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An intercultural analysis of the use of hedging by Chinese and Anglophone academic English writers

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Abstract: Due to the dominance of English as the international language of scientific communication, second language (L2) academic writers with different first languages (L1s) need to enhance their L2 pragmatic competence and make rhetorical and stylistic accommodations to publish their academic work in English-medium journals. Hedging strategies, among other things, are one of the important indicators of L2 pragmatic competence in academic writing. With Crompton's taxonomy of hedges as the conceptual framework and by referring to the interview findings, we built two purpose-driven corpora and analysed the use of the hedging devices in the conclusion section of applied linguistics research articles written in English by Chinese and Anglophone scholars from intercultural perspectives. We attempted to answer an overarching question: "To what extent did the two groups of academic writers differ in hedging?" Results indicate that: 1) overall, Anglophone academic English writers used more hedges than their Chinese counterparts; 2) Chinese and Anglophone writers did not show statistically significant differences in the frequency of using most of the categories of hedges except for only one subcategory (namely, the "I/we + non-factive verb" structure); 3) both groups showed a similar pattern in the choice of various categories of hedges; 4) there were differences in linguistic expressions between the two groups in the use of hedging. These results are discussed in relation to intercultural rhetoric and L2 academic writer pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Anglophone English writers, L2 academic writing, hedging, intercultural rhetoric, L2 pragmatic competence, conclusion section

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1 Introduction

Recent discussions of English as the international language of scientific communication indicate that academic writers with different first languages (L1s), including writers in English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) (hereinafter referred to as L2), are expected to develop competencies in intercultural rhetoric in order for their research findings to be accepted by the Anglo-sphere academic community (e. g., Connor 2008; Martín and Pérez 2014; Moreno 2013; Mu et al. 2015; Mur-Duenas 2011). This is because if they wish to publish their research in English-medium journals, the standard for making judgements on the use of English is usually that of how competent they are in using the language for conveying their ideas or arguments (Gea-Valor et al. 2014; Moreno 2010, 2013). Neither reviewers nor editors of academic journals typically show sympathy with L2 English writers and make decisions in their favour because of the fact that the authors are L2 English writers. Specifically, it is essential that L2 academic writers improve their L2 pragmatic competence and make rhetorical and stylistic accommodations (Connor 2004, 2008, 2011; Moreno 2013) to satisfy the academic English discourse norms and the requirements of English-medium journals for facilitating their readers' understanding of their intended meanings accordingly.

Hedging strategies, among other things, are one of the vital indicators of L2 pragmatic competence (Hyland 1996; Skelton 1988a), which merit our attention. The use of *hedge* as a linguistic term traces back at least to Lakoff's (1973) work, in which *hedge* refers to "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (p.195). According to Lakoff, hedging is a means for distinguishing the more marginal members of the conceptual categories of language from the central items. Since Lakoff's early work, the connotation of the concept of *hedge* itself became more abundant and different views took shape from perspectives such as "politeness" (Brown and Levinson 1987) and "linguistic vagueness" (Channell 1994). Given the fact that "scientific texts are not only content-oriented and informative but also seek to convince and influence their audience" (Martin-Martin 2008: 135), hedges are frequently used in academic discourse as sociopragmatic rhetorical strategies (Hyland 1996, 2016; Martin-Martin 2008). When academic writers employ hedges, they aim to achieve a variety of important pragmatic purposes, for example, modulating their commitment to a proposition, opening up a dialogic space, acknowledging subjectivity, or mitigating face-threatening criticisms, among others. In short, hedging is part of a writer's pragmatic competence, the lack of which would result in his/her pragmatic failure in written communication.

