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문학석사 학위논문

**Impact of L1 Background and
English Proficiency on Hedging
Patterns of Korean EFL Writers:
Learner Corpus-based Analysis**

한국 영어학습자의 모국어 배경과 영어능력이
영작문 혜징 표현 사용 양상에 미치는 영향

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Impact of L1 Background and English Proficiency on Hedging Patterns of Korean EFL Writers: Learner Corpus-based Analysis

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Abstract

Ever since first defined by Lakoff (1973) as “words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (p. 471), the concept of *hedges* has consequently widened in a way to modify the speaker/writer’s commitment to the truth-value of a whole proposition (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997) and eventually to realize an interactional and communicative strategy called *hedging*, a product of social forces. In the latter approach where hedges are treated as purposive imprecise language, hedging signals distance, “unobtrusively injects an author’s personal view into his communication” (Dubois, 1987, p. 539), and protects the writer’s reputation by avoiding absolute statements. Such tentativeness eludes personal responsibility for statements, reducing the author’s “degree of liability” (Hübler, 1983, p. 18).

Hedges have crucially been concerned with academics whose claims are inevitably framed as tentative. They enable writers “to present unproven claims with caution and to enter a dialogue with their audience” (Hyland, 1998a, p. 6). With the growing interest in interlanguage pragmatics and the “inseparability of language and culture” (Roberts, 1998, p. 109), intercultural communicative awareness and the ability to use pragmatic knowledge strategically have further been highlighted in second language learning scene. Despite its significant status in academic society, however, interpreting and using hedges appropriately have repeatedly been reported to be difficult for learners, especially in academic writing where EFL writers

tend to unfold a collection of facts in a direct and impersonal manner (Bloor & Bloor, 1991; Dudley-Evans, 1991; Hyland, 2000a; Kamimura & Oi, 2006; Oh, 2007; Skelton, 1988). The present study was motivated in search of diagnostic analysis on the problematic areas of hedges for Korean EFL learners and thus aims to provide suggestions for ways to guide them toward the skillful use of hedging.

The data used for the research were extracted from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE). From a total of 1,300 participants, 2,600 essays were collected and examined. The participants were composed of four language groups: The Korean learner group along with two other learner groups with East Asian native language backgrounds, and the native speaker group from five different English-speaking countries. All the participants of the study were classified into one of the four English proficiency levels (or score bands) defined in this study, which has enabled the analysis of the effect of proficiency factor as well as language factor on the pattern of hedging usage.

The results resonate with findings from previous studies that native speakers employ hedging markers at a higher frequency than ESL/EFL learner writers do (Aijmer, 2002; Baumgarten & House, 2010; Hyland, 1995; Skelton, 1988). The findings direct attention to three aspects of EFL writing with regard to their usage and pattern of hedging expressions. The EFL learners were found to be dependent on a restricted number of hedging devices than the native speakers for the very nature of the target language

itself, including the semantic, pragmatic, form complexity, and saliency. The rise in EFL proficiency was accompanied by the broader range of hedging devices available to the learners, although it did not prove to affect the frequency in a consistent manner. Finally, the Korean learners, whom we refer to as *the learner group in focus*, were observed to be strong and assertive in tone, which points to their lack of experience in manipulation of expressing tentativeness in their claims. Another problem in the area of stylistic aspects was diagnosed in terms of mixed use of written and spoken registers.

Several theoretical and pedagogical implications for EFL teaching and assessment can be drawn from the present study. First, the present study provides a piece of evidence that supports the proficiency impact on the use of two lexical pairs. Second, the correlation of proficiency with the lexical pairs can possibly contribute to the development of automated writing evaluation system, particularly to the identification of the features of styles that can be quantified and used in automated scoring. Third, explicit instruction on hedging is needed in EFL settings, an aspect which has largely been neglected in Korean English classrooms. Lastly, regular English writing practice sessions should take place in order to familiarize the learners with the stylistic features present in academic genres of discourse.

Keyword: Hedging, pragmatic competence, L2 writing, academic writing, learner corpus

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation of the Study

The ability to express arguments in an appropriate manner in English is a difficult and complex matter for language learners, but it is indeed an important aspect to successful writing. In order to be persuasive and effective, writers need to make arguments that are not only acceptable to readers, but also reflect socially appropriate conventions. The writers should indicate the intensity of their conviction, which may range from uncertain possibility to confident probability, and at the same time convey a suitable degree of modesty and humility in their argumentation. A variety of cautious words, phrases, and expressions can be used to indicate the strength of a writer's commitment in argument and stance. In pragmatics, the cautious language employed to express fuzziness, impreciseness, tentativeness, degree of commitment, and avoidance of full responsibility in argument is often called *hedges* or *vague language* (Holmes, 1984). When a writer has to decide on the stance on a particular subject, or the strength of an argument that needs to be addressed, hedging allows him/her to advance the claim with caution (Hyland, 1998a), “unobtrusively injects an author’s personal view into his communication” (Dubois, 1987, p. 539), and eventually reduces the “degree of liability” (Hübler, 1983, p. 18).

Research indicates that native speakers of English (hereafter, NSs) often consider the writing of non-native speakers (hereafter, NNSs) digressive, vague, and insufficiently explicit, if it does not follow the relatively rigid norms of essay writing and textual moves (Carlson, 1988; Clyne, 1988; Connor, 1987). Experts on second language (hereafter, L2) writing specify that indirectness markers need to be used judiciously and that extreme vagueness should be avoided, because the writer seeks to create an impression of explicitness, accuracy, precision, and rational support (Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994). Although these forms can have considerable effect on the reader's assessment of the writing, they are generally acknowledged to be difficult to acquire for language learners – even learners with high-level proficiency in English have commented on the difficulties they had encountered with expressing arguments effectively, yet cautiously (Bloor & Bloor, 1991; Dudley-Evans, 1991). This is not unexpected, as the writers' commitment to their argument can be expressed in a range of ways, and such a diversity of expressions can likewise convey a wide range of meanings. To add to their problems, their efforts to acquire and master these expressions are frustrated, as their writings are often measured against an unrealistic standard of an expert writer models. Despite the problems the learners face, previous researches on L2 writing have focused mainly on sentence-level grammar and vocabulary, and little attention has been paid to the issue at hand, which is to raise awareness of the stylistic conventions and genre-specific knowledge in L2 learners. Thus,

while there is enough evidence and motivation to dig deeper into the ways to help learners write effectively pragmatics-wise, there is still little idea as to how EFL (English as Foreign Language) learner writers, especially Korean EFL writers, differ from NS writers in expressing their confidence and doubt.

Hence, the present study attempts to conduct the interdisciplinary analysis of pragmatics and SLA (Second Language Acquisition), by delving into the patterns of hedging observed in academic prose of Korean EFL learners in comparison with those of NS participants. Two other learner groups with East Asian native, or first language (hereafter, L1) backgrounds are also selected as reference groups. The samples of argumentative essays are extracted from a specialized corpus of EFL learner writings and analyzed in terms of the frequency and range of hedging markers, potentially with a view to diagnosing specific areas of problem in communicating writer commitment and employing hedging expressions.

1.2 Research Questions

This study seeks to find answers to the following three questions:

- (1) How do the range and frequency of hedging devices used by the Korean EFL learners differ from those used by NS writers?

(2) How does the English language proficiency affect hedging patterns of the Korean EFL learners?

(3) What are the distinct patterns of hedging as a stylistic feature used by the Korean EFL writers?

1.3 Organization of the Study

This study is a special corpus-based analysis of hedging patterns in argumentative essays written by the Korean EFL learner writers in comparison with those of the NS writers. The rest of the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and reviews previous research on this topic. Chapter 3 describes the data and methods of analysis used in this study. Chapter 4 reports the results of the analyses. Chapter 5 discusses the major findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusions and limitations of the study along with their implications for EFL teaching and assessment.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Hedging and Its Categorization

2.1.1 Hedging: From Semantics to Pragmatics

The use of *hedge* as a linguistic concept goes back to early 1970s, when Lakoff (1973) published his article, *Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts*. He was not so much interested in the communicative value of the use of hedges as he was concerned with the logical properties of words and phrases such as *largely*, *in a manner of speaking*, *very*, and *rather*, “whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (p. 471). His analysis involves linguistically indeterminate words which describe items that fall outside the central core of the conceptual categories of natural language, such as ‘animal’, ‘fish’, or ‘bird’. Thus, instead of saying,

- (1) Whales are mammals.

one may wish to point out that whales are in fact among the more peripheral members of the group in question and therefore say,

(2) Whales are *more or less* mammals.

The group membership of whales is hence qualified by the hedge *more or less*, as cetaceans are not stereotypical mammals. His initial analysis on hedges revolved around semantics, as his main interest was in how hedging functions interacted with the conceptual categories of natural language.

After Lakoff's popularization of the concept, the semantic side of hedges has been studied in the years to follow. The term has since been continuously defined and refined, for example in the work of Prince, Frader, and Bosk (1982) and Hübler (1983). In their discussion of hedging in physician-to-physician discourse, Prince et al. (1982) add at least two kinds of fuzziness – one within the propositional content, which they call *approximators* (3), and the other “in the relationship between the propositional content and the speaker, that is the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition conveyed” (p. 85), which is termed *shields* (4):

(3) His feet were *sort of* blue.

(4) *I think* his feet were blue.

A similar distinction is made by Hübler (1983), who distinguishes between *understatements* and *hedges* for expressing indetermination. Understatements concern the propositional content of a sentence (5), while hedges are connected with the claim to validity of the proposition a speaker

or writer makes (6):

- (5) It is *a bit* cold in here.
- (6) It is cold in Alaska, *I suppose*.

Hübler's conceptualization greatly resembles that of Prince et al., whose approximators correspond to Hübler's understatements and shields to his hedges. To what end such division heads, however, has been disputed, as it "seems to be sustainable only in the abstract: It looks more like a description of a property of a text sentences than of language use" (Skelton, 1988, p. 38).

While some researchers were exploring the semantic principles of hedges, others paid attention to their role in interaction between sender and addressee, which provides a basis for a more pragmatics-oriented approach to hedging. In fact, in much of the more recent work on hedging, it is the interpersonal aspect of the strategy that has been given focus. Markkanen and Schröder (1997) define hedging as a strategy of "saying less than one means" (Hübler, 1983, p. 23), to carry out the function of modifying the sender's responsibility for the truthfulness of an utterance, the definiteness of an utterance or its information, and the attitude of the author to the propositions and information put forth in a text. Crismore and Vande Kopple (1988), in turn, view hedges as devices that "signal a tentative or cautious assessment of the truth of referential information" (p. 185), which allows senders to reduce the responsibility toward the given information.

Characterizations on pragmatic aspect of hedging capture its essential feature: Avoidance of sender responsibility toward the referential information presented. A more thorough analysis of hedges in linguistic interaction has revealed that hedges not only protect the sender, but also moderate the relationship between the discourse participants. Drawing from Brown and Levinson's (1987) anthropological model of politeness, Myers (1989) explains that politeness is "a strictly formal system of rational practical reasoning" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 58) in academic writing. He thinks that any academic claim is a *threat* (or, Face Threatening Act, *FTA*), because new claims, regardless of what they affirm or contradict, carry new ideas and points. According to Myers, in fact, a new argument limits other researchers' "freedom to act" (p. 16). Thus, he believes that hedging in academic writing is like other politeness strategies used in everyday social interactions and categorizes it under a range of politeness strategies:

Hedging is a politeness strategy when it marks a claim, or any other statement, as being provisional, pending acceptance in the literature, acceptance by the community – in other words, acceptance by the readers. (p. 12)

Interaction in writing encompasses "positioning" or "adopting a point of view" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 175), using stance or engagement devices. Hedging falls under the function of *stance* - an attitudinal dimension, which involves features which refer to the ways the authors present themselves and

convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments. The interactional macro-functions with the sub-categories are summarized in Figure 2.1. Clearly, hedges stimulate a personal interaction between the producer and a receiver of language, and help the producer present a proposition as an opinion, rather than a fact.

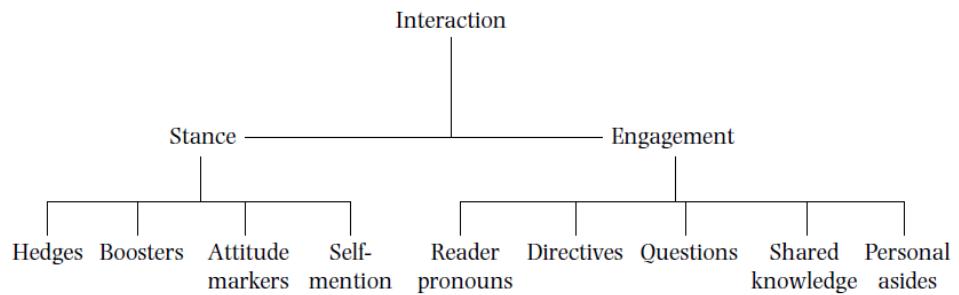


Figure 2.1 Resources of Academic Interaction (from Hyland, 2005a)

To sum up, hedges are lexical items which reduce or soften the illocutionary force of utterance. Thus they are used to express the speaker's views tentatively or unconfidently; or they may serve to mitigate the force of negatively affective speech acts such as accusations, criticisms or disagreements; or less often, they may be found attenuating the strength of positively affective speech acts such as praising, complimenting and encouraging utterances.

2.1.2 Linguistic Realizations of Hedging

Numerous linguistic expressions have been associated with hedging.

Related literature seems to agree that hedges are essentially linguistic choices that include an inherent property of fuzziness to indicate the degree of commitment to the truth value of what is being said. Nevertheless, due to the multiplicity of the forms hedging takes, there has been variation between studies on which linguistic phenomena should be regarded as hedges. In some studies, the focus is on a specific linguistic feature of hedging. Lachowicz (1981), for example, reveals that the use of passive voice is a useful strategy for hedging, in that it is less dogmatic in tone and expresses a “tendency toward generalizing cases in point, allows for the author to be more open to other possibilities of interpretation” (p. 113). Hedging can also be accomplished with numerical imprecision as pointed out by Dubois (1987) and Channell (1994). On the other hand, other researchers have tried to cover a wider range of hedging devices. Holmes (1984) draws attention to the items that involve different degrees of probability, and classifies the items into five grammatical categories. Similar items are mentioned by Markkanen and Schröder (1997), according to whom modal verbs, modal adverbs and particles, the use of some pronouns and even the avoidance of others, agentless passives, impersonal expressions, and certain vocabulary choices may be seen as key manifestations of hedging. Other linguistic

devices with hedging potential have also been introduced by Grabe and Kaplan (1997) and Hyland (1994, 1998b).

Looking at the linguistic items that researchers have associated with hedging, it seems clear that the scope of hedging has widened significantly since Lakoff's (1973) seminal work. While his study mainly covered the semantics of hedges, in the following works, as had already been visible in his work, the pragmatics of hedging began to attract considerable attention. With the widening of the scope, the range of devices to be used for hedging broadened as well. In fact, the semantic potential needed for hedging "can be achieved in indefinite numbers of surface forms" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 146).

Describing hedging items exhaustively on the basis of any clearly defined linguistic categories, therefore, seems difficult, if not impossible. It is possible, however, to look at the linguistic phenomena representing the most typical realizations. Although various lists of hedging items produced in previous studies may not explain all potential cases of hedging, they provide some of the most important linguistic phenomena pertaining to the strategy. In essence, the devices viewed as hedges in related literature indicate reservation, avoidance of commitment, and uncertainty on the proposition. In the same vein, the effects of hedging are those of modifying truth value, commenting on the accuracy of, and/or influencing the truthfulness and force of propositions. In fact, as Markkanen (1985) brings out, the definition of hedges given by Brown and Levinson (1978)

resembles Lyons' (1977) description of modality. A close association between hedging and modality is also found in Bloor and Bloor (1993), who use the two terms interchangeably. Moreover, Crompton (1997) and Hyland (1998a) equally establish a close connection between hedging and modality – more precisely, the *epistemic* type of modality. Epistemic modality generally occurs when “the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters” (Lyons, 1977, p. 797). Epistemic modality is therefore linked to the sender's knowledge and beliefs concerning the information being given, extending to the sender's “confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed” (Coates, 1987, p. 112).

