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**Investigating Gender Differences in the Use of Lexical Hedges among  
Algerian EFL Students**

The case of third year students at Biskra University

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Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for a Master Degree in Sciences of  
Language

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## **Declaration**

I, **DJAFER Rokia**, do hereby declare that this submitted work is my original work and has not previously been submitted for any institution or university for a degree. I also declare that a list of references is provided forward indicating all the sources of the cited and quoted information. This work was certified and completed at Mohammed KHEIDAR University of Biskra, Algeria.

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this modest work to my parents, my family, and my friends.*

*I love you all*

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## **Abstract**

Since language is used as a tool for human communication, it is inevitably featured by gender. However, many people seem unaware of the fact that the gender of the speakers is an influential factor to create a difference in their lexical choices. In Algeria, surprisingly, not many studies have been conducted in this field of research. Thus, there is a need to pursue this research in the Algerian context. Therefore, this study aims at investigating gender differences in the use of lexical hedges among Algerian EFL students. Moreover, it seeks to examine when and why these speakers used lexical hedges. Depending on the nature of this research, a mixed method approach was adopted. In relevance to this approach, two research methods were selected for this investigation, focus group and observation. The focus group was conducted with eight third year EFL students at Mohamed Kheider University. They were divided into two groups, four participants in each group distributed according to their gender. An observation to the students' use of lexical hedges was also conducted to investigate the frequency and the patterns of using lexical hedges within the conversations of EFL students. After analyzing the data obtained from the focus group and observation, we reached our research aims. We found that several differences in the use of lexical hedges among the female and male participants were discovered. It was also found in this study that lexical hedges are used to reflect the speaker's sense of doubt, hesitation, lack of evidence, pausing, responding, contrast, stating a fact, possibility, ability, necessity, clarification, self-repair, uncertainty, concession, nuancing, inconvenience, speculation, prediction, supposition, indefinite and condition. After realizing this disparity between women and men's speech, it is recommended to pursue a further research in the Algerian setting to have more understanding of the topic.

***Key Words:* Gender, Gender differences, Algerian setting.**

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language.

**RQ:** Research Question.

**F:** female.

**M:** Male.

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# **General Introduction**

## **Introduction**

The major thing that distinguishes human beings from animals is our way to communicate with each other by using language. However, language differs from one individual to another depending on age, gender and other factors. The use of language varies between men and women at the level of phonology, morphology, syntactic structure, pragmatics especially in the use of vocabulary. Therefore, the main objective is to go through their way of using language and to find out the common differences in their conversation that reflects gender differences. In view of this, the purpose of this study is to identify gender differences in the use of lexical hedges in the speech of the Algerian EFL learners.

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

Language is a means of communication. People use language to communicate with each other. In the same speech community, no two speakers are exactly alike in the way they use language. As a form of social behavior, language is also featured by gender difference. In Algeria, there are few studies about this topic; therefore, there is a need to pursue this research in the Algerian context. In this respect, this paper tries to describe the influence of gender on language. More specifically, to investigate the influence of man and women on the use of lexical hedges. As a result, the present study tries to focus on how Algerian female and male EFL students' use lexical hedges differently and when do they use them.

### **2. Aims of the Study**

This study aims to look at the differences in the speech of Algerian men and women. The focus of the study will be on the use of lexical hedges as a tool of communication. Thus, this study aims to investigate the impact of gender in the use of lexical hedges of English language among Algerian EFL students. More specifically, the current research seeks to study the frequency and the patterns of using lexical hedges within the conversations of EFL students.

### **3. Research Questions**

This research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference between Algerian female and male EFL students use of lexical hedges in spoken language?

RQ2: To what extent female and male students use lexical hedges in the spoken English?

RQ3: How female and male students use Lexical hedges and for what reason?

### **4. Significance of the study**

Notably, gender and communication is indeed an important research area as its findings will be useful for both genders, and the community at large as they are able to obtain crucial knowledge about the differences between men's and women's linguistic features in speech. Besides, in the area of gender and language, it is pertinent to have some knowledge about these differences to help in the development of effective communication between and across genders in different contexts. The findings of this study will present some information about the differences in lexical choices of Algerian male and female students. More importantly, this research attempts to shed light on how gender influences the use of lexical hedges among Algerian EFL students, and the different conversational situations of that use.

### **5. Methodology**

It is assumed that women use hedges more than men. Moreover, many theorists support the notion that suggests that men are more accurate and assertive than women, thus they tend to use few hedging devices in their communication. On this basis, this thesis investigates the gender differences in using lexical hedging among Algerian EFL students.

#### **5.1. The Research Method**

The research method that has been used in this study is the mixed method approach. It has been selected to achieve the purposes of this study. Qualitative and quantitative

approaches will be applied as an attempt to examine gender differences in the use of lexical hedges among Algerian EFL students. Moreover, it is more suitable and applicable for the nature of our research.

### **5.2. Population and sample**

For this study, the population is third year EFL students at Mohamed Kheider University. They have been chosen due to their level in English. They are able to communicate and use the English language properly. Among the aforementioned population, eight students, four males and four females, were selected randomly

### **5.3. Data Gathering Tools**

In this study, the researcher used focus group and observation as tools to gather data. A focus group that requires from the participants to negotiate their ideas was conducted. All female and male participants were present to express their opinions in the discussion session about topics suggested by the researcher. Moreover, an observation to the students' lexical hedges use during and after the discussion has been implemented.

## **6. Research structure**

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter provides an overview about gender and language. We have presented a brief history to the issue of gender and language, and then we tackled language-gender theories, in addition to the existing differences in gender's language and its possible explanations. This chapter also highlighted the main changes of gender's language that occurred over time, the difference between sex and gender, sex role stereotypes and gender bias. Furthermore, we discussed gender's first and second language acquisition.

The second chapter is about the use of lexical hedges. We introduced the term hedging by providing different dictionary definitions. Moreover, we evaluated the term "hedges" from

the point of view of Lakoff (1973-1987), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Prince et al, (1982), and Fraser (1995). Furthermore, we tackled the current views on hedging and discussed the concept “to hedge” from Itani (1995) point of view. Afterwards we reviewed hedges as a pragmatic phenomenon along with its devices, types and functions. Finally, we discussed some previous related studies.

The last chapter was about the fieldwork and data analysis of this study. It has dealt with the research approach of the study, population and sampling, instruments, data collection and data analysis. Furthermore, we analyzed and interpreted the gathered data then we provided a summary to the findings.

## **7. Definitions of Key Terms**

**Gender:** Gender refers to the psychological, social and cultural differences between man and woman. Moreover, it is not something we have, but something we do, something we perform and it is the social elaboration of biological “sex.”

**Gender Differences:** Gender differences are variances between males and females that are based on biological adaptations that are the same for both sexes.

**Algerian setting:** it refers to the place where this research work was positioned.

**Chapter One:**  
**Language and Gender**

## **Chapter One: Language and Gender**

### **Introduction**

#### **1. Language and Gender**

##### **1.1. Language and Gender - A Brief History**

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**1.4.4. Physiological Differences**

**1.5. Changes of Gender's Language through the Time**

**1.6. The Difference between Sex and Gender**

**1.7. Sex Role Stereotype and Gender Bias**

**1.8. Gender and First Language Acquisition**

**1.9. Gender and Second Language Acquisition**

**Summary**

## **Introduction**

This chapter is an attempt to provide an overview to language and gender. It deals with language-gender historical background, language-gender theories, in addition to the existing differences in gender's language and its possible explanations. Moreover, it highlights the main changes that occurred over time, the difference between sex and gender, and then we will discuss sex role stereotypes and gender bias. Lastly, we will tackle gender's first and second language acquisition.

## **1. Language and Gender**

### **1.1. Language and Gender - A Brief History**

Li (2014) argued that the earliest research about language and gender could be traced back to ancient Greek, where many dramas witnessed gender differences in language. However, it was not until the early 20th century that language and gender attracted anthropologists and linguists' attention. Li (2014) also stated that in 1960, the study of language and gender has become an independent linguistic topic, this is when the feminist movement appeared and sociolinguistics advanced.

There are strong beliefs within the culture about how men and women behave and need to behave, and most of it was focused on the way they speak. Furthermore, the vast number of etiquette books that were popular around the twentieth century, reflected those convictions. Books such as 'The Woman's Book: Contains Everything a Woman Ought to Know', is one of many which shows how people thought women were expected to behave. Their purpose is to influence women's behavior, as "male behavior has traditionally been seen as the norm and in need of no particular advice or attention." (Goddard & Patterson, 2000 as cited in Broadbridge, 2003, p. 3).

Jespersen (1922) mentioned that women are more sophisticated in their speech, and use less coarse and gross expressions. However, men would quickly be reduced to a state of boredom due to the nature of women's conversation. These views clearly illustrate how women are seen as being linguistically lacking in comparison to men.

Moreover, Broadbridge (2003) stated that gradually through the course of the twentieth century, due to women's role in the war efforts, opinions about women began to change, culminating in the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies. This led to a reexamination of women's language and a discussion of the inequality in views. In addition, these views of women as being somehow 'abnormal' or 'inferior' in their style of speech were changed, as scholars started to explore language in depth and the differences within it.

Furthermore, Ishikawa (2014) noted that (Lakoff, 1975) in her work "Language and Women Place" discussed the differences among genders, and this led to a series of works centered on phonological and lexical variations and others on discourse functions, such as compliments and apologies or turn taking. Several corpus related research also explored the syntactic and lexical differences between genders.

## **1.2. Theories of Language and Gender**

There are four approaches regarding language and gender. The approaches are deficit approach, dominance approach, difference approach and discursive approach.

### **1.2.1. Deficit Approach**

The first approach of language and gender is the deficit approach. It was presented by Lakoff (1975), who viewed the females' language as inferior to the language of males (Gu, 2012). She also argued that women's language was characterized by linguistic forms such as hedges, 'empty' adjectives like charming, divine, nice, and speaking in italics' (exaggerated intonation contours), which are expressive of uncertainty, lack of confidence and excessive.

This approach considered women as a disadvantage on being a language user, as their language was formed from an implicit male standard. Lakoff (1975) supported the deficit theory by claiming that the view of women's language is deficient and inadequate. She argued, "Women are socialized into behaving like ladies (linguistically and in many other ways) and that this in turn keeps them in their place because ladylike precludes being powerful in our culture" (Baquee, 2016, p. 5).

Finch (2003) discussed Robin Lackoff's work when he stated that "The overall pictures which emerges from Lakoff (1975) study is that women's speech is generally inferior to men's and reflect their sense of personal and social inferiority" (Akhtar, 2014, p. 4).

### **1.2.2. Dominance Approach**

The dominance approach is a weaker version of the deficit model. It considers women as a wronged group, and explains linguistic differences in women and men's speech in terms of men's dominance and women's subordination (Coates, 2004).

Talbot (1998) criticized this approach as "manifestations of a patriarchal social order", and he concluded that this approach can easily be sighted along with the difference approach and both of them provided an early paradigm for the study of language and gender in social sciences (Akhtar, 2014, p. 5).

### **1.2.3. Difference Approach**

The first criticism of deficit theory emerged in the beginning of the 1980, and an entirely new approach was presented: the difference theory. Coates (2004) argued that the difference approach focuses on that women and men belong to different subcultures. It was a direct result of women's growing resistance to being treated as a subordinate group.

Talbot (1998) claimed that, "behavior previously perceived as men's efforts to dominate women, which is reinterpreted as a cross-cultural phenomenon" (Akhtar, 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, Tannen (1990) argued that the difference approach describes the language of

women as being clearly different to that of men, in that they are more nurturing, supportive and co-operative. He also stated six points for male and female language. Those six points are Status vs. Support, Independence vs. Intimacy, Advice vs. Understanding, Information vs. Feelings, Orders vs. Proposals, and Conflicts vs. Compromise.

According to Crawford (1995, p.1), “men and women are fated to misunderstand each other unless they recognize their deeply socialized differences”. The main value of this approach is the process by which men and women develop themselves in different subcultures. However, this theory has been criticized by arguing that it only pays attention to the women’s contributions to the language, but ignore the social reality that women and men are considered unequal (Rahmi, 2015). In addition, Johnson and Meinhof (1997) criticized the difference approach because it fails to address why women and men belong to different subcultures (Baquee, 2016).