Pragmatic competence, as used in our study, refers to the writer's ability to use language appropriately in dynamic contexts to produce an academic text which can meet the rhetorical norms and expectations of a discourse community. According to Chen (2009), pragmatic competence consists of: 1) pragma-linguistic competence, 2) sociopragmatic competence, 3) pragmacognitive competence, and 4) discoursal competence. Given the focus of our study as well as space constraints, we concentrate on the first two dimensions of pragmatic competence. Pragmalinguistic competence, in our view, means that pragmatically competent writers must have at their disposal necessary linguistic resources for choice in academic writing. Sociopragmatically competent writers should also be sensitive to the culturally-based rhetorical conventions in academic writing. Thus L2 academic writers need to attach great importance to hedging strategies, which are particularly useful for promoting their L2 pragma-linguistic and sociopragmatic competence so as to achieve their communication goals interculturally (Moreno 2013).

Pragmatic competence is also represented in the way that different sections of research articles (RAs) embody different rhetorical functions with various linguistic resources (Abdollahzadeh 2011; Salager-Meyer 1994). Studies have begun to examine these functions of text units, as reported in Moreno (2013). Scholars have found that the conclusion section of a RA boasts important rhetorical functions, where, typically, the author's persuasive text is intended to be interpretative rather than factual statements (Abdollahzadeh 2011; Swales 1990, 2004; Swales and Feak 2004). The conclusion section is usually where authors are provided with an opportunity to demonstrate the significance of the findings in the study (e.g., theoretical and/or practical implications) (Chen 2012). It often involves what the research results might imply: Do they confirm or refute a theory, or modify existing theories, or clarify a controversial issue, or develop a new model, or enrich our understanding of a phenomenon? The practical implications are also included in this section if the results can be applied to solve certain practical problems. Briefly, the conclusion section, as the essence and destination of RAs, is an overall judgment and evaluation of research results, functioning as a finishing touch for the whole text (Qi and Yang 1999: 109). Thus, authors employ hedging strategies to achieve their intended purposes because appropriate uses of hedging strategies could make authors better adjust their relationships with their own propositions and arguments, and help construct certain power relations between them and readers as well as reviewers (Mu et al. 2015). Therefore, if the authors hedge properly, expressing their claims and arguments tentatively or in a less assertive manner, it is more likely that their conclusions would be accepted by a specific academic discourse community. Otherwise, their concluding remarks might sound blunt or even

impolite as to incur readers', editors', as well as peer reviewers' doubt, oppositions, and/or dissatisfaction. As a result, authors would not be able to realize their intercultural communication goals effectively.

Abdollahzadeh (2011) conducted a comparative study of interpersonal meta-discourse in the conclusion section of applied linguistics RAs written in English by Anglo-American and Iranian academic writers. He reported that native writers of English and L2 writers with Arabic as their L1 are not different in terms of using hedges. Hedging the arguments, for these two groups of writers, serves as a strategic means for obtaining academic community acceptance and solidarity with readers. In contrast, Yagiz and Demir (2014) found some significant differences in the use of hedging strategies in published articles between native writers of English and L2 writers with Turkish as their L1. These differences are not so much in the quantity as in the manner in which hedges were used (see also Mu et al. 2015). They concluded that "in many cases L2 writers do not employ hedging structures in tune with the rules and norms of Anglo-sphere academic discourse community" (p. 267).

What about the use of hedging devices by L2 English writers with Chinese as their L1 in contrast to those by native English-speaking writers? Can L2 English writers communicate interculturally in an effective manner? Unfortunately, only a few sporadic studies are documented about L2 English writers with Chinese as their L1 (Bunton 1999; Cheng and Steffensen 1996; Hyland 2005). For instance, Feng and Zhou (2007), Hu and Cao (2011), and Wang (2008) focused on the use of hedging in the abstracts of RAs, and Jiang and Tao (2007) on that in the discussion section of medical RAs. A very recent study by Mu et al. (2015) investigated the use of hedging devices in the whole body of applied linguistics RAs. Understandably, these studies have helped us how to understand RAs. Nevertheless, up to now we have not found any research on how the L2 English writers with Chinese as their L1 use hedging strategies in the conclusion section of RAs. Given the significance of the conclusion section of RAs for advancing the authors' arguments, our study was conducted to fill the research gap. Specifically, we explored if there would be similarities and/or differences between Chinese academics and their Anglophone counterparts in the use of hedges in the conclusion section of applied linguistics RAs written in English. We concentrated on three research questions.

