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## HEDGING IN ACADEMIC WRITTEN DISCOURSE

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### ABSTRACT

The recent proliferation of studies on hedging in written academic discourse shows that hedging has been widely employed and is considered effective and a prerequisite for scientific journals. Hedging is generally used for making a proposition and its relationship with the representation of reality and for attenuating the claims to avoid any risks of negations. The present research analyses the use of hedging in the Indonesian academic context. The data were taken from a corpus, named C-Smile, of undergraduate students' theses of the English Department, Faculty of Letters, State University of Malang, totaling up to 1,587,059 words. Employing the hedging taxonomy advocated by Hyland (1996), the present project discovers that "reliability" hedges were the most frequent (88.13%) in use. Of the reliability hedges, modal verbs were found to have the highest frequency (79.60%). Furthermore, the modal auxiliary verb 'can' was the most frequently occurring hedging device (38.94%). Nevertheless, there is a scarce occurrence of highly-technical terms of hedges, such as allegedly, presumably, supposedly, etc. Moreover, hedges were more frequent in the Discussion section (56.74%) than in the Introduction section (43.26%). It was concluded that they mostly employ reliability hedges referring to the not-feel-confident due to the influence of culture, i.e., collectivism. It is also possible that they use hedges for the sake of politeness and to make their claims accepted by the readers (Bonyadi et al., 2012). Additionally, the typical kinds of hedges employed and (mis)use of hedges may be attributed to the fact that the corpus is the product of EFL learners whose English falls into the category of interlanguage.

**Keywords:** hedging, academic written discourse, corpus study

### Abstrak

Pesatnya perkembangan studi tentang *hedging* dalam wacana tulisan akademis akhir-akhir ini menunjukkan bahwa *hedging* telah digunakan dalam tulisan akademis secara luas dan efektif serta bahkan dijadikan syarat dalam penulisan jurnal penelitian. *Hedging* umumnya digunakan oleh seorang penulis dalam membuat suatu proposisi dan hubungannya dengan representasi realita dan memperhalus argumentasi untuk menghindari resiko perlawanan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis *hedging* dalam konteks akademis di Indonesia. Data penelitian ini didapatkan dari korpus, yang bernama C-Smile, skripsi-skripsi sarjana mahasiswa Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Negeri Malang, pada tahun 2011, 2012, dan 2013, yang berisi 1.587.059 kata. Dengan menggunakan taksonomi *hedging* yang dirumuskan oleh Hyland (1996a), jenis *hedges* yang paling sering ditemukan adalah "reliability" hedges (88.13%). Selain itu, *modal verbs* adalah jenis *reliability hedges* yang mempunyai frekuensi paling tinggi (79.60%). Di antara *modal auxiliary verbs*, "can" ditemukan paling sering di antara yang lainnya (38.94%). Namun, jarang sekali ditemukan jenis *hedges* yang merupakan istilah-istilah canggih yang jarang ditemukan dalam bahasa Inggris di konteks Indonesia, seperti *allegedly*, *presumably*, *supposedly*, dan lain sebagainya. *Hedges* juga lebih banyak ditemukan di bab Discussion (56.74%) daripada di bab Introduction (43.26%). Dari penelitian ini, dapat disimpulkan bahwa penulis-penulis skripsi tersebut paling banyak menggunakan *reliability hedges*, yang berkaitan dengan rasa kurang percaya diri, karena pengaruh budaya, yaitu kolektivisme. Dapat disimpulkan juga bahwa mereka menggunakan *hedges* demi kesopanan dan/sehingga membuat pendapat mereka dapat diterima oleh pembaca. Selain itu, adapun segala macam *hedges* yang khas dan ke(tidak)sesuaian penggunaan *hedges* yang ditemukan dalam penelitian ini disebabkan fakta bahwa corpus ini merupakan produk dari pelajar yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing yang kemampuan

Bahasa Inggrisnya termasuk dalam kategori *interlanguage*.

**Kata kunci:** *hedging*, wacana tulisan akademis, studi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Many researchers have conducted studies on language used in written academic discourse (e.g. Hyland, 1996a; 1996b; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Martín-Martín, 2008). The across-discipline research carried out by Samraj (1995), for example, investigated the linguistic and discoursal features found in graduate students' academic writings. Peacock (2011) did a similar study on the use of *introductory it* plus *that*-clause and *to*-clause complementation found in 288 research articles across eight disciplines. Ädel and Römer (2012) also conducted research on advanced students' writings across disciplines and also levels. All this shows how the analysis of language in written academic discourse has been proceeding.

