

# LINGUISTIC MARKERS AND STYLISTIC ATTRIBUTES OF HEDGING IN ENGLISH ACADEMIC PAPERS WRITTEN BY NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

Amara Prasithrathsint<sup>2</sup>

## บทคัดย่อ

การเบี่ยงบัง หมายถึงการทำให้ถ้อยคำมีความหมายเบาบางลง เพื่อลดผลกระทบ ซึ่งอาจทำให้เกิดความไม่แน่นอนในภาษา แต่ก็เป็นที่ยอมรับว่าเป็นลักษณะสำคัญในการเขียนทางวิชาการในภาษาอังกฤษ วัตถุประสงค์ของบทความนี้ คือ วิเคราะห์วจนลีลา

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<sup>1</sup> ตัวบ่งชี้ทางภาษาและคุณลักษณะทางวจนลีลาของการเบี่ยงบังในบทความวิชาการภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยคนที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่กับคนที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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<sup>2</sup> (อมรา ประสิทธิ์รัฐสินธุ์) Professor Emeritus, Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

การเขียนทางวิชาการในภาษาอังกฤษโดยเน้นบทบาทสำคัญของการเบี่ยงบัง และลักษณะทางภาษาที่เป็นตัวบ่งชี้ ข้อมูลที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ได้มาจากบทความภาษาอังกฤษในวารสารวิชาการทางมนุษยศาสตร์เขียนโดยคนที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ คนฟิลิปปินส์ และคนไทย สมมติฐานคือผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศใช้การเบี่ยงบังน้อยกว่าและแตกต่างจากเจ้าของภาษา ผลการวิเคราะห์แสดงว่าตัวบ่งชี้ที่เด่นของการเบี่ยงบังคือกริยาช่วย *may, might, could* คำกริยา *suggest, appear, seem* และคำวิเศษณ์ *perhaps* และ *often* ตัวบ่งชี้ที่พบทั้งหมดแบ่งออกเป็นสามกลุ่มตามคุณลักษณะทางวจนลีลาของการเบี่ยงบัง ได้แก่ “ความน่าจะเป็น” “ความไม่ตัดสินใจ” และ “การประมาณ” การเบี่ยงบังที่ปรากฏในข้อมูลสนับสนุนคำกล่าวของไฮแมน (Hyman 1994) ที่ว่าการเบี่ยงบังทำให้ผู้เขียนสามารถแสดงความไม่แน่นอนของความจริงในคำกล่าว นอกจากนั้นยังพบว่าผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ใช้การเบี่ยงบังในความถี่สูงสุด รองลงมาคือผู้เขียนชาวฟิลิปปินส์ และผู้เขียนคนไทยใช้น้อยที่สุด ข้อค้นพบนี้ชี้บ่งเป็นนัยว่าการเบี่ยงบังขึ้นอยู่กับระดับความสามารถทางภาษาและความรู้เรื่องการแปรทางวจนลีลา และมีความจำเป็นที่จะต้องสอนเรื่องการเบี่ยงบังแก่ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สองหรือภาษาต่างประเทศ

## ABSTRACT

*Hedging means mitigating words so as to lessen the impact of an utterance. It may cause uncertainty in language but is regarded as an important feature in English academic writing. The purpose of*

*this paper is to analyze the style of academic writing in English with particular reference to the significant role of hedging and the linguistic features that mark it. The data was taken from academic articles in the humanities written by native speakers of English, Filipino speakers of English, and Thai speakers of English. It is hypothesized that speakers of English as a foreign language use fewer and different hedging devices than native speakers of English. The result of the analysis shows that the prominent linguistic markers of hedging are the auxiliaries may, might, could, the verbs suggest, appear, seem, and the adverbs perhaps and often. They are divided into three groups according to their stylistic attributes of hedging; namely, probability, indetermination, and approximation. The use of hedging found in the data confirms what Hyman (1994) says; i.e., that hedging allows writers to express their uncertainty about the truth of their statements. It is also found that English native speakers use hedges most frequently. The Filipino speakers of English are the second, and the Thai speakers of English use hedges the least frequency. This implies that hedging is likely to be related to the level of competence in English including knowledge of stylistic variation, and that it needs to be formally taught to those who speak English as a second or foreign language.*

## Introduction

The present paper focuses on **hedging**, which means mitigating words so as to lessen the impact of an utterance. A *hedge* may cause uncertainty in language, as can be seen in Examples (1)-(5) below.

- (1) *He's sort of crazy.*
- (2) *That's somewhat difficult.*

- (3) *About fifty people attended the meeting.*
- (4) *He will probably be more comfortable in his new office.*
- (5) *Like any drug, antibiotic side effects can occur and may interfere with the patient's course of medication.*

In the above examples, hedging is achieved by using *sort of*, *somewhat*, *about*, *probably*, *can*, and *may*. These words or expressions weaken the statements. Without them, the propositions will be straightforward and more falsifiable.