- (1) What are the similarities and differences (if any) in the frequency of use of various categories of hedges between Chinese and Anglophone academic writers?
- (2) What are the similarities and differences (if any) in the pattern in the choice of various categories of hedges between Chinese and Anglophone academic writers?

- (3) What are the similarities and differences (if any) in the linguistic expressions of various categories of hedges between Chinese and Anglophone academic writers?

It is our hope that our research findings will enable us to offer some implications for developing L2 writers' academic writing skills and enhancing their L2 pragmatic competence.

2 Taxonomies of hedges

There are various taxonomies in the existing literature and each has its own merits and weaknesses. On the basis of Lakoff's (1973) study, Prince et al. (1982), through empirical research on oral medical discourse, classify hedges according to their functions. They divide hedges into two categories: Approximators and shields. Approximators refer to hedges that affect the proposition content, whereas shields refer to hedges that implicate that the speaker is not fully committed to the truth of the proposition. Shields fall into two subcategories: plausibility shields and attribution shields. Plausibility shields implicate that the speaker is asserting a belief acquired via plausible reasoning (e. g., *I think, seem, probably*), whereas attribution shields simply attribute the belief in question to someone other than the speaker (e. g., *according to Dr. Smith*). Their classification criteria have been questioned by some scholars. As Skelton (1988b) points out, Prince et al.'s classification seems possible only in abstracts, because in the process of language use the illocutionary force of shields may penetrate through longer stretches of discourse, thus transforming approximators into shields. Although his criticism needs further discussion, Skelton suggests that Prince et al.'s classification is at least debatable (Varttala 1999). Clearly, the social purpose of the medical conversations is to make an accurate diagnosis, so the classification of hedges according to function is inevitably affected by the nature of the corpus. For instance, attribution shields are a means of conferring status to reported speech (e. g., within the hierarchy of "doctors, nurses, and patients"). As Prince et al. (1982) put it in their discussion of attribution shields, the speaker's own degree of responsibility for the truth of a proposition is "only indirectly inferable" (p. 89). Skelton (1988b) also notes that it appears difficult to determine whether a reporting verb expresses a comment (i. e., hedge) or just a report. Admittedly, it is sometimes argued that Hyland's work (1996, 1998) would be the "locus classicus" on hedging in scientific RAs, providing the definitional and other baselines of hedges for further study. Regrettably,

attribution shields in Prince et al.'s (1982) terminology were not excluded in Hyland's (1998: 124) work. Such a drawback in Hyland's work led us to a decision against using Hyland's taxonomy as our conceptual framework despite its popularity in the field of academic writing.

In addition to the purely functional classification, there exist other taxonomies of hedges. Salager-Meyer (1994: 154–155), by the contextual analysis of written medical English discourse, establishes the formal-functional classification, in which hedges are divided into five categories (summarized as follows):

- a) shields: all modal verbs expressing possibility (*might*), semi-auxiliaries (*seem*, *appear*), probability adverbs (*probably*), and their derivative adjectives, epistemic verbs (*suggest*, *speculate*);
- b) approximators: (*approximately*, *somewhat*, *often*, *occasionally*);
- c) expressions of the authors' personal doubt and direct involvement (*I believe*, *to our knowledge*);
- d) emotionally-charged intensifiers (*extremely difficult*, *absolutely interesting*, *of particular importance*, *surprisingly*);
- e) compound hedges (*It may suggest that ...*, *It would seem likely that ...*).

Also, her approach appears to have some questionable areas. As we can see, there are apparent overlaps between the categories. For example, concerning the third category of hedges, it seems that only expressions including a direct mention of the author can be used to express his/her personal doubt and direct involvement. However, studies (e.g., Lachowicz 1981) have shown that the author is not necessarily referred to directly so as to make his/her doubt or involvement known to us all. Thus, many expressions in Category (1) "shields" (e.g., *appear*, *suggest* and *probably*) can also pertain to Category (3) in certain contexts (Varttala 1999).