Another development of study on language is shown by the emergence of contrastive studies across languages. A study by Murillo (2012), an intercultural analysis of the use of reformulation markers in Business Management research articles of L1 English and Spanish and L2 English, is one of the examples. Other related studies involve contrastive studies between English and Spanish (Williams, 2010), English and French (Kanté, 2010), English and Spanish (Williams, 2008), English and Thai (Watkhaolarm, 2005), English and French Fetzer and Johansson (2010), and English and Korean (Lee, 2001).

Like the work by Murillo (2012) investigating L2 learners' academic writings, Lee (2011) also investigated L2 writers' research articles. Nam (2010) also carried out research on ESL students' writings to investigate and evaluate the productive vocabulary knowledge. Besides, Lu (2010) investigated the syntactic complexity in ESL writings, too. There have been, however, few studies researching on the linguistic phenomena found in EFL students' academic writings. For this reason, it is crucial to conduct further research investigating EFL academic writings.

All the above-mentioned studies have revealed the differences in the use of rhetorical, pragmatic, and lexico-grammatical features in written academic discourses (e.g. Samraj, 1995; Ädel and Römer, 2012; Murillo, 2012). These three points are shown to be crucial in academic writings. The recent study aims to investigate one of them, i.e. pragmatic features, specifically hedging.

In recent decades, there have been studies on hedging conducted by a number of researchers in the world. This proliferation shows how cornerstone the research into hedging in daily life is, especially hedging in written academic discourse. Furthermore, Hyland (2009) argues that the study on hedging has just begun and is relatively new in discourse analysis. The early work conducted by Holmes (1988) was to investigate epistemic devices used to express doubt and certainty in English. Her concern was that there should be a basis for including appropriate epistemic devices employed to express doubt and certainty in ESL textbooks. In her paper, she provided the range and the relative frequencies of the devices in naturally written and spoken discourse. Her goal was to evaluate the adequacy of some famous ESL textbooks. She found that modal verbs were the most frequent hedges in both written and academic discourse, and were more often found in the written one. She also found other epistemic devices other than modal verbs, such as lexical verbs, adjectives, adverbials, and nouns, quite frequently used. She for this reason concluded that textbooks writers should not only focus mostly on modal verbs but also on other devices.

A research project carried out by Salager-Meyer (1994) analysed 15 articles drawn from five leading medical journals. She discussed how communicative purposes can influence the frequency and distribution of hedges in research paper (RP) and case reports (CR). It was found in her study that the most frequent hedges were shields (mostly modal and epistemic verbs), approximators, and compound hedges. In addition to that finding, she also found that the most heavily hedged section of the articles was Discussion (RP)/ Comment (CR), whereas the section Method (RP)/ Case Reports (CR) was the opposite. She concluded that the way the writers chose the expressions of tentativeness was due to "the general structure of the discourse, by its communicative purpose, by the level of claim the writers wish to make, and by the authors' pretension to universality and generalization" (Salager-Meyer, 1994: 1).

Another study analysing the forms of hedging was conducted by Hyland (1996b) who investigated 26 molecular biology research articles. After formulating hedging taxonomy in his earlier research investigating hedging in scientific research articles (1996a), he found that modal verbs preoccupied the writers in expressing tentativeness and that hedges were mostly found in Results and Discussion sections of the research articles by 84%. Similarly, Kelly and Bazerman (2003) presenting the pattern of the distribution of hedges suggest that authors tend to employ hedges mostly in Discussion sections. Durik et al. (2008) investigating the effect of hedge placement and hedge type on attitudes, source evaluation, and perception of argument strength also conclude that hedges are mostly found in Discussion section for the section is where the author do the interpretation.

Furthermore, Martín-Martín (2008) analysed 40 research articles (RA) written in English and Spanish in the field of Clinical and Health Psychology from a cross-cultural viewpoint. What he attempt to find were the frequency and distribution of hedges and their function in academic writings. He found distribution of hedges in both languages equally employed and that the most frequent strategy used was the strategy of indetermination (Martín-Martín, 2008) (mostly expressed by modality devices and approximators) (cf. Salager-Meyer, 1994). He therefore concluded that in English written texts, the authors' face was more protected since hedges were more often found in English rather than Spanish academic texts.