Hedging has characteristically been related to epistemic modality, as meanings of both epistemically modal devices and hedges are closely related to the sender's degree of confidence regarding what is said. For instance, Nash (1990) claims that modality works as an insurance that limits the responsibility in pointing out the limitations of propositional information. To illustrate,

- (7) Linguists *may* have found a new theory on second language acquisition.
- (8) Students of linguistics *may* study in the renovated library.

the auxiliary verb *may* in (7) is used epistemically to express tentativeness

toward the propositional truth, which may be seen as hedging. In (8), on the other hand, the same verb is used to express permission, a non-epistemic meaning not associated with hedging. A similar idea was worded by Hyland (1998a), who argues that “the writer or speaker’s judgments about statements and their possible effects on interlocutors is the essence of hedging, and this clearly places epistemic modality at the center of our interest in the analysis of hedging” (p. 2).

At this point, it appears that hedges may be approached by associating it with the notion of epistemic modality. In English, this means that hedging is realized by a number of lexical categories, including modal auxiliaries (e.g. *may*, *might*), lexical verbs (e.g. *think*, *seem*), adverbials and adjectives (e.g. *perhaps*, *probably*, *likely*), and nouns (e.g. *possibility*, *probability*). This is not to say that hedging may be studied on this basis without problems. Nonetheless, it seems that relationship between hedging and epistemic modality is close enough to provide us with a useful starting point for analysis, allowing us to focus on inherently fuzzy items that can typically be used to hedge the information given.

In the present study, therefore, hedging will be defined in broad terms as a strategy by which one may indicate different degrees of less than full commitment to conceptualizations of the universe. This perspective establishes a close link between hedging and the linguistic devices used to express epistemic modality. In addition to the traditional tokens of epistemic modality, the scope of the concept is extended to cover linguistic items

conveying meanings similar to the most typical epistemic devices. The approach adopted, therefore, is not a form-based, but rather data-driven exploration of the different linguistic items that were found to modify group membership and truth value.¹

2.1.3 Classification of Epistemic Hedges

The present study seeks to approach hedging as a strategy by which language users can indicate the degree of commitment to the propositional value. In the field of study on epistemic hedges, attempts have been made to categorize such items and provide a useful taxonomy of potential functions that any hedge may fulfill. Holmes (1988) analyzed the ‘learned’ sections of the Brown and LOB (Lancaster/Oslo-Bergen) corpora of written English and identified the most frequent epistemic devices in written language. The list of devices was expanded by the relevant items found in the research literature (e.g. Coates, 1983; Hübler, 1983; Perkins, 1983) and by native

¹ As hedges are perceived as open-ended category, analysis on hedging may take into account the hedging potential of other possible means that may be seen as epistemic. For example, passivization is one of the linguistic strategies frequently mentioned in relation to hedging, as a passive construction allows “writers to withhold full commitment to their propositions” (Hyland, 1998a, p.77). Similar connections are made between hedging and the choice of tense (e.g. Hyland, 1998a). While it may be possible to regard such measures as strategies pertaining to hedging, a thorough analysis of the hedging potential of tense and voice would in all likelihood be nearly impossible, since every sentence in the data chosen for examination involves choices of voice and tense, and it is even more difficult to determine where such choices are intended to produce a hedging effect. Therefore, a decision was made here to exclude the hedging use of such syntactic strategies as voice and tense, the quantitative analysis instead encompassing hedging as realized through the use of other epistemically oriented expressions.

speakers' contributions. She deemed it helpful to categorize the items into distinct grammatical classes and unveiled the relative frequency of the grammatical classes used to express doubt and certainty (See Table A1 in APPENDIX for her classification scheme of epistemic devices).

Hyland and Milton (1997) took a similar classification approach and proposed a refined list based on the review of literature on modality (Hyland, 1996a), reference grammars (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Starvik, 1972), and previous studies of frequency expressions (Kennedy, 1987). It should be noted here that such frequency expressions can often be used to adjust the strength of claims (Halliday, 1994) and shape EFL learners' assertions (Allison, 1995). As a result of this refinement, the list contains 75 of the most frequently occurring epistemic expressions in native speaker academic writing (See Table A2 in Appendix for their classification scheme).

McEnery and Kifle (2002) compiled the two lists produced by Holmes (1988) and Hyland and Milton (1997), from which an inventory of the 100 most frequent epistemic devise in academic writing was produced (See Table 2.1). Subsequently, the list was applied to examine the range and frequency of the items in question between NNS and NS corpora. The comparison of the NNS and NS writers revealed that the NNS writers use devices of polarized epistemic devices, while NS speakers employ devices of medial certainty much more frequently. The NNS group's tendency to use stronger devices was attributed to the small number of devices they were given in their course of language learning.

Table 2.1 McEnery and Kifle's Classification Scheme (2002)

Modal verbs	Adjectives	Nouns	Lexical verbs	Adverbs
could	always	claim	appear	about
couldn't	(not) always	doubt	argue	actually
may	apparent	estimate	assume	almost
might	certain	evidence	believe	always
should	a certain extent	possibility	claim	(not) always
shouldn't	clear		doubt	apparently
would	evident		estimate	approximately
wouldn't	possible		expect	around
will	probable		indicate	certainly
won't			know	clearly
			predict	commonly
			presume	definitely
			propose	doubtless
			seem	essentially
			speculate	evidently
			suggest	frequently
			suppose	generally
			tend	in fact
			think	in general
				in theory
				in X's opinion
				indeed
				largely
				likely
				maybe
				never
				naturally
				necessarily
				normally
				obviously
				of course
				often
				perhaps
				possibly
				presumably
				quite
				rarely
				relatively
				sometimes
				surely
				undoubtedly
				usually

Vásquez (2007), who researched the dynamic relationship between language and social identity, used McEnery and Kifle's (2002) list of epistemic devices to analyze a set of narratives taken in a variety of work meetings. Frequent use of markers of hesitation, tentativeness, and uncertainty in the collected narratives underscored the uncertain nature of moral stance taken by novices in the workplace. The results further pointed to the crucial roles to be played by all participants of workplace narratives.

The list has been put into use by researchers who wished to unearth the intricate logic behind the hedging pattern of L2 writers, with the aid of learner corpus analyses. Oh (2007) investigated the hedging and boosting metadiscoursal devices used in Korean college students' English writings in comparison with those of NS writers. In this study, a collection of academic essays written by college students from several universities in Korea as well as the data collected from an L1 corpus were examined by investigating the ranges and frequencies of McEnery and Kifle's (2002) list of epistemic lexical items. The results showed that the Korean L2 learners depended on a limited range of hedges and boosters. Compared with the L1 students, for example, Korean students exhibited the strong tendency to use limited epistemic markers while they employed other devices in a significantly less frequency. In addition to the very narrower range of markers, L2 learners revealed undistributed uses of epistemic markers in terms of the grammatical and semantic category. In general, Korean writers were inclined to maintain stronger voice to their statements than the NS writers.

Another recent study which examined the ranges and frequencies of McEnery and Kifle's (2002) list of items in both EFL and NS corpora found that EFL learners take a stronger stance in their statements and rely on a restricted range of devices with simpler constructions compared to native speakers (Kim & Suh, 2014).

In the current study, McEnery and Kifle's (2002) list is further modified and used as a main scheme of selecting and classifying hedging expressions used by native and non-native English writers.

2.2 Hedging in Second Language Writing

Hedges are an “essential element of academic argument” (Hyland, 1998a, p. 6) in genres such as argumentative or persuasive essays, where writers generally position themselves on a particular side and unfold their arguments on “a continuum of commitment ranging from uncertain possibility to confident assurance” (Hyland & Milton, 1999, p. 147). Hedges allow writers “to present unproven claims with caution and to enter a dialogue with their audience” (Hyland, 1998a, p. 6), as they decrease the writer’s responsibility for the extent of truth value of claims and display politeness and indirectness so as to reduce the imposition on the writer (Hinkel, 2002). Consequently, appropriate use of hedging is indeed a very important skill in pragmatic competence, and writers need to be equipped

with it to produce more persuasive and sophisticated texts.

Despite the importance of appropriate use, L2 learners often face difficulties interpreting and adequately using hedges, thus experiencing pragmatic failure in L2 writing. Several studies observed the tendency of EFL writers to use more direct and unqualified writing than NS writers (Bloor & Bloor, 1991; Hu, Brown, & Brown, 1982; Johns, 1990; Silva, 1993). Researchers attribute the tendency, firstly to cultural difference. Strategic use of hedging has repeatedly been reported to be a common argumentative rhetoric strategy in Anglo-American scientific texts to distinguish the fact from the possible and to develop the writer-reader relationship (Hyland, 1995, 1998b; Lewin, 2005). Nevertheless, those coming from outside the target community do not easily grasp the idea of measures typically employed in the academic discourse genre. They also ascribe the inappropriate use of assertion to L1 influence. Because writing is viewed as a cultural phenomenon, it is suggested that once this cultural schema is entrenched in L1, it would likely influence writing in L2 (Connor, 1996; Purves, 1988).

Kaplan (1966) was the first to consider the cross-cultural rhetoric patterns to be the key to analyzing errors in L2 learning. In his study, Kaplan argues that the patterns of rhetoric are culturally relative and that the paradigms of logic are not universal. His exploratory diagrams of rhetoric patterns indicate that English speakers think in a straight line, while Asians think in circles and others in zigzags. He further assumes that the culturally-

bound thought and writing patterns of learners' L1 interfere with their ESL writing, as they "employ a rhetoric and a sequence of thought that violate the expectations of the native speakers" (p. 4).

EFL and ESL writing instructors have also drawn significant implications from contrastive rhetoric studies ever since Kaplan's pioneering article was first published (Atkinson, 2003; Connor, 2004; Kachru, 1994, 1997; Leki, 1991; Matsuda & Silva, 2014; Mauranen, 1993; Ortega, 2012; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000; Uysal, 2008). His diagrams have also been widely reprinted, appearing even in ESL composition textbooks. For example, ElWardi (2006) presented a modified version of Kaplan's original model (See Figure 2.2) to highlight the importance of understanding the differences in rhetoric (or patterns of logic) among various cultural groups. According to her modification, English speakers think and write in a linear and sequential manner; Asians place the topic in a larger global context and indirectly show that the topic connects to other ideas; Arabs use parallels and comparisons to communicate an idea; Latin and Romance language users create and allow digressions and flowery symbolic and metaphoric structures; and Russians digress but return to the main topic in the end.

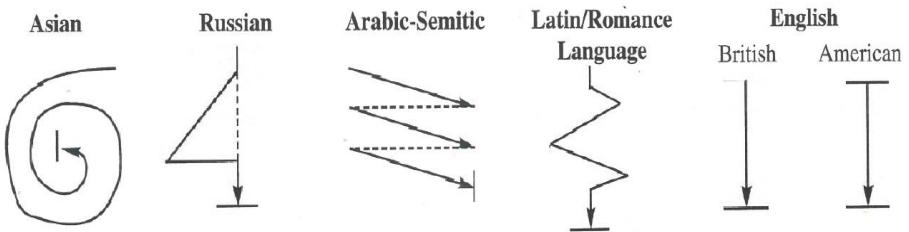


Figure 2.2 ElWardi's (2006) Modification of Kaplan's (1966) Diagram of Five Cultural Rhetorical Patterns

In fact, as Atkinson (2000) states, “the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis has held perhaps its greatest allure for those in nonnative-English-speaking contexts abroad, forced as they are to look EFL writing in the eye to try to understand why it at least sometimes looks *different* – often subtly out of sync with what one might expect from a *native perspective*” (p. 319). It is crucially related to the teaching and learning of L2 writing at advanced levels of proficiency, as proficient EFL writers who have mastered grammar of the target language would produce pieces of writing that have a persistently “*un-English* taste of peculiar strangeness” (Koch, 1981, p. 2). For instance, Dudley-Evans (1991) found that L2 writers at their postgraduate level often receive comments from their PhD supervisors on their qualification and confidence in expressing arguments. It is especially believed that implications derived from valid research on rhetorical schemata of various languages will surely lead to better ESL writing instructional practices for teachers. Similarly, when ESL students are better instructed to meet the expectations of L1 readers in their writing classes,

they would surely be in a better position to make informed rhetorical choices when composing in the target language.

Tackling the difficulties of using hedges is often met with frustrations, as there are a great number of devices in stock to be used for pragmatic functions in academic prose. Moreover, hedges can take many forms and carry multiple semantic meanings and pragmatic interpretations; this adds another layer of difficulty for EFL learners (Hyland & Milton, 1997). The appropriate use of hedging devices becomes even more complicated as learners acknowledge that they operate in a quite different manner according to the types of discourse. For instance, *maybe* occurs at a more frequent rate in speech than writing, whereas *perhaps* is rarely used in conversation but extremely common in academic writing (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999).

In spite of the complex use of hedges, little emphasis has been placed on the correct use of hedging devices in traditional writing classrooms and existing writing textbooks (Hinkel, 1997; Holmes, 1984, 1988; Hyland, 1994; Hyland & Milton, 1999). Some textbooks give the impression that the writers should avoid hedging altogether (e.g. Winkler & McCuen, 1989). In fact, while several researchers have established that using hedges in academic writing is needed (Cherry, 1988; Myers, 1989; Swales & Feak, 1994), some EFL instructors unintentionally mislead students into believing that writing in English requires more direct and linear rhetoric and any sign of deference or humility should be avoided if they are to approximate NS

argumentative structure (Bloor & Bloor, 1991). Gilbert (1991) reports that as L2 students are instructed that well-constructed English writing is expected to be direct, they often produce drafts that are too direct and frank. Since such student texts may be regarded as inappropriate and impolite, they are edited by the teacher to be *appropriately* direct. The editing and modifying procedure taken on by the teacher, she notes, runs the risk of making the text artificial, contrived, and impersonal, when the essence of the concept of writing is honesty and sincerity. Low (1996) attempts to explain such inattention to interpersonal features within the framework of the lexical invisibility hypothesis, which states that L2 learners might have difficulty processing hedging expressions appropriately. Hyland (2000a) re-examined the lexical invisibility hypothesis in the L2 learning environment and found that L2 learners attended primarily to boosters, while consistently ignoring hedges, thus lexically invisible.

The cross-cultural rhetoric studies and the research on pragmatic use of hedging devices have demonstrated that the rhetorical preferences of different languages and cultures continue to manifest themselves consistently in the writing of L2 students (Connor, 1995; Sötter, 1988) and that NNS writers run the risk of violating communicative norms as they find it difficult to appropriately hedge their propositions in academic prose (Allison, 1995; Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2005; Hinkel, 1999). Generalizations which can be drawn from previous empirical studies are that hedging expressions employed by EFL learners tend to be limited in number

and type, and polarized in meaning – either too strong or too tentative. These characteristics were found in the writings of Korean learners of English as well (Kim, 2011; Oh, 2007). Despite much interest in hedges and its usage in L2 writing in the research literature, little attention has been paid to hedging patterns of learners with varying proficiency levels. Comparing the use of hedging devices before and after treatment, Wishnoff (2000) found evidence that higher proficiency aids improvement in the use of hedging devices in writing and concluded that effects of instruction depend on the learners' level of linguistic competency, which also seems to influence whether or not transfer of training will occur between different types of writings. Hyland and Milton (1997) compared Hong Kong learners of English in terms of their linguistic proficiency and witnessed higher-level learners advancing their arguments with more skillful use of hedging devices. Their work, however, was more concentrated on comparing learners against NS writers and thus failed to show the intricate relationship between proficiency and hedging pattern within the learner group. Moreover, the participants were learners in Hong Kong where English is taught from kindergarten, with immersion programs onward in their education, which provides them with a truly bilingual environment. On the other hand, EFL learners, such as those in Korea, China, and Japan do not start learning English until elementary school, and schooling is monolingual in nature.

The present study, therefore, sets out to contribute to the existing body of interlanguage pragmatics studies by addressing one underrepresented area

in the field, that is, the influence of EFL proficiency on hedging in L2 writing. In addition, the participants come from different language backgrounds, which will provide a window to a way different language groups behave in hedging their claims in writing.

2.3 Learner Corpus and Corpus-Based Study

In modern research of hedging in academic prose (Channell, 1994; Hinkel, 1995, 1997; Kay, 1997; Pagano, 1994), researchers' observations and conclusions are supported by means of corpus analyses. A corpus may be defined as a collection of naturally occurring language, although it should be noted,

...that computer corpora are rarely haphazard collections of textual material: They are generally assembled with particular purposes in mind, and are often assembled (informally speaking) *representative* of some language or text type. (Leech, 1992, p. 116)

The main goal of SLA study is to uncover the principles that operate in the process of language teaching and learning. As the process of acquisition is mental and internal, therefore not observable, it has to be accessed through learner performance data (Granger, 1998a). SLA research, by tradition, has drawn upon three major data types, which are identified by

Ellis (1994): a) language use data, which reflect learner's attempt to use L2 in comprehension or production; b) metalingual judgments, which tap learners' intuitions about L2; and c) self-report data, which explore learner's strategies through questionnaires and think-aloud tasks (See Figure 2.3).