Based on a full analysis of various definitions and classifications of hedges, Crompton (1997) proposes his own definition and taxonomy of hedges. With reference to Lyons's definition of epistemic modality (1977: 797), Crompton defines hedges in academic discourse as "an item of language which a speaker uses to explicitly qualify his/her lack of commitment to the truth of a proposition he/she utters" (1997: 281). His taxonomy of hedges includes six categories (1997: 284), and they were adapted for use in our study (see Table 1).

As discussed above, Prince et al. (1982) categorize hedges in the light of their functions, and Salager-Meyer (1994) builds the formal-functional classification of hedges. In contrast, Crompton's (1997) taxonomy is primarily based on the form/structure of hedges (e.g., epistemic copulas/modals, adjectives/adverbs expressing probability) in academic discourse (see Table 1). While there are a variety of linguistic resources serving as hedging devices (e.g., Markkanen and Schröder

Table 1: Crompton's (1997) taxonomy of hedges.

Categories of hedges	Concepts	Examples
H1	Epistemic copulas	The moon <i>appears</i> to be made of cheese.
H2	Epistemic modals	The moon <i>might</i> be made of cheese.
H3	Adjectives expressing probability	It is <i>likely</i> that the moon is made of cheese.
H4	Adverbs expressing probability	The moon is <i>probably</i> made of cheese.
H5	Non-factive verb phrase structures (which fall into two sub-types)	
H5.1	I/we + non-factive verb	<i>I suggest</i> that the moon is made of cheese.
H5.2	Impersonal subject + non-factive verb	<i>It is therefore suggested</i> that the moon is made of cheese.
H6	Impersonal subject + non-factive verb + NP	<i>These findings suggest a cheese moon.</i>

1988; Varttala 1999), Crompton's taxonomy is limited to a choice of "items of language", which are most likely to be seen as hedges by the academic discourse community. Of course, this narrow selection excludes some non-lexical hedging elements, e. g., tense and questions. It is argued, however, that lexical items are most easily associated with hedging in the eyes of the readers of academic texts (Varttala 1999). Also, Hyland (1994) notes that, when Anglophone writers employ hedges to indicate tentativeness, discretion and doubt, the selection falls largely upon lexical hedging elements. Further, since Crompton's taxonomy is mainly concerned with the form/structure of hedges, his approach is immune to the influences of the nature of the corpus in Prince et al.'s (1982) classification and avoids overlaps over Salager-Meyer's (1994) classification. We, therefore, decided to adopt Crompton's taxonomy as the conceptual framework of this study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Corpora

Before conducting a comparative study, Moreno (1998) recommended that "we must be sure that we are really comparing elements that can be in fact

compared” (p.553). In other words, though two entities might be different in some degree, they do have some properties in common (Moreno 1998). Hence, before we compared the hedging devices between the two groups of writers, a series of work had been done to build *tertium comparationis* (Connor 2004; Connor and Moreno 2005) or a common platform of comparison for the design of the comparable corpora (Ghadessy et al. 2001), as shown in Table 2. That is, some study constants were established in terms of text source, genre, participants, academic discipline, and textual unit of analysis, among other things. To start with, the text sources for this study were RAs from two applied linguistics journals. The RAs of Anglophone academic writers were selected from *Applied Linguistics* (hereinafter referred to as *AL*), which is an indexed international applied linguistics journal. The RAs of Chinese academics were selected from *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* (hereinafter referred to as *CJAL*). *CJAL* is also an international applied linguistics journal (the only English-medium journal of this field with its editorial office in mainland China), which has been indexed in the MLA International Bibliography and EBSCO. *CJAL*’s policies for

Table 2: Similarity constraints established for the design of the comparable corpora of applied linguistics RAs by Anglophone and Chinese authors.

