 10 CR (Case Reports). The articles were chosen from 6 outstanding medical journals in Spanish: Archivos de Bronconeumología and Medicina Clínica, among others. Our English L2 corpus consisted of 10RAs from outstanding journals such as, British Medical Journal, Chest..

As a second step in our study, we developed a hedging taxonomy in Spanish using Salager-Meyer's model (1994) as a starting point. Her taxonomy included: 1) Shields, such as "to appear", "to seem", "probably", "likely", "to suggest", "to speculate". 2) Approximators, for instance "approximately", "roughly", "somewhat", "often", "occasionally". 3) Author's personal doubt and direct involvement, for example "I believe", "to our knowledge". 4) Emotionally-charged intensifiers, as in "dishearteningly weak", "particularly encouraging". 5) Compound hedges, as "It may suggest that...", "It would seem somewhat unlikely that...". However, in our taxonomy we didn't include her fourth or fifth category but added a fourth category: Agentless strategies and we focused on a pragmatic rather than a lexical point of view.

CATEGORIAS PRAGMÁTICAS	FUNCIONES EN EL DISCURSO	ÍTEMS LINGÜÍSTICOS	NIVEL LINGÜÍSTICO
ESCUDOS	El autor utiliza estas expresiones para protegerse y anticiparse a una posible reacción negativa ("boomerang effect") por parte de la comunidad discursiva a la cual pertenece. (Salager-Meyer, 1994)	1. a) verbos modales b) semi-auxiliares c) adjetivos de probabilidad d) adverbios de probabilidad e) verbos epistémicos	A) LÉXICO

<p>APROXIMADOR implícitos</p>	<p>Se emplean para indicar probabilidad e implicar cierta “vaguedad” en las afirmaciones. (Fortanet, Palmer y Posteguillo, 1998)</p>	<p>2. Adjetivos y/o Adverbios y locuciones adverbiales de:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) cantidad b) grado c) frecuencia d) tiempo 	
<p>EXPRESIONES DE DUDA PERSONAL E IMPLICACIÓN DIRECTA DEL AUTOR</p>	<p>Sirven para enfatizar la dimensión interpersonal: evaluar y valorar el propio material, así como para negociar el estatus de los postulados de uno. Ferrari (2003)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) condicional b) subjuntivo c) marcas de 1ª persona (posesivos, desinencias y pronombres) <p>Formas no personales*</p>	<p>B) MORFOLÓGICO</p>
<p>ESTRATEGIAS DE DESAGENTIVACIÓN</p>	<p>1) Sirven para modificar e incluso esconder la actitud del escritor hacia las proposiciones presentadas en el texto. 2) Sirven para esconder quién es el responsable del valor de la</p>	<p>* Las formas no personales pertenecen al nivel morfológico pero su función es desagentivadora.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) voz pasiva desagentivada y pasiva refleja b) despersonalización 	<p>C) SINTÁCTICO</p>

	verdad de lo que se está diciendo. Lewin (1998)	(verbos activos con sujetos inanimados y nominalizaciones)	
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Table 1. Hedging taxonomy proposal in Spanish.

Our data and results

After carrying out a crossgeneric and a crosslinguistic analysis of hedging, we have come up with the results we show in Table 2 (the percentage of hedging according to the section of the RAs or CRs they appear) and Table 3 (the frequency of hedging types in the total hedging scoring throughout the three different corpora)