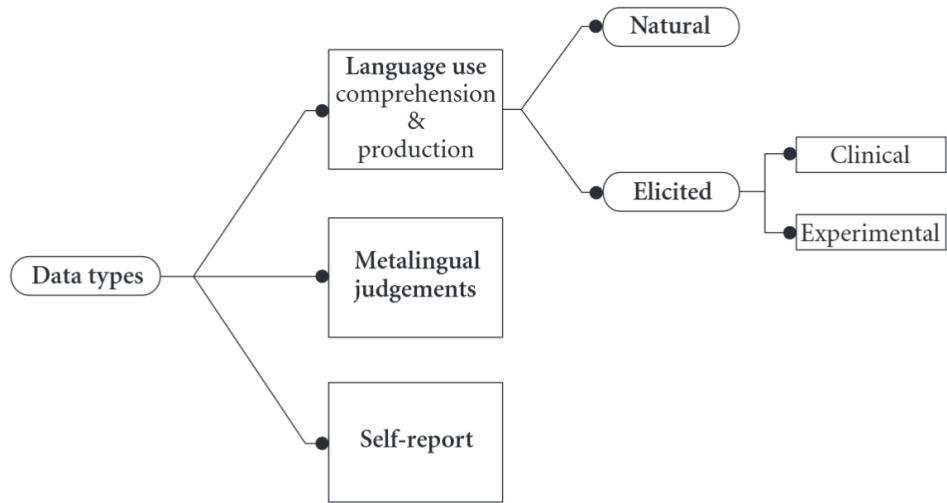


Figure 2.3 Data Types Used in SLA Research (from Granger, 2002)

Current SLA research focuses mainly on introspective data, or Ellis's Types 2 and 3, and language use data of the elicited type, and appears no longer interested in natural language use data. There are a variety of reasons for this: The primary reason lies in infrequency of some language features, which refers to the fact that "certain properties happen to occur very rarely or not at all unless specifically elicited" (Yip, 1995, p. 9). Another challenge comes from the difficulty of controlling the variables that affect the learner's language output – when insufficiently controlled, the effect of

these variables cannot be examined in a systematic way. Lastly, natural language data do not reveal the entire array of linguistic repertoire of learners as “they [learners] will use only those aspects in which they have the most confidence. They will avoid the troublesome aspects through circumlocution or some other device” (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 26). Introspective and elicited data also have limitations, however, and their validity has been put into question (Granger, 1998a). The artificiality of an experimental language situation likely imposes task variables on learners, and it may lead them to produce language which deviates from the type of language they would naturally use. Furthermore, because of the constraints of experimental elicitation, researchers have to manage on a very narrow empirical base, often no more than a handful of informants, something which seriously limits the generalizability of the results. A need for more and better quality data on which to build learner corpora is clear, particularly one that would answer most of the criticisms leveled at data collection procedure and its validity.

A learner corpus can be produced in a variety of formats. It can take the form of a *raw corpus*, i.e. a corpus of texts with no extra features added, or of an *annotated corpus*, i.e. a corpus with added textual or linguistic information, such as parts-of-speech or syntactic structures. A learner corpus should be documented for learner and task variables as well. Specific details about the variables must be recorded for each text and made available to the researchers in the form of SGML (Standard Generalized

Markup Language) file header in the text files, or stored separately from the text file but linked to it by a reference system (Granger & Leech, 2014). Markup insertion is a very time-consuming process, but it enables researchers to create their own subcorpora by selecting texts which match a set of attributes to be examined and carry out interesting comparisons, such as between written product and speech from different proficiency levels or from different native language backgrounds.

The growing influence of learner corpora, or “electronic collections of natural foreign or second language learner texts assembled according to explicit design criteria” (Granger, 2008, p. 338) has shed novel insights on the teaching and learning of English as a foreign/second language (De Knop & Meunier, 2015; Granger, 2013; Granger, Hung, & Petch-Tyson, 2002). Teachers and learners of English can benefit from the learner corpus at least in three ways (Oh, 2007). First, the learner corpus provides data on actual language use that is much more accurate and specific than what is suggested by native speaker’s intuition, and thus provides solid grounds and resources for improving the content of English learning and teaching. Second, corpus analysis can offer an alternative methodology for English teaching and learning from which the learners discover various patterns and uses of the target language by themselves, with the added advantage of access to authentic data, not prefabricated patterns developed solely for educational purposes. Finally, the learner corpus can work as an instrument of diagnosis where compiled and analyzed learner language provides information on the

learners' linguistic competence and areas of difficulty they experience.

A learner corpus, by design, is very suitable for contrastive analysis of the written text produced by the L2 learners, in the sense of "comparing/contrasting what non-native and native speakers of a language do in a comparable situation" (Péry-Woodley, 1990, p. 143). Such contrastive analysis of the text produced by native and L2 speakers of a target language, which is often called Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA), involves two types of comparisons (See Figure 2.4). Traditional contrastive analysis has proved that simply comparing learner's L1 against target language norm is not sufficient by itself to predict learning difficulties. CIA, on the other hand, involves comparison of different interlanguages, as well as comparison of L1 and interlanguage (cf. James, 1994).

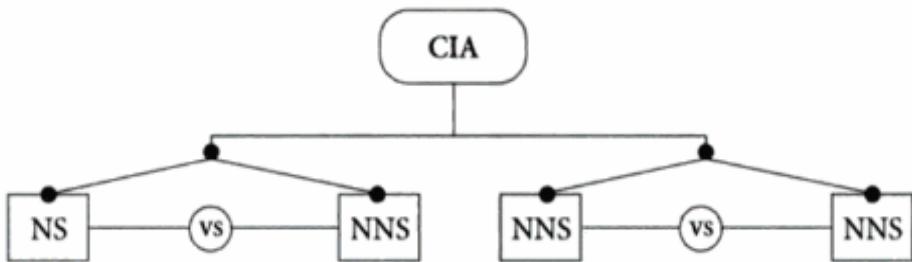


Figure 2.4 Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (from Granger, 2002)

As the two types of CIA comparisons are geared toward different purposes, it is useful to look at them separately. Comparisons between NS and NNS aim to reveal the features of non-nativeness of learner language.

At all levels of proficiency, but particularly at the most advanced ones, such features will not only involve plain errors and mistakes, but disparity in the frequency of use of certain words or expressions. Before learner corpus entered the scene, work on learner production data had concentrated mainly on errors, but now, researchers can also carry out quantitative investigation on distinctive features of interlanguage, such as overuse and underuse, which opened up a new chapter of a study with important implications for language teaching. To take just one example, textbooks and electronic tools such as grammar checkers advise learners against using passive structure and suggest using the active structure instead. A study on the use of passive structure in NS and NNS corpora (Granger, 1998b), however, uncovered that learners underuse the passive and that they do not need this type of inappropriate advice. L1 and interlanguage comparisons require a control corpus of native English, and there is no lack of them – a corpus such as ICE (International Corpus of English) even provides a choice of standards: British, American, Australian, Canadian, and others. The second type of comparison is comparison between interlanguages. By comparing learner corpora or subcorpora exhibiting different varieties of English – difference in age, proficiency level, L1 background, task type, learning setting, and others – it enables researchers to evaluate the effect of these variables on learner output.

Even though learner corpus has sometimes been employed in examination of hedging expressions in L2 settings (Hasselgren, 2002;

Hyland, 1994, 1997; Wharton, 2012), the previous studies are not without limitations. The number of studies conducted on hedges is far less than those conducted on other areas such as grammar (Aijmer, 2002; Biber & Reppen, 1998; Granger, 1999), vocabulary (Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Kim, 2002; Ringbom, 1998a), phraseology (De Cock, 1998; Milton & Freeman, 1996), and discourse (Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; Cheng & Warren, 2000; Flowerdew, 1998; Petch-Tyson, 1998). To add to that, most of these studies have been carried out with Chinese L2 writers along with other ESL learners from different language backgrounds. These studies seem to put the entire L2 writers into one single category of *seriously deficient in argumentative skills* due to unhedged features, which may be overgeneralized as a common pattern of L2 writers' language use. A phenomenon deserving of attention is that little effort was made to investigate how Korean EFL learners develop their argumentation in their writings, and the present research sets out to address the very issue.

The present study has an additional advantage in that it compares the data elicited from the same prompt. As most of the previous studies thus far have compared data drawn from separate sources or corpora, the variables which might intervene may not have been fully controlled. The present study, therefore, seeks to investigate the understudied area of corpus-based analysis of stylistic conventions of EFL learners, the Korean learner group being the foci of every corner of the examination, with a view to coming up with pedagogical implications helpful for Korean EFL learners in particular.

Chapter 3 Method

3.1 Corpora and Participants

The corpus used in this study is the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE).² The ICNALE is one of the largest learner corpora ever compiled and provides reliable data source for international contrastive interlanguage analysis. The ICNALE consists of two major modules: The ICNALE-Spoken and The ICNALE-Written. The ICNALE includes 1.8 million words of controlled L2 English speeches and essays by 3,550 college students, including graduate students, in ten countries and areas in Asia as well as L1 productions by 350 English native speakers. The total number of collected L1 and L2 production amounts to 10,000, which consist of 4,400 speeches and 5,600 essays (Ishikawa, 2013). For the purposes of the present study, only the essays written by EFL learners from South Korea, China, and Japan, and English native speakers were extracted and examined. The specific details of the participant information are listed in Table 3.1. One thing to note in Table 3.1 is that as each participant was asked to contribute two essays to the corpus, the number of essays collected was 2,600, which is double the number of participants (1,300).

² Data cited herein have been extracted from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English, distributed by Dr. Shin'ichiro (Shin) Ishikawa of Kobe University, Japan. All rights in the texts cited are reserved.

Table 3.1 The Description of the Participants in the ICNALE

EFL Group					ENS Group	
Country	CEFR-based L2 Proficiency Levels				TOTAL	# of participants
	A2	B1_1	B1_2	B2+		
Korea	75	61	88	76	300	Australia Canada
China	50	232	105	13	400	Great Britain New Zealand
Japan	154	179	49	18	400	(non-USA) USA
TOTAL	279	472	242	107	1,100	TOTAL
						17 28 28 13 86 114
						200

Prior to taking part in the ICNALE-Written project, all participants were asked to fill in the data collection sheet, including their name, country, sex, age, and major. Ages ranged from 15 to 25, and the ratio of male to female was 1.06:1 (M=671, F=629).

Another important piece of information collected from the participants was scores in the English proficiency test. Standardized English test scores from participants, such as TOEIC, TOEFL, and VST (Vocabulary Size Test) scores, were collected and classified into four levels which correspond to the levels of language proficiency proposed in the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference): A2 (Waystage), B1_1 (Threshold: Lower), B1_2 (Threshold: Upper), and B2+ (Vantage or higher). The mutual conversion table adopted in the project is included in APPENDIX B. For the sake of simplicity, the levels will hereafter be referred to as A (Waystage), B (Threshold: Lower), C (Threshold: Upper), and D (Vantage or higher). Both

L1 and L2 productions were elicited through carefully selected prompts in the following:

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Use reasons and specific details to support your claim.

- (A) *It is important for college students to have a part time job.*
- (B) *Smoking should be completely banned at all the restaurants in the country.*

Participants were given 20 to 40 minutes to complete a 200-to-300-word essay. Since they were required to write two essays under the given topics, the allotted time for the entire writing session was 40 to 80 minutes. Although they were not allowed to use dictionary or any other reference tools, they were asked to use spell-checker to retrieve misspelled items in the data as well.

3.2 The Selection/Classification Scheme for Hedges

The present study adopted McEnery and Kifile's (2002) list of 100 items as a main basis of selecting and classifying hedging items in the participants' essays. The categories and list of hedging items used in their scheme is based on Holmes' (1988) and Hyland and Milton' (1997) schemes. The list can also be viewed as a modified version of Hyland's (2005b) classification

schemes for hedges and boosters (See APPENDIX A). The list is substantiated from previous studies on modality and hedging by Coates (1983), Leech and Starvik (1988), and Quirk et al. (1972).

Table 3.2 The List of Hedges to Be Used in the Present Study

Modal verbs	Lexical verbs	Adverbials	Nouns	Adjectives
will	think	sometimes	opinion	possible
would	feel	usually	chance	likely
may	hope	almost	idea	unlikely
might	believe	maybe	view	apparent
should	consider	about	possibility	probable
can	seem	often	hope	
could	expect	in my opinion	doubt	
	argue	generally	belief	
	imagine	in general	tendency	
	suggest	naturally	theory	
	tend	probably	claim	
	claim	frequently	explanation	
	guess	around		
	assume	perhaps		
	doubt	approximately		
	indicate	normally		
	propose	relatively		
	suppose	not always		
	appear	commonly		
	estimate	apparently		
	predict	in reality		
		in theory		
		possibly		
		presumably		
		likely		
		largely		
		rarely		
		a certain extent		

3.3 Procedure and Method of Data Analysis

In order to identify hedging phenomena and analyze their functions, the texts gathered from the ICNALE corpus were scrutinized for a list of hedging devices. All 73 items in the list were lemmatized for a detailed and accurate analysis. Each suspected hedge and the surrounding context for later reference was stored in computerized form. Compiled results were subsequently subjected to qualitative analysis, as no hedges are “inherently hedgy but can acquire this quality depending on the communicative context or the co-text” (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997, p. 4) and therefore context-dependent. Deletion of certain entries was conducted, which, for example, brought 3,609 modal verbs found in the Korean learner corpus down to 1,267 counts.

With the collected data in hand, quantitative analyses were conducted through the following procedures: The data on the total number of participants and the number of words they submitted to the corpus were provided by Dr. Ishikawa through the online ICNALE. The raw frequency rates were computed by dividing the total number of tokens by the number of participants in focus. In addition to the raw frequency rates, the normalized frequency rates were obtained and used in this study to examine potential L1 group differences in the use of hedging devices after controlling for essay length. Their values were calculated by dividing the total number of hedging items (or tokens) gathered from the search results

by the total number of words, and the figures were subsequently converted to percentage rates. The frequency rates were calculated by grammatical categories, language groups, and proficiency levels within each language group, respectively. The results were also graphically presented in figures, and the forms of graph were selected on the grounds that the selected form describes the differences in focus more conspicuously.

One-way Chi-square tests were conducted on the raw and normalized frequencies to see whether there were any statistically significant differences among participant groups. In these Chi-square tests, the frequency (normalized frequency) of hedging devices obtained from the corpus data for different participant groups (e.g. L1, proficiency groups) served as the primary dependent variable. There were two different independent variables that were used separately in the one-way Chi-square tests. The principal independent variable of interest here was the participants' L1 background, that is, whether they were EFL learner writers as indicated by the code of language background – KOR, CHN, or JPN – or native speakers of English as evidenced by the code ENG. A second independent variable of interest was the proficiency level, the variable assigned only to the EFL learners. The chi-square values (χ^2) were calculated manually and triple-checked for accuracy by using the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(\text{Observed frequencies} - \text{Expected frequencies})^2}{\text{Expected frequencies}}$$

In the computation of χ^2 , the deviations ($f_i - m_i$) between observed and expected frequencies were squared, divided by m_i , and added. Finally, using the table of Chi-square critical values, a decision was made whether the obtained χ^2 values for different degrees of freedom (df) were statically significant at various significance levels.

The qualitative analyses were carried out through examining the stored files, especially so for the items with unusually high or low frequency. Specifically, the two lexical pairs chosen for comparison between the Korean learner group and the NS group were singled out for their remarkably different frequency rates in the two groups and were subjected for further quantitative analysis. In addition, the example sentences to be presented in the sections to follow were extracted from the representative examples throughout language groups and proficiency levels.

Despite the attempts made to raise validity of the analysis, it must be recognized that a multi-faceted phenomenon such as hedging can hardly be studied exhaustively or to any absolute degree of reliability (cf. Hyland, 1996b, 1998a). The aim of the study, therefore, is by no means to offer a final interpretation of hedging; instead, the objective is to provide information on the patterns observed in the use of various devices that can typically be perceived as hedges by the EFL learners, especially the Korean EFL learners, and to draw on the results for meaningful pedagogical applications.

