HEDGES USED IN SCIENTIFIC EFL WRITINGS

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Abstract

This small research aims to see how the use of hedges is used in academic EFL writing made by Indonesian academicians. It was conducted based on the experience that for non-native English speaker like Indonesian, writing is the tough work to do. L2 learners sometimes find difficulty to write for academic purposes or make claims. One of the strategies that L2 learners do is by using hedging devices. The problem of this research is how effective hedges are used to present findings cautiously with leaving room for readers to have their own interpretation. According to Levinson (1987) with his theory of FTA (Face Treathening Act), those words mostly function as a tool for speakers or writers to make them comfortable and save negative face. It means that the writers should choose the correct words to achieve the communicative goal. The data is taken from 10 dissertations written in English. The method used is Decriptive-Qualitative analysis. The study focuses on 2 kinds of hedging strategies proposed by Hyland (1996). They are writer-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. The first strategy consists of (1) passive voice, (2) dummy subjects, and (3) abstract rhetors. The latter consists of (1) personal attribution and (2) conditionals. The results reveal that writer-oriented hedges are the most frequent hedging device utilized by Indonesian researchers, such as: passive construction and dummy subjects. The findings reveal that the use of passive constructions and modality (can, may, might, should) are highly desireable by Indonesian researchers. It means that Indonesians like to let the data talk by themselves in order to avoid a potential conflict and hence to maintain the harmony between writers and readers.

Keywords: Hedging devices, negative politeness, writing strategy

I   INTRODUCTION

It is known that writing in foreign language for most Indonesian people is difficult. As EFL learners, this will be a very tough job, especially when they have to write academic text or writing. As members of a particular discourse community or researchers or writers, they wish to publish their works or findings in international journal. To reach this goal, the use of hedges will be important. Hedges can be used to conform to this academic writing (Banks, 1996).

It was Weinrich (1966) who was first introduced the word "hedge". He called these devices as "metalinguistic operators". Few years later, Lakoff (1972) in his article entitled *Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts* made this concept more popular and had the greatest initial impact. Lakoff defined this concept as "words whose function is to make meanings fuzzier or less fuzzy". He said that "sort of" as an example of hedge. The following year, Fraser (1975) introduced the hedged performative. He discussed hedged performative is based on the use of modality, such as: *will*, *can*, *must* or semimodality like *want to*, *would like to*, and *wish to*.

Hedges are pragmatic features that the speakers or writers use to seek the assertions that they make, toning down uncertain or potentially risky claims, emphasizing what they believe to be correct and conveying appropriately collegial attitudes to listeners (Hyland, 1996). Myers also (1989) says that hedges can be used to mitigate propositions. Hedges will help to reach "the optimal relevance" (Sperber and Wilson, 2001) between speaker and listener or writer and reader. The writer should make some choices in strategy and linguistic forms in order to adapt with his or her intention. Hedges are often chosen to achieve the goal. According to Brown and Levinson, the definition of hedges is particles that are used to mitigate propoisition become weak. Indonesian people are well known as friendly people and have low-profile characters. Most of them can easily make friends with others, both local and foreign people. They show intimacy and warmth to the sorrounding (Maryanto, 1998).

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987) states an FTA is a violation of the speakers' or writers' privacy and freedom of action, for which hedges provide a possible compensation. Hence the negative politeness enables the speaker or writer to go on-record, but with the redress which means that the speaker or writer makes an effort to minimize the imposition of his/her claims.

Hedges may also influence when writers write the text, especially the academic texts. This argument is supported by Hyland (1996) who states that academic texts are full of hedges. Hedges (particles, lexical, and clausal hedges) are pragmatic markers that attenuate or weaken claims. Academic Texts or scientific texts are not only content-oriented and informative but also seek to convince and influence their audience. An increasing number of research studies on a variety of disciplines (for

example: Hyland, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000; Salager-Meyer, 1991, 1994, 1998; Skelton. 1997; Meyer, 1997). Furthermore, Myers (1998) examined corpus of biology research articles.

In scientific writing, vagueness can be seen as motivating factor for the use of hedges. In case of exact data is missing or if precise information is irrelevant in prelimenary results. Hedges will protect writers from false statements by indicating either lack of commitment of to the truth value of propositions or a desire not to express that commitment categorally. In contrast, Salager-Meyer (1994, 151) says that hedges are "ways of being more precise in reporting results". She adds that by doing this way the credibility of a statement may be increased.