The more recent study was done by Nivales (2011) who analysed hedges and boosters in college research papers across disciplines. In the study, it was found that hedges and boosters were almost equivalently found in both Introduction and Discussion sections of the papers. The most regular hedges she found was those expressed by citation, impersonal third person and unnamed agents and were frequently found in Psychology research papers.

Another piece of research quite similar to the work by Nivales (2011) was recently done by Serholt (2012) who investigated the use of hedges and boosters in male and female Swedish advanced ESL learners' academic writings, i.e. C-essays (bachelor theses). Interestingly and quite different from what Nivales (2011) has found, she found that most of writers use hedges more than boosters. She concluded, however, that the state of being L2 learners, though advanced, still makes them feel hard to use hedges than boosters. This, accordingly, results in the incorrect usage of them or failure at interpreting them expressed in handwritings (Hyland, 2000). Additionally, she also *compared the distribution of hedges and boosters used by male and female Swedish learners*. She, through the use of hedges, could predict that Swedish female L2 learners were bolder than the male learners to give fuller commitment to the propositions.

Other studies quite similar to the work by Martín-Martín (2008) in terms of cross-cultural perspective were conducted by Chang, et al. (2012) who investigated attribution hedges in Chinese academic discourse, Bonyadi et al. (2012) who employed Salager-Meyer's hedging taxonomy (1994) to investigate hedging in Environmental Science research articles of English and Iranian research writers, Ghazanfari and Abassi (2012) who analysed Persian prose to investigate the functions of hedging, Alonso et al. (2012) who analysed the use of hedging by Spanish researchers, and Behnam et al. (2012) who scrutinised the frequency, forms, and functions of hedging in 100 qualitative and quantitative research articles by employing the hedging taxonomy of Hyland (1996a), like the present study does. Additionally, the present study analyses the functions by discussing the motivations behind the use of the hedges. All the studies previously presented have shown that hedges are undoubtedly used in academic writings. This means that the act of hedging is necessary for academic writers or researchers.

Building on the previous studies by Hyland (1996a; 1996b), Salager-Meyer (1994), Behnam et al. (2012), Serholt (2012), etc., the present research explores the analysis of hedging in written academic discourse more for the present study focuses intensively on the investigation of the use of hedges in the theses of undergraduate students who are EFL learners in English Department, State University of Malang. Moreover, unlike the studies by Serholt (2012) investigating hedges used by Swedish L2 learners, or Ghazanfari and Abassi (2012) analysing Persian prose, or Alonso et al. (2012) conducting study on hedging employed by Spanish researchers, the present study explores hedging in Indonesians' academic writings.

In addition to the aforementioned studies, there have also been studies on hedging which are corpus-based. The works by Holmes (1988) and Hyland (1996a; 1996b) are two of other studies which are corpus-based. *Flowerdew (2000) also has carried out research on hedging using corpora. He showed that learner discourse consists of an under-use of hedging devices in order to make their writings seem to be direct*. Other corpus-based studies investigating other linguistic features include the study on the use of modal verbs in TIME magazine by Leech (2011), the research on the use of large corpora of conversation to investigate narrative by Norrick (2008), and the corpus-based work investigating collocation and colligation by Yamasaki (2008). In this advanced world, these corpus-based studies show that the analysis of language in use has developed well. Data manually counted in the past can now be calculated electronically and quickly. For this reason, the present study is a corpus-based study where the data were taken from the theses of Indonesian undergraduate students in the English Department, State University of Malang. The theses are pooled in order to build a corpus, named C-Smile, which can be used by other researchers.

Moreover, research article writers actually employ hedges in different sections for different purposes (Behnam et al., 2012). It is supported by Salager-Meyer's (1994) finding that Discussion section is the most heavily hedged section, while Method section is the least. Falahati (2004) also examined hedges in Introduction and Discussion sections of medicine, psychology, and chemistry research articles in both English and Farsi languages.

Furthermore, Jalilifar (2011) analysed hedges and boosters in Discussion sections of 90 research articles of Applied Linguistics and Psychology. Swales (1990), Hyland (1996b, 1998), and Varttala (2001) also found that hedges are mostly employed in Discussion section. More importantly, the most recent study conducted by Serholt (2012) who examined hedges and boosters in Swedish L2 learners' bachelor theses also specify

the investigation only on Introduction and Discussion sections in which most of the writer's arguments exist.