#### **1.2.4. Discursive Approach**

Cameron (1995) demonstrated (from feminist perception) how representations of gender roles can change based on responses to economic climate changes (Baquee, 2016). She described how these changes are taken and who actually influences the reproduction of patriarchal ideology. Power structures inherent within patriarchal society establish gender behaviors, which are explained by that power, as Sattel (1983) explained that: “the starting point for understanding masculinity lies, not in its contrast with femininity, but in the asymmetrical dominance and prestige which accrues to males in this society” (Baquee, 2016, p. 7). Sattel’s statement was the “discursive” element to the analysis of gender; a step forward from the binary and towards a wider conversation. Cameron (2006) pointed out that “earlier females were considered as inexpert communicators (as in the Deficit/Dominance approach), more lately men have been ascribed this characteristic not because the actual communicative behavior of men and women is thought to have changed but male behavior has been re-framed as dysfunctional

and damaging” (Akhtar, 2014, p. 7). Cameron’s essay illustrates how within the study of language and gender, the discursive approach takes into account sociological factors.

The three approaches- deficit approach, dominance approach and difference approach, discussed how gender differences conveyed by language use is evident within different gender physical manifestation. However, the more recent approach that is the discursive approach explores how gender is built through language within a cultural framework.

### **1.3. Female and Male Differences in Using Language**

Language is one of the aspects that differentiates women from men. This can be seen in their pronunciation, intonation, lexical choices and many other language-based variations to be discussed below.

#### **1.3.1. Differences in Pronunciation**

The phonological variations between men and women speech were reported in a number of languages. According to Wenjing, (2012), women articulate more standard pronunciation than men. That means standard form of pronunciation and elegant accent mostly derives from women’s language rather than men’s (Baquee, 2016). Moreover, women use expletives in a milder tone, but men often speak in a strong tone (Gu, 2013).

Nonetheless, the pronunciation of women is generally better than that of men. Such as the pronunciation of the ‘ing’ sound. Shuy (1969) in her study in this field found that 62, 2% of men pronounced ‘ing’ in a wrong manner, and only 28, 9% of women did not pronounce it correctly (Xia, 2013). Moreover, Pan (2011) in her work explained how men and women’s pronunciations are not the same when they pronounce the initial [h]. For example the word home, women pronounce it [h3um] while men pronounce it [“3um].

#### **1.3.2. Differences in Intonation**

Women tend to speak in high pitch voice due to physiological causes, but scientists

found that this is often correlated with “timidity” and “emotional instability” of women (Baquee, 2016). Furthermore, females prefer to use a rising tone even in a declarative sentence, which exposes their confusion and indecision (Gu, 2013).

In addition, women are seen to use the reverse stress, which means that men frequently place the highest pitch to highlight on the most important word, on the other hand, in a sentence; women use the lowest pitch on the most important word (Baquee, 2016). For example:

Husband: When will dinner be ready?

Wife: Around six o'clock...

The wife is the only one who knows the answer, but she still answers her husband with a high-rise tone that means “will that do”. This sort of intonation reflects gentility and docility of women. The husband will surely feel his wife’s respect.

Lakoff (1975) says that women respond to a question with a rising pattern of intonation rather than falling intonation. They will display their gentleness in this way and this intonation often reveals a lack of confidence. On the opposite, men tend to use falling intonation to prove they are confident of what they mean. Falling intonation often reveals confidence and sometimes power.

### **1.3.3. Differences in Vocabulary**

Jespersion (1922) asserts that men introduce new and fresh expressions rather than women, and they are the main language renovators (Darani & Darani, 2012). Further, he generalizes that women’s vocabulary is much less extensive than that of a man. Moreover, women and men tend to choose different words to express their feelings. For Instance, when a woman is frightened, she usually shouts out, “I am frightened to death”! If a man says this, people will think he is a coward and womanish. The differences in vocabulary between females and males can be shown in the following five aspects:

### **1.3.3.1. Color Words**

There is special feminist vocabulary that men dare not use. Women typically spend much more of their time on color-related activities such as choosing clothes than men do. They often use borrowed French color words to describe things, such as azure (blue), mauve (lavender), aquamarine (blue-green) etc., but most men do not use them. These words are not common for women, but it is their own way to show their elegance (Gu, 2013).

### **1.3.3.2. Adjectives**

Using adjectives to describe things and express feelings may indicate that women are more sensitive to the environment and more likely to convey their emotions with words, which makes women's language more interesting than men's.

According to (Gu, 2013), females always use certain adjectives to describe their emotions, such as charming, divine, and cute. While men only use the simple terms to explain the effect, like good, very, etc.

### **1.3.3.3. Adverbs**

There are existing differences in the use of adverbs between women and men. Women tend to use such adverbs like awfully, pretty, terribly, vastly, and so, while men like to use very, utterly, and really. Jespersen (1992) stated that women use "so" more than men. Such as, "It was so interesting" is often uttered by a woman.

### **1.3.3.4. Swear Words and Expletive**

Xia (2013) noted that since women are gentle and docile, they usually avoid using swear words and dirty words. They claim that these kinds of words will not only make others uncomfortable and give an image of "no civilization", but also destroy the relationship between her and others. Women are always paying attention to the grace of themselves and their use of language. Women usually avoid such expressions and pay more attention to their manners and

politeness. They do not use abusive words or language in their conversation unlike men who use slang expressions often in their speech.

#### **1.3.3.5. Diminutives**

Xia (2013) argued that women like to use terms that means “small” like “bookie” which refers to a small book. They do enjoy using phrases that display affections, such as sweetie and dearie. When a man uses such terms, people may think he might have personality disorder or he is not manly.

#### **1.3.4. Difference in Syntax**

There are some variations in preference of syntactic form between men and women. Gu (2012) claimed that both males and females use tag questions in a certain situation; nonetheless, females use tag questions more when voicing their opinions. Tag questions are their preferred way to talk even when they are sure about what they want to say. Their aim is that they want to be recognized by others. They like to speak implicitly and use rising tone, which expresses consult and uncertainty. On the contrary, men prefer to be direct which is the reason behind using declarative and imperative sentences to express orders and requests.

#### **1.3.5. Hedges**

Pan (2011) defined hedges as words that convey the sense that the speaker is uncertain about what he or she is saying, or cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement, such as “kind of”, “sort of”, “you know”, “I think”, “I suppose”, and “I guess”, etc.

Hedges seem to appear more frequently in women’s speech. In addition, hedges mitigates the possible unfriendliness or unkindness of a statement, that is, for the sake of politeness. Besides, women usually apply embedded imperatives to ask someone to do something compared to men. “Will you please open the window?”, “Please close the door”, “On your way back, could you please bring that here?” are usually used by women.

### **1.3.6. Interrogative Sentences**

Women use interrogative sentences more than men. Women see interrogative sentences as a way to carry on a productive conversation. Lakoff (1975) noted that women are more likely to use an interrogative sentence to express their idea compared to men, and they prefer to use tag questions, because they will make the tone less tense. Fishman (1980), gathered several couples “conversation tapes”, and he found women used tag questions three times as men did (Xia, 2013).

### **1.3.7. Correctness of Grammar**

Women pay more attention to the correctness of syntax. While expressing their thoughts, they would make utterance clear by using detailed grammar. For example:

Woman: We are going to go to the park today.

Men: We are going to the park today.

### **1.3.8. Differences in Their Attitude towards Language**

Women pay more attention to the standard language than men do, and they are stricter with language usage rules. For Example:

Man: Are you comin’?

Woman: Are you coming?..

### **1.3.9. Nonverbal Differences**

Xia (2013) argued that men are noticed to interrupt more in a conversation than women do. Women are more patient even though they want to talk, but they will just wait until others finish their talking. In a conversation involved both sexes, it was found that women play the role of patient listeners. They do not interrupt often, but they encourage others to talk. However, men are eager to be heard also they do not like to be silent. This makes them more dominant than women.

### **1.3.10. Differences in Choosing Topics**

Since their childhood, males and females tend not only to speak differently, but to choose different topics as well. According to Tannen (1994) men would rather discuss sport, computers or military topics, while women will most often revolve around mutual relationships, interpersonal events and emotions, family with specific details and thorough descriptions (Alčaković & Markovic, 2013).

## **1.4. Some Possible Explanations**

Wenjing (2012) noted that there are four possible explanations to the differences in the language used by males and females, which are psychological, social, cultural and physiological (Baquee, 2016).

### **1.4.1. Different Psychology**

Ning & Dai (2010) argued that in most English speaking communities, women are more status-conscious than men. Therefore, women tend to use more standard expressions in their speeches. Moreover, it has been proposed that men prefer to think logically, while women think emotionally. This argument can better testify that when in face of unlucky events or complains, men will try to come up with a solution while women try to show their sympathy.

### **1.4.2. Different Social Status**

Xia (2013) discussed that the more distinct the roles are, the larger the variations. She discussed that women's tone is not that confident as men's, and this is because they have little power or no power at all in the society. Women are often named, titled and treated differently from men. Women are more likely than men to be referred to by their first names because women are inferior to men in this society, so they appear to be non-assertive when they talk. They tend to discuss, share and search for reassurance. On the opposite, men tend to look for answers, to offer advices and even lectures to their audience. The term gender was also

considered to form the basis of women's subordination in public and private life. Women are expected to be the second class in both home and workplace.

In addition, the use of generic masculine reinforces the secondary role of women in many social groups. This kind of usage does not just represent current prejudices, but they are easily transmitted, reinforcing the lower power and prestige ascribed to women in a society. With the growth of social awareness in many parts of the world over the past decades, numerous efforts have been made to overcome this prejudicial use of language. For example, people use the word chairperson instead of chairman more frequently nowadays. Many publishers and journals now follow recommendations to avoid gender discrimination and gender prejudiced language use.

#### **1.4.3. Different Cultural Background**

Language and culture are inseparable. Lakoff (1975) believes that the difference between men and women's language is a symptom of a problem in culture, and not primarily the problem itself. Moreover, Ning & Dai (2010) noted that a culture usually divides behaviors into masculine and feminine, where behaviors, styles, or interests that are usually assigned to women as "womanish" and consider the boys who behave in this way "sissies." Women with interests that belongs to men are referred to as "manish" and the girls who act this way are often called "tomboys." As a result, even a little boy, knows how to behave himself, because he fears being called "sissy". Men and women pay attention to their speech and behavior because there is a division given out by their culture, which is deep-rooted in their minds.

#### **1.4.4. Physiological Differences**

Wenjing (2012) noted that the latest medical research on the development of language skills, found that the women's left hemisphere develops earlier than men's (Baquee, 2016). This means that the girl speaks more frequently and emotionally than boy does from the beginning. On the other hand, the latest voice and tone experiment proved that the male's and

female's voice tones quality on the resonance peak is very different because of their gender. Moreover, women's vocal cords are shorter, thinner and relaxer than men's vocal cords.

Nonetheless, Xia (2012) noted that the physical differences between the two Genders was due to the phonological processing in males which is located on the left of the brain, while in females it included both left and right sections of the brain. No difference in efficiency was shown, nor is there any evidence so far that any neurophysiologic difference accounts for differences between the two groups in using language.

Since biological sexual differences cannot explain the differences in men's and women's societal roles and opportunities, scholars created and employed other methods and analytical categories in order to describe these distinctions.

Furthermore, Georgetown University researchers led by Michael Ullman said that boys and girls appear to use different parts of their brain to learn some fundamental parts of grammar and certain diction learning (Ning & Dai, 2010).

### **1.5. Changes of Gender's Language through the Time**

Language has a great connection with society, so if change occurs in society, language will change too. With the development of productive forces and civilization, the strict rules that the society prescribes for men and women are changing. Many territories are no longer solely men's. Women are not the on-lookers; rather they start taking more assertive role on what is going on.

Women are eager to overturn their social statues, and in any area, they want to be equal to men. Nowadays, more and more women walk out their homes; and even more and more of them are in the high government posts. Their skill shows people that women can do the work well too. With the changes in their social status, women became more confident and assertive than before. They have the confidence to say what they want to say, they also have bravery to

disrupt men's talk. They are brave enough to lecture men, not only being lectured by men. For example, the rules of modern Japanese are not rigid as they were before (Xia, 2013). This is the result of modern civilization, and this is the result of women's struggle.