The concept of "hedging" or concepts similar to "hedging" found in previous studies were sometimes represented by other terms. Zadeh (1965) introduced the concept of "fuzzy sets" to denote things that do not have precisely defined criteria of membership, while Lakoff (1973) used "fuzzy concepts" in defining "hedges." Hence, the word "hedge" has the quality of imprecision. There are also other terms that are used with the same meaning as "hedges;" for example, "downgraders" (House and Kasper 1981), "downtoners" (Quirk and others 1985), and some others that mean the same as "hedging," such as "mitigation" (Stubbs 1983), "understatement" (Hubler 1983), "tentativeness" (Holmes 1983), "vagueness" (Myers 1996), and "indirectness" (Hinkel 2005). In this paper, the term "hedging" will be used consistently to signify all the concepts proposed by these scholars, i.e., the process of downgrading, downtoning, mitigating, understating statements, or in brief, making statements less forceful or assertive. As for "hedges," I will use this term to refer to devices or features that bring about indirectness, tentativeness, vagueness, understatement, and mitigation in statements.

Previous research on hedging has concentrated mostly on politeness strategies, such as studies by Brown and Levinson (1987), Held (1999), Varttala (2001), Crespo Fernández (2005), Fialova (2010), Adams (2013), Dressen-Hammouda (2013), Tang (2013), Muayyad Omran Chiad (2013), Peng and others (2014), and Wulan Rahayu (2014). They are concerned with how speakers use hedges as strategies in, for example, expressing negative politeness, minimizing imposition, softening commands, and maintaining face.

In addition to the above list, other studies focus on hedging in relation to such issues as pragmatic competence (e.g., Fraser 2010), gender difference (e.g., Matsumoto-Gray 2009), cross-cultural difference (e.g., Yang 2003, Hinkel 2005), language teaching (e.g., Nugroho 2002), political language (e.g., Matsumoto-Gray 2009, Jalilifar and Alavi. 2011), and academic writing (e.g., Hyland 1994, 1998, Musa 2014). It is this last matter that interests me; i.e., the relationship between hedging and academic writing because hedging seems to contrast with other features of academic writing.

Hedging is considered to be a significant characteristic of academic writing among other important features; namely, complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy and responsibility.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that hedging would appear to be opposed to such typical features of academic language as precision, objectivity, explicitness, and accuracy. Nevertheless, it plays an important role in writing scholarly articles. Hyland (1994,

1998) states that hedges are epistemic devices used by writers when they are uncertain about the factuality of their assertions and that scholars do not argue for their results or criticisms in isolation but must formulate their claims to be as acceptable as possible to their colleagues. Others express the important functions of hedging in academic language. For example, Myers (1989) considers hedging in academic writing to be a politeness strategy. Vande Kopple and Crismore (1990) maintain that hedges signify a lack of full commitment to the propositional content of an utterance and help modify the truth-value of propositions. Crompton (1997) suggests that hedges are expressions of epistemic modality or markers of strength of new knowledge claims. He proposed forms of hedges, such as lexical verbs (e.g. *The result suggests that...*), modal verbs (e.g. *The result might be that...*), probability adverbs (e.g. *The result possibly is that...*), and probability adjectives (e.g. *It is possible that the result...*). Also, in listing linguistic devices of hedging, Martin-Martin (2003) argues that to attribute a function to a hedge, one must consider both the linguistic and situational contexts. He proposes four types of strategies; namely, a strategy of indetermination (e.g. *may, might, can, seem*), a strategy of camouflage hedging (e.g., *really, generally speaking*), a strategy of subjectivisation (e.g., *in my experience, to our knowledge*), and a strategy of depersonalization (e.g., passive constructions). His proposal has been applied in later research; for example, Varttala 2001, Nivales 2011, Alonso Alonso and others 2012. It has also been adopted to the analysis of the current study.

A large number of studies dealing with the relationship between hedging and

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<sup>3</sup>“Features of academic writing,” retrieved from <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/featfram.htm>, December 25, 2014.

academic writing have also shed light on another important issue; i.e. the problem of hedging among non-native speakers of English. The findings from those studies yield the same conclusion: that native speakers of English use more hedging in academic language (such as research articles, academic criticism discourse) than non-native speakers of English; e.g., speakers of German (Clyne 1991), Spanish (Vassileva 1997, Alonso Alonso *et al.* 2012), Chinese (Yang 2003), Norwegian (Hasselgreen 2004), and Finnish (Crismore *et al.* 1993, Varttala 2001, Riekkinen 2009). Some of these articles also show that non-native speakers of English perceive hedging differently from native English speakers; for instance, Alonso Alonso *et al.* (2012) found that Spanish authors of research articles think that hedging makes scientific texts unclear and that hedges are indicators of a lack of commitment by native speakers. Martin-Martin (2003) and Uysal (2014) claim that differences in the use and perception of hedging are due to cultural differences. This is generally accepted, but in addition to that, in this study, I will try to show that native-like competence in English is related to differences in the use of hedging.