Tertium comparationis	Values of prototypical features perceived as a constant across the two corpora
Text source	
Two journals of applied linguistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Co-editors and editorial board: well-known scholars in the field of applied linguistics – Similar policies for submission and acceptance and systematic and rigorous review procedures – Indexed in international databases
Genre	RA
Mode	Written English language
Participants	
– Writers	– Researchers, professors and other scholars in the field of applied linguistics
– Targeted readers	– Researchers, professors, professionals, teachers and advanced students
Academic discipline	Applied linguistics
Level of expertise	Expert/experienced writers
Textual unit of analysis	Conclusion section
Publication date	2009–2011

Notes: 1 Table 2 is an adaption of a table provided in Connor and Moreno (2005: 159), which in its turn is an adaptation of a table provided in Moreno (1996: 162), as acknowledged in Connor and Moreno (2005).

2 Number of texts in each independent corpus is 30.

submission and acceptance are highly similar to those of *AL*. For instance, it also operates a double-blind peer review process so as to ensure fairness, objectivity and transparency. The required length of the manuscript is also equivalent (8,000–10,000 words). It has an editor-in-chief and associate editors as well as an international editorial board consisting of well-known scholars from home and abroad, a high rate of submissions, and thus systematic and rigorous reviewing and editorial procedures. Besides, the targeted readers of *CJAL*, like those of *AL*, involve researchers, professors, professionals, teachers, and research students.

Further, in order to see synchronic variations (Biber et al. 1998) in the use of hedging, we selected 30 RAs in *CJAL* and *AL* respectively, which were published between 2009 and 2011, a time frame that reflected the latest development when the corpus was built for the present study. One key criterion for inclusion of these articles was that they must have a conclusion section each. Those that did not contain an independent conclusion section were discarded. The other criterion was that all of the articles selected from *CJAL* must be written by Chinese scholars, while all of the articles selected from *AL* were single-authored by Anglophone scholars or had Anglophone academics as first authors. We ascertained the identities of these two groups of writers by nationality, native language and educational background. For instance, all the Chinese authors in this study come from mainland China, whose native language is Chinese (rather than Tibetan or Uyghur), and who have graduated from or are studying in universities of mainland China. We verified the information on their identities through some search engines (e. g., Wikipedia, Google and Baidu), the websites of their affiliates, or other social media platforms such as Facebook, ResearchGate.net, and Academia.edu, and even by email or telephone. Lastly, we regarded the conclusion sections of the 30 RAs from *CJAL* as Corpus *CJAL*, whose tokens are 9876; and we treated the conclusion sections of the 30 RAs from *AL* as Corpus *AL*, whose tokens are 15,901 (for a list of references of the 60 articles involved, see Appendix B).

Apparently, there exist differences between the two journals. As far as the academic status is concerned, *AL* is a leading international journal included in the SSCI index and circulated widely around the world; whereas *CJAL* is also an international journal published at de Gruyter Mouton, one of the leading publishers in linguistics; its authors are predominantly scholars of a Chinese background from within mainland China and around the world, as clearly indicated by their institutional affiliations, but it is not an SSCI-indexed journal, nor is it a core or CSSCI (Chinese Social Science Citation Index) journal. We speculated that, apart from the research content, there could possibly be some discrepancies in language use between the two journals, which might be closely related to the writers' portrayal of pragmatic competence. An important indicator of

pragmatic competence, hedging, thus, becomes the variable for the present study, which provides us with a strong justification for our attempt to make comparisons of how hedging is used in RAs in the two different journals.

3.2 Data analysis

After the corpora were built, two of us set about manual annotation of the hedges according to Crompton's (1997) definition and taxonomy, respectively. During the process of manual annotation, some unrelated usage was excluded according to context. For instance, the research objective involved in Example 1 (i. e., *I think*), and the attribution shield in Prince et al.'s (1982) terminology in Example 2 were eliminated, because they did not belong to the category in this study.

Example 1. Chinese EFL learners significantly overuse *I think* compared with native speakers. (the underline added; hereinafter the same) (CJAL 17)

Example 2. In this vein, Cook (2000: 204) argues that 'Play ... does not entail a rejection of order or authority, though it does at least imply more voluntary and creative reasons for embracing them'. [AL 3]

Our tagging consistency rate was about 86% in the first round. After analysis and discussion of the different views on certain cases, we performed the second round of annotation, the tagging consistency rate reaching 97.3%. Finally, some cases still failing to reach unanimity were excluded. A tallying of all the features was completed using Nvivo and then statistical data were submitted to chi-square test to find out if there would be statistically significant differences. Incidentally, the gap between the quantities of the data in the two corpora does not skew the results of this study greatly in light of the formula of chi-square test used in the present study (see Table 3).