People's linguistic behavior was not only attributed with social status, but also connected with their profession, education, etc. Xia (2013) stated that in modern society, more and more people are having high education, so we can see that more and more men begin to behave themselves when they talk. Usually, they seldom break into other's conversation abruptly. Instead, they are patient enough for others to finish their talks. They use less rigid impressive sentences. We can hardly hear them using swear words or taboos. They become polite and gentlemen-like. The interesting thing is that they also begin to use tag questions.

## **1.6. The Difference between Sex and Gender**

Rahmi (2015) stated that some people sometimes confuse the word "gender" by considering it the same as "sex". In fact, they have different meaning. According to Gaur (2006, p.12) "Sex is designation based on biology, whereas gender is socially and psychologically constructed by the process of interactions in the family, social and education settings." Moreover, "gender" is not something we have, but something we do, something we perform and it is the social elaboration of biological "sex." Whereas, sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential.

Furthermore, the British sociologist Giddens (1989) described sex as male-female biological or physical distinction, whereas gender involves the psychological, social and cultural differences between man and woman. He also explained that sex is something you have, and it can be defined in terms of objective, scientific criteria- that is, the number of X chromosomes an individual has. Gender, on the other hand, is social property; something obtained or created through relationships with others through an individual's devotion to certain cultural norms and proscriptions. For example, a boy is bought a car and blue cloth by his

parents, while a girl is bought a doll and pink cloth. These phenomena show how the parents try to form their children who have opposite sex differently when they start bringing them up (Rahmi, 2015).

It is widely contended that the biological differences between males and females is what determines gender by causing differences in their abilities and roles. (Çakici, 2011, p. 4) stated that:

Higher levels of testosterone, for example, are said to lead men to be more aggressive than women; and left-brain dominance is said to lead men to be more “rational” while their relative lack of brain lateralization should lead women to be more emotional (Çakici, 2011, p. 4).

Furthermore, the relation between physiology and attitude is not simple. Hormonal levels, brain activity patterns, and brain anatomy have seen to be both a result of different activity and a cause. Moreover, women’s corpus callosum, the bridge between the two hemispheres of the brain, has been shown to be comparatively larger than men’s. The smaller corpus callosum of men is supposed to result in more lateralization, whereas the large one of women is expected to result in greater integration between the two hemispheres, at least in visual-spatial functions. However, despite the proof for sex-linked brain injured populations, generalizations on sex differences remains uncertain.

Nonetheless, any findings that could help physiological differences are already combined with any difference of gender roles. This feed directly into social and particularly into educational policy with arguments that gender fairness in such “left-brain areas” as mathematics and engineering is impossible.

### **1.7. Sex Role Stereotype and Gender Bias**

Differences in behavior are the result of specific interventions by adults. Male and female babies are treated differently from the moment they are born. Gender bias awareness has begun to have some influence on child-rearing activities, children start to make gender distinctions and develop gender preferences around the age of 3 or 4. Thus, children enter school having been socialized into the correct gender-role behavior for their age in relation to community expectations (Delamont, 2001, as cited in Çakici, 2011). According to Flanagan (1993), differences in approved gender roles between males and females are much stronger in low- Social Economic Situated families than in high- Social Economic Situated families cited (Çakici, 2011).

Socialization into this kind of approved sex-role behavior persists throughout life, and schools contribute to it. Though it is difficult to generalize, schools differentiate between the sexes in several ways. According to Çakici (2011), males receive more attention from their teachers than females. Males experience more criticism from their teachers than females, but they also involve in more experiences with their teachers in such areas as approval, instruction giving, and being listened to. Teachers tend to punish females more promptly and explicitly for aggressive behavior than they do for males.

### **1.8. Gender and First Language Acquisition**

According to Coates (2004), girls' got superiority over boys in the acquisition of speech. Moreover, girls tend to do better than boys when it comes to babbling, the first word, and number of words used at 18 months.

Clarke-Stewart (1973) observed American mothers and first-born children from when the children were 9 months old until they were 18 months old (Coates, 2004). She found that girls' language skills in terms of comprehension and vocabulary were significantly higher than

those of boys. This was a result of the positive involvement of girls' with the mother. The mothers of girls differed from that of boys' when it comes to spending more time with their daughters, had more eye contact with them, used a higher proportion of directive and restrictive behaviors, and a higher ratio of social to referential speech.

Nelson (1973) studied the acquisition of vocabulary by eighteen American children between the age of one and two (Coates, 2004). Her sample was divided into two groups according to the rate at which they acquired vocabulary (the index was the age at which the child had acquired fifty words). The result showed that all the boys had a slower acquisition rate. The mean age for fifty words was 18.0 months for the girls and 22.1 months for the boys.

Perkins (1983, as cited in Coates, 2004), discovered that frequency of the use of modal expressions differed in relation to the child's gender. Girls used modal expressions more frequently than boys, whereas the difference was not significant. Interestingly, Perkins (1983) found that social class was significantly correlated with modal usage. He concluded that children from middle-class homes used modal expressions more frequently.

## **1.9. Gender and Second Language Acquisition**

Ellis (1994) stated, "women might be better at L2 learning than men as they are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms in the L2 input and they will be more likely to rid themselves of interlanguage forms that deviate from target-language norms." (Çakici, 2011, p. 468).

Moreover, Çakici, (2011) mentioned that two surveys, Burstall's (1975) research in England on primary school students of French and Boyle's (1987) study in Hong Kong on university students of English, showed that female students were more successful than male students in the applicable examinations. Nevertheless, Ellis (1994) did not arrive at definitive conclusions on these findings. He notes that such generalizations might be deceptive as Boyle's study also showed higher achievement among male students in listening tests.

Bacon (1992, as cited in Çakici, 2011) analysis among university students of Spanish in the US found no such significant difference between boys and girls.

Apart from achievement, the attitudes towards language learning and motivation are two variables that are closely related to gender. According to the research of Gardner and Lambert's, female students of L2 French in Canada were more motivated than male students and also had more optimistic attitudes towards the speakers of the target language (Block, 2002 as cited in Çakici, 2011). Additionally, Bacon & Finnemann (1992) university students of Spanish in the US were more instrumentally motivated than male students (Çakici, 2011).

## **Summary**

This chapter is an attempt to review the issue of language and gender. We presented language-gender historical background, language-gender theories, in addition to the existing differences in gender's language and its possible explanations. Furthermore, we casted some light on the changes of gender's language that occurred through time, the difference between sex and gender, sex role stereotypes and gender bias. Then, we discussed both gender's first and second language acquisition. In the next chapter, the researcher will present an overview about hedges.

**Chapter Two:**  
**The Use of Lexical Hedges**

## **Chapter Two: the Use of Lexical Hedges**

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**Summary**

## **Introduction**

This introductory chapter provides an overview to the use of lexical hedges. In line with that, the first title of this chapter is an attempt to introduce the term hedging by providing different dictionary definitions. Then we will evaluate the term “hedges” from the view of Lakoff (1973-1987), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Prince et al., (1982), and Fraser (1995). Moreover, we will tackle the current views on hedging, and there will be a discussion to the concept “to hedge” from Itani (1995) point of view. Afterwards we will deal with hedging as pragmatic phenomena then its devices; also, we will shed light on the functions of hedges. Lastly, we will present the types of hedging and previous related studies.

## **2. The Use of Lexical Hedges**

### **2.1. Definition of Hedging**

According to Oxford English Dictionary a hedge is “to go aside from the straightway; to shift; shuffle, dodge; to trim; to avoid committing oneself irrevocably; to leave open a way of retreat or escape.” (Crompton, 1997, p. 272).

Collins English Dictionary defined the English word hedge as follows: “if you hedge or if you hedge a problem or question, you avoid answering the question or committing yourself to a particular action or decision.” (Sinclair, 1987, p. 677).

Moreover, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1987) defined the word “hedge” as something that gives protection while the verb to hedge is used to refuse to answer directly (Gribanova, 2018).

Furthermore, The Stylistics Dictionary (wales, 1989) defined the process hedging as qualification and toning down of utterance and statements in order to reduce the riskiness of well what one says (Gribanova, 2018).

## 2.2. Evolution of the Concept Hedging

### 2.2.1. Lakoff (1972-1987)

Lakoff (1972) defined hedges as “words whose meaning is verifiably includes fluffiness words whose activity to make things fuzzier or less fluffy.” (Shaflee & Namaziandost, 2018, p. 4). He noted that the values true or false are a matter of degree, and hedges make natural language expressions more/less true or more/less false. Moreover, he stated that, utterances would very often be neither true, nor false, but rather true or false to a certain extent, or true in certain respects and false in other respects.

Lakoff (1972) presented the following degrees of truth, corresponding, to degree of membership in the category bird.

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| (1) a. A robin is a bird. | (true)                                    |
| b. A chicken is a bird.   | (less true than a.)                       |
| c. A penguin is a bird.   | (less true than b)                        |
| d. A bat is a bird.       | (false or at least very far from true)    |
| e. A cow is a bird.       | (absolutely false) (Lakoff, 1972, p. 473) |

In (2), the hedge “sort of” makes the values that are true or near to true (e.g. (1) a.) false or near false (e.g. (2) a.), while uniformly increasing low truth-values to mid-range of truth (e.g. (2) b-c.), leaving lowest truth i.e. false range constant (e.g. (2) d-e.).

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| (2) a. A robin is sort of a bird. | (False -- it is a bird, no question about it)         |
| b. A chicken is sort of a bird.   | (True, or very close to true)                         |
| c. A penguin is sort of a bird.   | (True, or close to true)                              |
| d. A bat is sort of a bird.       | (Still pretty close to false)                         |
| e. A cow is sort of a bird.       | (False) (Lakoff, 1972 as cited in Itani, 1995, p. 13) |

He argued that “Sort of” is a predicate modifier, but one of a type that has not been previously studied in formal semantic in that its effect can only be described in terms of

membership functions for fuzzy sets. He noted that it is very difficult to see how such effects can be explained in a two-valued system, where the argument is either true or false and individuals are either set members or not.

Markkanen et al., (1997) did not support George Lakoff's idea of hedging by stating that, "Lakoff was not interested in the communicative value in the use of hedges but was concerned with the logical properties of words and phrases" (Alajmi, 2015, p. 29). In other words, his attention is primarily on the semantic aspects of hedges that serve the fuzziness purpose.

### **2.2.2. Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987)**

Brown & Levinson (1978), in their study of politeness, claimed that "face" is something that is commonly concerned with human beings, i.e. across cultures. They proposed two kinds of face-preserving strategies positive and negative strategies. The former are roughly expressions of solidarity, and the latter are expressions of restraint.

They list hedging as one of various face-preserving politeness strategies. For example, in order to avoid disagreement with the listener (a positive politeness strategy, which aims at building solidarity) the speaker can make her own viewpoint safely ambiguous by using hedges such as sort of, kind of, in a way etc. As in (1):

(1) I really sort of think/hope/wonder.... (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 116)

In order not to coerce the listener, a negative politeness strategy, which aims to restrain imposition, the speaker, may use hedging expressions that weaken illocutionary forces of commands, for example:

(2) Close the window, if you can. (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 162)

"Sort of" in (1) explicitly conveys that the speaker does not devote herself to the proposition to be expressed. Therefore, "sort of" in (1) is a linguistic means to explicitly communicate the speaker's minimal belief in the proposition expressed. The second statement



Unlike Lakoff (1973) etc., Prince et al., (1982) do make a semantics/pragmatics distinction and turn to the Gricean framework with its saying/implicating distinction in analyzing hedges (Itani, 1995).

However, the distinction suggested by Price et al., (1982) in some later works was criticized, because the division between approximators and shields can found to be very difficult to make in analyzing authentic language and is effective only in abstract (Varttala, 2009, as cited in Navrátilová, 2013).

#### **2.2.4. Fraser (1975)**

Fraser (2010) argued that certain performative verbs, such as apologize, promise or request when proceeded by specific modals, such as can, must and should result in “attenuated illocutionary force” (Navrátilová, 2013, p. 10). For example:

(1) I must advise you to remain quiet.

(2) I wish to forbid you to leave. (Fraser 1975, as cited in Itani, 1995, p.16).

According to Fraser (1975), the first situation (1) is a case of strongly performative, while the second (2) is a case of weakly performative because its performative use is unclear (Itani, 1995).