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Overall Frequency of Hedging Devices

The total number of hedging devices counted was compared against the total number of words in the data. The proportion was subsequently converted to tokens per 100 words for comparison (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 The Description of Overall Frequency of Hedging Devices by Language Groups

	EFL			NS	χ^2 value
	KOR	CHN	JPN		
Total number of hedging devices	3,297	5,548	5,057	2,850	1238.98***
Tokens per 100 words	2.43	2.92	2.85	3.16	0.097

***p<.001

The overall frequencies of the hedging devices in the four groups were significantly different ($\chi^2=1273.39$, df=3, p<.001). The table shows more hedging expressions in the NS data than in the EFL learner data, confirming findings from previous studies that NS writers employ hedging devices at a higher frequency (Aijmer, 2002; Baumgarten & House, 2010; Hyland,

1995; Skelton, 1988). This implies that EFL learners convey uncertainty with a more restricted number of items. Drawing from the normalized frequency, the Korean learners used a hedging marker approximately every 41 words, while the NS writers used one every 32 words. This does not necessarily mean that the Korean learners have a lower level of pragmatic awareness – the extent to which they can appropriately and correctly employ a wide variety of hedging items is what counts as pragmatically competent. Therefore, a further qualitative exploration into the data is needed to see whether the learners are pragmatically aware of the devices and whether they are capable of using the feature fluently.

Prior to detailed examinations across proficiency levels and grammatical categories, the most frequent items expressing tentativeness were ranked and listed in descending order (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 The Most Frequent Items across Language Groups

	KOR	CHN	JPN	NS
1	think (25.8%)	will (27.4%)	think (37.2%)	will (17.5%)
2	will (20.8%)	think (15.6%)	will (14.8%)	would (17.1%)
3	would (6.2%)	may (10.5%)	may (7.4%)	think (16.3%)
4	feel (5.8%)	feel (3.9%)	feel (5.9%)	may (6.3%)
5	can (3.4%)	in my opinion (3.8%)	opinion (4.8%)	feel (5.2%)
6	may (3.3%)	would (3.2%)	idea (4.0%)	believe (4.4%)
7	idea (2.4%)	chance (3.1%)	would (3.2%)	idea (2.6%)
8	believe (2.3%)	view (2.8%)	often (2.4%)	seem (2.9%)
9	might (2.2%)	idea (2.7%)	chance (1.9%)	might (2.4%)
10	chance (2.1%)	believe (2.5%)	almost (1.7%)	opinion (2.1%)

The six frequently used items throughout all language groups were

extracted from the table and mapped with their values in Figure 4.1.

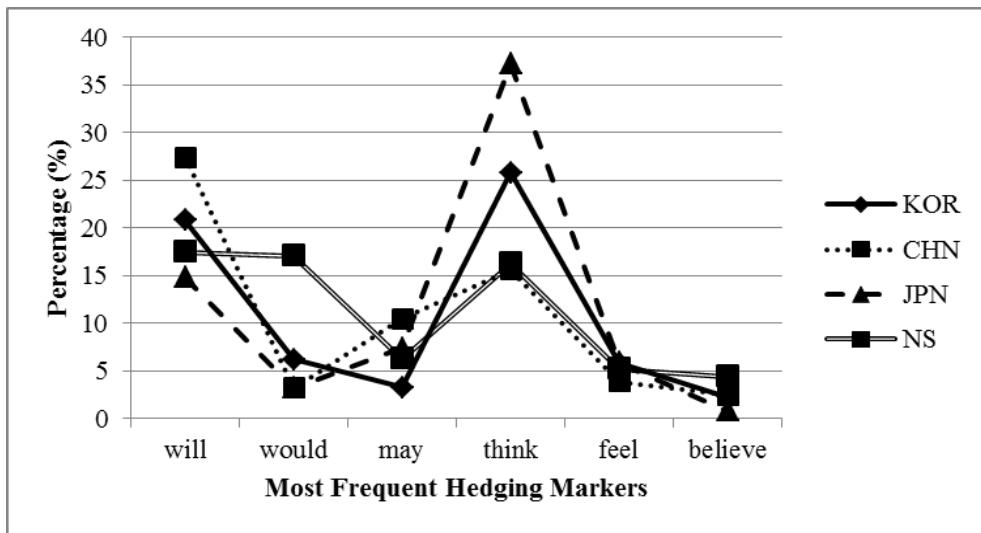


Figure 4.1 Distributional Patterns of Most Frequent Items across Language Groups

Similar as they seem in their pattern of frequent usage, the differences among the groups became apparent in the detailed statistics. The total count of top ten items was 2,448 for the Korean learner group, which accounted for 74.2% of all hedging expressions used. The essays of the Chinese and Japanese learner groups contain a similar range of hedging devices: The top ten items accounted for 75.7%, and 83.2%. Meanwhile, the ten devices made 2,173 occurrences in the NS corpus, which took up 76.3% of the total usage. In terms of the raw frequency, 34 of 73 items occurred more than 10 times in the Korean participant samples, and 11 items were not used at all. On the other hand, 44 items occurred more than 10 times in the NS

participant samples, and 5 items were not used at all. Thus, the NS participant group could be said to have used wider range of items than the Korean group did.

4.2 Distributional Patterns across Grammatical Categories

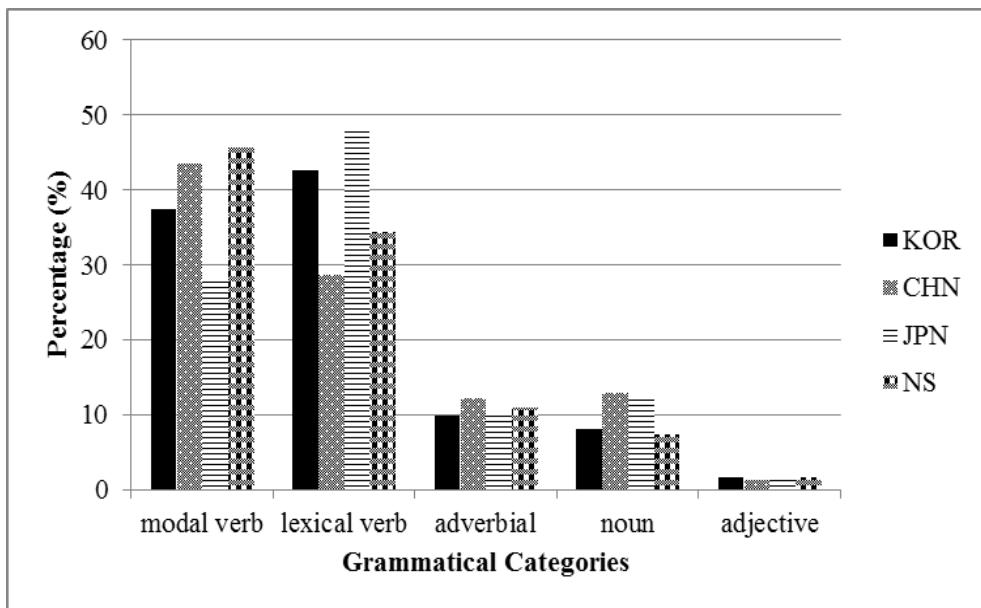


Figure 4.2 Distributional Patterns of Hedging Devices by Grammatical Categories

The part-of-speech used to realize hedging functions shall be considered in detail in the sections to follow to bring further differences to surface.

4.2.1 Hedging in the Use of Modal Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs used as hedging markers and their relative frequency rates are shown in Figure 4.3, according to language groups.³

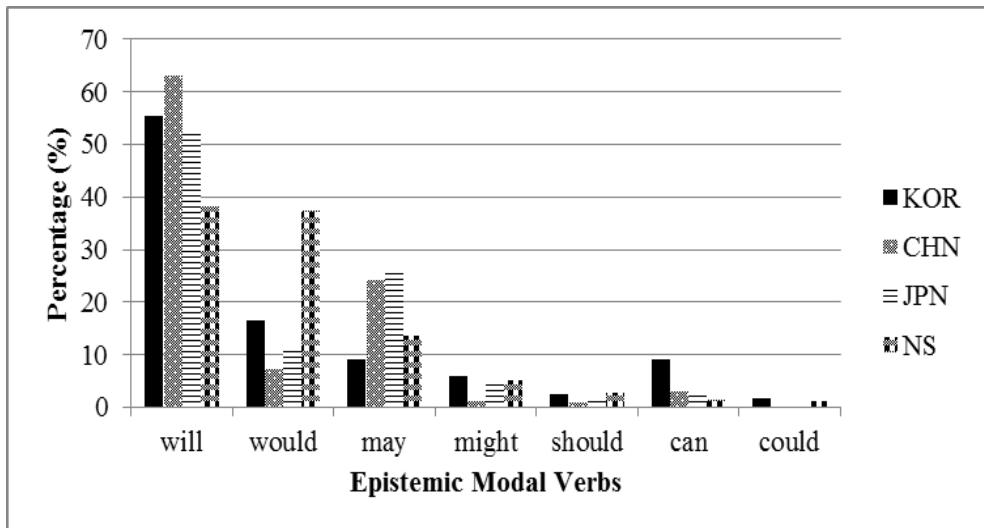


Figure 4.3 Distributional Patterns of Modal Verbs by Language

Background

Modal verb *will* takes up the greatest portion in all EFL student groups – 55.4%, 63.0%, and 52.6% in the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese data. However, whereas the Korean students' use of *will* takes up over half of

³ The occurrences of *should*, *can*, *could*, *may*, and *might* were carefully scrutinized in their context to rule out the instances marking modality other than epistemic functions. Nevertheless, context is not a disambiguating factor in all instances. *Will*, for example, expresses confident prediction about present or future events based on past experience (Coates, 1983). Futurity, however, inevitably involves certain degree of uncertainty (Palmer, 1990), and the uncertainty introduced by the writer makes the factuality depends solely on the writer's perception and knowledge of the world. Thus, most instances of *will* and *would* were counted as valid in its epistemic meaning, carrying the degree of writer's confidence in the statement made in their knowledge of the world.

modal instances, their use of *would* is comparatively low (16.4%), amounting to only less than half of its usage of the NS writers (37.5%). By choosing to depend largely on one of these complementary modals, the Korean learners seem rather assertive in tone, while the NS writers appear more tentative, although the message, in its essence, is the same:

- (1) If they do not work and just study inside their schools, they *will* only have academic knowledge lacking any practical knowledge which can be useful when they take part in the society after they graduate. (D_KOR)
- (2) By having as many part-time jobs or as much real job experiences as they can get, students *would* have more options after graduation. (NS)
- (3) And in this way, there *will* be less people smoking and it is possible that this dispute will disappear. (C_KOR)
- (4) It *would* seem that any sensible person *would* not want to give a complete stranger health problems, especially ones as serious as the ones that accompany smoking and second hand smoke. (NS)

The same speculation holds for the Chinese and Japanese learner groups, whose corpora contained only 7.4% and 11.2% of *would*.

Equally interesting is the highest incidence of epistemic *can* in the Korean learner data which is 9.1%; their usage was the highest among the four language groups, and over five times higher than what was made by the NS participants (1.6%):

- (5) E-cigarette *can* also be one solution. (B_KOR)
- (6) Also, cigarette smoke *can* be disgusting to even smokers when they have a meal. (B_KOR)
- (7) So before getting career, part-time job *can* be an alternative. (D_KOR)

Park (2012), claiming that the range of modal verbs produced by the Korean learners of English is very limited, adds that they consistently show overreliance on *can*, taking up 43% of all modal expressions. In fact, the analysis of the Korean learner corpus data revealed that the overall count of *can* including its non-epistemic meaning reached 1,255, which is only slightly higher than the total count of all the hedging modal verbs (1,238). Their heavy dependence on this particular device might have led them to opt for *can* for hedging as well, when the NS writers likely have chosen *may* for the same purpose (13.7%).

Modal verbs with hedging functions carry different degrees of certainty regarding the truthfulness of the information provided (Cornillie, 2009). For example, certainty is expressed by modal verbs *will*; probability is expressed by *would* and *should*; and possibility is expressed by *may*, *might*, *can* and *could*. In other words, modal verbs are distributed across semantic categories that represent discrete point on a scale from minimum to maximum certainty. Modal verbs were thus grouped into three – markers of certainty, probability and possibility – and the occurrences were calculated (See Figure 4.4).

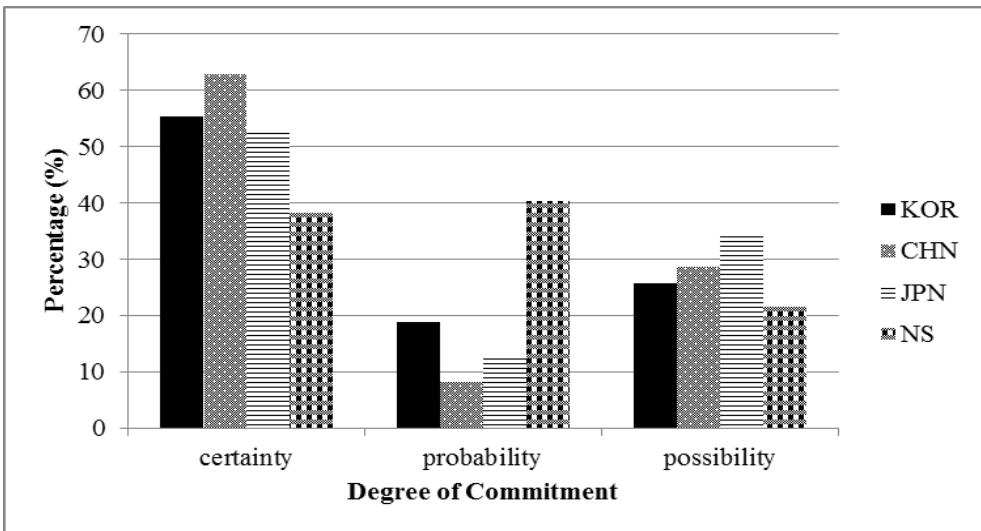


Figure 4.4 Distributional Patterns of Commitment by Language

Background

The disproportion in certainty markers between the Korean learners and the NS participants seems to resonate with the findings of earlier studies that L2 learner writers make more strong, unjustified assertions than the NS counterpart does, which consequently leads them to modify their claims with an inappropriate degree of directness (Allison, 1995; Hu et al., 1982; Hyland & Milton, 1997). In other words, EFL learners of English, whatever their intention may have been, by unwittingly using markers of certainty with substantial frequency, they appear far more assertive, stronger, and authoritative in their tone than NS writers. While possibility markers have comparatively similar distributions, probability markers made overwhelmingly high occurrence in the NS corpus, approximately twice more than they did in the Korean corpus. Although usage of probability

markers was fairly low throughout EFL groups, the Korean learners used them the most frequently, employing them at about 10% and 5% more than the Chinese and Japanese learners did, respectively.

4.2.2 Hedging in the Use of Lexical Verbs

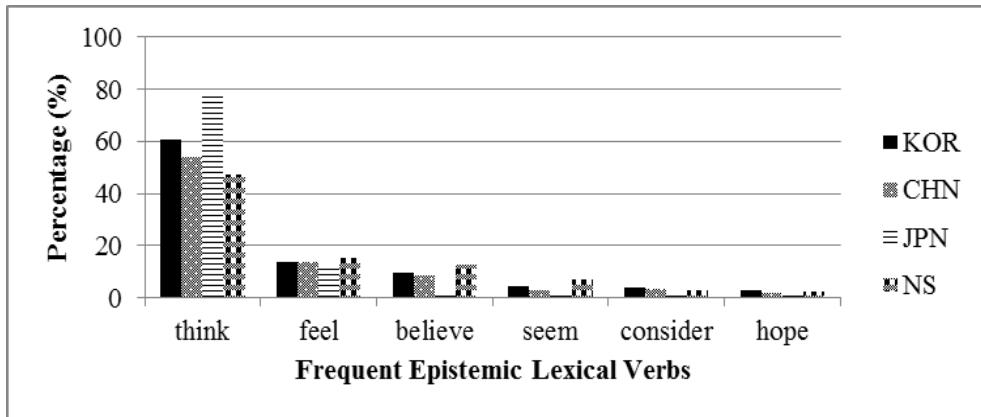


Figure 4.5 Distributional Patterns of Lexical Verbs by Language Background

Twenty-one lexical verbs used for hedging were analyzed in context from which six frequently used lexical verbs of each language group were extracted. As the density of the three most frequent verbs – *think*, *feel* and *believe* – shows in partial, the range of hedging verbs the EFL participants resort to is very local: These constitute 83.9% of total usage in the Korean, 76.6% in the Chinese, and even 91.6% in the Japanese learner corpus. The

occurrence of *believe* was significantly high in the NS samples, which implies that the NS participants regard the verb to be more persuasive and effective in advancing argumentation.