Apart from the issue above, it has also been found in earlier studies (e.g, Scheffter 1996, Wishnoff 2000, Nugroho 2002, Hyland and Bondi 2006, Vazquez and Giner 2008) that the occurrence of hedging varies according to discipline; for instance, among branches of science, medicine is the richest with hedges, and between strong research articles in medicine and popular articles in medicine, the latter shows more frequency of hedging. The analyses in all of those studies are based on data from research articles in various branches of science. To

date there has been no interest in hedging in the humanities. Thus, in this study, I purposely use data from academic articles in the humanities only. It will find out to what extent hedging is used in the humanities and whether it is used with equal frequency between native and non-native speakers of English.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze the lexical items and their stylistic attributes that mark hedges in academic articles in the humanities written by native speakers of English, near-native speakers of English represented by Filipino scholars and non-native speakers of English represented by Thai scholars. There is a good reason for choosing to compare Filipino and Thai speakers of English with native speakers of English. Indeed, as confirmed by Gonzalez (1998), English is a second language in the Philippines and according to Pendley (1983), Forman (2005), Dueraman (2012). English is a foreign language in Thailand. The English proficiency of Filipino people is on average native-like, but that of Thai people is generally low. As Glass (2008) points out in his study, even though Thailand reformed its curriculum related to English language teaching and learning in public schools, little or no writing is included and students who graduate from high school are likely to have had very little practice in writing in English. Even at university level, students who do not major in English do not know how to write a composition in English. Dueraman (2012: 270) also explains why Thai people's English is weak. He argues that English in Thailand is not widely used as Thai is the language used in formal situations and that for many Thais, English is not necessary to them after graduation. This is the reason why English writing is a difficult task for Thai students. The idea that Thai learners

of English have problems with writing makes me curious as to how much they know about the use of hedging in their writing.

Thus, in this study I hypothesize that speakers of English as a foreign language use fewer and different hedging devices than near-native and native speakers of English.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide guidelines for teaching non-native speakers of English to realize the significance of hedges and to use hedging efficiently in academic writing.

## Research procedures

Data on hedges used by native speakers of English, Filipino speakers, and Thai speakers were taken from articles published in journals in the humanities. Three journals were selected by judgment sampling with these criteria. First, they are open-access international peer-reviewed journals; secondly, they are similar in their publication objectives and the scope of the branches of the humanities covered; thirdly, the articles in one of the journals are mostly written by American or British scholars, another by Filipino scholars, and the other by Thai scholars. The three journals in the humanities that were selected are:

- 1) *Humanities* published by a group of scholars named MDPI AG, Basel, Switzerland.
- 2) *Humanities Diliman* published by the University of the Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines.
- 3) *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities* published by Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

From these three journals, a number of articles were purposely selected so as to represent three different sets of speakers of English; i.e., American or British, Filipino and Thai scholars, respectively. The nationalities of the authors were checked in order to verify that criterion. Also, the articles chosen from each of the three journals were as similar as possible in terms of the branches of the humanities they belonged to and the total length of all the samples. Table 1 shows the total length of the texts (word counts) from which data were taken.

**Table 1: The total length of the texts**

Texts written by English scholars	Texts written by Filipino scholars	Texts written by Thai scholars
34,236 words	34,351 words	33,834 words

After obtaining the sample texts, the next step was to identify markers of hedges in the texts. As this paper focuses on lexical hedges only, I therefore selected thirty words from those provided in Martin-Martin (2003) and Alonso Alonso *et al.*(2012). They are the words that seem to be the most common in my opinion. From the thirty words purposely selected, only twenty-three words were found in the sample texts. They are classified according to parts of speech into five groups as shown in Table 2. Those that were not found in the texts were neglected.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The words that were not found at all in the texts are these words: *estimate, assume, presumably, mainly, predominantly, to a great extent, for the most part.*

Table 2: The words that are used as markers of hedging in academic papers

VERBS	MODAL AUX.	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS	NOUNS
appear	could <sup>5</sup>	likely	apparently	tendency
seem	may	possible	generally	
tend	might	probable	largely	
suggest			maybe	
			often	
			perhaps	
			possibly	
			primarily	
			probably	
			seemingly	
			sometimes	
			usually	

Table 3: Linguistic markers of hedging and their attributes

probability	indetermination	approximation
<i>probable</i> <i>possible</i> <i>likely</i> <i>probably</i> <i>possibly</i> <i>perhaps</i> <i>maybe</i> <i>may</i> <i>might</i> <i>could</i>	<i>apparently</i> <i>seemingly</i> <i>sometimes</i> <i>suggest</i> <i>appear</i> <i>seem</i>	<i>often</i> <i>usually</i> <i>primarily</i> <i>generally</i> <i>largely</i> <i>tend</i> <i>tendency</i>

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<sup>5</sup>The word *can* was at first included in the list, but was removed later on because it had several meanings. In addition to being used to mark hedging, the word *can* was also found to be used to mean ‘to be able,’ and ‘to be permitted to.’ I found that it was sometimes difficult to separate between *can* that marked hedging and *can* with its other meanings. Therefore, to avoid biased frequency counting, I removed the word from the original list.

In the analysis process, I examined the attributes or functions of those key words in academic papers and classified them accordingly. After that, I counted the frequencies of the occurrences of the key words in each set of data so as to determine the difference between the native speakers' and the non-native speakers' use of hedging strategies.

### **The attributes of the linguistic markers of hedging**

The results of my analysis of all the twenty-three markers of hedging used in the sample texts show that they can be divided into three groups according to their attributes. The term "attribute" is used here to refer to a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic of hedging in academic writing style.<sup>6</sup> The three attributes that classify the linguistic markers of hedging into three groups are: 1) **probability**, 2) **indetermination**, and 3) **approximation**, as shown in Table 3.

### **Linguistic markers of "probability" attribute in academic hedging**

Following Crompton (1997), I use the word "probability" here to mean the chance that the proposition will be true. In academic writing, authors must be responsible for telling the reader honestly about the accuracy of their statements. If the likelihood of their statement turning true is not one hundred percent, they need

to qualify their statement by using such words as those found in this study; namely, probable, possible, likely, probably possibly, perhaps, maybe, may, might, could (See the first column of Table 3). Examples<sup>7</sup> of the use of "probability" markers are as follows. Note that the key words are underlined.