Along with the argument of being vague, Joanna Channel (1994) states that the language system permits speakers to produce utterances without having decided whether certain facts are "excluded or allowed by" them. Hedges, however, are sometimes required to capture the probabilistic nature of reality and the limits of statements (Toulmin, 2013). In fact, the use of hedges is typical of professional writing to make absolute statements more accurate (Hyland, 1998). Moreover hedges play critical role in academics' presentations of their own work (Hyland, 1998).

Hedging is an important interactional strategy which is used in communication. This strategy can make the communication go smoothly. Therefore, to become an effective communicator, speaker should be able know how and when using hedging devices in different process of communication. Hedging devices here mean that verbal propositions which are employed by participants of communication (both speaker and hearer) to prevent the conflict, to stay away from being blunt, weaken or strengthen the illocutionary force and protect the face (Brown and Levinson 1987; Stenstorm 1994, Salager-Meyer 1994).

Leech (1983) proposes the six maxims of Politeness Principle (PP). Those are tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. The tact maxim regulates the operation of the directive speech acts and addresses the dominant type of politeness which can be measured on the cost-benefit scale, the more costly an action, the less polite it is. Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that in any social interaction, participants devote much of their time to face-work. They argue that "face" is something which concerns human beings universally and it is divided into negative face and positive face. The first one deals with negative politeness strategy which gives the freedom of individual action and a desire to be unimpeded. Another words, it is called strategies of independence or *deference politeness strategy*. Meanwhile the positive face deals with positive politeness strategy which attempt to save hearer's face. This strategy is also called strategy of involvement or *solidarity politeness strategy*. Look at this example: *I really **sort of** think/hope/wonder....* (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 116).

Being polite means to be considerate conversational partner. In terms of negative politeness, being polite means to choose the right words to express communicative message which might be felt as face-threatening for the addressee such as refusal, criticism or claim in order to prevent conflicts. In written communication, researchers present their own findings or claims by using pragmatics markers. Those markers are called hedges. Hedging devices are the critical tool to prevent potential arguments and save FTA. Look at the example: *close the window if you can* (Brown and Levinson, 1987:162). So by using "if", this sentence of command can be weakened or hedged.

II   MATERIALS AND METHODS

Hedging devices are mostly used to mitigate propositions or claims. As Hyland (1996) states in his article *Nurturing Hedges in the ESP Curriculum*: "Hedges therefore have an important role in a form of discourse characterised by uncertainty and frequent reinterpretation of how natural phenomena is understood" (Hyland, 1996:478). Furthermore he adds that academic discourse involves interpretative statements because cognition is variably hedged, writers offering an assessment of the referential they provide. Rather than being factual and impersonal in order to alert readers to writers' opinion.

In addition to it, hedges are used to prevent the conflicts in order to avoid the humiliation of both speakers and hearer or writers and readers. In the context of academic writing, authors tend to mitigate the force of their scientific claims by means of hedging devices in order to reduce the risk of opposition and minimise the face threatening acts (FTA) that are involved in making claims. This argument goes along with Hyland who says that one of the functions of using hedges is to allow writers to anticipate possible negative consequences of being wrong (Hyland, 1996:479). Academics seek agreement for the strongest claims they can for their evidence, as this is how they gain their academic credibility, but they also need to cover themselves againts the embarrassment of categorical commitment to statements that later may be shown to be inaccurate. Hedges also help writers to develop and maintain relationship with the reader, addressing affective expectations in gaining acceptance for claims. Altough academic

writings try to persuade and convince the readers, they can be rejected. So the writers should use the strategy of preventing it by utilizing the hedges.

Following the Hyland's theories about hedges seen from the relationship between writers and readers, I made investigations on *Writer-oriented Hedges* and *Reader-oriented Hedges*. I am interested in investigating the relationship between writers and readers because this is not much explored by researchers, especially hedges made by L2 learners in academic writings. The *Writer-oriented hedges* is a kind of strategy which facilitates the communicative strategy in which a writer can get his readers to see the real world on his side. The writers persuade readers to accept his/her claims by seeing the evidence through three subcategories: (1) Passive Voice. (2) Abstract rhetors, and (3) dummy subjects (Hyland, 1996). Meanwhile *Reader-oriented Hedges* try to involve the readers on writers' claims to minimize the uncertainty from the readers which might happen. The subcategories belong to this are (1) Personal Attribution and (2) Conditionals.

The corpora for this data were taken from 5 dissertations written in English and made by Indonesian student writers who were studying at Faculty of English Applied Science in one of prominent private universities in Indonesia.