An interesting case in point was *appear*: While it was the ninth most frequently used lexical verb in the NS corpus (13 counts), the count for epistemic *appear* for the Korean learner corpora was 0. The learners did in fact amply use *appear*, but not with epistemic meaning – they used it to mean ‘to become visible or noticeable’, which is listed as the first meaning under the entry (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010):

- (8) This pattern of behavior *appears* even in a restaurant. (C_KOR)
- (9) Next, many students have the image of “broke college students” in rather than sit idly by and let stereotype define them, they can actively pursue a part-time position which will make them *appear* to be more responsible and trustworthy than they would *appear* if they were simply languishing about. (NS)

Development in linguistic ability, particularly in word meaning, is believed to proceed from the concrete to the abstract (e.g. Anglin, 1970). Thus, the Korean learners in the present study are observed to be going through the stage of development where they are currently putting more weight on concrete meaning than a rather abstract meaning.

4.2.3 Hedging in the Use of Adverbials, Nouns, and Adjectives

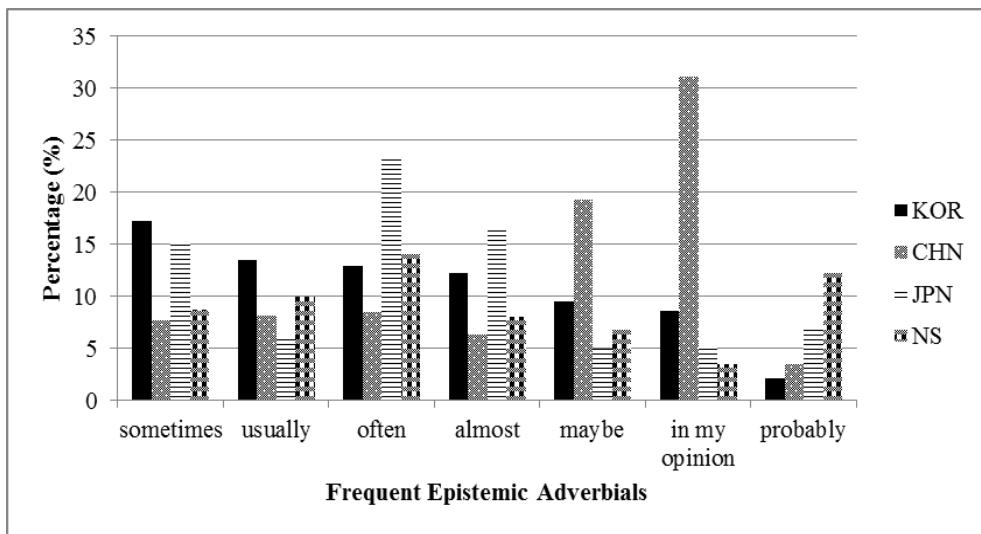


Figure 4.6 Distributional Patterns of Adverbials by Language Background

A total of 28 hedging adverbials were examined, and seven adverbials which made the most frequent occurrences were extracted. While the Korean participants hedged their claims with adverbials at comparatively similar proportions, the Chinese and Japanese participants were marked for much higher frequency in their use of only a few adverbials.

Two adverbial items which seem to perform a similar function have quite different status in the Korean and NS data. While *maybe* has been more frequently used in the Korean learner group, *probably* has been ranked

as the 2nd most often used adverbial in the NS corpus.

The gap in the frequency rates of the use of adverbial *in my opinion* was significant between the Korean learners and the NS participants as well. There is no crystal clear answer to the question why NS writers do not seem to prefer this expression, but Rawlins (1980) shares his opinion: Recounting his experience as a writing instructor, he specifically taught his students to cross out phrases like *in my opinion*, since, for a reader who is expecting to be offered the writer's convictions expressed with the assurance of certainty, *in my opinion* is like hiding behind the implied apology. In addition, drawing too much attention to the writer is not preferred in English writing conventions, unless the writer is making a point which ties directly into the writer's personal experience (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988). On the contrary, Korean learners seem to use this expression interchangeably with *I think*, whereby strengthening their commitment:

- (10)In conclusion, *in my opinion*, advantages of part-time job outweigh the disadvantages greatly. (C_KOR)

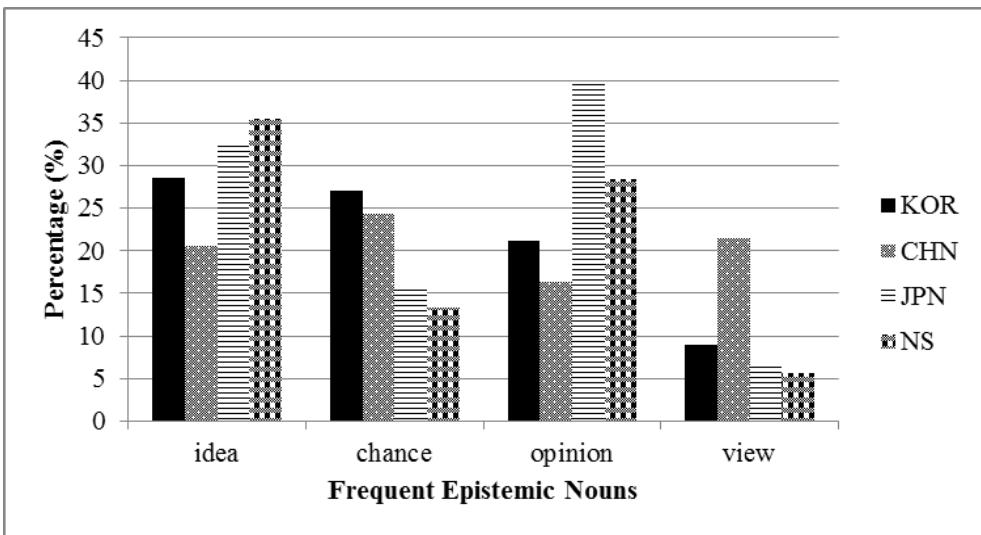


Figure 4.7 Distributional Patterns of Nouns by Language Background

Figure 4.7 contains the four most frequently used nouns and their distributional patterns. Although the participants did not show particular preference for hedging nouns, noteworthy differences were found in the sentences containing them.

Data analysis showed that the Korean learners constructed hedging noun phrases mostly in either bare nouns or nouns preceded by determiners or quantifiers. Their use of nouns with qualifying adjective was relatively few in number, accounting for 13.5% of total noun usage. The Chinese and Japanese students modified hedging nouns with adjectives in 19.2% and 12.0% ratio, respectively. In contrast, 42% of noun usages in the NS corpus came with adjectives:

(11) Students need to learn very early that the *best chance* at success that

they have is by taking financial responsibility. (NS)

Furthermore, the scope of adjectives the Korean learners paired with hedging nouns was very limited – *good* taking up 54.5%, and the following adjectives *different*, *better*, and *strong* taking up 26.3% of the total. The underuse of quite simple structure ‘adjective+noun’ in EFL student essays can be accounted for their lack of linguistic competence, especially concerning the modification of abstract nouns, which can still be a difficult concept to manipulate.

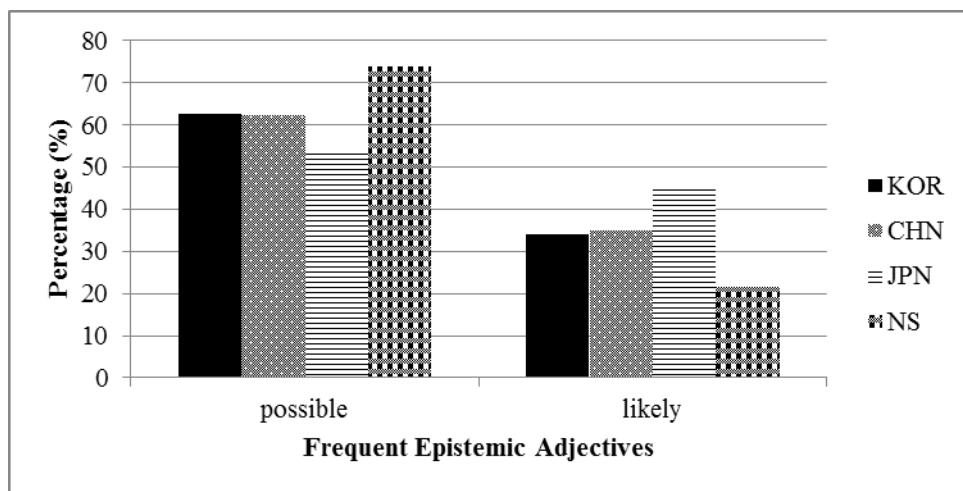


Figure 4.8 Distributional Patterns of Adjectives by Language

Background

The data of five hedging adjectives were analyzed with careful consideration of context from which the two most frequently employed adjectives were obtained. Small as the quantitative data itself was, close

observation yielded interesting results.

The patterns of adjective usage were quite different between the Korean learner group and the NS group: Compared to the NS participants, the Korean learners showed 32.8% higher preference for impersonalized clauses when using hedging adjectives:

(12)It is *likely* that they realize that money is something precious and it's the result of hardworking. (C_KOR)

(13)And in this way, there will be less people smoking and it is *possible* that this dispute might disappear. (C_KOR)

Impersonalized structures were more frequently found in the Korean learner corpus than in the other EFL learner corpora – the frequency outnumbered that of the Chinese and Japanese learner group by 15.6% and 11.7%, respectively.

Yet another fascinating finding was that the NS writers employed comparative clause *as...as possible* far more frequently, accounting for 64.7% of total usage of *possible*:

(14)These experiences are critical for the young individual who will need *as many life experiences as possible*. (NS)

(15)I wanted to make sure that I was *as conscientious as possible* to my smoking habits. (NS)

(16)They should devote *as much time to their learning as possible* without being weighed down by extra commitments. (NS)

In fact, for the Korean learners, comparison was restricted mostly to simple adjectives within the structure:

(17)I wish that smoking is banned in restaurants *as soon as possible*.

(B_KOR)

(18)It is important to make the settings *as inconvenient as possible* for smokers. (D_KOR)

4.3 Distributional Patterns across Proficiency Levels

Thus far, the overall frequency and distribution of hedging devices across different language groups were briefly considered. This section will show the distributional patterns across proficiency levels and grammatical categories and discuss notable features.

The three EFL learner groups consist of four ability bands – A, B, C and D, advancing in proficiency from left to right. Their essays were checked for hedging markers, the occurrences were counted, and specific analyses according to categorical distributions were made. The first language group under the scope was the Korean learner group: Table 4.3 shows the number of participants in each proficiency band, the number of hedging devices employed, and the normalized frequency. Subsequently, Figure 4.9 maps tokens per 100 words by proficiency groups, with the NS

participant group situated at the rightmost position.

Table 4.3 The Description of Hedging Devices Used by the Korean EFL Learners across Proficiency

	A (n=75)	B (n=61)	C (n=88)	D (n= 76)	χ^2 value
Total number of hedging devices	821	614	1,006	856	94.94***
Tokens per 100 words	2.49	2.30	2.53	2.38	0.014

***p<.001

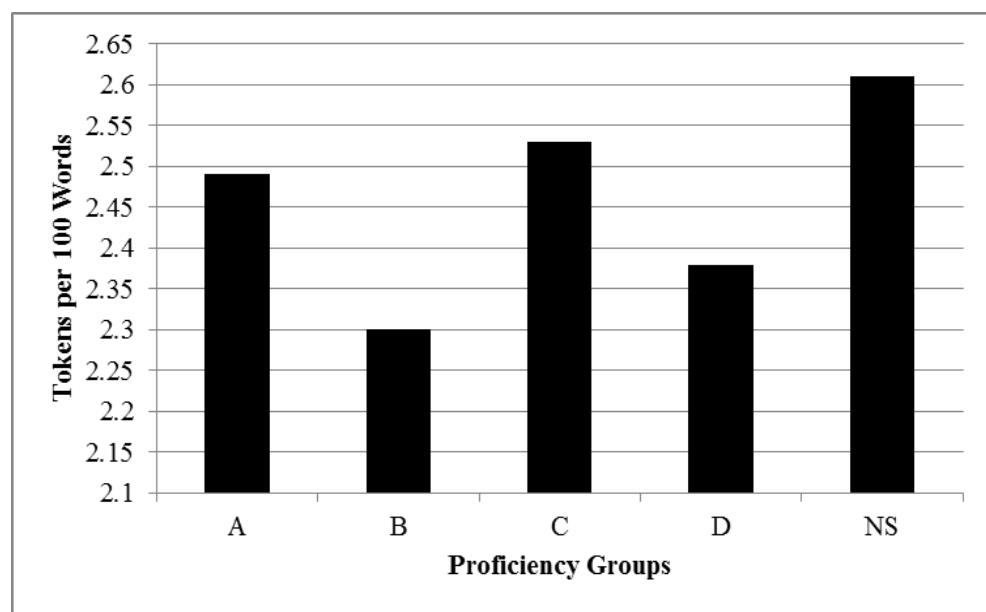


Figure 4.9 The Frequency of Hedging Devices Used by the Korean EFL Learners across Proficiency

Even though we can see the frequency graph rise and reach its peak in the NS group, EFL proficiency in this case does not necessarily appear to influence the frequency of hedging devices, as the graph rises and falls between proficiency groups. Although the normalized frequency across the four bands did not bear significant differences ($\chi^2=0.014$, df=3, p>.995), an analysis on the raw frequency showed a significantly big difference among them ($\chi^2=94.94$, df=3, p<.001).

Similar observations were made in the case of the other two language groups, in which the frequency of hedging devices does not seem to have a direct linear relationship with the language proficiency. From what we have considered concerning the effect EFL proficiency has on the frequency of hedging device usage, although it is clear that NS writers in general make use of these devices more frequently, proficiency variance within the learners seems to impact the use of hedging in a way much more complicated than originally assumed, which may possibly be moderated by other various factors.

With quantitative data on the frequency in hand, further investigation into the specific pattern of usage was conducted by looking into proficiency variations of the categorical distributions. As with the analysis of frequency data, uses of each grammatical category were counted, compared against the total usage for normalization, and mapped onto respective figures. In addition, the total number of different hedging items utilized and the relative percentage of the top ten items were examined to determine the range of

devices available for learners with different proficiency levels.

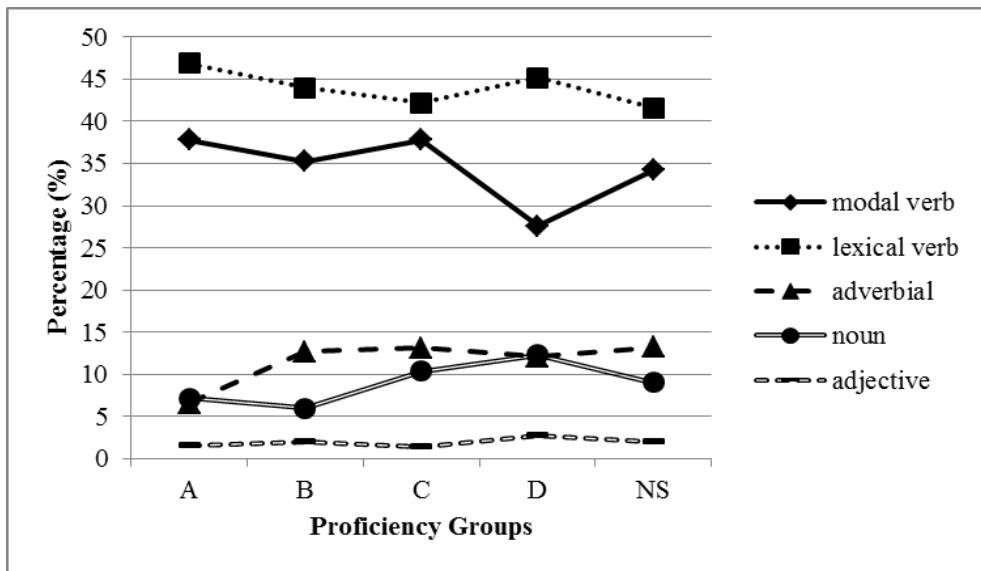


Figure 4.10 Categorical Distributions of the Hedging Devices used across Proficiency in the Korean Learner Group

An interesting feature noted from Figure 4.10 is that the rise of proficiency is accompanied by a more even distribution of the five grammatical classes in the Korean learner group. That is, the difference between the most and the least frequently used grammatical classes within the data gets smaller as the proficiency grows (61.6%, 54.5%, 51.1%, 42.4%, 39.6% in A, B, C, D, and NS). Another pattern to note is the distinct reverse pattern of usage in the two major categories: Modal verb occurrence steadily increases and lexical verb occurrence decreases with the rise in proficiency. This developmental pattern illustrates that the learner essays progressively

become more similar to the NS texts through increasing proportions of underused grammatical classes and decreasing proportions of overused ones.

