学术语篇中模糊限制语的篇章建构功能研究

A Discourse Construction Approach to Hedging in Academic Writing

葛天爽 著

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Preface

The traditional view considers academic written work as a channel to transmit information in an objective and impersonal manner without any involvement of the writer's personal opinions. Indeed, academic writing is better regarded as socially constructed 'rhetorical artifacts'. Thus, in order to avoid the appearance of over-rigid categorization in putting forth information, authors of academic papers often engage in process of negotiation or persuasion. Hedging has been considered as a salient characteristic of academic writing.

The use of hedging devices (HDs) in academic writing has recently received a lot of attention. As hedging is a prominent feature in English academic discourse, non-native speakers of English (NNS) who wish to gain academic recognition must develop proficiency in an appropriate use of hedging in their academic English writing. However, presenting information with an appropriate degree of certainty or hesitation presents a challenge for English language learners. In many studies it has been found that NNS writers do not adequately understand or do not recognize what the norms of academic writing in English.

Given this broad context, this book focuses on Chinese university level students' use of hedging in their academic written work in English. There are two central aims in this book. One aim is to investigate how Chinese students' choices of HDs are different in terms of patterns and rhetorical functions, from those of native speakers of English (NS) students. A comparison of learner corpus with native speaker corpus provides data on the

properties of interlanguage, covering lexico-grammatical patterns which are typically overused or underused, in addition to those which are misused by language learners (Barlow 2005:342). A corpus linguistic① approach in the first phase is considered as a lexical approach to the description of HDs, which focuses on co-occurrence patterns of HDs in texts.

Another aim of this current study is to examine the patterns of HDs in rhetorical structures. This provides a useful starting point for the corpus approach to genre-level discourse analysis of lexical patterns of HDs. Previous corpus studies of HDs have focused on the quantitative distribution of lexical and grammatical features, generally disregarding the language used in higher-level discourse structure and discourse organisation. The genre-level discourse analysis starts with the macrostructure of a text with a focus on larger units of text rather than only focus on lexico-grammatical patterning. However, most qualitative discourse analysis has focused on the analysis of discourse patterns in a few texts, but they have not provided tools for empirical analysis that can be applied on a large scale across a number of texts. The advantages of a corpus approach to discourse analysis for the study of HDs lie in the representativeness of a large amount of authentic text samples, and the computational tools for investigating distributional patterns across discourse contexts.

This book is structured into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research context in which the present book is set.

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① Corpus linguistics is not just a branch of linguistics, nor a linguistic theory, but a methodology of 'doing' linguistics (e.g. Leech 1992; Biber *et al.* 1998: 3-4; McEnery & Wilson 2001; Meyer 2002). However, it has been argued, corpus linguistics is more than just a methodology (Leech 1991).

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After a brief overview of the general notion of hedging, its background and development, it introduces the main models and approaches that form the interpretive framework of this research. The methodological approach applied in this research draws on corpus linguistic and genre-based research. Therefore, Chapter 2 focuses on corpus linguistics and genre analysis. With the corpus approach, this book focuses on lexical and grammatical features of HDs. With genre analysis approach (move analysis in the current study), a text structure view of HDs is taken. The research questions guiding the present research are listed in Chapter 3, which introduces the methodology of the study. The HDs analysed in detail are initially selected on the basis of frequency comparison between the NS and NNS corpora. Ten HDs are selected for detailed analysis: *would*, *may*, *should*, *suggest*, *seem*, *most*, *possible*, *perhaps*, *always* and *usually*. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are a direct consequence of the selection of HDs on the basis of frequencies. These three chapters present the results of corpus analysis and move analysis, dividing the HDs into three main groups: 'modal verb HDs', 'lexical verb HDs' and 'adjective and adverb HDs'. Each of these three chapters has a structure where the first half deals with the patterns of HDs in the context of the concordance lines, and the second half looks at HDs in the rhetorical structure. In Chapters 4 to 6, analysis of concordance lines of the ten selected HDs reveal the linguistic patterns of HDs and the relationships between the particular patterns of HDs and their functions in local textual context. Corpus-based genre-level discourse analysis in the second half of these three chapters illustrates how textual features, patterns of HDs and functions of HDs are linked. Chapter 7 brings the results of the three groups

of HDs together, and discusses the relationships among patterns, functions and rhetorical structures. Moreover, how students from both the NS and the NNS groups manipulate their attitudes to the truth of statements and reflect the different rhetorical purposes of the academic writing through the use of HDs is discussed in this chapter. Finally, the main conclusions of the study are drawn in Chapter 8, outlining the contribution of the present research to the corpus theoretical approach to the study of HDs, to a corpus-based approach to genre analysis, and to a contrastive study of learner corpora.