## **1.2 Research Objective**

The aim of the present study is to investigate the use of hedges in written discourse. Besides, the research also seeks for the overall frequency and distribution of hedges used by the undergraduate students of English Department, State University of Malang in the Introduction and Discussion sections of the theses.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 The Principle Definition of Hedging**

Hedging is known as the strategy used to show tentativeness using hedges. Hedging is also commonly defined as a term which refers to shields, indeterminacy, vagueness, or approximation (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1996a; 1996b). Lakoff (1972) defines hedges as a means in the form of words or phrases to make something more or less fuzzy. Moreover, Dixon and Foster (1997) also state that hedges signal imprecision and lack of complete commitment. In some other cases, hedges are used to show politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Holmes, 1984; and Myers, 1988). The latter is mostly related to spoken discourse, while hedges are also commonly used in written discourse, for instance in academic writings.

Another definition of hedging is also proposed by Behnam et al. (2012:20) who state that hedging is "a multi-objective linguistic device, the learning of which can help a researcher to appropriately express his scientific claims". Skelton (1988) also defines hedging as commentative language which is useful as a strategy by which propositions can be modified. Bonyadi et al. (2012) define hedges in their study more detailed by associating them with the so-called metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is not a device which adds to the content of a proposition but guides or directs the readers to the way they are supposed to understand and evaluate the content (Hyland, 1998). Also, Holmes (1988) argues that when discussing about politeness in the sociolinguistic literature, we are concerned with epistemic devices referring to hedges.

Ghazanfari and Abassi (2012) referring to Swales (1990) propose a more complex definition of hedging stating that hedges are rhetorical devices employed to demonstrate honesty, modesty, and proper caution in self-reports and to make space diplomatically for other researchers. Along with this, Hyland (1995) and Salager-Meyer (1997) state that an author uses hedges to present their propositions cautiously, tentatively, diplomatically, and modestly to live up to the expectation of the discourse community in which they are involved.

### **2.2 Principle Functions of Hedging**

It is apparent that hedging is the act, while hedges are the instrument used to do that act. Both are commonly found in written discourse. Moreover, when we discuss the definition of hedging, it is mostly and inevitably correlated to its functions. Hyland (1996a, 1996b), one of other researchers proposing the function of hedging, argues that when it is crucial for writers to propose unproven proposition with caution and precision, then the use of hedging in academic writings is centrally needed. This can also mean that the means called hedges referring to vagueness, uncertainty, and tentativeness have been used by writers to propose their ideas in a very careful way (Kresnanto, 2012). Lakoff (1973) argues that hedges are used to mitigate the claims for politeness purposes (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Ghazanfari and Abassi, 2012, referring to Myers, 1989; Martín-Martín, 2008), while Behnam et al. (2012) and Chang et al. (2012) referring to Dubois (1987) state that hedges are employed to express claims in an unobtrusive way. In Hübler's point of view (1983), hedges can be used to express indetermination, too. In line with this argument, Martín-Martín (2008) also proposes the strategy behind the use of hedging as the strategy of indetermination, strategy of camouflage hedging, strategy of subjectivisation, and strategy of depersonalisation.

Salager-Meyer (1994) has his own personal reasons in using hedges; they are used for the diminution of the risk of the disapproval and the mitigation of the truth-to-face. Along the lines, Chang et al. (2012) who refer to Bazerman (1998) argue that hedges are very useful to help a writer stand up for their arguments against any criticisms. Besides, Meyer (1997) also suggests that hedges are advantageous to communicate indefiniteness and thus make the claims invulnerable.

Unlike Brown and Levinson (1978), Myers (1989), and Martín-Martín (2008), Lewin's (2005) analysis demonstrates that politeness is not the main reason of using hedges, but he formulated five principal functions of hedging: politeness, self-protection, politics (modesty), avoiding responsibility, and preventing the truth.

Moreover, Chang et al. (2012) who conducted recent study on hedging believe that hedges can function to save an author's face, prevent objections, redeem the force of the arguments, and show suitable and acceptable circumspection. Additionally, other recent studies by Bonyadi et al. (2012) and Kresnanto

(2012) also demonstrate that hedges are employed to decrease the effects of FTA (Face Threatening Acts) which is recognised as the *author's claims* by Myers (1989). Hedges are also used in a particular context (Alonso et al., 2012).

