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The Pragmatic Development of Hedging in EFL Learners

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余盛明 著

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前　言

传统的语际语用学通常囿于言语行为和话语的跨文化对比研究，而本书则专注于缓冲语的语际发展研究，其创新有二。第一，它超越了语际言语行为和话语本身的研究，而是深入到对言语行为和话语之修饰手段的研究(缓冲语就是这种修饰手段之一)；第二，它不再是简单的对比研究，而是缓冲语的习得和发展研究，可以说是从二语习得的外围研究深入到习得的本体研究。其研究意义无需赘述，其研究方法也是开创性的。

211 名中国大陆的初中、高中和大学生参与了本研究，其语料通过笔头回答开放性问卷、口头面对面采访、组织全班进行辩论等方式进行采集。语料分析的结果显示，他们的语际缓冲语的主要类别为量化近似语、施为防护语、情态防护语、语用标记模糊语以及其他语法层面和语篇层面的缓冲语策略。研究还表明，以上各类缓冲语不仅有其自身的发展方式，而且共同构成一个有序的发展势态。随着他们语际语用能力的提高，不仅他们的缓冲语语用能力得到了发展，他们的缓冲语语用社会意识也得到了发展。

但缓冲语的这一切发展又呈现出语际语的阶段性发展特点，与目标语相比既有自身的发展规律与特征，又明显地反映了发展的不充分性。

Abstract

This cross-sectional study distances itself a bit away from the traditional crosscultural and contrastive interlanguage pragmatics, to go beyond interlanguage speech acts and discourse to investigate EFL learners' pragmatic development in hedging, an ability in mitigating speech acts or discourse. 211 Chinese Mainland students at junior-high, senior-high, and university levels participated in the study, and the data were collected with open written questionnaires, oral interviews, and organized oral debates.

Results show that the major hedging categories elicited from the EFL learners are quantificational approximators, performative shields, modal shields, pragmatic-marker hedges, and other syntactic and discoursal hedging strategies. While each category develops in its own way, these categories have shown a sequential developmental pattern, roughly simplified as a route starting from performative *I think*, to modal shields, to quantificational approximators, to other performative shields, to pragmatic-marker hedges, and finally arriving at hedge clusters. Their sociopragmatic hedging awareness also develops along with their pragmalinguistic hedging devices: in the early stage the learners tend to emphasize rather than mitigate their speech acts or discourse, which gradually gives way to an incongruent combination of intensifiers and mitigators, showing an increased hedging awareness but incompetent hedging system. It is at the university level that the learners develop both a high awareness of hedging and a congruent and harmonic hedging system. Therefore, the hedging effect increases over the stages, but even at the higher stage, the hedging effect is merely medium ranged.

In spite of the developments, the EFL learners habitually fall back on *I think* and a few top hedges (e.g., *maybe*), regardless of their proficiencies. This has been characterized as one of the most

distinctive features for the EFL hedges, and is perhaps the way EFL learners use hedges. However, their dependency on *I think* decreases as their English proficiency increases, suggesting that other hedges are gaining chances to develop.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study is a cross-sectional research on the pragmatic development of hedging with Chinese-speaking EFL learners. Its theoretical framework relies on two areas of study as its resources: the area of interlanguage pragmatic development and the area of hedging studies. The following is an account of the background in the two areas.

1.1 Interlanguage Pragmatic Development

Whereas interlanguage studies during the 1970s were typically concerned with learners' phonological, morphological, and syntactic knowledge, the adaptation of Hymes's (1972) notion of communicative competence to second language learning and teaching (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980) called for an extension of the scope of interlanguage research to include learners' pragmatic and discourse knowledge. This area is referred to as *interlanguage pragmatics* (ILP). Interlanguage pragmatics is a relatively young but rapidly growing research field. Due to its interdisciplinary nature and the lack of unity of the many studies which are placed under this heading, it has proved highly problematic to delimit and describe the characteristics and aims of ILP theory. Indeed, it has been constrained and inspired by both second language acquisition (SLA) and general pragmatics so that it becomes such a complex field that takes into account the full complexity of cognitive, social, and cultural functioning of any interlanguage.

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