(1) ...to understand some of the factors that may have influenced Ruth's and Naomi's assimilation.

(2) The single most important aspect of this history may be the fact that the humanities emerged in their modern form during an age not unlike our own.

(3) Petrina convincingly suggests that the missing chapter (5–9), corresponding to entire folia in the manuscript, might have been lost.

(5) There is just nothing there from which a general question could be raised.

(6) Then we must explain how it is nevertheless possible for us to have knowledge of the external world on the basis of experience.

(7) Other environmental catastrophes, pandemics, or economic and social meltdowns may be no less probable, but seem more likely to delay rather than reverse progress.

(8) Perhaps the first to draw a detailed depiction of Igorot tattoos was another German scientist, Hans Meyer, who traveled to the mountains of the Cordillera in the late 1890s.

(9) After much turmoil, possibly chaos, the global economy will stabilize and become sustainable.

All the sentences above would sound different in terms of the chance of being

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<sup>6</sup>In the present study, I use the term "attribute" to relate hedging to academic style. In previous studies, most scholars use the words "strategy" or "function" to emphasize the pragmatic quality of hedging. Here I attempt to show that in doing a stylistic analysis, it is important to show a correspondence between a linguistic marker and a stylistic attribute.

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<sup>7</sup>All the examples showing linguistic markers of hedging were taken from the articles used as the sources of data for this study.

true if we removed the probability markers. For instance, in (1), if we deleted *may*, we would get the statement *the factors that have influenced...* which would sound more truthful than *the factors that may have influenced...*. The same results are found in (2)-(5). In (6) and (7), if the words *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* were not used, the statements would be plain and stronger in terms of probability, such as *...we must explain how to have knowledge of the external world...* and *Other environmental catastrophes... delay more than reverse progress*. In (8) and (9), if the adverbs *perhaps* and *possibly* were deleted, the statements would be easier to verify for their truth.

### Linguistic markers of “indetermination” attribute in academic hedging

The second group of key words found in the sample texts mark uncertainty or indecisiveness on the part of the authors of academic papers. Indeed, they must be responsible for what they claim or express. If they are not sure whether their statements are definitely true or are supported by full evidence, they need to express that quality by using words associated with that attribute, which is labeled here “indetermination,” the term I borrowed from Martin-Martin (2003), who defines it as endowing the proposition with a certain shade of lesser explicitness and more uncertainty.<sup>8</sup> The linguistic

<sup>8</sup>It is important to note that the term “indetermination” used by Martin-Martin (2003) is broader than that used in the present study. This category, according to him, includes such words as *may*, *might*, *can*, *seem*, *appear*, *probably*, *assume*, *suggest*, *probable*, *possible*, and also *generally*, *approximately*, and *frequently*. Some of these words are classified differently in this study.

markers of indetermination found in the data are *apparently*, *seemingly*, *sometimes*, *suggest*, *appear*, *seem*, and examples of statements containing them are:

(10) *...the genealogies compiled by current revivalists appear to put a new twist on an already overlaid plot.*

(11) *The unfinished/unedited state of the manuscript may suggest that a total reconciliation between James’s markedly idealized vision of kingship and government and Machiavelli’s treatise was impossible.*

(12) *The poet seems to suggest that future generations may come to envy our own comparatively blessed state.*

(13) *Fowler’s sentences and his translation style as a whole, with so much subordination, may seem obscure and clumsy.*

(14) *As the Vietnam War escalated seemingly against everyone’s better judgment...*

(15) *One is thus apparently stuck within an interpretative circle.*

(16) *Sometimes, James VI assigned the translations to specific writers.*

In the statements above, the verbs *appear*, *suggest*, and *seem* and the adverbs *sometimes*, *seemingly*, and *apparently* make the propositions weaker than those without them. For instance, in (10)-(13) the sentences without such verbs would be *...the genealogies compiled by current revivalists put a new twist on...*; *The unfinished/unedited state of the manuscript confirms that a total reconciliation between was impossible*; *The poet states that future generations may come to envy our own comparatively blessed state*. Of course, these statements, without hedging, sound straightforward and confirmed. As for (14)-(16), the removal of the hedging adverbs *seemingly*,



*apparently*, and *sometimes* would make the statements direct and determined.

### **Linguistic markers of “approximation” attribute in academic hedging**

The third group of linguistic markers includes five adverbs; namely, *often*, *usually*, *primarily*, *generally*, *largely*, one verb; namely, *tend* and one noun; namely, *tendency*. They possess the same attribute; i.e., generalization by guessing or estimating. This hedging attribute enables the authors to say something important without having to take responsibility if what they state turns out to be false because those words protect them. The scholars are saved because what they claim is just an approximation or estimation. There is some part that could go wrong. This helps scholars avoid overstatement or too strong a claim. I label this group of hedging markers “approximation,” the term used by Riekkinen (2009)<sup>9</sup>, who shows that such words can soften academic criticism. The following are examples of statements containing “approximation” hedging devices.<sup>10</sup>

(17) *The great cities of Europe were transformed from their often still medieval layouts and architecture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries...*

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<sup>9</sup>It should be noted that the term “approximation” used by Riekkinen (2009) covers more hedging markers than those shown in this study. I adopted the word but not the scope of its meaning.