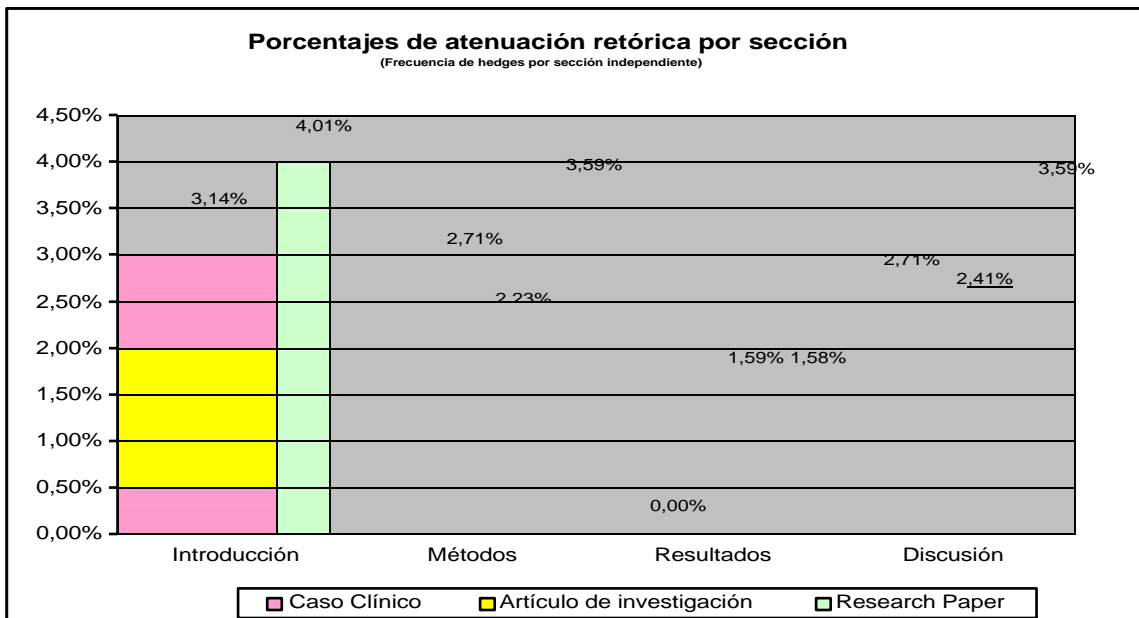


Table 2. Percentage of hedging according to IMRD section

Porcentajes de atenuación retórica por categoría y género

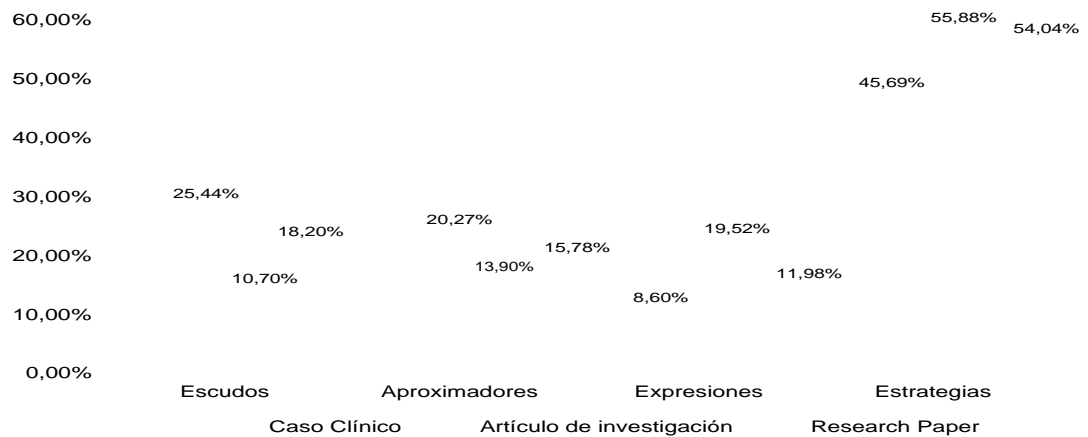


Table 3. Frequency of hedging pragmatic categories according to genre (RP and CR) and language (English and Spanish)

Conclusions

According to our results Spanish and English scientists seem to modulate their writing differently as former tend to hedge much less and thus, may sound slightly more assertive than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. However, we could relate this greater modulation of English scientists to a historically and culturally entrenched tradition founded on skepticism, doubt and refutation.

References

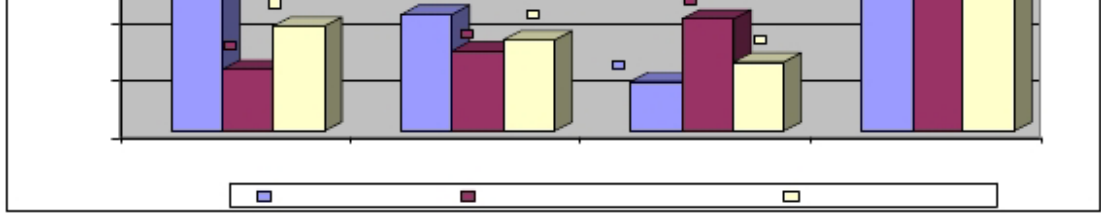
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