Furthermore, he lay out a series of principles to account for the fact that (1) appears to convey the performative that I advise you to remain quiet while (3) is a very unusual way to communicate the performative that I invite you to my party. Moreover, (4) communicates the performative that I invite you to my party, whereas (2) is a very odd way to try to communicate the performative that I forbid you to leave.

(3) I have to invite you to my party.

(4) I wish to invite you to my party (Fraser 1975, as cited in Itani, 1995, p. 16)

He added that an expression of the speaker’s desire is tantamount to seeking the hearer’s permission to perform an act, but it is strange to seek permission from the hearer to

forbid him to do anything, hence the oddity of (2). What make such cases of hedging is the speaker's lack of complete commitment to or responsibility for performing the speech acts of advising, forbidding, inviting, etc.

The speaker suggests by voicing “obligation”, she has no flexibility in the matter. If she had options, she might not perform that act, etc. by expressing her “wish” to do something instead of doing it directly. She implies that the listener may have other wishes, which she would like to take into consideration, that she will perform the act only with the permission of the hearer, etc.

In other situations, there is an expression of ability to perform a speech act. For example:

(5) I can promise you that I will not squeal.

(6) I can swear that no one saw me enter that building. (Fraser 1975, as cited in Itani, 1995, p. 17).

By expressing her ability to do something rather than doing it directly, the speaker will indicate that she does not want to perform the act with her full endorsement (e.g. (5)). On the other hand, she might intensify her dedication to the act by expressing her ability (e.g. (6)). However; Fraser (1975) provided (7) in which “might” is used with a performative verb.

(7) I might suggest that you ask again.

(8) I suggest that you ask again (Fraser, 1975, as cited in Itani, 1995, p. 17)

In (8), it is evident that the speaker does not express the performative (9) i.e. it gives her low commitment to the provocative act. Unlike (1), (4) and (7), there is no context in which the speaker of (8) is not hedging. Even if the subject matter is not the speaker, utterances using may/might tend to express the speaker's hedging as seen in (9)-(10):

(9) He may might come tonight.

(10) It may/might be raining now.

Lyons (1977) claimed that the use of “may” and “might” is a case of subjective modalisation, in order to express the speaker's reservations. Therefore, “may” and “might” tend to be legitimate hedge cases.

This brief analysis of past research on hedges shows that linguists do not have an agreed description of hedging phenomena. Lakoff (1973) analyzed hedges as linguistic means to affect the truth-value of an utterance. Moreover, Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) analyzed the concept of hedging as a means of mediating social relationships by achieving politeness affects. Prince et al., (1982) on the other hand analyzed it as affecting both the propositional content as well as the speaker's propositional attitude . Finally, Fraser (1975) analyzed it as tools for modifying an illocutionary force.

### **2.3. Current Views on Lexical Hedges**

The concept of hedging is regarded as “any linguistic means used to indicate either (a) a complete commitment to the true value of an accompanying proposition, or (b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically.” Hyland (1998, p. 133).

Hyland (2005) categorized hedges according to three functions: (i) decreasing force of statements by using specific adverbs, e.g., almost, fairly, partly, etc.; (ii) making statements indefinite by means of frequency adverbs, e.g., usually, sometimes, and (iii) reducing responsibility for truth with the use of probably, perhaps, or may (Abbas, kadir & Ibrahim, 2019).

In another respect, Geyer (2008) confirmed that hedging expressions are referred to as examples of politeness strategies (Abbas et al., 2019). Likewise, Crompton (1997) asserted that hedging is a positive politeness strategy since it reflects positive attitude of the hearer.

Whereas, Riekkinen (2009) argued that hedging can be a kind of negative politeness as the writer or speaker gives the content of the utterance fuzzier instead of keeping its original meaning. According to him, a criticism is an example of this kind by which the utterance is

mitigated to become more acceptable to the reader or hearer. Hedges can also help us to show how identities and views of the world are established via the users.

Lastly, Holmes (1995) stated that hedges are linguistic forms, such as modal verbs and pragmatic particles that can be used “to weaken or reduce the force of an utterance.” (Riihimäki, 2008, p. 23)

## 2.4. What is “to Hedge”?

Itani (1995) in her work gave a clear explanation to the term “to hedge”, which will be presented below.

(1)P: I suppose the capital of USA is Ottawa, am I right?

T: I suppose the capital of UK is Paris, am I right? (Itani, 1995, p. 29)

He stated that, in (1) T the teacher obviously does not “suppose” that Paris is the capital of UK. This can be compared with (2) in which the speaker might not suppose the embedded proposition but in fact strongly believes it:

(2) I suppose you could be mistaken. (Itani, 1995, p. 29)

However, he mentioned that the difference is the following. (1)T is an irony that, as the speaker claims, the clear meaning of the phrase is not communicated to the hearer. In (2), on the other hand, the explicit content that the speaker supposes that the hearer could be mistaken is communicated to the hearer as the speaker's assumption though the speaker is being polite and the point of the utterance is in fact the embedded proposition itself.

Therefore, in (1) the speaker's supposing the embedded proposition is not transmitted to the hearer as the speaker's belief, while in (2) it is communicated and the speaker of (2) is hedging. That is, when the speaker's limited conviction is communicated in the technical sense of this term, i.e. the speaker express the information to the hearer freely, the speaker can be considered to be hedging.

Based on his own assumption, the hearer of (2) might conclude that the speaker strongly believes that he is mistaken but this does not fall within the speaker's communicative intention and thus she cannot be held responsible for it. The speaker of (2) has not asserted that the hearer is incorrect but only said with reservations that it might be the case. The speaker could protect herself from damaging her relationship with the hearer and even from later claims when the hearer is not. Thus, the speaker of (2) is hedging by communicating her limited conviction in the proposition that the hearer is mistaken.

From this, hedging was described as a pragmatic phenomenon by which the speaker expresses that the speaker has limited conviction in or commitment to a proposition communicated by her utterance.

Itani (1995) clarified what is meant by a “proposition communicated”. He noted that in (2), the proposition concerned is merely the embedded proposition that the hearer could be mistaken. In relevance terms, the propositional form of the utterance is the linguistically encoded logical form with reference assigned, ambiguity and vagueness resolved, and this notion would include “I suppose” in (2). Then “proposition” is not or at least need not be the propositional form of an utterance in relevance terms.

## **2.5. Hedges as Pragmatic Phenomena**

The field of pragmatics is strongly influenced by the work of Grice (1975), who outlined the cooperative principles in order to arrive at a complete understanding of what an addresser meant by an utterance.

Hedges indicate how Grice maxims are observed which means that hedges are linked to expectation of maxims of quantity, quality, manner, and relevance (Mohamed & Sahib, n.d.).

For instance:

(1) All I know is smoking damages your health.

Grundy (2000) argued that, in this scenario, the addresser limits the quantity of information available. Therefore, the maxim of quantity is hedged.

(2) They say that smoking damages your health.

The addresser suggests in the previous instance that the statement is either true or false by using “they say that” and she/he is not sure that “Smoking damages the health”. Thus, the addresser hedges the maxim of quality.

(3) It was dead funny, if you see what I mean.

In the previous instance, the addresser noticed that she/he had made a pun therefore she or he added, “If you see what I mean” to indicate her/his conscious of the maxim of manner. Thus, the maxim of manner is hedged.

(4) What is your name by the way?

In the previous instance, the addresser use of “by the way” implies that what has been said before it is not relevant to the conversation. Such type of hedge is used when the addresser wants to switch from one topic to another one. Therefore, the relevance maxims may be hedged.

Later, Fraser (1990) used Grice's notion of conversational maxims to equate politeness with interpersonal communication. He agrees with Grice's core concept of how the cooperative principle can operate. He says that the Cooperative Principle provides that “you should say what you have to say; when you have to say it, and the way you have to say it” Fraser (1990, p. 222).

Before Fraser's work, Lakoff was among the first scholars to study politeness from the perspective of conversational maxims. However, “Lakoff explicitly extends the notion of the grammatical rule and its associated notion of well-formedness to pragmatics” Fraser (1990, p. 223). She based her theory on two fundamental areas of linguistic competence involved in linguistic interactions, namely the Gricean maxims and the principle of politeness (Alajmi, 2015).

In comparison to the theory of Grice, Brown and Levinson (1978) established their theory of politeness, which somehow opposes the concept of Gricean cooperation.

## **2.6. Hedging Devices**

Hedging is a feature that is expressed by different linguistic categories. These devices include grammatical classes described as modal auxiliaries, introductory verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

### **2.6.1. Modal auxiliaries**

Modality use is considered as a major device of hedging. The use of modal auxiliary verbs can vary in accordance with their contexts. Modality is always connected to the epistemic function. Markkanen and Schröder (1997) argued that, “This connection is very clear in the case of modal verbs with epistemic meanings.” (Alajmi, 2015, p. 31). Thus, they are classified according to their function by which the meaning of an utterance is shifted from certainty to doubt. The following are the most commonly used modal auxiliary verbs for hedging.

#### **2.6.1.1. Can/ Could**

The modal verbs “can/could” retains the sense of possibility. Its epistemic meaning occurs in interrogative and negative contexts, thus creating assumptions and uncertainty in an utterance. Similarly, the modal auxiliaries “may/ might” have the same epistemic meaning as “can/could”. “Could”, expresses the possibility to assess the value of truth as well (Hyland, 1998).

#### **2.6.1.2. Must/Need**

From a grammatical prospective, the modal verb “must” is always seen in English language as a marker used to express a clear necessity. Thus, it refers to a certainty that differs in degrees from strong to weak levels (Hyland, 1998). On the other hand, “must” holds a sense of obligation as well. In other words, it occurs whenever the concept of “need” is inferred.

### **2.6.1.3. Should/ Shall**

Hyland (1998) claimed that in grammar both “shall and should” express a sense of necessity, but within a lower range than “must”. The modal “should” is sometimes used as an alternative option for “must” because of the tentative sense it implies. It indicates lack of confidence and possibility in an utterance.

### **2.6.1.4. Would/Will**

The modal verb “would” is a marker that indicates a sense of prediction in a situation, which occurs in the past. “Will”, the present form of “would”, communicates necessity, in the same manner as “must”, but in a lower range. “Would” is similar to “could” especially if a speaker or a writer wants to express possibilities in a present situation more than “will” (Hyland, 1998).

### **2.6.1.5. May/Might**

The modal verbs “may/might” occur in different contexts as hedging devices. They are considered typical hedges that serve possibilities and hesitations. According to Hyland (1998), “might” can serve a better function to present ambiguity more than “may” because it implies less certainty in statements.

## **2.6.2. Introductory Verbs**

Lexical verbs such as “believe, suggest, indicate, assume, tend to” are considered as hedging devices and called introductory verbs. These verbs provide mitigation and then lessen the sense of commitment and the truth-value of an utterance. Introductory verbs are used in some utterances to serve the function of doubt as a means of justification to support a claim (Alajmi, 2015).

### 2.6.3. Probability Adjectives and Adverbs

Alajmi (2015) argued that, probability adjectives and adverbs are other forms of hedging in spoken and written contexts. Modal adjectives such as “possible, probable, potential and apparent” serve a degree of uncertainty. Modal adjectives are used more commonly as a hedging as they work to weaken the writer’s commitment.

On the other hand, adverbials such as “probably, possibly, apparently” are used more than adjectives. They are used to influence the value of the proposition. This is due to the role adverbs that serve the function of downgrade, which reduces the effect of the verb.

### 2.6.4. Frequency Adverbs

Another category related to adverbs is frequency adverbs. Usually this category is described as unspecified words that mainly refer to time. They are words such as “rarely, occasionally, and usually”, which function as indefinite devices that can be good choices for hedging purposes. Indefiniteness helps users not to commit full assertion. At the same time, adverbs with indefinite degree share the same function of other adverbs in general. They are, also, considered as downgrade devices to decrease the potential force or effect of an utterance Alajmi (2015).