The research methodology used is the descriptive qualitative. I employ this method because my intention was to obtain insights as to the strategies utilized by post graduate student writers of English Applied Linguistics. I studied a relatively small number of dissertations. This is in accordance with the main characteristics and spirit of the qualitative approach which says that what stands out in a qualitative study is the depth and breadth of the analysis, not the number of the subjects studied. A qualitative study has nothing to do with statistical significance; rather it seeks to pursue a profound understanding on a particular phenomenon by utilizing all resources, data, observation and even subjective interpretation.

2.1   CORPUS SELECTION

In this study, I chose the Discussion Section to be analyzed for two reasons:

a)   This section contains writers' claims of their researches;
b)   This section is most important and crucial part of their dissertations.

2.2   TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

In collecting data, I listed all proposotions found in the Discussion Sections which contain hedges. Then investigating those hedges and put them according to the subcategories being determined. This section includes the contexts, the graphs, the tables and the interpretations of the results.

This study used both theoretical and empirical perspectives to make sense of what happened, as well as, the context that caused it to happen. After that I interpreted the data gained to seek answers for research questions.

The steps that were undertaken were:

a)   Hedges were identified by words, phrases and clauses based on the indicators provided by Hyland (1998). Those were found in Result and Discussion Section in every dissertation;
b)   They were classified into the subcategory being determined;
c)   Those hedged units were put in the tables to show how they are distributed in percentages. By calculating their frequency of hedges, it would be easy to look at the tendencies of the strategy of hedges;
d)   Finally I interpreted the data in relation to the strategy being used.

III   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For this study, I investigated the section of Results and Discussions in 5 (five) English dissertations made by student writers who were studying in the Faculty of English Applied Linguistics. I chose the names randomly but I preferred to pick them based on the year when these dissertations were made which ranged from 2011-2013. The names are kept in initials in order to make them unreveal from the public. The data is as follows:

Table 1. Topic Selections

No	Writers (Initials)	Titles of Dissertations	Page numbers of Result & Discussion Section	Numbers of hedged units in Result & Discussion Section
1	CH	The Production and Recognition of English Word Stress: An Auditory Word Priming Study	124	137
2	YY	Verbal Communication of Emotions: A case Study of Obama-McCain Presidential Debates	122	142
3	IID	EFL Learners' Metaphor Competence English Proficiency, English Exposure and Learning Style	89	101
4	HT	English Collocational Mismatches in Second Language Writing	178	191
5	SS	The Construction of Self in Academic Writing: A Qualitative Case Study of Three Indonesian Undergraduate Student Writers	84	114

I was interested in investigating the Result and Discussion Section because this section is important part of the dissertation because this is the part where the student writers made their claims as the results of their researches. When making claims, student writers try to persuade readers who come from their academic community. In scientific writing, hedges are effective and propositional functions work in rhetorical partnership to persuade readers to accept knowledge claims (Myers, 1985).

3.1 RESULT

Table 2. Realisation of Hedges

No.	Initial	Writer Oriented	Reader Oriented	Others
1	CH	PV : 33.23 % DS : 12.34% AR : 24.21%	PA : 8.54% C : 2.35%	Others: 19.33%
2	YY	PV : 38.68% DS : 19.54% AR : 12.30%	PA : 10.37% C : 1.56%	Others: 17.55%
3	IID	PV : 36.25% DS : 18.64% AR : 14.45%	PA : 6.35% C : 1.75%	Others: 22.56%

4	HT	PV : 40.25%	PA : 4.92%	Others:
		DS : 16.56%	C : 1.55%	14.4%
		AR : 21.32%		
5	SS	PV : 28.35%	PA : 17.65%	Others:
		DS : 19.68%	C : 2.24%	16.54%
		AR :15.54%		

Notes:

- PV   : Passive Voice

- DS   : Dummy Subjects

- AR   : Abstract Rhetors

- PA   : Personal Attribution

- C   : Conditionals

3.2   ANALYSIS

3.2.1 WRITER-ORIENTED HEDGES

From the results gained, it can be seen that the student writers often use passive constructions (PV). This is because they prevent of being blamed of making errors in presenting their claims (Brown and Levinson, 1987:194). Look at the sentences below:

1) Verbal communication *can be expressed* literally (YY, p.51)
2) The results *are summarized* in the following table (CH, p. 135)
3) Metaphors *were produced* most bylow English proficiency (IID, p.103)

From the examples above, the absence of agency (Hyland, 1996b, 444) is the central to the charateristics of *Writer-oriented Hedges*. Those sentences (1, 2, and 3) are the first subcategory of this strategy. In connection with agency, as an agent in the process of producing a piece of scientific knowledge, a scientific writer is seeking to place discoveries in wider community.