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Chapter 1

The Attention Hedging Has Been Getting

Introduction

For the study of hedging devices (HDs) in English academic writing of Chinese undergraduate students, this chapter provides both a review of relevant literature on HDs and a theoretical framework for the study. Section 1.1 traces in literature how the concept of hedging has developed over time. Such a historical overview reveals the core concept of hedging, its basic properties and characteristics. Then, in Section 1.2, some important and up-to-date studies of HDs in discourse of academic writing are reviewed, which indicate the direction of the current study. This is followed by Section 1.3, which outlines the grammatical forms and functions of HDs. A theoretical framework of HDs in academic discourse is then established for the present study by collecting information on the grammatical form of HDs and evaluating the various functions of HDs in the context of academic discourse.

1.1 Development of the concept of hedging

The development and enlargement of the concept of hedging can be divided into three stages. The first stage has a mainly linguistic

focus, in which hedge is considered as a modifier of words or phrases within a proposition, chiefly in respect of propositional content (Lakoff 1972; Brown & Levinson 1987). The second stage is mainly linguistic and pragmatic, in which hedge is seen to modify the truth-value of the whole proposition and the speaker or writer's commitment or attitude to the propositional content. In this account the focus is on the speaker-content relationship (Fraser 1975; Vande Kopple 1985). The third stage is mainly pragmatic and social, in which hedge is seen to modify the relationship between interlocutors or wider social relationships, with the focus being on interpersonal and social relationships (Markkanen & Schroder 1989, 1992).

The notion of 'hedge' and its use as a linguistic term date from a 1972 article by Lakoff entitled 'A study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts' (Hyland 1996b; Meyer 1997). Lakoff was not interested in the communicative value of the use of HDs but instead was mainly concerned with the logical implications of sending statements that were more or less vague in nature; therefore, his definition of HDs is purely semantic. Therefore, according to Lakoff, words or phrases like 'sort of', 'rather' and 'largely' can be regarded as HDs because they have the ability to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy.

Since the publication of Lakoff's (1972) original paper, the concept of HDs has been extended as HDs have been examined using other approaches such as Speech Acts Theory (Brown & Levinson 1987), the study of oral discourse (Holmes 1982; Hosman 1989), and, particularly, pragmatic analysis and the study of academic discourse (Butler 1990; Markkanen & Schroder 1997). Various definitions of hedging have been proposed by researchers. Zuck and Zuck (1986: 172), for instance, define HDs as 'the process whereby the author reduces the strength of what he is writing' in case the results of research turn out not to be true. In their definition, the

interpersonal aspect of hedging has been emphasized, which extends the original concept of hedging in language to a pragmatic use in communicative situations. Brown and Levinson (1987: 145), define HDs as 'a word, particle or phrase' modifying another linguistic unit (such as a predicate or noun), category membership or an element of an utterance, to make the modified part more vague (in terms of face value) or more precise (in terms of the speaker's own opinion). In this sense, hedging can be interpreted as a sign of politeness strategy to build up writer-reader relationship by supporting the writer's position and opinion. In other words, hedging aims at mitigating a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson 1987). Writers leave room for opinions of readers as well as to him/herself against potential criticism in case of being proven wrong.

In later work, HDs have been treated as realizations of an interactional or communicative strategy called hedging, which takes the hedge concept far from Lakoff's original concept. Thus, Markkanen and Schroder (1989, 1992), who discuss the role of HDs in academic texts, see them as modifiers of the writer's responsibility for the truth value of the propositions expressed or as modifiers of the weightiness of the information given, or the attitude of the writer to the information. According to Markkanen and Schroder (1992), HDs can even be used to hide the writer's attitude. Markkanen and Schroder (1992) also suggest that HDs offer a possibility for textual manipulation in the sense that the reader is left in the dark as to who is responsible for the truth value of what is being expressed.