The following table summarizes the common identified functions of different hedging devices (as cited in Alajmi, 2015):

**Table 2.1: Hedging Devices Functions**

	Category	Item	function
01	<b>Modal auxiliary Verbs</b>	Could/Can	Root possibility
		Might/May	lack of confidence
		Would	Assertion weaken & softener

		Will/ Must	Necessity and assurance justifier
		Should/Shall	Hypothetical necessity
02	<b>Introductory verbs</b>	I Believe/ I suggest/ I think	Lack of commitment / lack of confidence / claim softener
		It appears/ it seems/ it sounds	
03	<b>Probability adjectives</b>	Potential/ Possible	Ambiguity
04	<b>Adverbials</b>	Probably/ Possibly/ Usually/ Occasionally	Doubt and uncertainty

## 2.7. Types of Hedging

Namasaraev (1997) stated that, “There are nine types of lexical hedges according to its classification” (Rosanti & jaelani, n.d., p. 33). The table below shows the classification of hedging.

**Table 2.2: Classification of Hedging**

Classifications	Words	Sample of sentences
Modal auxiliary verb	will, must, might, can, should, could, would, may	‘Such a measure might be more sensitive to changes in health after specialist treatment.’
Lexical verb	appear, believe, assume, tend, suggest, estimate, think, argue, speculate, indicate, seem, propose, suppose	‘In spite of its limitations, the study appears to have a number of important strengths.’
Probability adjective	possible, likely, unlikely, clear, definite, certain, probable	‘It is likely to result in failure.’

Adjective Noun	assumption, claim, probability possibility, estimate, suggestion	'We estimate that one in five marriages end in divorce.'
Adverb	Practically, presumably, clearly, probably, conversely, possibly, perhaps, definitely, certainly, virtually apparently, completely	'There is, perhaps, a good reason why she chose to write in the first person.'
Adverb of frequency	Often, occasionally, generally, usually, sometimes, normally, frequently, always, rarely, never, seldom.	'Sometimes it could produces a lot profit'
'If' clause	If true, if anything	'If true, our study contradicts the myth that men make better managers than women.'
Compound hedges	seems reasonable, looks probable, may be suggested	Such compound hedges can be double hedges (it may be suggested that; it seems likely that; it would indicate that; this probably indicates); treble hedges (it seems reasonable to assume that); quadruple hedges (it would seem somewhat unlikely that.
Fillers	You know, you see, by the way, sort of, well, hmm, uhm, uhh, uh..huh, all I know, I mean, yeah, like.	You know, it can help them to fulfill the daily needs.

## 2.8. Hedging Functions

Hedges varies according to its function within different communicative circumstances. In other words, hedging may serve various functions, which may change depending on propositional situation itself.

Alajmi (2015) claimed that the hedging devices are usually seen as having two purposes. The first purpose demonstrates the lack of commitment to the truth of something people say.

The second function serves as an alternative softener and politeness technique to minimize the force and the effect of utterances so the listener understands what has been said in conversation or a written text.

A study by Prince et al. (1982) indicated that hedging serves two different function categories: approximators and shields. Additionally, approximators can be divided in two subcategories: the adaptors and rounders, and shields are also divided into two subgroups: the plausibility shields and attribution shields (Itani, 1995).

Adaptors are devices used as modifiers in which a term is adapted in a communicative interaction to reveal the truth degree of the original proposition. For instance:

Her attitude was a little rude last night.

The main function in this sentence is to show criticism. The speaker used the adaptor “a little” to soften criticizing her attitude. Consequently, the degree of truth is affected and criticism in this case is appropriate.

Rounders, nonetheless, are considered as tools of measurement. They are used to restrict the degree of a given subject in a statement. Consider the following example:

I paid approximately \$10,000 to buy this diamond ring.

The speaker here does not give the exact price. The speaker attempts to make the statement not too far from the given fact, bearing in mind that the hearer should understand the meaning that the speaker wishes to deliver.

Plausibility shields are tools that respond to speculation by the speaker about something (Alajmi, 2015). They use the first pronoun (singular and plural) to express the speaker's willingness to take responsibility for an alternative idea to be a reference. For example:

As the door is open, I suppose he is still in the office.

Here, the tone of the speaker is moderated in a way as not to force his/ her opinion on the hearer. Thus, “I suppose” is used here to indicate a reference to the utterance. Attribution shields serve the same speculating purpose. The difference is that they include a structure for a third person, for example:

John says that the company will increase the yearly bonus for all employees.

In this example, the speaker avoids personal involvement and mitigates the responsibility of making a certain statement. There are different hedges used under these subcategories as the following table shows (as cited in Alajmi, 2015):

**Table 3.2: Approximators and Shield Tools**

<b>Tools of Approximators</b>		<b>Tools of Shields</b>	
<b>Adaptors</b>	<b>Rounders</b>	<b>Plausibility shield</b>	<b>Attribution shields</b>
Might	Over	I suggest	X says that
Could	Roughly	I think	According to
Sort of	Around	I am afraid	It is believed
A little	About	I wonder	

Hedging devices can serve different purposes depending on the context. In numerous and innumerable communicative interactions, they vary according to different circumstances and different relations between participants.

## **2.9. Previous related studies**

The current research sheds light on how women and men use language differently. Many researchers and scholars in their works analyzed the differences in the language used by both genders.

Scholars like Jespersen (1922), discussed how women have smaller vocabularies, show extensive use of certain adjectives and adverbs and produce less complex sentences. He also noted that women use “so” more than men. Such as, “It was so interesting” is often uttered by a woman.

Lakoff (1975) pointed out that women and men speak English in different ways. She mentioned that women’s language was characterized by linguistic forms such as hedges, ‘empty’ adjectives like charming, divine, nice, and speaking in italics’ (exaggerated intonation contours), which are expressive of uncertainty, lack of confidence and excessive deference or politeness .

Furthermore, According to Crawford (1995, p.1), “men and women are fated to misunderstand each other unless they recognize their socialized differences”. He also stated that the way both genders talk is formed by the fundamental difference.

Researchers such as Bquee (2016) declared that the language used by females is not the same used by males. He also stated the way they are different from each other when it comes to vocabulary use, tone of talking, syntax and the style of delivery. Xia (2013, p. 1489) stated, “There are many differences in using language between the two genders, and also there are some changes through time”. Moreover, Gu (2012) claimed that both males and females use tag questions in a certain situation; nonetheless, females use tag questions more when voicing their opinions.

In conclusion, most of the previous related research findings have shed light on how males and females use language differently. However, our study focuses more on gender use of lexical hedges among Algerian EFL students, which will bring new dimension to the Algerian setting.

## **Summary**

Through this chapter, we introduced the term hedging by providing different dictionary definitions. Then we evaluated the term “hedges” from the point of view of Lakoff (1973-1987), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Prince et al, (1982), and Fraser (1995). Moreover, we tackled current views on hedging and the concept “to hedge” from Itani (1995) point of view. Afterwards we reviewed hedges as a pragmatic phenomenon then its devices. Then we shed light on the functions of hedges. Lastly, we presented the hedges types and previous related studies. The findings obtained about the issue under investigation will be presented, analyzed, and interpreted in the following chapter.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Fieldwork and Data Analysis**

## **Chapter Three: Fieldwork and Data Analysis**

### **3.1. Introduction**

### **3.2. Research Approach**

### **3.3. Population and Sampling**

#### **3.3.1. Participants**

### **3.4. Instruments**

#### **3.4.1. Focus Group**

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#### **3.7.1. Gender Differences in Using Lexical Hedges**

##### **3.7.1.1. In Case of Fillers**

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##### **3.7.1.3. In Case of Modal Auxiliary Verbs**

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##### **3.7.1.5. In Case of Adverbs of Frequency**

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##### **3.7.1.7. The Total Frequency**

### **3.8. Summary of the Findings**

#### **3.8.1. The Frequency of Using Lexical Hedges**

### **3.8.2. Reasons for Using Lexical Hedges**

#### **Summary**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The current chapter is devoted to the fieldwork and data analysis of the study. For the requirement of this study, two data gathering tools were used, focus group and observation. The study was conducted with third year students of English as foreign language. The previous tools aims mainly at gathering the needed data to reach our research objectives, the frequency and requirements of using lexical hedges. The present chapter deals with the research approach of the study, population and sampling, instruments, data collection and data analysis. Furthermore, we will analyze and interpret the gathered. Lastly, we will provide a summary to the findings.

### **3.2. Research Approach**

Since the aim of this study is to investigate gender differences in using lexical hedges and to find out when the EFL students use them, this study adopted a mixed method research approach. The quantitative method is adopted to examine the frequency of using lexical hedges that answers the first research question, which is “Is there any significant difference between Algerian female and male EFL students use of lexical hedges in spoken language?” The qualitative method is adopted to describe the requirements of using lexical hedges, which answers the second and third research question “To what extent female and male students use lexical hedges in the spoken English?” and “How female and male students use Lexical hedges and for what reason?”

### **3.3. Population and Sampling**

To check the validity of information that help answering the research questions, the researcher dealt with EFL students to collect the needed data to feed the study.

#### **3.3.1. Participants**

To conduct our research, a sample of Eight Algerian third year EFL students at Mohamed kheidar University were randomly chosen for this study. The participants belonged

to the same group. They were familiar and comfortable with each other. This helped the students to be more spontaneous during the discussion. It is crucial because the more the language used is spontaneous the more the results are accurate (Altuna & Basurto, 2013). The selected participants were assigned into two equal groups namely male group (n=4) and female group (n=4). Having equal numbers of males and females will prevent bias and show gender differences. The students were all native speakers of Arabic and their age ranged from 20 to 27. The researcher of the current study observed that the participants enjoyed the same level of language proficiency.

The decision with working with third year students is mainly due to their level in English. They are good speakers of English, which will help them to communicate properly and comfortably.

### **3.4. Instruments**

Any research relies on the primary sources that are in the form of research instruments in order to collect data and to achieve reliable results. Thus, our investigation depends on two research tools including focus group, and observation.

#### **3.4.1. Focus Group**

After selecting the participants, a focus group was conducted to collect a linguistic corpus that represent the data of this study. This data will enable the researcher to explore both female and male participants' use of lexical hedges and the aspects of that use. Four girls and four boys were randomly chosen to participate in the discussion. The researcher asked every single participant to start a conversation about the proposed topics through sharing their opinions and arguments. All female and male participants expressed their opinions in the discussion session. The researcher worked as controller, observer, and sometimes as a participant to make sure no one dominated the others whilst trying to ensure that each

participant contributed in the conversations.

### **3.4.2. Observation**

Observation is one of the major instruments that a researcher may use to collect data and to help adequately analyzing that data. It is a useful tool to gather concrete, realistic and direct information. Observation involves describing the behavioral patterns of people in a systematic way.

In our research, the observation took place during and after the discussion. We attempted to observe the students linguistic behavior and to reach as accurate as possible interpretations regarding their use of lexical hedges. The researcher hoped to get deeper understanding of that sociolinguistic behavior.

The tool used for data collection in both focus group and observation was the recording. According to Eggleston (2013), the use of at least one tape recorder is useful in order to supplement the observation and other additional techniques such as field notes or checklists. In the case of this research work, it was used in order to record the students' discussion. Recordings of participants' conversations were done on 10, March 2020 in the morning from 9 o'clock to 9:55, using a tape recorder. It was proved in research that the language used in the morning is not the same as the one used in the evening or anytime else (Altuna & Basurto, 2013).

The recording happened with the permission of the participants. However, the purpose of the study was not mentioned to avoid bias. The recording lasted 55 minutes. The observation took place during and after the conversations. Then comparison between men and women use of lexical hedges was conducted.

### 3.5. Data Collection

To produce a qualitative and quantitative description to the frequency and purpose of using hedges, Eight third year Algerian EFL students at Mohamed Kheidar University were randomly selected and assigned into two equal groups, namely a male and female group. They were put together due to the idea that in a mixed sex setting, both genders use more lexical hedges. The researcher chose the students from the same group so they can be comfortable with each other, and spontaneous in their use of language. This will help the study to be more successful. The researcher gave much more importance to the fluency rather than accuracy. The single sentences was the unit of the study, and their use of lexical hedges was evaluated.

According to Brown et al., (1990), males and females' language may be affected by the chosen topics (Shaflee & Namaziandost, 2018). To tackle this concern with the previously mentioned problem, five topics, which are not biased i.e. both genders are interested in, were selected for the study. The discussions around the following topics were used as data: the educational system in Algeria, homeschooling, homework, social media, and the Algerian society. The researcher asked each participant to give his or her opinions about each topic. The participants were asked for permission to record their voices; however, the main purpose of the study was not explained to avoid the impact of participants' possible biases in their use of hedging devices. Therefore, every respondent idea was recorded and analyzed. The language corpus derived from these conversations represents the data to be analyzed in the current study.