<sup>10</sup>Martin-Martin (2003) used the term “camouflage” hedging for this group of “approximation” hedging devices.

(18) *The term is used, usually in hip-hop, of identifying a person or object which is known.*

(19) *Translation Studies primarily examine questions of “power relations and textual production” inasmuch as a text cannot exist “outside a network of power relations.”*

(20) *It is not possible to conclude that as a consequence Moabites are more generally accepted or that the ethnic boundary has somehow changed.*

(21) *James noted the weight of tradition and culture largely to back down the positivists of his day.*

(22) *...emic approaches which are often taken by natives themselves tend to be primordial, whereas etic approaches are usually instrumental.*

(23) *There is a tendency towards greater religious attendance with increased time in the U.S.*

As can be seen from the examples given above, if we removed the adverbs *often*, *usually*, *primarily*, *generally*, and *largely* from (17)-(21), the results would be statements with strong claims. Also, in (22) and (23) the words *tend* and *tendency* help soften the authors’ statements; i.e., make them less accurate and safer in terms of falsification.

All the examples above illustrate how certain words are used as hedging devices in academic writing. They seem to be powerful but very subtle. They might be difficult to learn by non-native speakers of English. In the following sections, I will show the results of the analysis of the frequencies of the use of those hedging markers in English academic papers written by humanities scholars who are native and non-native speakers of English.

Table 4: The total occurrence of all the markers of hedging used by the three groups of speakers

	<b>native speaker of English</b>	<b>Filipino</b> (near-native)	<b>Thai</b> (non-native)
Hedging markers (per 1,000 words)	7.6	6.6	3.5

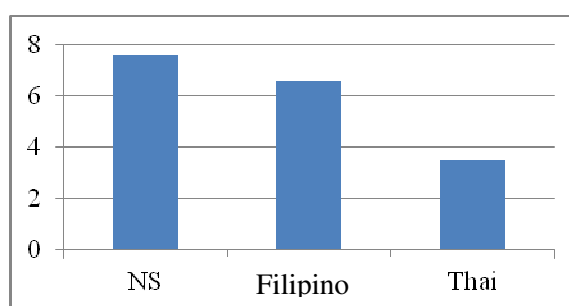


Figure 1: Markers of hedging used by the three groups of English speakers

### The frequencies of the use of hedging devices by three groups of speakers

As stated earlier, I collected data from academic articles written by three groups of speakers with different degrees of competence in English. They are British or American scholars representing “native” degree of competence, Filipino scholars representing “near native” degree, and Thai scholars representing “non-native” degree of competence. The academic articles written by them were divided into three groups accordingly. Table 4 and Figure 1 below show how frequently the linguistic markers of hedging occur in each group.

As can be seen in the table and figure above, hedging devices are used most by native speakers (7.6 times per 1000 words of text length), second most by Filipino scholars (6.6 per 1000 words of text length), and least by Thai scholars (3.5 per 1000 words of text length). This confirms my hypothesis that non-native speakers of English use less hedging in academic articles than native speakers of English. In other words, the frequency of hedging in academic writing in the humanities depends on the degree of native competence in English.

It is interesting to note that this finding seems to support the concept of “world Englishes” proposed by Kachru (1985, 1986, 1990). He divides all the varieties of English into three main groups, which he

calls “the three Concentric Circles of English.” They are “the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle.” The varieties of English in the Inner Circle are those used by native speakers of English in the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The varieties that are institutionalized and used widely in certain countries are placed in the Outer Circle; for example, those used in India, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. All the rest are English varieties used as foreign languages, as in Japan, China, Vietnam, and Thailand. They are located in the Expanding Circle. The “Englishes” in the three groups are differentiated in linguistic, sociological, and ideological dimensions. The hierarchical degree of the use of hedging devices found in the present study corresponds well to Kachru’s three Concentric Circles of English.

In addition, the findings of this study also seem to enhance the theory of “contrastive rhetoric,” which according to Connor (1996), means the study of how a person’s first language and culture influence his or her writing in a second language. Therefore, it is safe to say that the reason why the non-native speakers of English, particularly the Thai authors, use less hedging than native speakers is that their English writing is influenced by their native language and culture. Indeed, I myself have observed that the Thai language has different strategies of hedging, most of which are used in conversations. The most common strategy seems to be the use of final particles, which are obviously difficult or impossible to transfer into English writing. Once they cannot be transferred, they are forgotten, and this may cause the lack of hedging in English written by Thais. Moreover, in Thai culture, an academic writer seems to

be more authoritative than in English speaking culture. He or she seems not to be very concerned whether his/her statement will be proved wrong. Thai scholars tend to be blunt in their statements or propositions. However, this point needs to be further investigated before it becomes conclusive.

### **The occurrence of “probability” hedging**

Concerning the use of each category of hedging devices (**probability, indetermination, approximation**), it is interesting to see how frequently each marker under each category is used. Table 5 and Figure 2 show the frequency of each marker of the “probability” hedging used by the three groups of speakers and in general.