Thus, the following devices can all be regarded as HDs in academic writing: the use of modal verbs, adverbs and particles, the use of certain pronouns and avoidance of others, the use of impersonal expressions, and the use of the passive and other forms of agentless construction, even the use of certain rhetorical and stylistic devices

can be regarded as HDs.

Starting from a functional view of HDs, the role that might be performed by HDs in interpersonal and social relationships have been considered and debated by researchers. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), hedging can be used as a strategy to maintain social relationships and preserve face of communicators. Based on the discussion of Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) work, Myers (1989) argues that the use of HDs can be seen as a politeness strategy in both a positive way and a negative way. The interpersonal politeness strategy can help to build up the writer-reader relationship by supporting the writer's position. Hyland's (1998a) view of hedging was not limited to the politeness interpersonal strategy, but extended to consideration of the whole academic community. He states that HDs are 'the means by which writers can present a proposition as an opinion rather than a fact: items are only HDs in their epistemic① sense, and only when they mark uncertainty' (Hyland 1998a: 5). Hyland (1998a) argues that by using HDs in academic texts, besides showing the extent of the accuracy of writers' statements, writers also attempt to invite readers to evaluate the truth value of the proposition as individuals in order to establish an academic community (see also Hyland 1996a, 1996b).

1.2 Academic writing and hedging

The following literature review pays attention to the use of HDs in academic writing, where HDs are often examined within a corpus. This research begins with a description of characteristics of academic

① Epistemic modality, according to Coates (1983: 18), is concerned with 'the speaker's and writer's assumptions or assessment of possibilities, and in most cases, it indicates confidence in the truth of proposition expressed'.

text in which HDs are examined in the present study. Then, a literature review of previous empirical studies of HDs is presented in Sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3. Section 1.2.2 focuses on studies which examined and compared the forms and functions of hedging across different rhetorical sections of academic texts. How L2 learners use HDs in English and the problems they encounter are discussed in Section 1.2.3.

1.2.1 The social nature of knowledge and academic writing

The majority of hedge studies are found to be concerned with academic writing, in areas such as economics (Pindi & Bloor 1986; Channell 1994), abstracts (Rounds 1982), medical papers (Salager-Meyer 1991, 1994), molecular genetics (Myers 1989), and news (Zuck & Zuck 1986, 1987). According to Hyland (1998a: 6), hedging is an 'essential element of academic argument', which other researchers have also found to be the case (Myers 1989; Hyland 1996a; Hinkel 1997) and help structure the research paper. As Hyland notes,

> In science, HDs play a critical role in gaining ratification for claims from a powerful peer group by allowing writers to present statements with appropriate accuracy, caution, and humility. HDs help negotiate the perspective from which conclusions can be accepted (Hyland 1996a: 434).

That is to say, the use of HDs is obligatory in academic writing and science articles, thus becoming one type of 'obligatory context' in which HDs occur (Hyland 1996b: 434). Clearly, functions of

HDs in academic writing are more pragmatic than semantic①. For example, they rely more on the characteristics of contexts and the academic genre than on the semantic meaning of the HDs in question (Meyer 1997). Features of academic writing are considered below in order to show why academic writing can be a fruitful area of examination in hedging research.

Academic written genres have their own communicative purposes and distinctive structural patterns. Widdowson (1984: 220) claims that 'academic genres, like other forms of writing, require writers to consider the expected audience and anticipate their background knowledge, processing problems, and reaction to the text'. According to Hyland (1994), readers try to generalize the main thought from an academic paper, criticise the positions of the author, and evaluate the work for its importance to their own research. Academic writing is the main channel through which new research findings are communicated. The primary objective of academic writing is to present new knowledge claims and to make the strongest possible case for their acceptance by peers and for their ratification of those claims as new knowledge by the community of members of their discipline (Hyland 2000; Thompson 2001). Therefore, it may be said that academic writing is an act of argumentation, and research articles are characterized by such acts as stating, questioning, asserting, evaluating, reporting, arguing and concluding. The accomplishment of these acts in academic research writing concerns epistemic change and interpersonal relations. In securing acceptance for their new knowledge claims, writers have to alter the knowledge set of the reader according to their purpose (Hyland 2000; Thompson

① 'Pragmatic' is concerned with the use and function, while 'semantic' is focused on the meaning of propositions.

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