Out of 73 hedging items, 40 different devices appeared in the works of group A, 46 in group B, 52 in group C, and 55 in group D. The rise of the number of items with the increase in EFL proficiency reflects the learners' improvement in their ability to make use of a wider range of hedging items. Even 54 devices of group D, however, fall short of 64 devices used by the NS group – which once again shows that however proficient they are, the EFL learners have a comparatively limited range of hedging devices to draw upon. What is also noticeable is the increase in proficiency brings with it the corresponding decrease in the percentage of the ten most frequently used items in the Korean learner corpus. The ten items account for 71.2%, 69.5%, 65.2%, and 58.2% of the total number of hedging items used by groups A, B, C, and D, respectively. This indicates that proficiency is an active variable affecting the range of hedging devices, allowing the more proficient learner to choose from a wider spectrum of options in their use of hedges.

The increase in proficiency resulted in a more even distribution in the Chinese and Japanese learners as well. The gap between the most and the least frequent classes converged in both the Chinese learner group – 39.1%, 39.7%, 36.4%, and 28.7% – and the Japanese learner group – 57.2%, 53.3%, 51.9%, and 47.0%, from A to D. The relative percentage of the top ten devices likewise decreased with proficiency advancement: The devices accounted for 69.3%, 68.4%, 64.7%, and 60.5% in the Chinese learner

group, and 74.3%, 72.5%, 72.3%, and 68.2% in the Japanese learner group.

The consistent pattern throughout EFL learners verifies that the rise in proficiency is closely associated with the ability to utilize a broader range of hedging items. It further suggests that higher level writers are more likely to hedge their claims with a broader range of items, while lower level writers tend to do so with a more restricted number of devices.

4.4 The Lexical Pairs and EFL Language Proficiency

More specific, focused analyses of hedging devices at specific item pair levels have yielded an unexpected, yet meaningful, pattern of use demonstrating the relationship between language proficiency and hedging. In the process of examining a number of hedging items and their occurrences, two intriguing lexical pairs emerged, whose frequency rates differed greatly between the Korean learner group and the NS group. Interestingly enough, each of these two pairs of words belongs to the same grammatical category, conveys similar meanings, but is headed toward the divergent directions in their distributional patterns. Presented next are the distributional characteristics of the two identified pairs: *will* vs. *would* and *think* vs. *believe*.

The first example is found in the contrasting pattern of use for *will* and

would between the Korean EFL and NS groups: Whereas the NS writers used both modal verbs in similar proportions, the EFL writers altogether favored *will*, much more so than they would for *would*. The result supports the observations made by Hyland and Milton (1997) and McEnery and Kifle (2002), who also found *would* occur more frequently in the NS corpus than it does in the NNS corpus. Consistent pattern in the hedging modal usage of EFL learners in a number of related studies led the researcher to wonder, if non-native-like pragmatic awareness somehow prompts learners to frequently employ *will*, would the advancement in proficiency also increase the likelihood of their employing *would*?

Thus, the data of modal usage of four proficiency bands in the Korean learner group was re-examined for their use of *will* and *would*. The raw frequency rates of proficiency bands were compared against the total usage of hedging modals. Because the size between the four groups is inconsistent, the raw frequency was divided by the number of essays submitted, and the subsequent frequency per essay is described in Figure 4.11; frequency rates normalized as percentage is demonstrated in Figure 4.12.

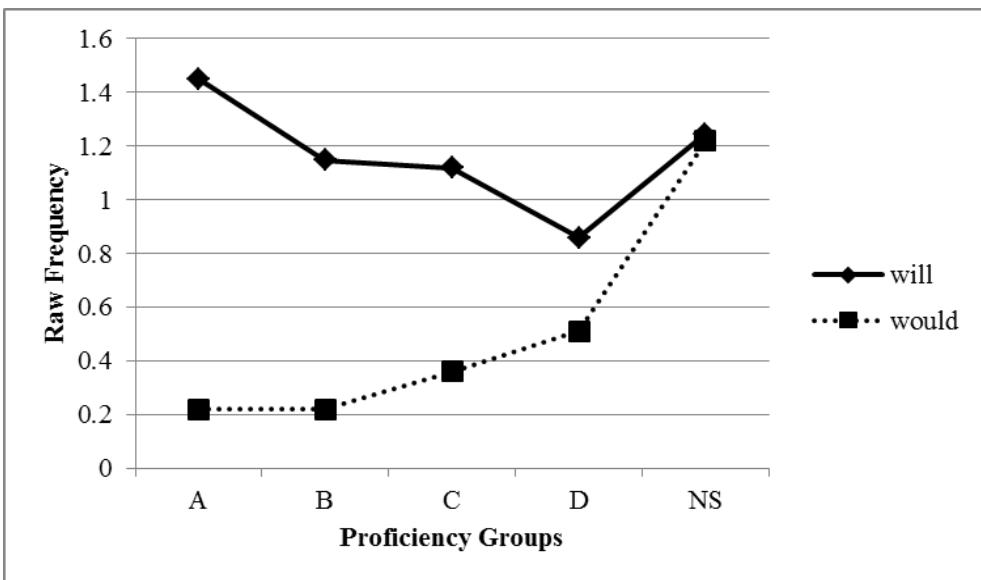


Figure 4.11 Raw Frequency of *will* and *would* by Proficiency per Essay

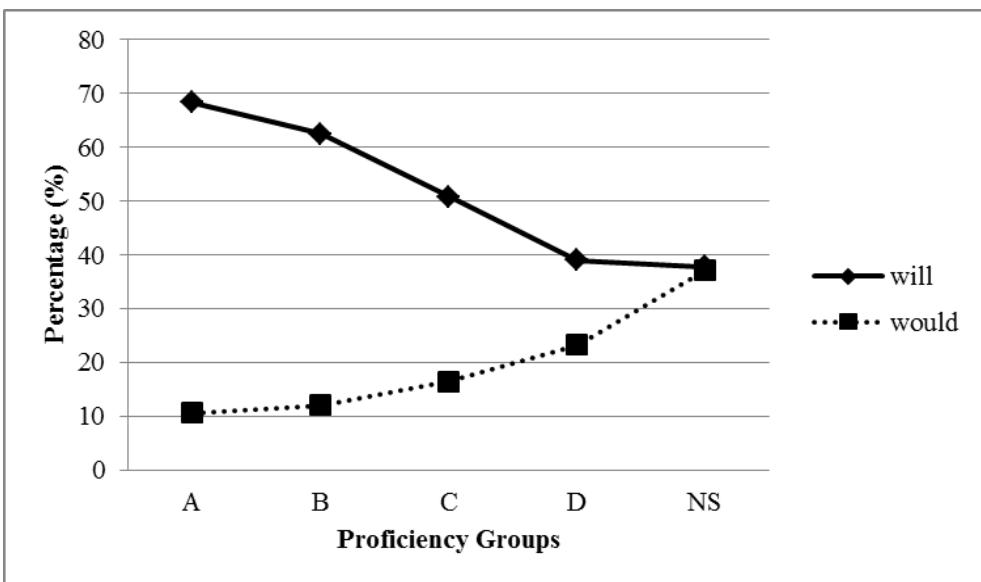


Figure 4.12 Distributional Patterns of *will* and *would* by Proficiency

Interestingly, the use of *will* progressively dropped with the advancement in proficiency – 68.3%, 62.5%, 50.7%, 38.9%, and reached the

lowest of 37.8% in the NS group. On the contrary, the use of *would* steadily rose with the increase in English proficiency – 10.6%, 12.0%, 16.4%, 23.2%, and hit the highest of 37.0% in the NS group. The present study thus suggests that proficiency is an important variable affecting the choice EFL learners make between *will* and *would*, and that the increase in proficiency helps them resemble the modal usage pattern of NS writers.

The discrepancy in the distribution of the two hedging modals leads one to wonder what the odds might be that certainty markers would occur more frequently in tandem with the increase in proficiency. Thus, the data for commitment scale of modal verbs was under analysis once again, with a special focus on the variance among proficiency bands (See Figure 4.13).

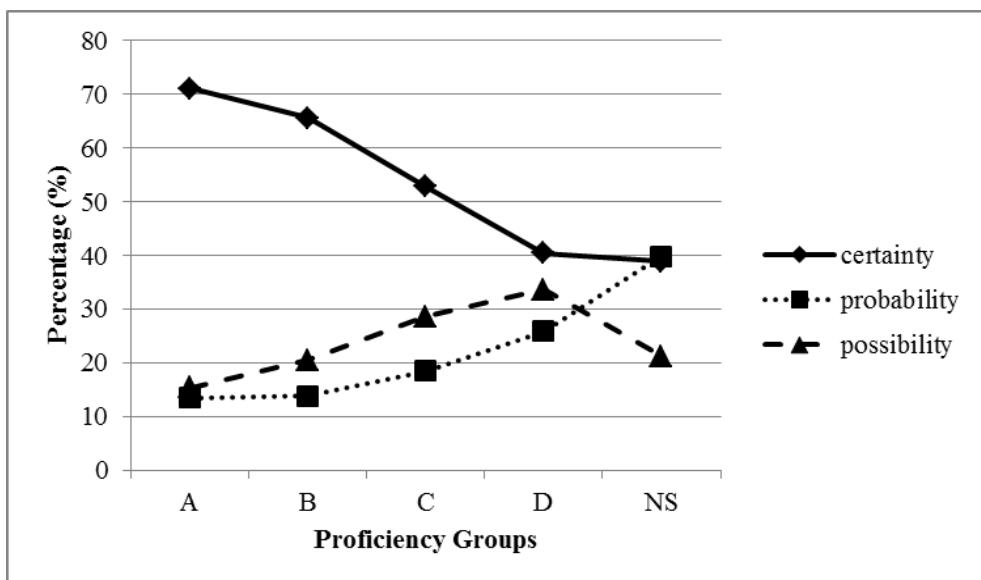


Figure 4.13 Distributional Patterns of Commitment by Proficiency

Clearly shown is the closing-in of the gap between the rates of certainty markers and probability markers – 57.6%, 51.7%, 34.2%, 14.5%, and less than 1% in the NS group. The gap becomes progressively narrower as proficiency advances. Possibility markers, despite the drop in usage in the NS corpus, occur increasingly more frequently as proficiency advances. Previous studies reported that NNS writers tend to be more assertive and strong in their tone, whereas NS writers prefer tentative argumentation (Milton & Hyland, 1996; Takimoto, 2015); the present study, however, also demonstrates that EFL learners, as they progress in their linguistic ability, choose to employ hedging items which are closer to NS standards in epistemic commitment continuum.

Another pair of hedging words with similarly direct, or inverse proportional patterns was lexical verbs *think* and *believe*. While *think* was the most frequently employed lexical verb in both the Korean and NS corpora, Korean learners tended to rely much heavily on the item. *Believe*, on the other hand, occurred on a much higher frequency and ranked as the 7th frequently used item in the NS data. The raw frequency of the four proficiency groups was divided by the number of essays submitted, and the subsequent frequency per essay is represented in Figure 4.14; frequency rates normalized as percentage are demonstrated in Figure 4.15.

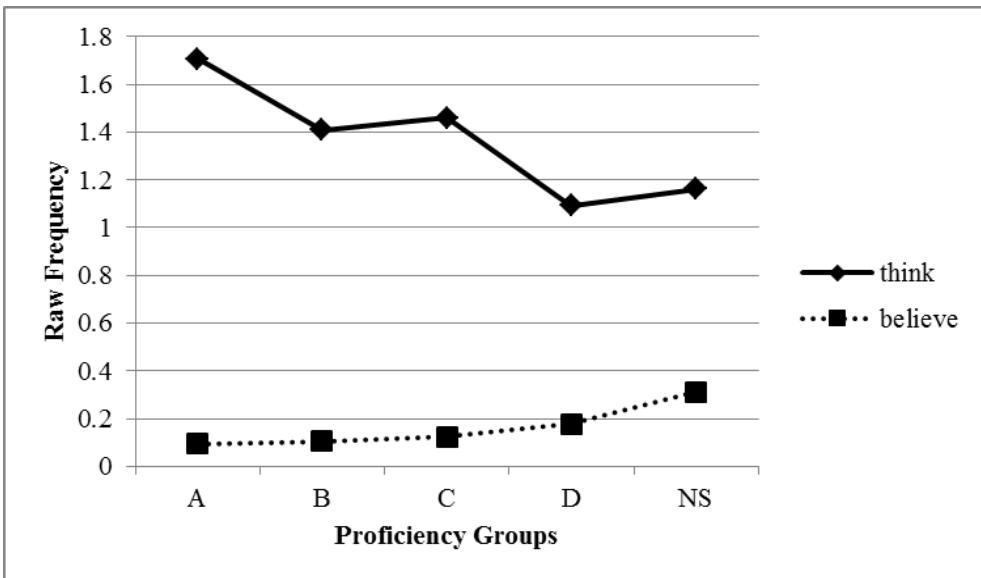


Figure 4.14 Raw Frequency of *think* and *believe* by Proficiency per Essay

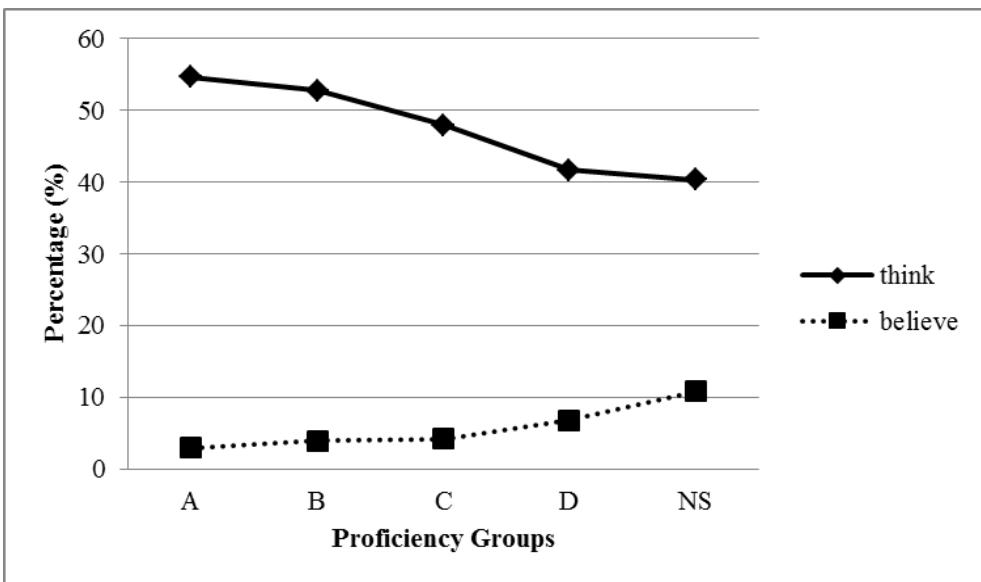


Figure 4.15 Distributional Patterns of *think* and *believe* by Proficiency

The detailed observation on the frequency rates of both verbs along the

developmental curve gave equally interesting results. The occurrence of *think* steadily decreased as learners became more proficient – 54.7%, 52.7%, 47.9%, 41.7%, and reached the lowest of 40.3% in the NS group. In contrast, the occurrence of *believe* became increasingly more frequent as proficiency level increased – 2.9%, 3.9%, 4.1%, 6.7%, and got to the highest of 10.8% in the NS group. The results suggest that heavy reliance on *think* at the lower level grows weaker as learners become more proficient. The present study goes a step further and proposes that proficiency also affects the use of *believe*, that is, the occurrence of *believe* becomes more frequent as learner's proficiency advances. In addition, what has been suggested is visually demonstrated afresh: Proficiency plays an important part in the learners' use of hedging devices, which, in turn, allows them to approximate the NS standard of usage as they progress in their linguistic ability.