The increase of studies on hedging certainly makes researchers formulate and develop the theory of hedging. According to Bruce's hedging taxonomy (2010), there are eleven kinds of hedges, some of which are can, could, possibly, appear, seem, and so forth. These words can indicate where the act of hedging exists. In Bloor and Bloor (2007:104), there is an illustration showing the existence of hedging. They introduce the terms hedged and unhedged proposition. When a proposition is hedged, it means that there are hedges used, and vice versa. Like what Lakoff (1972), Brown and Levinson (1987), Salager-Meyer (1994), and Hyland (1996a; 1996b) have pointed out, Bloor and Bloor (2007) have an idea about the act of hedging that is when hedges are used due to certain circumstances; hedges are the ostensible indicators of uncertainty. The circumstances Bloor and Bloor (2007:104) mean involve the conditions when one is "unsure of the facts" and "not wanting to risk full commitment".

Since hedges express doubt (Hyland, 2000) and are commonly found in academic writings, when used, they are considered weak in committing to the writer's own propositional information (Hyland, 2000). In other words, in an extreme way, their writings can be doubted by the readers; what they have searched can be questionable. *Kresnanto (2012) also concludes that hedges are used as an avoidance strategy to save and protect the one's face and even express indirect messages.*

Additionally, what can result from the investigation is that there may be some who fail to use hedges appropriately. This will make it even worse and more hesitating. This failure, according to Jalilifar (2011), is caused by the lack of knowledge of academic English. Besides, hedges can also be a shield which does not give any effect toward the truth-condition of the proposition but does toward the writer's commitment to the proposition (Prince et al., 1982).

The previous studies carried out by Bonyadi et al. (2012), Chang et al. (2012), Alonso et al. (2012), Ghazanfari and Abassi (2012) are likely to be based on the conclusion drawn by Deng (2003) who argues that the employment of hedges in certain way can be influenced by culture or 'nationality' (proposed by Yang, 2006) since, to him, culture can affect the style of writing, including the use of hedges. Culture can significantly indicate what we say, where and when, and in what way we say it. Thus, those who have different cultural background possibly have different perspectives in terms of expressing directness, politeness, and other pragmatic competences (Bonyadi et al., 2012). By contrast, Yang (2006) who investigated hedging in Chinese academic discourse and also Martín-Martín (2008) conclude that it is not the nationality but the discipline which influences the use of hedging in academic written discourse. It is thus critical, due to these arguments, to conduct research on hedging in academic context of Indonesian students who are EFL learners who might be influenced by their own culture, and to investigate their purposes in employing hedges.

### 2.3 Types of Hedges in Academic Written Discourse

There have been some theories explaining and describing the use of hedges in academic written discourse. Meyer's (1997) Hedging Strategies in academic written discourse is one of the theories. There is an interesting subtitle in his book that says about hedging strategies: "Strengthening the Argument by Weakening the Claim". This definitely means that people can do what the subtitle means by using the so-called hedges. One of his strategies is obtained from academic texts: some examples of hedging that he deems extreme. This means that people will inevitably find or even use such expressions in academic written discourse. Meyer (1997) even considered it as true hedges and one of the strategies in writing academic articles.

According to Meyer's (1997) hedging strategies, hedges were classified into nine groups. Table 1 shows the nine kinds of hedges used in written academic discourse.

Table 1 Hedging Strategy by Meyer (1997)

TYPES	EXAMPLES
Volitional modality	...would like to....
Inherently weak illocutionary forces	suspect, suggest, etc.
Pretending that the facts actually speak for themselves, or compel the author to claim what s/he is claiming	This explains...., it must be concluded...., etc.
Invoking the fact-finding process itself	It is found that....
Shifting responsibility to method	'techniques enable us' to perform some desirable speech act.

To hedge a speech act verb, as tokens of politeness to the authors of other texts in connection with coming-to-know verbs, to further weaken the strength of an assertion to question the completeness of the knowledge reported	What can be said is.... We can agree that.... ...can be found .... As far as can be ascertained...
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Additionally, based on Salager-Meyer's study on hedging carried out in 1994, there were five types of hedges:

1. Shields: *can, could, may, might, would, to appear, to seem, probably, to suggest*, etc.
2. Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time: *approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally*, etc.
3. Authors' personal doubt and direct involvement: *I believe...., ...to our knowledge...., ...it is our view that....*, etc.
4. Emotionally-charged intensifiers: *extremely difficult/interesting, of particular importance, unexpectedly, surprisingly*, etc.
5. Compound hedges: *...could be suggested...., ...would seem likely...., ...would seem somewhat....*, etc.