Table 5: Frequencies of *probability* hedging markers

Markers of <i>probability</i> hedging	NS	Filipino	Thai	Total frequencies	percentage
<i>may</i>	56	44	18	118	36.3
<i>perhaps</i>	23	18	8	49	15.1
<i>might</i>	23	23	3	49	15.1
<i>could</i>	17	18	12	47	14.5
<i>possible</i>	14	4	11	29	8.9
<i>likely</i>	5	8	1	14	4.3
<i>probably</i>	1	10	0	11	3.4
<i>possibly</i>	0	3	2	5	1.5
<i>maybe</i>	1	1	0	2	0.6
<i>probable</i>	1	0	0	1	0.3
TOTAL	141	129	55	325	100

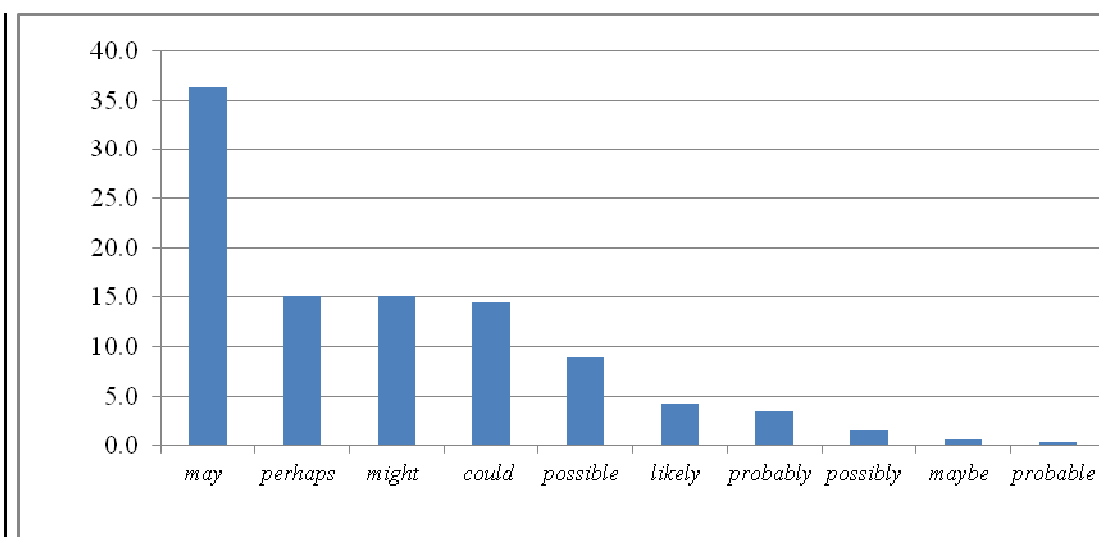


Figure 2: Occurrence of each marker of *probability* hedging

Table 5 and Figure 2 show that in general the native speakers of English use the “probability” hedging devices most, the Filipino speakers the second most, and the Thai speakers the least. Concerning each marker, the word *may* is the most frequently used (36.3%). The second are *perhaps*, *might*, and *could*. The third is *possible* (about 9%). All the rest occur less than nine per cent. It is interesting that *maybe* and *probable* rarely occur—less than one per cent.

Considering the use of each hedging marker by the three groups of speakers, we can see in Table 5 that all the words are used more frequently by NS except *likely*, *probably*, *possibly*, which are used more by the Filipino group. This is interesting but there is no concrete evidence for any explanation. However, the data seems to suggest that non-native speakers use fewer modal auxiliaries in “probability” hedging than native speakers. This finding reveals a new fact that has not been found in any previous study. The reason for it is probably the influence of their native language.

#### **The occurrence of “indetermination” hedging**

The category of “indetermination” hedging devices includes six markers: *apparently*, *seemingly*, *sometimes*, *suggest*, *appear*, *seem*. Table 6 and Figure 3 below show the occurrence of each marker in academic articles written by native speakers and the two groups of non-native speakers and also its occurrence in general.

Similar to the case of “probability” hedging markers, the total occurrence of all the “indetermination” hedging markers is found the most in the native speaker group, second in the Filipino group, and the least in the Thai speaker group. As for the occurrence of each marker, it was found that the verbs *appear*, *seem*, and *suggest* are used many more times than the adverbs *sometimes*, *seemingly*, and *apparently*. Also, among all of these markers, the verb *suggest* is overwhelmingly preferred by native speakers compared to non-native speakers (25 vs. 9 and 7 tokens).

#### **The occurrence of “approximation” hedging**

The markers of “approximation” hedging are *often*, *usually*, *primarily*, *generally*, *largely*, *tend*, and *tendency*. The frequency of each of these words in academic papers written by native speakers and non-native speakers is shown in Table 7 and the general trend of occurrence of each marker is illustrated by Figure 4.