The data were classified based on the kinds of lexical hedges and respondent gender. The types of lexical hedges regarding the language features, such as fillers, lexical verb, modal auxiliary verb, compound hedges, if clause and adverb of frequency were classified (Rosanti & Jaelani, 2016). The total of lexical hedges was based on its properties and all of the lexical hedges, which were applied, by female respondents and male respondents were counted. The female and male students' orientation in utilizing lexical hedges was analyzed. The data

collected in the fieldwork has been subjected into statistical processing.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

Data Analysis is a crucial step in reporting and interpreting the research findings. Thus, our main concern in this section was the analysis of the results obtained from the responses of the participants. After collecting the needed data or linguistic corpus, the researcher transcribed them and used the frequency to point out the differences between the performances of females and males during their discussions about various topics. After getting the data from females and males' respondents, the researcher then put it on the tables. Then, the writer separated the data based on their gender. In this study, the writer explored the female and male respondents' propensity in choosing words when they expressed and evinced their idea by utilizing lexical hedges.

### **3.7. Analysis and Interpretation**

Student's use of lexical hedges was analyzed, interpreted, and then used to reinforce our study. The findings were reported with tables and descriptions. The results was presented in tables and graphs. The tables present the frequency of using lexical hedges among females and males participants. It was organized based on the gender of the participants and how many times they used certain hedging devices. The data was interpreted and analyzed statistically and represented graphically using the quantitative descriptions, namely the frequency of using lexical hedges. Moreover, we described the requirements of using lexical hedges.

#### **3.7.1. Gender Differences in Using Lexical Hedges**

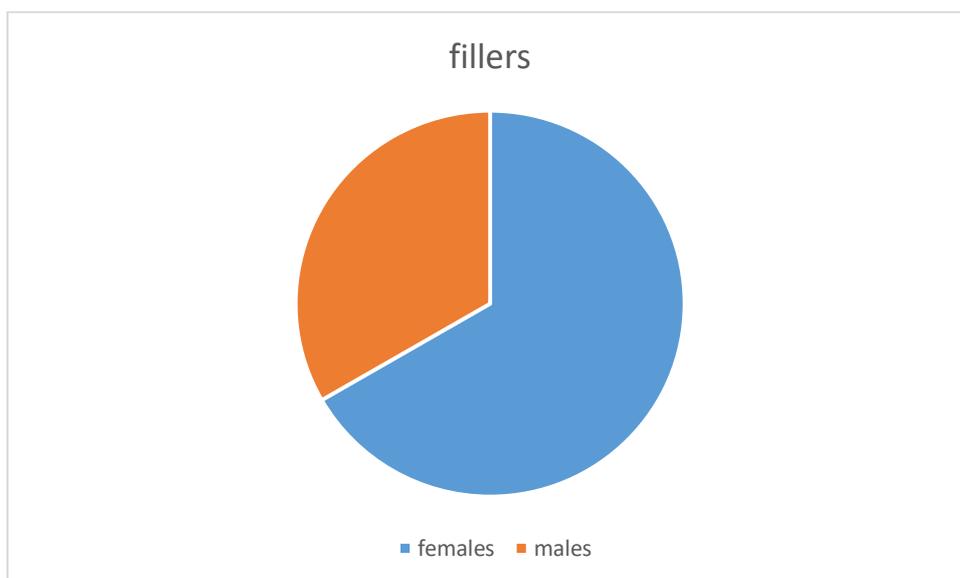
It is deduced that there are differences among female and male respondents' propensity in selecting word of lexical hedges and this can be seen in their use of lexical hedges as fillers, lexical verbs, modal auxiliary verbs, compound hedges, adverbs of frequency and "if" clause.

## 3.7.1.1. In Case of Fillers

Table 3.4. Data of lexical hedges as fillers

Fillers	Females	Males
Well	1	3
You know	0	1
Sort of	1	0
I mean	14	4
Total	16	8

As Table 4 reveals, the female respondents used (16) words of lexical hedges as fillers, while, the male respondents' tendency utilized (8) fillers. Females used the filler "I mean" (14) times, and "well" and "sort of" once. On the other hand, "well" was used by males three times, "you know" once, and "I mean" four times. It can be interpreted from the data of this table that females use fillers more than males in their regular conversation. The results has been portrayed in the pie chart below:



Graph 3.1. Total percentage for using lexical hedges as fillers

### **Well**

- (1) M 1: well... if we look at our education, it is definitely not well studied.
- (2) M 4: well... we can take similar actions.
- (3) F 2: well I used to come every morning and ...
- (4) F 1: well, of course homework are important; however ...

In example (1), the participant used “well” as a pause because he was not ready to answer the researcher’s question about his opinion about the education system in Algeria. “Well” in this case used as a pause to gather thoughts. Moreover, Male 4 in example (2), sounded not very sure of his statement, so the speaker indicated uncertainty by using “well”. Furthermore, Female 2 in example (3) responded to the addresser question by using “well” without pausing. “Well” in her case is considered as a response mark. Lastly, in example (4), the student politely refused the idea the researcher proposed then he started stating his own opinion. The statement was softened by using “well” to ease the transition.

### **You Know**

- (5) M 4: we are used to it, you know.

Here, Male 4 used “you know” to enjoin the interlocutor to fill in the gaps in what is being said and co-construct meaning. In other words, the speaker used “you Know” to breakdown articulatory, to appeal to his interlocutor to fill in the gaps through his common knowledge.

### **I Mean**

- (6) Female 1: it is an old system, I mean; they do not bring new things.

In this example (6), the first sequence “it is an old system” was clarified and exemplified by the second sequence “they do not bring new things”. Her first statement was inadequate, so she tried to clarify it by giving more explanation. Therefore, the participant used “I mean” as a clarification and explanation mark.

(7) F1: I mean...we disliked his method.

In example (7), the student talked in behalf of the other participants. She was not very sure if she is supposed to mention this statement or not. She may thought that the others would not accept what she would say. So “I mean” in this case indicated hesitation.

(8) F 1: I mean something like that.

In this example, the meaning of the utterance is not plain. Thus, “I mean” in this case prefaced fuzziness and ambiguity.

(9) F 1: I mean he is able to criticize but at the same time...

In the first clause, the student did not disagree with the argument suggested, then she came to her position using “but”. She used “I mean” to introduce concession, but returns to and justifies her main argument. Therefore “I mean” in this situation introduced concession and nuancing.

(10) F 2: social media is a waste of time...I mean, I have learned a lot from influencers still...

In this example (10), the speaker first mentioned how social media is just a waste of time, afterwards she corrected what she said, using “I mean” to introduce correction.

“I mean” used as self-repair followed by the correction in this case.

### **Sort of**

(11) F 3: sort of.

When the researcher asked about the importance of homework, Female 3 responded with “sort of”. In this case, the speaker did not devote herself to the proposition expressed. It is interpreted as a mark of inconvenience and doubt.

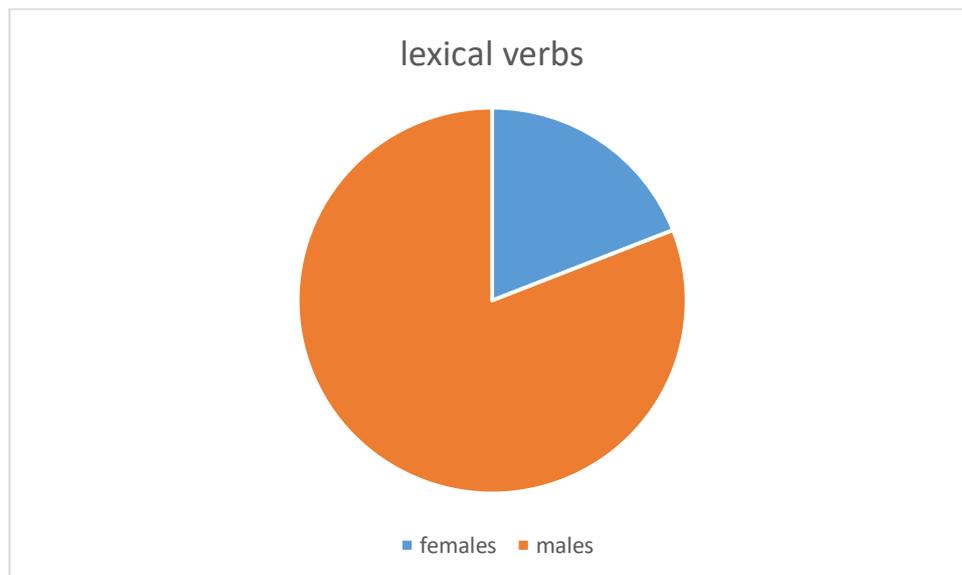
## 3.7.1.2. In Case of Lexical Verbs

Table 3.5. Data of lexical hedges as lexical verbs

Lexical verbs	Females	Males
I believe	1	0
I think	1	15
I guess	2	2
Total	4	17

Regarding using the lexical verbs as lexical hedges as presented in Table 5, the female respondents' tendency used (4) lexical verbs in contrast to the males group who used (17). The hedge "I think" was used (15) times and "I guess" twice. However, females utilized "I believe" and "I think" once, and "I guess" twice. Therefore, it can be concluded that males used more Compound hedges in their discussions than females.

The result can be portrayed in the pie chart below:



Graph 3.2. Total percentage of using lexical hedges as lexical verbs

### **I Believe**

(12) F 1: I believe... it make people more isolated.

Female 1 used the lexical verb “I believe” in order to express her opinion about social media. Here the student did not fully commit to the truth condition of the proposition expressed. Thus, “I believe” in this case was used as uncertainty marker.

### **I Think**

(13) M 3: I think homework can help students.

In example (13), the speaker did not mention in what way homework can help the students. Here the student conveyed his personal opinion without evidences. Therefore, “I think” in this situation indicates the lack of evidence.

(14) M 2: I think, since 2010, the educational system lost its trustiness. .

Male 2 in this statement (14), was uncertain about the exact year the educational system in Algeria started to lose its trustiness, so he guessed and approximated that it is the year of 2010. Henceforth, “I think” in this case was a mark of uncertainty and approximation.

(15) M 3: I think our educational system depends more on memorizing. In example (15), the speaker discussed what he noticed about our educational system. He used “I think” as an evaluative marker as well as to express his personal opinion.

(16) M 3: I think it is useless.

The statement (16) was very direct and blunt. The participants here used “I think” to soften the assertion. Thus, “I think” in this case was used as a downtowner to reduce assertiveness and attenuate any unwelcome effect on the hearer.

### **I Guess**

(17) F 3: each one of us, I guess, presented a syllabus.

The speaker in example (17) was not very sure if each one of her classmates presented

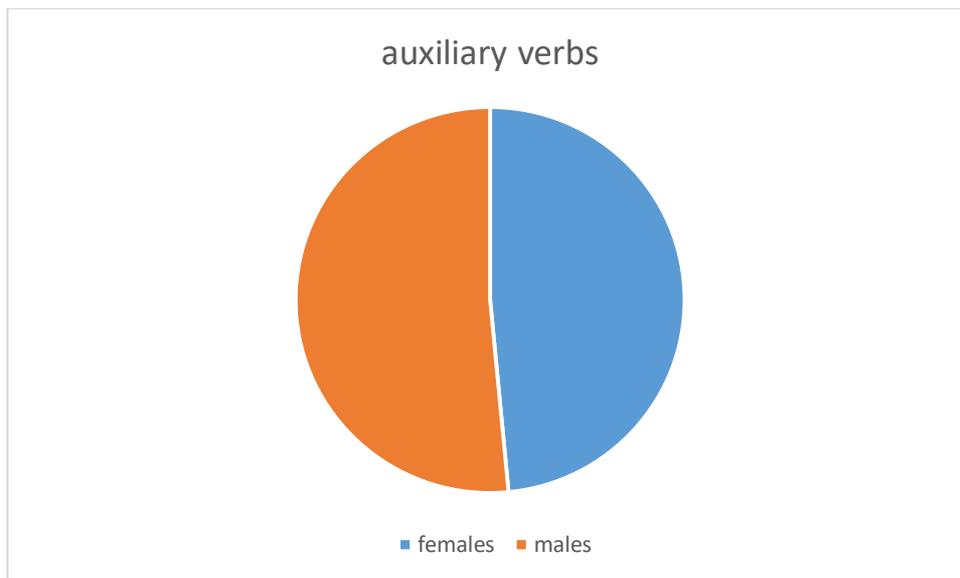
their work or not. She used “I guess” because she had second thoughts about the validity of her statement. Therefore, “I guess” in this case was a marker of doubt.