Meanwhile the second subcategory of this strategy is dummy subject (DS). For grammarian, like Quirk et al (1985), dummy subjects are considered to be expletive. This means that "it" in English is regarded as "empty" subject. Look at the sentences below:

4) *It* seemed that learners from the high English proficiency were more serious (IID, p.162)
5) *it* can be seen that their vision and mission were presented in series of words (HT, p. 112)

"it" used as dummy subject and it is the most neutral of the pronouns and it is thought to be an "impersonal subject". Dummy subject 'it' can be used with other reporting verbs like "seem" like the example in no 4 (Sinclair, 1990:331).

The last subcategory in this strategy is abstract rhetors (AR). Scientific writing can perhaps be used to challenge the theory of classical rhetoric.Within classical rhetoric; humans are recognised as the only actors that can speak (Myers, 1996:22). The term 'rhetor' can simply defined as an orator and therefore has been understood as a practitioner of the art of using language skillfully for persuasion. However, scientific writings can now be used to imagine a rhetorical situation in which everything is a possible rhetor, including non-humans, such as: a piece of a research. Look at these sentences below:

6) *The table* above shows that words with final stress produced much less correct *(CH, p.154)*
7) *The results* showed that an average learners knew 71% of the relationship (IID, p. 104)

Usually humans are subjects of the various verbs of saying. But, in scientific writings humans are not always the subjects of the actions that people are talking about. The data that the researchers found can be said to be stating an argument. These can be regarded as an explanation.

3.2.2 READER-ORIENTED HEDGES

The second strategy is Reader-oriented Hedges which tries to involve the readers in his/her claims. These hedges will help a scientific writer make sure that their research is reliable. Personal Attributions (PA) are the substrategy that a writer uses not only to convey information but also professional attitude about the reader and his/her negotiation of knowledge claims (Hyland, 1996b:446). Personal perspective can be attributed to scientific claims. Look at the following sentences:

8) *We* can infer that the students will get benefit more from repetition *(CH, p. 143)*.
9) *Our* interaction partner expects that we will feel this way (YY, 142).

The second subcategory of this strategy is conditional (C). Alternative opinions such as condtionals are commonly used as personal views. Alternative conditionals are widely discussed by the grammarian Quirk et al (1985) who argues that they may be used for open or hypothetical conditions. In one hand, open condtionals are neutral; they leave unresolved the question of nonfulfillment of the condition. On the other hand, a hypothetical condition conveys the writer's belief that the condition will not be fulfilled and hence the probable or certain falsity of the proposition. Look at the claims below:

10) *If we* understand the words' meaning, we can see the speaker's feeling (YY, p.151).
11) The result shows that *if* 20 items were used, then realibility of the instrument would   be low (IID, p. 87).

IV   CONCLUSION

Hedging devices are often utilized by Indonesian student writers because these help them conceptualise the claims that they are going to convey. Moreover, these devices will assist the student writer to communicate with the readers and their academic community, because the claims will be accepted by the readers if the writers successfully communicate it with the readers. It can be said that hedges are communicative tools to negotiate with the potential readers. A claim can be presented by using PV, DS and AR in which these belong to writer-oriented hedges. Meanwhile reader-oriented hedges give the maximum degree of visibility of the writer. The writer tries to develop the relationship with his/her reader. Reader-oriented hedges make the content of the claim more tentative. In conclusion, the use of Writer-oriented hedges is more preferable because the empirical evidence is able to explain and describe what the findings of the research are. So the student writers do not need to say much about it.

 The findings of the study have important implications to the study of academic writing as one of the compulsory courses taught in Indonesian universities where English subject is still paid small intention. In universities, English subject is only minor subject in non-English Department. It has been indicated that writers' awareness of the use of hedging writing is essential because the ability to use hedging devices appropriately helps writers craft their statements to produce credible, rational, and convincing claims.

Hedging is also important to maintain the writers' academic credibility. Furthermore hedging will help writers protect their reputation as scholars and minimize the damage which may arise. In science, writers may hedge because of small samples, preliminary results, uncertain evidence or imperfect measuring techniques (Hyland, 1996:479).

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