Table 6: Frequencies of *indetermination* hedging markers

markers of <i>indetermination</i> hedging	NS	Filipino	Thai	Total frequencies	percentage
<i>appear</i>	17	18	16	51	30.7
<i>seem</i>	18	20	11	49	29.5
<i>suggest</i>	25	9	7	41	24.7
<i>sometimes</i>	7	5	1	13	7.8
<i>seemingly</i>	1	3	3	7	4.2
<i>apparently</i>	1	3	1	5	3.0
TOTAL	69	58	39	166	100

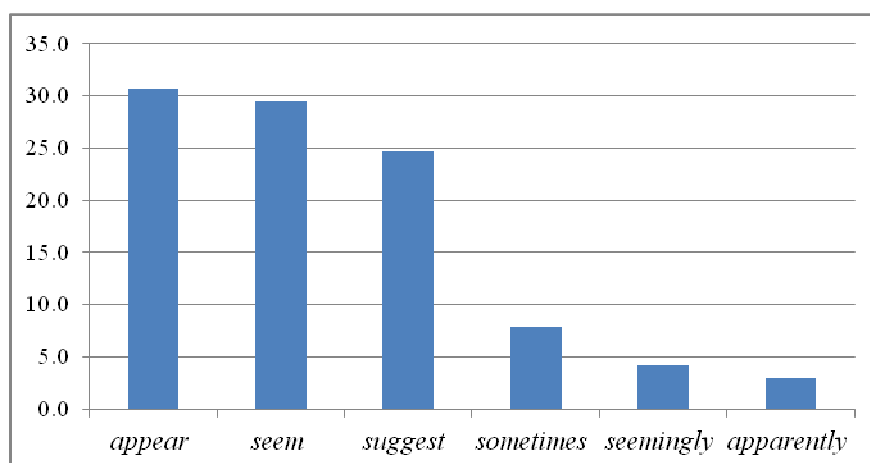


Figure 3: Occurrence of each marker of *indetermination* hedging

Table 7: Frequencies of *approximation* hedging markers

markers of <i>indetermination</i> hedging	NS	Filipino	Thai	Total frequencies	Percentage
<i>often</i>	21	12	18	51	45.5
<i>usually</i>	3	2	10	15	13.4
<i>tend</i>	4	3	7	14	12.5
<i>generally</i>	3	4	5	12	10.7
<i>primarily</i>	3	2	4	9	8.0
<i>tendency</i>	1	1	4	6	5.4
<i>largely</i>	3	0	2	5	4.5
TOTAL	38	24	50	112	100

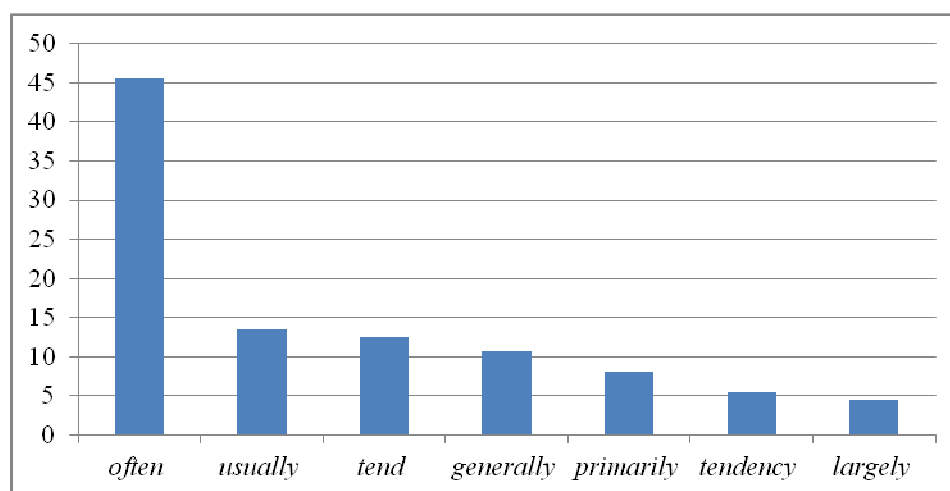


Figure 4: Occurrence of each marker of *approximation* hedging

Table 7 and Figure 4 show that among all the linguistic markers of approximation hedging, the word *often* is the most frequently used. All the rest are not remarkably different in terms of their frequencies. Also, from Table 4, we can say that, unlike the other categories of hedging devices, there is very little difference among the three groups of speakers concerning their choice of each of the markers except the word *usually*, which is much preferred by the Thai group. This may be because the word *usually* is a very common word and is used widely in all situations. Also, unlike the other types of hedging, it is remarkable that “approximation” hedging is used about 33% more often by Thai writers than native speakers and over twice as much as the Filipino group. This seems to imply that Thai scholars tend to make statements with estimation in their academic writing.

#### **The frequency of each of the hedging markers without separating into types**

It may be interesting to see how frequently each of the markers of hedging is used without taking into account their attributes or their classification into groups. Table 8 has two columns: the first shows all the markers (23 words) dealt with in this study; the second column shows their total actual tokens of occurrence.

Table 8: Frequency of each marker of hedging

<b>Markers of hedging</b>	<b>actual tokens of occurrence</b>
<i>may</i>	118
<i>appear</i>	51
<i>often</i>	51
<i>perhaps</i>	49
<i>might</i>	49
<i>seem</i>	49
<i>could</i>	47
<i>suggest</i>	41
<i>possible</i>	29
<i>usually</i>	15
<i>likely</i>	14
<i>tend</i>	14
<i>sometimes</i>	13
<i>generally</i>	12
<i>probably</i>	11
<i>primarily</i>	9
<i>seemingly</i>	7
<i>tendency</i>	6
<i>possibly</i>	5
<i>apparently</i>	5
<i>largely</i>	5
<i>maybe</i>	2
<i>probable</i>	1