In a study recently conducted by Serholt (2012), the words indicating hedges which were investigated were *seem, appear, assume, likely, possible/possibly, speculate, believe, indicate, probable/probably, suggest*, and all modal auxiliary verbs (*can, may, must, shall, will, could, might, should, and would*). Moreover, Martín-Martín (2008) proposed kinds of hedges by correlating hedges with the strategy of a writer in using hedges.

Table 2 The Strategy of Hedging by Martín-Martín (2008)

STRATEGY	HEDGING DEVICES
Strategy of indetermination	<b>Epistemic modality:</b> <i>can, may, could, might</i> , etc. <b>Verbs of cognition:</b> <i>to seem, to appear</i> , etc. <b>Epistemic verbs:</b> <i>to assume, to suggest</i> , etc. <b>Modal adverbs:</b> <i>possibly, probably</i> , etc. <b>Modal nouns:</b> <i>possibility, suggestion</i> , etc. <b>Modal adjectives:</b> <i>possible, (un)likely</i> , etc.
Strategy of camouflage hedging	<i>really, generally, actually, in fact</i> , etc.
Strategy of subjectivisation	<i>...to our knowledge...., In my experience....</i> , etc.
Strategy of depersonalization	<i>It was concluded that...., It can be inferred....</i> , etc.

More importantly, the more organised and complete hedging taxonomy is proposed by Hyland (1996a). After dividing the scientific statements into factive and non-factive statements, he considers non-factive statements as statements which are hedged. Hyland (1996a) proposes types of hedges used in the non-factive statements, i.e. content-oriented and reader-oriented hedges. He further groups content-oriented hedges into accuracy-oriented and writer-oriented hedges. Accuracy-oriented hedges are then divided into attribute and reliability.

Attribute aims at helping authors formulate a proposition and its correlation with the facts, whereas reliability refers to the authors' attempt at making claims with a low degree of certainty. Moreover, writer-oriented hedges are used for impeding any refutations. The last but not least, reader-oriented hedges, almost similar to the advantage of using writer-oriented hedges, function to avoid any risks of criticisms by involving the readers in the discussion.

This classification of hedging by Hyland (1996a) (see also Appendix 7) is the one the researcher bases on in discussing the results of the findings to answer the objectives of the present research: frequency and distribution of hedges, and why the writers use the hedges in their theses. This is the most appropriate hedging taxonomy employed in the present study as it is the most organised taxonomy and focus more on the functions of hedges rather than the forms (Behnam et al., 2012), like what is mainly investigated and discussed in the present study, i.e. the functions of the hedges. In discussing the functions of hedges, the present researcher interprets the motivations for using the hedges. The hedging taxonomy by Hyland (1996a) is what the present researcher bases on in discussing the results of the findings. Besides, the researcher uses words indicating hedges as keywords, to look for the hedges in the theses before classifying them into certain types based on Hyland's hedging taxonomy (1996a).

### 3. Research Method

The present study on the use of hedges in written academic discourse is a descriptive qualitative study whose basic purpose is to seek for a deep understanding of human behaviour and the reasons for what causes this

sort of behaviour. The data collected in this research, therefore, were nonnumeric linguistic data, for this research was on the use of hedges, which were words. Johnson and Christensen (2004) and Behnam et al. (2012) propose that qualitative research depends mainly on the collection of qualitative data which usually are nonnumeric data involving words and pictures.

Moreover, this study is also quantitative but does not require and provide any advanced statistical analysis (identical to the study by Nivales, 2011) of the data since it primarily discusses and describes the linguistic phenomena which occur in written discourse, or more specifically, in academic writings. Therefore, this research was designed in such a way that the objectives could be fulfilled and finally achieved.

Concerning the present study on the use of hedges in the undergraduate theses, the data were collected from the library of English Department and Faculty of Letters, State University of Malang. The selected data were of 2011, 2012, and 2013 theses of the undergraduate students (resembling the studies by Hinkel, 1996; Nivales, 2011; Serholt, 2012). The data were in the form of soft files or files already burned onto CD. After copying all the files onto the computer, the researcher classified the data by year and major, and thus into three groups, i.e., Literature, Linguistics, and Education, in each year. The compilation of the theses resulted in a corpus of 1,587,059 words. The name of the corpus is C-Smile which is available for use by other researchers.