### 3.7.1.3. In Case of Modal Auxiliary Verbs

**Table 3.6. Data of lexical hedges as modal auxiliary verbs**

<b>Modal Auxiliary</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Can	3	10
Could	1	1
May	3	1
Will	5	1
would	0	2
should	4	2
Total	16	17

Table 3 indicates that Modal Auxiliary Verbs were used by females (n=16) while males used (n=17). Males used the modal auxiliary “can” (10) times, “could”, “may” and “will” once, while “would” and “should” were utilized twice. In the case of females, they used “can” and “may” three times, “could” once, “will” 5 times and “should” four times. The result has been portrayed in the pie chart below:



**Graph 3.3. Total percentage of using lexical hedges as modal auxiliary**

### **Can**

(18) M 2: can we talk about the methods of teaching?

Male 2, as it is shown in example (18), was asking for the permission of the researcher to talk about the teaching methods. “Can” in this case was a mark of politeness.

(19) M 3: homework can improve students’ level.

In this case, the learner talked about the importance of homework and its ability to improve students’ level. He emphasized on the word “can”, which the researcher considered as a mark of ability

(20) M 2: it can make the students more aware.

In example (20), the students talked about how it is possible for homework to rise the students’ awareness. Therefore, “can,” indicated possibility in this case.

### **Could**

(21) M 2: I could save him.

The student here talked about his ability to save one of his friends from doing something wrong. Therefore, the use of “could” in this case introduced ability.

**May**

(22) F 1: you may use it for your advantage only.

(23) M 4: you may use it as a motive.

The use of “May” in the statement (22), introduced possibility. The student talked about the possibility of using social media for good things only. In example (23), “may,” indicated ability. Male 4 discussed peoples’ ability to use others criticism as a motive to do better.

**Will**

(24) F 1: punishments will make them hate the subject more.

Female 1 assumed that punishing the students would make them detest studying. Therefore, the use of “will” in this statement (24) introduced speculation.

(25) F 1: there will be a contact.

The student predicted that in homeschooling, learners would have contacts with their teachers’ to complete their learning. Therefore, “will” in this situation (25), introduced prediction.

**Would**

(26) M 1: I would teach well.

Male1 predicted that in the future when he will become a teacher, he would teach well. Therefore, the term “would” in this case (26) was a mark of prediction and expectation.

**Should**

(27) F 1: we should change the basics.

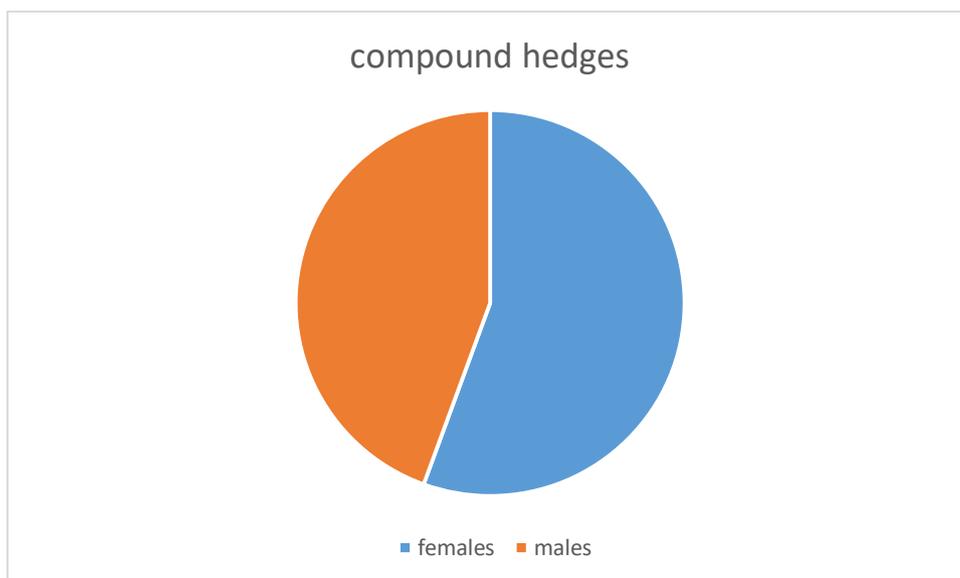
Female1 emphasized on the importance of changing the basics of the Algerian educational system. Therefore, “should” in this case (27) was a mark of necessity.

### 3.7.1.4. In Case of Compound Hedges

**Table 3.7. Data of lexical hedges as compound hedges**

Compound hedges	Females	Males
It can be possible	1	0
Even though	1	0
Even if	2	3
Total	4	3

Table 7 reports male and female groups' scores in using Compound hedges; as it is shown clearly above. The female respondents' tendency used (4) compound hedges in contrast to male group who used (3). Females used "it can be possible" and "even though" once, and "even if" twice, in comparison to males who used "even if" three times. The result has been portrayed in the pie chart below:



**Graph 3.4. Total percentage of using lexical hedges as compound hedges**

**It can be possible**

(28) F 3: it can be possible for educated parents.

Female 3 argued that homeschooling does not necessarily require from little kids to have educated parents, it is possible and can work even if the kid does not have educated parents. “It can be possible” in this statement (28) introduced possibility.

**Even Though**

(29) F 3: even though homework are not that difficult, we do not do them.

Female 3 stated the fact that they do not like doing homework even if they are easy. “Even though”, in this case (29) indicated contrast and stating a fact.

**Even if**

(30) F 4: even if you act like you do not care, but you care.

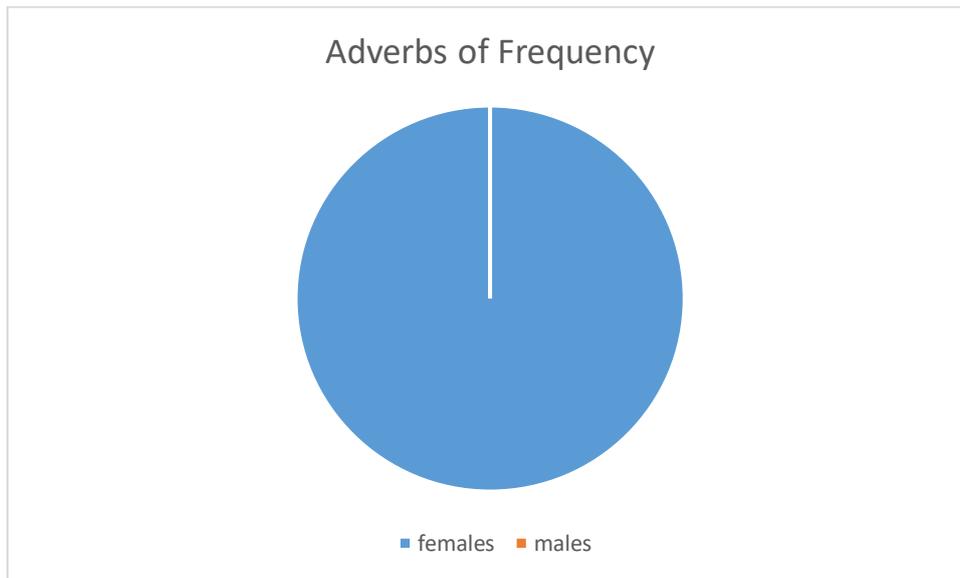
Female 4 supposed that people care about what others say, even if they pretend otherwise. “Even if” in this case introduced hypotheses and supposition.

**3.7.1.5. In Case of Adverbs of Frequency**

**Table 3.8. Data of lexical hedges as adverbs of frequency**

<b>Adverbs of frequency</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Sometimes	8	0
Always	1	0
Total	9	0

In Table 8, the performance of male and female groups is presented in using adverb of frequency as a type of lexical hedges. Both groups were different; the female group used more adverbs of frequency in their discussions (9) than males who used none. In this case, females used “sometimes” eight times and “always” once. The result has been portrayed in the pie chart below:



**Graph 3.5. Total percentage of using lexical hedges as adverbs of frequency**

### **Sometimes**

(31) F 3: sometimes, social media was helpful.

The speaker discussed how social media was helpful for her, however, the use of sometimes indicated how social media was not helpful in other situations. The adverb of frequency “sometimes” made the statement indefinite. Therefore, we conclude that “sometimes” is a mark of indefinite in this case (31).

### **Always**

(32) F 4: people in social media always show their good sides.

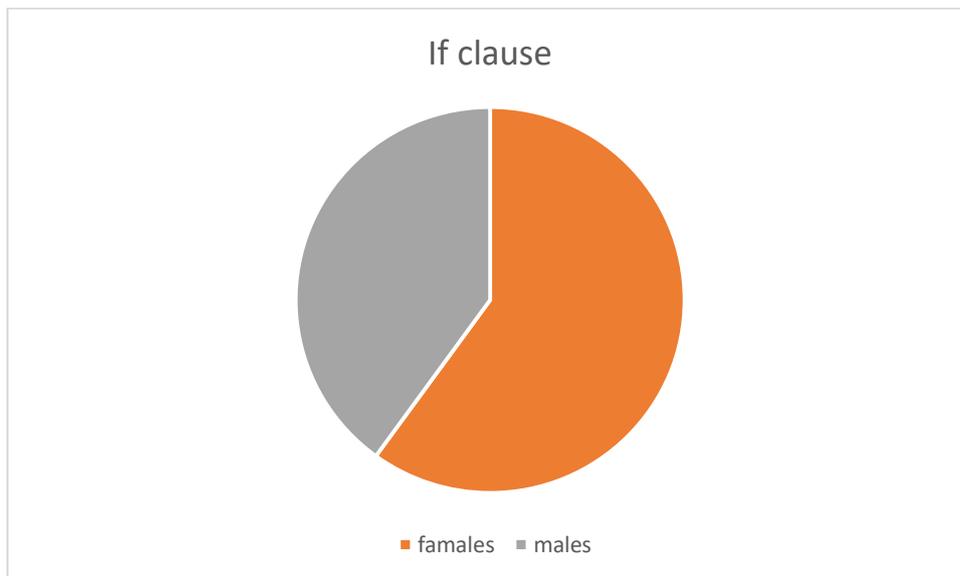
Female 4 in this example (32) argued how people all the time use social media just to show their good sides. This statement is invalid because people may use social media to show their good side frequently, but not constantly. Therefore, “Always” in this case lessened the validity of the utterance.

## 3.7.1.6. In Case of “if” Clause

Table 3.9. Data of lexical hedges as “if” clause

If clause	Females	Males
If clause	3	2
Total	3	2

Table 6 indicates that if clause were used by females (n=3) more than males (n=2). The result has been portrayed in the pie chart below:



Graph 3.6. Total percentage of using lexical hedges as “if” clause

(33) F 3: if the teacher decides to pick the homework, he should ask questions.

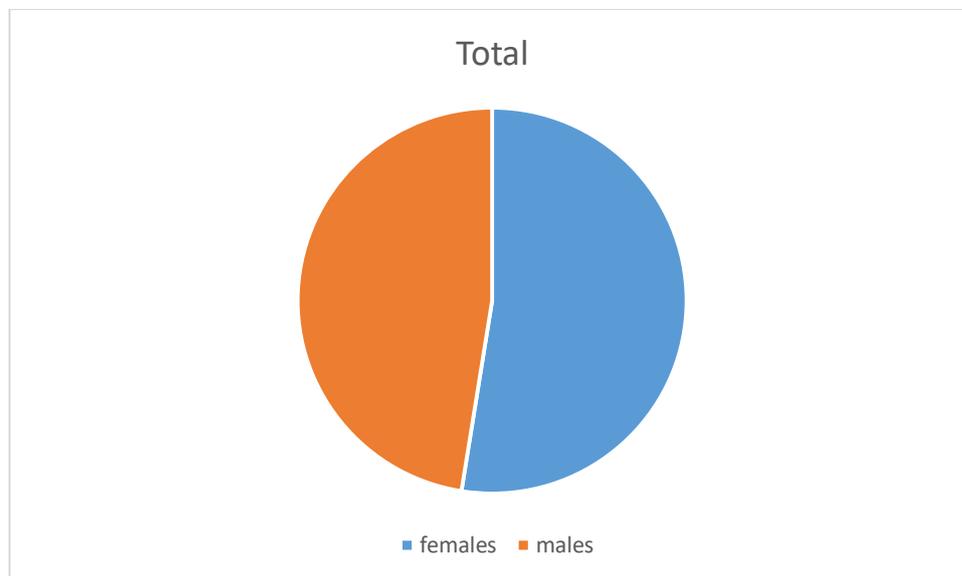
Female 3 discussed that in case the teacher thinks of giving the students homework, it should be under the condition of evaluating their work by asking questions. “If” clause in this situation indicated condition.