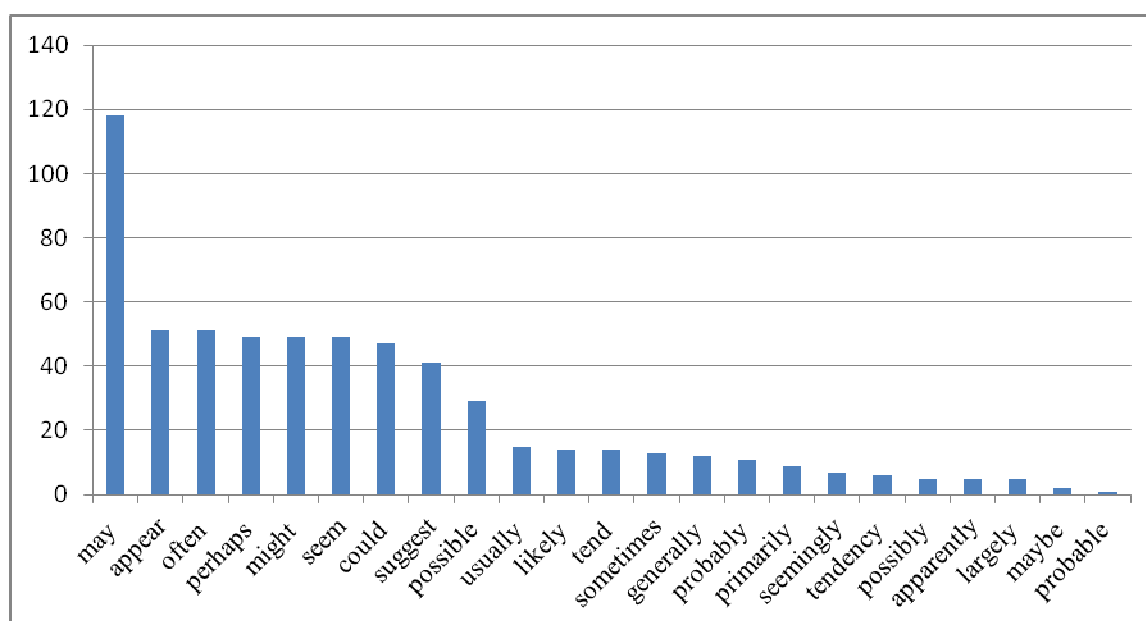


Figure 5: Occurrence of each of the hedging markers

As can be seen in Table 8 and Figure 5, the frequency of the occurrence of *may* is considerably higher than that of all the rest. This is probably due to its clear meaning and regular grammatical function. The other markers that are moderately popular are *appear*, *often*, *perhaps*, *might*, *seem*, *could*, *suggest*, and *possible*. The rest are much less frequently used.

## Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have tried to show what lexical items tend to be selected as markers of hedging in English academic writing, how frequently each of them occurs and whether their occurrence varies according to the speakers' degree of competence in English.

It was found that among the thirty purposely selected lexical items that had been considered in earlier studies to be hedging devices, only twenty-three occur

in the sample academic papers written by native English-speaking scholars, Filipino scholars, and Thai scholars. They are divided according to their attributes into three categories: **probability**, **indetermination**, and **approximation** hedging devices. The total occurrences of the markers in each category are found to be most frequently used by native speakers of English, and second by near-native speakers represented by Filipino scholars, and least frequently by non-native speakers represented by Thai scholars. The findings also show that the most frequently used marker of hedging is *may* and the other outstanding ones are *appear*, *often*, *perhaps*, *might*, *seem*, *could*, *suggest*, and *possible*.

This empirical study confirms that hedging has an important function in academic writing. The following summary table shows three dimensions of hedging inferred from the analysis.

Table 9: Three dimensions of hedging

Linguistic marker	attribute	function
<i>probable, possible, likely, probably, possibly, perhaps, maybe, may, might, could</i>	<b><i>probability</i></b>	To avoid being incorrect, mistaken or misunderstood and to protect the writer by warning the reader that he/she is uncertain about a claim, which can be right or wrong. The reader cannot blame the writer if it happens afterwards that his statement is not true.
<i>apparently, seemingly, sometimes, suggest, appear, seem</i>	<b><i>indetermination</i></b>	To be empirical, honest, and responsible by warning the reader that the writer has limited evidence with reference to stating something important.
<i>often, usually, primarily, generally, largely, tend, tendency</i>	<b><i>approximation</i></b>	To minimize threat, not to impose, and to be tentative by warning the reader that things can have an exception. Even though the writer has provided all the evidence, his statement is only a tendency. This is also to avoid imposing on the reader's belief in the writer's statement.

Generally speaking, hedging helps the writer to be precise while avoiding being wrong. As Musa (2014) says, researchers want to express claims with precision and at the same time to protect themselves. In short, hedges prevent possible future criticisms of the writer.

The findings of this study can lead to recommendations to EFL teachers and students; i.e., that they should take into account the importance of hedging in writing academic English, for example,

research articles, theses, dissertations, and research reports. Indeed, Fraser (2010) gave a good reason for this, saying that using hedges appropriately is difficult for second language learners and that it does not generally receive enough attention in second language teaching. Hedging needs to be intentionally and formally taught to language learners because, as expressed by Skelton (1988), it is part of pragmatic competence and requires subtlety and sophistication even in the mother tongue. Hyman (1996) urges ESP teachers to help

students understand the correct use of hedging. He even proposes two practical pedagogic approaches to it: first, to make hedging strategies used by expert writers become salient to students, and second, to help students develop the appropriate use of the hedging strategies in their writing.

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