4.5 Hedging as a Stylistic Feature in EFL Student Writings

Another central aspect of L2 academic writing is authorial presence, which refers to writers involving themselves in the assertions they make. Unlike speakers who communicate directly with their audience, writers do not enjoy the same luxury; as a result, their written product is required to be

clearer and more intelligible to readers, who are disconnected in terms of time and place from the original context of writing (Chafe, 1982). Personalized sentences, with the use of first person pronouns, allow writers to actively emphasize their contribution to the proposition made and thus engage them in the appraisal of its validity (Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2002; Tang & John, 1999). Meanwhile, the writer using impersonalized sentences evades the responsibility for the truth of a proposition, and this is typically done by sentence adverbs, impersonal pronouns, or passive voice. Thus, making an appropriate choice on person and voice helps writers reasonably distance themselves from readers, which may also contribute to successfully hedging their claims.

It was briefly mentioned in the previous section that the Korean English learners prefer constructing impersonalized sentences with adjectives. However, more than half of hedging verbs (57.8%) carried out the self-promotional function with first person pronouns, *I* or *we*. The Korean corpus examined in the present study revealed that they profusely used *I* to express what they think – in fact, *think* turned out to be the most frequent collocate to occur with *I*, occurring 440 times. The number overwhelmingly exceeds the next frequent collocate, *I believe*, which made 41 occurrences. The usage of *I* examined in the present study closely resembles the usage made by the EFL learners in Petch-Tyson's (1998) study (cf. Tang & John, 1999). She found that not only do NNS writers use *I* far more frequently than NS writers do, but also that they normally use it to discuss either the writer

within the essay, or to express what they think or want to say. On the contrary, NS writers made personal reference on a less frequent basis, and when they did, the references were made in past tense to recount personal experiences which were included to support their argument. Aijmer (1997) adds, “*think* is organized as a prototype with cogitation as a focus. This is a general concept which can easily be extended to belief, opinion, and intention by inferencing” (p. 12). Thus, many instances of the phrase were used by Korean learners to emphasize, “I am expressing my opinion here and now.” Sometimes they co-selected it with quality hedges such as *in my opinion, as for me, from my point of view, and as far as I'm concerned* as shown in the examples below. There were 25 co-selection cases in the Korean learner data, but no such co-occurrence was found in the NS data.

- (19)*In my opinion, I think* smoking should be completely banned at all restaurants in the country. (C_KOR)
- (20)*As for me, I think* the main task of students is to study hard and learn important knowledge. (A_KOR)
- (21)*So from my point of view, I think* government should take some steps to ban it. (B_KOR)
- (22)*As far as I'm concerned, I think* it is of great importance for college students to have a part-time job. (C_KOR).

The Korean learners also manifested their problem in the rhetoric, particularly in the overuse of sentence-initial adverbials, which was 19.8% higher than those found in the NS data. The finding is similar to the

connection made by previous researchers between EFL learners and their preference for sentence-initial adverbials (Granger & Tyson, 1996; Lee, 2004; Narita, Kurokawa, & Utsuro, 2003). Of higher frequency among those were *in my opinion*, *actually*, *usually*, and *maybe*:

(23) *Actually*, there are so many companies and government departments which employ college students as part-time-internship-workers because they are cheaper than formal employees, and they can be easily educated than cheaper workers. (D_KOR)

(24) *Maybe* smokers think that there are few legal smoking areas.
(B_KOR)

The problem associated with the recurrent use of sentence-initial adverbials involves running the risk of sounding too casual and colloquial, making their message inadequate for academic prose.

Chapter 5 Discussions

The aim of this chapter is to summarize and discuss the major findings of the current study which were also described in detail in the preceding chapter, with a view to seeking possible answers to research questions stated at the beginning of the current thesis. These questions address: (a) the contrast in the use of hedging devices between Korean EFL learners and NS participants; (b) the potential impact of English proficiency on hedging patterns; and (c) finally distinct stylistic features of Korean EFL writers. The major findings in relation to these questions are discussed next in detail.

5.1 Hedging Patterns of NS and Korean Learners

One core issue investigated in this study has to do with the comparison of hedging patterns between the Korean EFL writers and the NS writers. The examination of the corpora has shown the Korean learners' general tendency to rely on a smaller number of lexical devices for hedging than their NS counterpart. Overreliance on restricted vocabulary might have led to the lower frequency itself.

Needless to say, the very nature of the target language plays a crucial role in L2 acquisition. As noted by Holmes (1984), the inherent properties

of English hedging devices are intertwined with semantic and pragmatic complexity: a) many devices can convey a range of different meanings; b) devices not only convey the writer's confidence in the propositional truth, but also help contribute to a relationship with the reader; and c) their meanings can be signaled in many different ways.

There is little doubt that semantic complexity is an important factor affecting the acquisition and use of hedging devices. *Would*, for example, is very complex in that it has a number of meanings (Coates, 1983; Palmer, 1990; Perkins, 1983), which normally perplexes EFL learners regardless of their L1 backgrounds (Hinkel, 2002). This partly explains the relative infrequent use of this modal verb in learners across language groups.

Form complexity is another significant predictor for learner's preference (e.g. Brown, 2003), as is in the case of competing adverbs, namely, *maybe* and *probably*. As mentioned, they have different status in the Korean and NS corpora, although the two items similarly mark epistemic possibility. In view of ease of articulation, *probably* is formally more complex than *maybe*. Since the complex forms require more effort to use, comparatively easier pronunciation of *maybe* makes it more preferable in spoken discourse. Once it has become fixed, learners are likely to transfer it in writing, unaware that *maybe* is rarely used in academic writing in English. Thus, when two forms compete for the same or similar meaning, the shorter and easier one is likely to gain the upper hand and take up a major proportion.

5.2 The Impact of English Proficiency on Hedging

Another area of interlanguage pragmatics to be addressed is whether overall EFL proficiency factors would impact the range and frequency of hedging items Korean learners choose to employ. Although the findings could not prove a positive correlation of EFL proficiency with the frequency of hedges, they clearly demonstrate that hedging is a stylistic feature of written text that varies with the proficiency of the writer.

First of all, the range and types of hedging items employed by the writers became increasingly wider as they progressed in their EFL proficiency. The observed uneven use of hedging devices by the less proficient learners is consistent with the findings of previous studies not only in the area of epistemic hedges (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Kim, 2011; McEnery & Kifle, 2002; Oh, 2007) but of vocabulary in general (Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; De Cock, Granger, Leech, & McEnery, 1998; Kim, 2002; Lee, 2004, 2007; Ringbom, 1998a; Shin, 2007). This may also be partly due to their tendency to prefer expressions that they feel confident in over some other expressions that they are not sure of (Milton, 1998). The wider variety in hedging devices for higher level learners may then be regarded as the result of expansion in vocabulary size available to them.

The development of proficiency involved a more even distribution of grammatical classes of hedging devices as well. The fact that the polarized

pattern becomes more balanced as the proficiency rises again suggests that the progress in the ability to communicate politeness and tentativeness involves widening of the range of hedging devices. Further supporting evidence is found in the increase in the employment of hedging item types and the decrease in the percentage of the ten most frequently used items with the rise in proficiency.

One surprising and noteworthy pattern found in this study was the contrasting distributional patterns of modal verbs *will* versus *would*, which seemed to be closely in line with the development in EFL proficiency. It was observed that higher level learners' use of *will* decreased while their use of *would* increased. The learners' infrequent use of certain modal verbs may be attributed in part to the difficulty they have in using them (e.g. subjunctive mood, epistemic meaning, and degree of formality) – modal verbs are inherently complicated for their context-bound meanings and pragmatic implications, along with their unshared cultural values (Hinkel, 1995; Holmes, 1982). The Korean learners made very frequent use of *will* (55.4%), when the NS participants switched between *will* (38.3%) and *would* (37.5%) at similar proportions. *Will* is considered to serve a similar purpose with *would*, that is, of indicating the probability of present or future events. The distributional difference thus specifies that, to achieve the same function, Korean learners tend to keep a more emphatic and stronger tone, while NS writers employ more cautious and tentative form. The proficiency variance in the distribution of *will* and *would* further shows that the higher

level writers employ fewer hedging devices from the semantic category of certainty and more from the category of probability and possibility. It appears that the lower level learners stay focused narrowly on their own arguments that they express with certainty, which often results in texts with scarce hedging devices signaling probability or possibility. In contrast, the advanced EFL and NS writers who are better skilled at constructing a dialogue with an audience seem to build more persuasive arguments with a wide range of hedging items conveying probability as well as certainty. In other words, the higher level writers' frequent use of probability/possibility markers tends to lend the text a more dialogic tone while the lower level writers' heavy reliance on certainty expressions produces a more uncompromising text. These two types of texts are expected to have noticeably different effects on readers (Crismore & Vande Kopple, 1997).

A pattern similar to that of the two modals was found for another pair of items: The lexical verbs *think* and *believe*. The patterns of EFL learners' use of these verb pairs, therefore, suggest that they become similar to those of NS writers as their EFL proficiency increases. Researchers have long recognized the overreliance of *think* to be one of the distinct features of NNS writers (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Ringbom, 1998b). The present study has found the effect of advancing proficiency on learners' use of *think*, which becomes weaker, and on their use of *believe*, which becomes more frequent simultaneously. Not surprisingly yet still interestingly, the present study shows that the more proficient a learner is, the more closely s/he will

approximate the native English writers in all the measures noted above.

Perhaps the most conspicuous influence of EFL proficiency lies in the fact that many other factors change with the development in proficiency (cf. Pienemann, 1989). First, learners with different levels of proficiency have different processing capacity (VanPatten, 1996) and different attentional focus (Gass, 2004). Advanced learners may also become more sensitive to the stylistic aspect of modal devices. Secondly, the input factors, such as frequency, saliency and complexity may also change when the overall proficiency improves. The infrequent forms usually go unnoticed by novice learners, yet something atypical despite its infrequency may as well stand out for a learner at more advanced stages of learning (cf. Gass & Selinker, 2008). Finally, the advanced learners may rely less on matching L2 with L1. In the case of ‘weaker’ learners, Prince (1996) found that they were less able to transfer knowledge learned from translation into L2 context than more advanced learners. ‘Stronger’ learners, on the other hand, may resort to the context, utilize implicit knowledge or patterns from richer experience of input, and draw out inference as L1 children do.

If it can be assumed that rising proficiency roughly corresponds to learners’ development over time, as a result of the simultaneous progressive modifications in various dimensions, the learners may be represented to be gradually approaching the NSs in hedging their claims. Specifically, the EFL learners’ acquisition of this aspect of L2 pragmatic competence may entail the improvement in their ability to exploit a broad range of hedging

devices from various grammatical classes in diverse syntactic contexts on the one hand, and to balance assertions and doubts in their arguments to the degree appropriate by the NS norm on the other. Whether a NS norm is indeed the final destination of the development or its approximation is always desirable is debatable, especially with the current status of English as a lingua franca. Still, the results of the current study evidenced that the higher the EFL learners' proficiency gets, the closer their texts approach the NS writers', at least in the domain of hedging and pragmatic competence.

5.3 The Stylistic Features of Hedging in Korean Learners

A more in-depth contextual analysis of the texts written by the Korean learners was conducted to find out specific patterns in which the Korean learners perform their assertion in English academic essays, and the examination has revealed some interesting stylistic features in hedging their assertions. The first and foremost problem in terms of pragmatic use of hedges is that the Korean EFL learners proved themselves to be unfamiliar with manipulation of expressing doubt in their claims. They tended to present claims in epistemically stronger tone, as they made more frequent use of items that express certainty than NS participants did.

Furthermore, they tended to personalize their statements with *I* or *we*,

as found in “*I* strongly *claim* that...,” “*I suggest* that...,” “*We must think about...*” Their efforts to increase the validity of the proposition with personal pronouns are sometimes met with challenges, as exemplified in “*I think* about this problem, so *I think...*,” “As *I* am smoker, *I often feel that...*,” and “*In my opinion, I support...*” These examples echo findings by Banks (1994), whose participants in the study also employed personal pronouns with hedging verbs to strengthen the force of commitment to an argument. From a cross-cultural perspective, this is in part due to the differences in rhetorical tradition between the two languages. However, it is worth noting that this is not a culturally preferred type of transfer from their L1. Koreans value agreement, face, and harmony (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) – they tend to choose an indirect way to persuade people into their opinions or ideas in discourse. They avoid any unnecessary confrontational manner of argumentation, as “directness is thought to cause offence or loss of face” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p. 80). The possible assumption is that the Korean writers are yet to develop a complete understanding of the conventions between ‘explicitness’ and ‘directness’, which may lead to a failure in conveying “an appropriate degree of directness, deference or assertiveness for an academic register” (Hyland & Milton, 1997, p. 193). This suggests that the rhetorical interference may have a negative influence on the use of hedging devices. In another possible scenario where the findings of contrastive rhetoric research have been applied to L2 writing (Kaplan, 1966), the learners, having been instructed from the classroom that directness and

straightforwardness are the norm in the target culture, overcompensated for what they thought to be the norm in English. That is, although the same students may actually be more indirect when writing in their L1, they committed sociopragmatic error as they strived to be more socially appropriate, resulting in inappropriate linguistic behavior.

The second major problem has to do with their language use in colloquial and spoken style. High frequency of sentence-initial adverbials was pointed out to be a stylistic feature potentially inappropriate for academic scene. Although related literature lacks studies on the logic behind the tendency, the researcher speculates that saliency has intervening effect on the acquisition and use of certain hedging devices. Some devices that are more frequent in learners are often more salient and noticeable to them than others. Saliency is related to frequency in many intriguing ways. The frequent form is usually the one easily to get noticed, and thus more salient and prominent. Frequency in itself, however, does not guarantee saliency. For instance, *probably* in the normal speech is probably of low saliency in the language stream, as it is usually pronounced very fast with no particular stress by the speaker. On the contrary, it is much easier for learners to notice adverbials such as *actually*, *in my opinion*, and *usually*, because it is normally used in the sentence-initial position. Infrequent as they are, they prove to be quite salient for L2 learners, and are most likely to be frequently used by learners, as has been supported from the findings of the present study.

Another striking feature of the Korean learners' speech written-down can be exemplified by the frequent occurrence of verbs *say* and *talk about*: The Korean learners used them at 12.1% higher frequency than NS writers. Such conversational and personalized forms can prove particularly tricky for L2 writers, as distinguishing written register from spoken one can be a very challenging task. In her study, Granger (1998b) also found the L2 writers' striking overuse of *say*, and suggested that the overuse may partly be due to interlingual factors. Clearly, Korean learner writers are grappling with difficulty of moderating the degree of their conviction in argument here – they often get lost in the mixed signals of spoken and written style, and make mistakes of transferring informal conversational forms to academic written forms.

Lastly, it seems meaningful to discuss here in more profoundness the overuse of the lexical verb *think* by the Korean learners, which was consistently observed throughout the data used for this study. It was also found that they typically collocated it with personal pronoun *I*. In relation to this, Hyland (2000b) describes academic writers who use expressions such as *I think* or *I believe* as showing “an overt acceptance of personal responsibility for a judgment” and a demonstration of “a confident and expert mind in full control of the material, making judgments and passing comment on issues of concern to the discipline” (p. 123). Likewise, Harwood (2005b) argues that when researchers take responsibility for a claim by using personal pronouns in conjunction with verbs of thought or

emotion such as *think* or *believe*, they make an impression of “conviction and authority” (p. 1212). It remains doubtful, however, whether the Korean learners who employed the same expression represent such confidence and expertise, with full control of the material. Rather, expressions such as *I think* are examples of spoken register transferred to written product, and show a lack of understanding of academic discourse genre and its conventions. Thus, a chasm in ability between EFL learner writers and NS writers requires a different set of criteria, even when the same expressions and structures are being examined.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Implications

The present study has attempted to uncover the impact of L1 backgrounds and EFL proficiency of L2 learners in the use of hedging devices in L2 writing. For this purpose, the argumentative essays written by three different language groups were collected, each of which was divided into four proficiency bands, to be compared among them as well as with the corresponding NS participants' essays. The findings clearly demonstrate that hedging is a stylistic feature of written text that varies with the proficiency of the writer. The EFL learners' general tendency to rely on a small number of lexical items was attributed to the nature of English, with its semantic and pragmatic complexity, form complexity, and saliency. The observation on the writing samples of the Korean learner group, which has been the center of our attention throughout the study, has enabled diagnosis of problems present in the writing education and assessment.