Since the present study was corpus-based, it was used AntConc 3.2.4w (Windows) 2011 as the analytic instrument. This software was beneficial to count the frequency and find the occurrence of hedges in the theses of the English Department students. AntConc 3.2.4w (Windows) 2011 is the latest version of AntConc; it provides a variety of functions, such as Concordance, Concordance Plot, File View, Clusters, Collocates, Word List, Keyword List, N-grams, and so forth. AntConc 3.2.4w (Windows) 2011 is free concordancing software which is developed and then published by Laurence Anthony (Fuhs and Wiechmann, 2006).

AntConc 3.2.4w facilitates and helps the text analysis and calculation. Working on the software requires the researcher to change the data into Text Document (.txt). This was done to make the statistical analysis simpler and more effective.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Referring to the frequency of hedges found in the theses, particularly in their Introduction and Discussion parts, the frequency of content-oriented hedges is very much higher (frequency= 13,335; percentage= 92.91%) than the reader-oriented ones (frequency= 1,017; percentage= 7.09%). The data also showed that accuracy-oriented hedges are much more frequently used (frequency= 13,146; percentage= 98.58%) than the writer-oriented hedges (frequency= 189; percentage= 1.42%). Additionally, the frequency of reliability is found higher (frequency= 11,585; percentage= 88.13%) than attribute which has the frequency 1,561 and its percentage is 11.87%.

The most highly frequent hedges are in the forms of modal verbs (frequency= 9,221; percentage= 79.60%). In the second place, epistemic verbs appear to have high, but much lower than modal verbs, in terms of frequency (frequency= 1,175; percentage= 10.14%). Epistemic verbs are almost equal in frequency to modal adjectives (9.23%). It is then followed by modal adverbs (0.56%) and nouns (0.47%) which are very low in frequency but appear to be comparable to each other.

The modal verb *can(not)* is the highest in frequency. Its percentage is far higher (38.94%) than the other modal verbs. It is followed by other modal verbs which occur relatively frequently, i.e. *will (not)* = 20.99%, *should (not)* = 13.44%, and *could (not)* = 8.88%. Additionally, *may (not)*, *would (not)*, and *must (not)* are found almost equivalent (the percentages (respectively) = 5.68%, 5.18%, 4.28%). The other ones which happen very rarely and, accordingly, have very low percentages are *might (not)* (2.32%), *shall (not)* (0.20%), and *ought to* (0.09%).

Interestingly, the use of modal verbs may vary. In using modal verbs as hedges, however, one has to carefully consider the most accurate function of them, especially as hedges helping reach the goal of indeterminacy. The authors who make these statements seem to have made a mistake in using the negative form of those modal verbs. They probably misunderstand the use of them.

Furthermore, hedges occur more in Discussion part by 56.82% (frequency= 8,155) rather than in Introduction part (frequency= 6,197; percentage= 43.18%). In Discussion part, it is undoubtedly hedged most since it is where the author evaluates the results and simultaneously makes claims. Viewed from the overall frequency of hedges it is likely that hedges in general are mostly distributed in more in Discussion than in Introduction. If examined on hedge words one by one, there are distinctions in the use of some words and phrases employed by research article writers across cultures and disciplines. Specifically, six of ten modal verbs analysed have higher frequency and percentage in Discussion part, i.e. *should (not)*, *could (not)*, *would (not)*, *must (not)*, *might (not)*, and *shall (not)*. The remaining modal verbs, i.e. *can(not)*, *will (not)*, *may (not)*, and *ought to*, are respectively higher in Introduction part.

From the findings, the discussion of why or the motivation behind the use of hedging in research papers are analysed, discussed, and concluded what are argued from the empirical data. Even though the motivation may not always be clear (Hyland, 1996a), the present researcher bases his claims mainly on what Hyland (1996a) has formulated using his hedging taxonomy which is also employed as the basis of analysis and discussion. Other motivations successfully formulated by other researchers are employed as either an extra or to support the main

arguments.

Content-oriented hedges or content-motivated hedges (Hyland, 1996b), according to Hyland's model (1996a), can be demonstrated through some delicacy. First of all, this is used for the linear agreement between the reality and the proposition being modified. Secondly, the employment of these hedges is for the need of cautiously and meticulously presenting the claims to anticipate any negation from the readers. These hedges therefore imply the authors' attitude toward the claims (Isabel, 2001).