### 3.7.1.7. The Total Frequency

**Table 3.10. The total data of lexical hedges**

Lexical hedges	Females	Males
Fillers	16	8
Lexical verbs	4	17
Modal auxiliary	16	17
Compound hedges	4	3
Adverbs of frequency	9	0
If clause	3	2
Total	52	47

The results has been portrayed in the pie chart below:

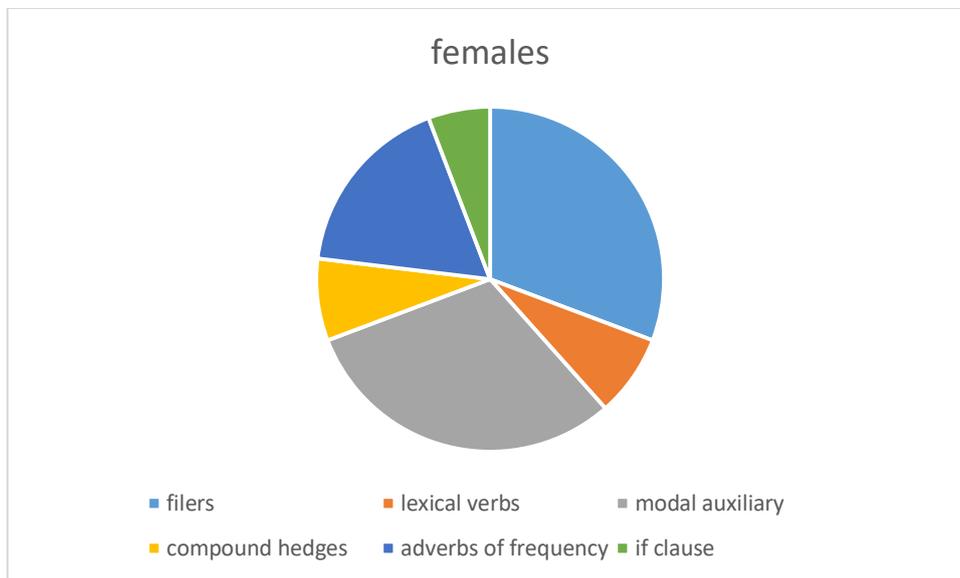


**Graph 3.7. Percentage of the total usage of lexical hedges**

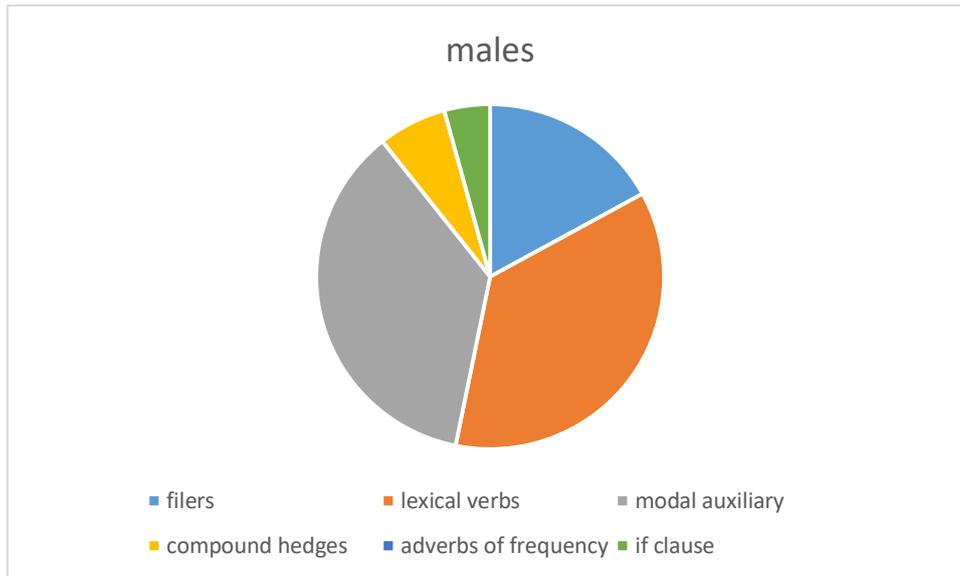
In the table above, we could see the distinctions of male and female respondents' in picking the expressions of lexical hedges. The aggregate of data on the table above, which

demonstrated the score of female students in creating words of lexical hedges, were (52) words. While the aggregate of male learners in using words of lexical hedges were (47) words. Females used fillers and modal auxiliary (16) times, lexical verbs and compound hedges four times, adverbs of frequency nine time, and “if” clause three times. However, males used filers eight times, modal auxiliary and lexical verbs (17) times, compound hedges three times and “if” clause twice. Accordingly, there were slight differences amongst female and male respondents’ propensity in picking the words of lexical hedges. It was revealed by the aggregate of lexical hedges utilized amongst female and male respondents in giving their ideas.

From the information that has been gathered, female respondents tended to pick the words of lexical hedges more than male respondents. However, it was not significant. After the information has been gathered, the researcher place it into graphic which clarified about female and male respondents’ in picking lexical hedges in expressing their views.



**Graph 3.8. Males’ respondents’ tendency in using lexical hedges**



**Graph 3.9. Females' respondents' tendency in using lexical hedges**

### 3.8. Summary of the Findings

The main aim of the present study is to investigate gender differences in the use of lexical hedges among Algerian EFL students. It seeks to find out which gender type uses lexical hedges more than the other and in which conversational situations these learners use lexical hedges. The results of the current study are summarized in the form of answers to the questions of the study as follow:

#### 3.8.1. The Frequency of Using Lexical Hedges

The gathered data demonstrated that female respondents use more lexical hedges than their male counterparts. However, the difference is not significant. It showed that female respondents were slightly more productive and creative in utilizing the words of lexical hedges than male respondents. In such manner, most frequent lexical hedges of adverbs of frequency such as "sometimes" and "always" were used by female respondents in their utterances; while male respondents significantly utilized lexical hedges as lexical verbs like; "I think" and "I guess" in their utterances.

### **3.8.2. Reasons for Using Lexical Hedges**

The data gathered from observing the students' linguistic corpus, indicated that lexical hedges could be used to convey multiple stances depending on the context and the type of lexical hedges. In other words, it can indicate doubt, hesitation, lack of evidence, pausing, responding, contrast, stating a fact, possibility, ability, necessity, clarification, self-repair, uncertainty, concession, nuancing, inconvenience, speculation, prediction, supposition, indefinite and condition.

### **Summary**

This chapter was devoted to the fieldwork of the present study. It has dealt with the research approach of the study, population and sampling, instruments, data collection and data analysis. More importantly, we analyzed and interpreted the gathered. Lastly, we provided a summary to the findings.

## **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

The current study deals with the differences existing in using hedges between males and females. The core of this study is to investigate the frequency and the patterns of using lexical hedges within the conversations of EFL students. The research was saved into two main parts; the theoretical part and the fieldwork. The former includes two chapters, which are devoted to describing the two variables of the study. The third chapter covers the analysis, description and findings from the data gathered from the focus group and observation.

The first chapter has been devoted to the theoretical aspect of gender and language. We presented language-gender historical background, language-gender theories, in addition to the existing differences in their language and its possible explanations. Furthermore, we casted some light on the changes that occurred through time, also the difference between sex and gender, sex role stereotypes and gender bias. Then, we discussed both gender's first and second language acquisition.

The second chapter was dedicated to the use of hedges. First, we introduced the term hedging by providing different dictionary definitions. Then we evaluated the term "hedges" from the point of view of Lakoff (1973-1987), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Prince et al, (1982), and Fraser (1995). Moreover, we tackled current views on hedging and discussed the concept "to hedge" from Itani (1995) point of view. Afterwards we reviewed hedges as a pragmatic phenomenon along with its devices, types and functions. Lastly, we presented some previous related studies.

The research requirements of this study necessitates two research tools; focus group and observation. It was done with eight third year EFL students at Mohamed Khiedar University.

The findings revealed that the female student use hedges more frequently than male students. However, the difference is not significant. It was also found that the EFL students

use lexical hedges when they are in a state of doubt, lack of confidence, uncertainty, etc. therefore, we conclude that the use of lexical hedges can convey multiple things depending on the context.

Based on the interpretation of this study of the current investigation, it is argued that the research aim is practically reached. Consequently, it is proved that the use of lexical hedges among Algerian male and female EFL students is not the same. In addition, they use hedges in different situations such as when expressing indicate doubt, hesitation, lack of evidence, pausing, responding, contrast, stating a fact, possibility, ability, necessity, clarification, self-repair, uncertainty, concession, nuancing, inconvenience, speculation, prediction, supposition, indefinite and condition. We can conclude that the results from the Algerian setting is different from the other settings, which found significant differences in the use of hedges among their EFL speakers.

### **Delimitations of the study**

This study is limited only to eight Algerian EFL students, four females and four males. Thus, its findings cannot be generalized. Moreover, the choice of studying certain types of hedges rather than the others is due to the difficulty of its analysis and interpretation, for instance, many researchers agreed on the fact that shields and approximators are very difficult to be studied.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The researcher of this study suggests these recommendations for further research that is related to the field of social sciences:

- A corpus study about gender and language should be conducted. For instance, analyzing females and males use of language based on a TV show, movie or reality shows.

- Conducting a research work about gender differences in using other language features such as, adjectives, adverbs, tag question, etc.
- Conducting a street survey to investigate the way Algerians use their native language.
- Investigating gender differences in using language in the written form.
- Investigating how much does people know about gender differences in using language.
- Investigating gender use of language with larger population.

With the varied differences in cultures, customs, traditions, beliefs and religions of Algerian, there may be differences in the results of this kind of study from the western setting.

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## المستخلص

قد يكون الكثير من الناس جاهلين بحقيقة أن جنس المتحدثين هو عامل مؤثر لإحداث فرق في اختياراتهم المعجمية. بتعبير أدق، ادعى باحثون سابقون أن النساء والرجال يستخدمون التحولات المعجمية بشكل مختلف. في الجزائر، من المدهش أنه لم يتم إجراء العديد من الدراسات في هذا المجال من الدراسات البحثية. وبالتالي، هناك حاجة لمتابعة هذا البحث في السياق الجزائري. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في الفروق بين الجنسين في استخدام التحولات المعجمية بين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر. علاوة على ذلك، فإنه يسعى لفحص متى يستخدمون هذه التحولات المعجمية. اعتماداً على طبيعة هذا البحث، تم اعتماد منهج بحثي مختلط. فيما يتعلق بهذا النهج، تم اختيار أداتين لجمع البيانات لهذا التحقيق. أولاً، أجرينا مجموعة تركيز مع ثمانية من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السنة الثالثة في جامعة محمد خيضر، أربعة اناث وأربعة ذكور. علاوة على ذلك، تم إجراء ملاحظة على إجابات الطلاب. بعد تحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها من مجموعة التركيز والملاحظة، تم الوصول إلى أهدافنا البحثية. وجدنا أن استخدام الاناث والذكور للتحولات المعجمية لم يكن متماثلاً. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، استخدموا التحولات للتعبير عن أشياء مختلفة مثل الشك، وانعدام الثقة، والاحتمال، وما إلى ذلك. وإدراكاً لهذا التفاوت بين كلام النساء والرجال والاختلافات في خطابهم، هناك حاجة لمتابعة بحث في هذا المجال من أجل تعلم المزيد عنها بعمق على أساس الإعداد الجزائري