The study is limited, however, in that the distribution of the proficiency bands was fluctuating; a more even distribution between proficiency levels would have yielded more reliable and valid results. Since the overall proficiency was not very high considering the participants were adult EFL learners, there is a need for a more profound approach to academic writing in a higher education setting which includes disciplinary variations in a genre analysis with learner corpora. Furthermore, the present study

examined cross-sectional data instead of a longitudinal one, due to temporal and financial constraints. It thus remains to be investigated in the future whether the changes across L1 backgrounds and proficiency levels identified in the present study are borne out when learners are traced over an extended period of time. Despite such limitations, the findings give important implications regarding EFL assessment and teaching.

6.1 Implications for EFL Writing Assessment

Diagnostic tests should be able to identify strengths and weaknesses in learner's use of language and focus on specific elements, rather than global abilities (Alderson, 2005). Several classifications have been proposed for rating scales, and the most commonly cited categorization is that of holistic and analytic scales (Hamp-Lyons, 1991). Between the two types of scales, analytic scales are generally regarded to result in higher reliability, have higher construct validity for L2 writers, but are time-consuming to construct and therefore more expensive; since analytic scales measure writing on several different aspects, better diagnostic information can be expected (Weigle, 2002). However, rating scales used in the assessment of writing have repeatedly been criticized for being imprecise and thus often resulted in holistic marking by raters (Brindley, 1998; Upshur & Turner, 1995). As

proper hedging and appropriate use of stylistic features are crucial in academic writing in order to gain acceptance from the audience, rubrics for writing performance that include category on pragmatics would result in a more valid and reliable rating scale than one that has typically been used in standardized performance assessment.

One such assessment is DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment), which includes an analytic scale with nine traits – organization, coherence, style, data description, interpretation, development of ideas, sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, and spelling. The category of hedging is clearly just one aspect of academic style. Knoch (2009) reports from his study on DELNA that when rating academic style, some raters focused more on non-academic vocabulary while others were more irritated by persistent use of markers of writer identity, such as *I*. It could therefore be argued that in order for a category which is open to subjective interpretations to be incorporated in the assessment scale, repeated and systematic rater training is a must.

Contrastive patterns of frequent items found in the present study offer an alternative for performance assessment, an implication for automated scoring system for essays. For example, automated essay scoring engine called *e-rater* was first developed by ETS (Educational Testing Service) in the 1990s (Burstein, 2003; Elliot & Mikulas, 2004) and has continually been updated to date. *E-rater* employed regression models based on a corpus of human-graded essays, and analyzes the rate of errors in grammar, usage,

mechanics, and style; the number of required discourse elements; the lexical complexity; the relationship of vocabulary used to that found in top-scoring essays on the same prompt; and the essay length (Attali & Burstein, 2004; Chodorow & Burstein, 2004). The assessment of style is primarily focused on detecting undesirable style, which is a repetition of the same words (Burstein, Chodorow & Leacock, 2004). Drawing from the relationship proficiency has with the occurrence of modal verbs *will* and *would*; lexical verbs *think* and *believe*, the proportion could be incorporated in the features of style in the automated writing evaluation system. Style of writing is not restricted to avoiding repetition of certain words – it is related to approximating the writing norms and conventions of writers from the target culture. Thus, it seems more appropriate that the occurrence of the items mentioned is taken into account for more accurate assessment of style in writing.

6.2 Implications for EFL Teaching

An important pedagogical issue pending at this point is how to teach hedging in L2 academic prose. In fact, the question, *Can pragmatics be taught?* has intrigued numerous researchers into exploring the effect of instruction on the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge. Some previous studies have demonstrated the superiority of a target language environment

over a foreign language environment for pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Barron, 2002; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992; Li, 2000; Matsumura, 2001, 2003; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Schauer, 2006; Taguchi, 2008; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Although such findings appear to argue that pragmatic competence can only be achieved through the exposure to the target language community and that the imbalance of grammatical and pragmatic competences in the EFL setting is inevitable, other researchers came up with rather encouraging findings which suggest that it *is* possible to improve interlanguage pragmatics through instruction, even in EFL classrooms (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Kinginger & Belz, 2005; Kinginger & Blatter, 2008; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Marriot, 1995; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Röver, 2005; Soler, 2005). For example, Wildner-Bassett (1984) found that EFL learners have improved in their use of gambits to manage conversation and modify illocutionary force, in response to instruction. Most of the studies saw the advantage of explicit instruction over an implicit one on improvement in pragmatic competence in EFL settings (Martínez-Flor & Soler, 2007; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001).

Teaching learners of the importance of hedging in L2 academic writing may require persistence and consistency on the teacher's part, because the need to hedge claims and propositions to show a proper amount of hesitation and tentativeness in writing is a textual feature which is more specific to the Anglo-American rhetorical tradition than to others (Hinkel,

2005). Together with the instructor's efforts, explicit instruction would thus initiate and stimulate acquisition of hedging. An instruction starts by first reminding the learners that the hedging items are probably structures they already know about; they just may not be aware that they can use them as strategies for hedging. In other words, L2 pragmatic acquisition is enhanced when learners are made to *notice* and focus attention on certain aspects or features of language (Schmidt, 1993). Learners should be made aware of proper ways to distinguish between observed facts and interpretations, explanations or comments, in order to be effective in argumentation. The problem starts when learners give the same weight to observed facts and interpretations. The hedging items considered in the present study can be a great starting point – the instructor can go over items in context and discuss the degree of confidence each item conveys. For instance, learners can look at sentences including hedging modal verbs and identify the verb as conveying certainty, probability, or possibility. Given the finding from this study, Korean learners would likely benefit much from practice and training that are designed to build up pragmatic awareness for epistemic probability by using the modal verb *would*. Instructors can draw learners' attention to a modal form, and help them distinguish the subtle difference between semantically close forms. When the learners are provided with scaffolding and support from the instructor, acquisition will be facilitated; if there lacks appropriate scaffolding and support, learning may be delayed or even be hindered (e.g. Johnson, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006;

Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). A recent study on the English curriculum in Korea also points out that aspects on hedging and stylistic features have not been sufficiently covered and even been ignored (Lee, 2011).

A more active engagement on the learner's part is also encouraged. As groups, the learners can underline all the hedging devices they can find in a passage, explain their usage, and provide each of them with an equivalent word in their native language (Salager-Meyer, 1994). Or, the procedure can turn the other way around: The instructor can delete all the hedging devices and ask the learners to fill them in with their own ideas, hedging it when necessary. Rewriting exercises which involve replacing definite assertions with hedges can also prove helpful. If a learner's proficiency has not ripened yet that a rewriting exercise is too difficult, other productive tasks include paraphrasing texts of varying certainty and completing sentence frames (Hyland, 1996b).

Another issue that must be dealt with here is the need for training in academic writing in English to familiarize learners to stylistic conventions characteristic to the genre. Teaching English writing, despite its importance, has widely been neglected in Korea, compared to other skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading (Kim, 2013). Ahn (1995) lists three reasons for the tendency: Over-emphasis on grammar and reading comprehension, limited knowledge English teachers possess on L2 writing instruction, and failure to set appropriate goals in L2 writing. English writing sessions in middle and high school classrooms are thus limited to correcting

grammatical errors and constructing simple sentences, only to check learners' fragmentary knowledge on grammar and this is far from the purpose set out in the original curriculum. Controlled writing practice may impede learner's logical reasoning and higher order of thinking, and have proven to be ineffective in enhancing their writing ability (Yang & Sohn, 2009).

With the systematic instruction on English academic writing, learners will be able to master stylistic features present in academic discourse genre, which will help them follow the academic standard in the target community. Regular writing practice sessions will aid learner writers to concentrate on the key differences between the types of lexical and syntactic features that differentiate formal written and informal conversational registers (Jordan, 1997). Therefore, L2 academic writing instruction must address the lexical items that are regarded as too conversational and thus should be avoided. To this end, the teaching of writing should help learners expand the range of hedging items to provide them with the means of expressing their ideas without relying on certain words to develop effective rhetorical persuasion. A practical exercise of the kind may be of use for lexical alternatives – e.g. providing alternative verbs for *think* to Korean learners (Hinkel, 2003), rewriting personalized sentences to an impersonalized version by using passives, dummy *it* subject, or rather object description of the self by using the words, *the writer* or *the author*.

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APPENDIX A

Other Classification Schemes of Epistemic Devices

Table A1. Holmes' (1988) Classification of Epistemic Devices

Modal verbs	Lexical verbs	Adverbials	Nouns	Adjectives
(be) bound to	appear	actually	assumption	apparent
can't	argue	apparently	belief	certain
couldn't	assume	at first sight	certainty	clear
have to	assure	beyond doubt	chance	evident
have got to	believe	certainly	claim	improbable
must	claim	clearly	danger	inevitable
will	consider	definitely	doubt	likely
would	convince	doubtless	estimate	obvious
ought to	doubt	essentially	evidence	plain
should	not doubt	in fact	explanation	possible
shouldn't	estimate	in reality	fear	probable
will not	expect	in theory	hope	sure
could	feel	in X's opinion	idea	unlikely
may (not)	guess	indeed	opinion	
might (not)	hope	indubitably	possibility	
	imagine	inevitably	speculation	
	know	maybe	tendency	
	not know	naturally	theory	
	look as if	necessarily	view	
	look (like)	obviously		
	presume	of course		
	reckon	perhaps		
	seem	plainly		
	suggest	possibly		
	suppose	presumably		
	tend	probably		
	think	surely		
	not think	undeniably		
	threaten	undoubtedly		
		unquestionably		
		(very) likely		
		without doubt		

Table A2. Hyland and Milton's (1997) Classification of Epistemic Devices

Modal verbs	Adjectives	Nouns	Lexical verbs	Adverbs
could	apparent	assumption	appear	about
couldn't	certain	belief	argue	actually
may	a certain extent	certainty	assume	almost
might	clear	chance	believe	apparently
should	likely	claim	claim	around
shouldn't	obvious	danger	doubt	certainly
would	evident	doubt	estimate	clearly
wouldn't	possible	estimate	expect	definitely
will	probable	evidence	indicate	doubtless
won't	sure	explanation	know	essentially
	unlikely	fact	predict	evidently
		fear	presume	frequently
		hope	propose	generally
		idea	seem	in fact
		opinion	speculate	indeed
		possibility	suggest	largely
		tendency	suppose	likely
		theory	tend	never
		view	think	normally
				obviously
				of course
				often
				perhaps
				possibly
				presumably
				probably
				quite
				rarely
				relatively
				sometimes
				surely
				undoubtedly
				usually

Table A3. Hyland's (2005b) Classification of Hedges and Boosters

Boosters	Hedges
actually	about
always	almost
believe	apparent
believed	apparently
believes	appear
beyond-doubt	appeared
certain	appears
certainly	approximately
clear	argue
clearly	argued
conclusively	argues
decidedly	around
definite	assume
definitely	assumed
demonstrate	broadly
demonstrated	certain-amount
demonstrates	certain-extent
doubtless	certain-level
establish	claim
established	claimed
evident	claims
evidently	could
find	couldn't
finds	doubt
found	doubtful
in-fact	essentially
incontestable	estimate
incontestably	estimated
incontrovertible	fairly
incontrovertibly	feel
indeed	feels
indisputable	felt
indisputably	frequently
know	from-my-perspective
known	from-our-perspective
must	from-this-perspective
never	generally
no-doubt	guess
obvious	indicate
obviously	indicated
of-course	indicates
prove	in-general
proved	in-most-cases
proves	in-most-instances
realize	in-my-opinion

realized	in-my-view
realizes	in-this-view
really	in-our-opinion
show	in-our-view
Showed	largely
shown	likely
shows	mainly
sure	may
surely	maybe
think	might
thinks	mostly
thought	often
truly	on-the-whole
true	ought
undeniable	perhaps
undeniably	plausible
undisputedly	plausibly
undoubtedly	possible
will	possibly
without-doubt	postulate
won-t	postulated
	postulates
	presumable
	probable
	probably
	quite
	rather
	relatively
	roughly
	seems
	should
	sometimes
	somewhat
	suggest
	suggested
	suggests
	suppose
	supposed
	supposes
	suspect
	suspects
	tend-to
	tended-to
	tends-to
	would
	wouldn-t

APPENDIX B

A Score Comparison Table for Various English Proficiency Tests

Table B1. The mutual conversion table adopted in the ICNALE

Levels	TOEFL PBT	TOEFL iBT	TOEIC	IELTS	STEP	TEPS	CET/TEM	VST
A2	-486	-56	-545	3+	3+	---	---	-24
B1_1	487+	57+	550+	4+	2+	417+	CET4	25+
B1_2	527+	72+	670+	4+	2+	513+	CET4	36+
B2+	567+	87+	785+	5+	Pre1+	608+	CET6/TEM4	47+

Note: Because all the participants were college students, the minimum proficiency level was set as A2, not A1.

국문초록

헤징 (Hedging)이란 예둘러서 표현하는 것으로서 처음 정의되었고 (Lakoff, 1973), 이후 그 정의가 다듬어지고 재정립되며 화자가 문장의 진실성에 대하여 가지는 책임을 경감시켜 주는 언어적 도구로서 발전하게 되었다. 의사소통 및 상호작용을 위한 전략으로서의 헤징은 종종 의도적으로 사용되어 화자의 개인적 의견을 소극적인 방식으로 전달함으로써 체면을 지켜주는 역할을 하기도 한다 (Dubois, 1987; Hübner, 1983).

헤징은 학술적인 글쓰기에서 특히 중요한데, 학술 사회에서의 주장이나 의견은 필연적으로 잠정적인 것으로 틀잡아져야만 그로 인한 학술적 논쟁이 가능해지기 때문이다 (Hyland, 1998a). 화자는 헤징 표현을 통하여 증명되지 않은 주장을 조심성 있게 제시할 수 있고, 뒤따를 수 있는 반론에 대처할 수 있다. 학습자들의 화용론적 중간언어, 그리고 언어와 문화의 밀접한 관계에 대한 관심이 증가하는 요즘, 문화 간의 의사전달에 대한 인식과 화용론적 지식을 전략적으로 사용할 수 있는 능력이 제2언어 학습 분야에서 점점 더 많은 관심을 받고 있다. 헤징의 학술적인 중요성에도 불구하고, 헤징 표현을 적절히 해석하고 사용하는 것은 학습자들에게 특히나 어려운 부분으로 손꼽힌다. 본 연구는 헤징 표현을 효과적으로 사용하는 데 있어 문제적 부분을 진단하고 그에 대한 발전 방향을 제시하고자 한다.

본 연구를 위한 자료는 the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE)에서 발췌하였고, 총 1,300명의 참가자가 작성한 2,600개의 짧은 글을 모아 분석하였다. 연구대상은 한국인, 중국인, 일본인 영어 학습자 그룹들 및 원어민 그룹으로 구성되었고, 각 영어 학습자 그룹은 미리 제출한 영어 성적에 따라 네 단계로 하위 분류 되었다.

빈도수 추출 결과, 원어민 영어 사용자들이 헤징 표현을 더 자주 사용한다는 이전 연구의 결과와 일치하였다 (Aijmer, 2002; Baumgarten & House, 2010; Hyland, 1995; Skelton, 1988). 연구 결과는 헤징 표현의 용법과 양식에 대한 크게 세가지 양상에 주목한다. 우선 EFL 학습자들은 원어민 영어 사용자에 비해 헤징 표현의 범위가 한정적이다. 또한 언어에 능숙해질수록 표현의 사용 범위는 넓어지며, 원어민 사용자의 헤징 양상에 가까워지는 모습을 나타내었다. 마지막으로 본 연구의 초점이 된 한국인 영어

학습자들은 원어민 영어 사용자들에 비해 어조에 있어 좀 더 강하고 확신에 찬 경향을 보였으며, 이는 주장을 함에 있어 헤징 표현을 사용하는 것에 대한 경험이 적어 익숙하지 못하다는 것을 나타낸다.

본 연구를 통하여 이끌어낼 수 있는 영어 쓰기 교육 및 평가에 대한 함의는 다음과 같다. 첫번째, 본 연구에서 집중적으로 다루어진 두 쌍의 단어들은 영어 능력 향상과 직접적이며 밀접한 관계가 있으므로 자동화된 쓰기 평가 시스템, 특히 문체를 평가하는데 큰 기여를 할 수 있을 것으로 기대된다. 두번째, 영어 교육 현장에서 종종 간과되는 헤징에 대한 교육이 필요하다. 세번째, 학습자들이 학술적 글쓰기에 필요한 문체를 습득할 수 있도록 정기적인 영어 쓰기 연습 시간이 마련되어야 한다.