Meanwhile, content-oriented hedges refer to the propositions which are presented with greater precision and caution. These hedges differentiate the facts from the inference and suggest that a proposition is based on the authors' believable logic in preference to reliable fact (Hyland, 1996b). More specifically, these hedges practically and functionally aim to acknowledge the imprecision between the proposition and the reality (which corresponds to attribute), and admit the uncertainty of the author's propositions (which are associated with reliability). Both hedges, however, usually overlap to each other in terms of forms and functions.

At last, the reason why the hedges that are closely associated with writer-oriented hedges in the way that they both function is used to anticipate the readers' negations or defend from the potential criticisms (Chang et al., 2012 referring to Bazerman, 1988) and thus save the authors' face (Chang et al., 2012). Reader-oriented hedges are, however, a bit deeper; they also aim at treating the readers with deference and even convincing them to compromise with the writers. The purpose of these hedges is associated with what was proposed by Myers (1989) who correlates the purpose with politeness. He claims that authors' claims can be interchangeably replaced by the word *threat* (FTA) since any claims contain new ideas and points. Ghazanfari and Abassi (2012), thus, argue that these hedges are employed to minimise the threat-to-face (cf. Bonyadi et al., 2012). Lakoff (1973; 1975) who early conducted research on hedging also believed that these hedges are used for politeness purposes (cf. Lewin (2005); Martín-Martín, 2008). These hedges are usually expressed by pronoun *we*, *our*, or *us* for these pronouns can give the audience a nuance of involvement in the authors' argumentation. To conclude, these hedges show the authors' attitude toward the readers (Isabel, 2001).

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the discussion about the findings on hedging in undergraduate theses which authors are Indonesian EFL learners, these authors, like other people from the other part of the world, employ hedges in their academic writing quite frequently. Similar to the previous related studies by Hyland (1996a; 1996b), these authors employ one kind of content-oriented hedges, i.e. reliability, most frequently among the other hedges. Since reliability hedges are employed when an author feels uncertain of their propositions, it means that they are not assured of the propositions or claims they make (Hyland, 1996a; 1996b). Additionally, like Deng (2003) has proposed that culture influences the use of hedges, these students employ reliability hedges referring the not-feel-confident because they live in a collectivistic society.

There is a bit possibility that they use hedges for the sake of being polite (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Myers, 1989) or making their claims recognised and hoping them accepted by the readers (Bonyadi et al., 2012) as these functions belong to writer-oriented and reader-oriented hedges. The findings show that the authors of the theses do not employ the last two hedges often.

Furthermore, the misuse of *can*, *cannot*, *could*, and *could not* done by these authors also mean that they lacks knowledge of English rhetoric (Jalilifar, 2011). This inadequacy of knowledge can possibly cause them rarely use sophisticated hedges, such as *supposedly*, *presumably*, or *allegedly*. Moreover, the fact that they use *can* most among the other hedges is not in line with the findings of other previous studies (e.g. Hyland, 1996b; and Nivales, 2001) which showed that *might*, *would*, and *may* were the most favoured and frequent modal verbs, explains that *can* is the most familiar hedge typically taught to and digested by Indonesian EFL learners.

The uniqueness found in the present study previously explained demonstrates that although the motivation behind the use of hedges can be similar, the way hedges are employed can differ across culture and due to the background knowledge. Other researchers may find different kinds of typical hedges employed by people from different parts of the world and probably find different motivations for employing such hedges.

## 6. SUGGESTION

In regard to the incorrectness of the use of some hedges, the appropriate usage of hedges should be taught (Bonyadi et al., 2012; Behnam et al., 2012; Salager-Meyer, 1994, referring to Rounds, 1981; Bloor, 1984; and Skelton, 1988) in writing class. They should be made aware of the correct use of hedges in writing an academic essay.

The study can be a stepping stone for the future research investigating hedging in academic context, written or spoken for the comparison. There can be further studies on certain hedges typically employed by particular group of people. There can also be further research investigating the functions or motivations behind the use of hedges in academic writings by also interviewing the authors. Finally, the studies on hedging in academic spoken discourse, for instance in English debate, can be carried out for the sake of



exploration of English linguistics in general, and in Indonesia specifically.

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