Table 3: The formula of chi-square test used in this study (2*2 Crosstab).

	Frequency of occurrence	Frequency of non-occurrence	Total
Corpus A	a	b	a + b
Corpus B	c	d	c + d
Total	a + c	b + d	a + b + c + d

$$\text{Note: } \chi^2 = \sum \frac{(o-E)^2}{E} = \frac{(ad-bc)^2 * N}{(a+b)*(a+c)*(b+d)*(c+d)}$$

O = observation frequency

E = expected frequency

$N = a + b + c + d$

For a better understanding of our data, examples of each of the categories of hedges from the corpora are given as follows:

H1 (Epistemic copulas)

Example 3. American English speakers tend to respond to compliments with Acceptance while Chinese people are overwhelmingly inclined to respond to compliments with Non-acceptance. (*CJAL* 16)

Example 4. The absence of long chains of claim/challenge/challenge, etc. would also seem to indicate that readers do not come to discussion with stable, well-worked through defensible positions; reading group literary reading, it would seem, is one of locating *potentials* for interpretation. (*AL* 26)

Example 5. It appeared that optimum conditions for L2 learning were created: students were engaged and alert; material was personalized and localized; there was a balance of fluency work (meaning in context; speed of response) and accuracy work (repetition; focus on word forms). (*AL* 21)

H2 (Epistemic modals)

Example 6. Teachers may believe that once students are willing to deal with the difficulties they have with language production, gradual improvement can be expected. (*CJAL* 11)

Example 7. It would also be helpful to investigate the joint effects of pre-task and within-task planning. (*AL* 4)

Example 8. Given the scarcity of psycholinguistic investigations of L2 word learning pointed out by Haastrup and Henriksen (2001), the findings from the present study should be beneficial for understanding the underlying factors that influence L2 word learning--in particular, L2 word-meaning inference while reading. (*AL* 13)

H3 (Adjectives expressing probability)

Example 9. First, English majors are more likely to respond to compliments with Acceptance than non-English majors. (*CJAL* 16)

Example 10. it is possible that the accuracy rate may increase and that the amount of time required to achieve a high level of mastery may be reduced. (AL10)

H4 (Adverbs expressing probability)

Example 11. Perhaps this explains the strong tendency for evaluations of the book to have been more formulated in the past than generated (co-constructively) in the present. (AL 26)

H5 (Non-factive verb phrase structures) H5.1 (I/we + non-factive verb)

Example 12. I have suggested that language and discourse, as indispensable elements of both social processes and the researching of them, can yield particular kinds of insight (AL 19)

Example 13. ...we would suggest that further research investigate its effect on other linguistic error categories. (AL 10)

Example 14. In this article, I have argued that tails are a surprisingly consistent and durable feature of spoken English.... (AL 20)

H5.2 (Impersonal subject + non-factive verb)

Example 15. It is believed that only when EFL learners realize the need to communicate and exchange information that more interactions will be generated. (CJAL 11)

Example 16. This suggests that although instruction makes a difference, more focused instruction is desirable to the Chinese college students when the learning period is limited and specific vocabulary outcomes are sought. (CJAL 14)

Example 17. The findings in this study indicate that knowledge of the most frequent 3,000 word families plus proper nouns and marginal words may provide 95% coverage of movies, which we suggest may be sufficient for adequate comprehension and incidental learning to occur. (AL 9)

Example 18. This supports the view held here that narratives are both recipient designed as well as occasion designed. (AL 28)

H6 (Impersonal subject + non-factive verb + NP)

Example 19. Clearly, many issues raised here suggest further areas of enquiry. (AL 1)

3.3 Interview

We collected interview data as a way of triangulation (Block 2000; Zhu and Li 2011). First, we adopted two-layer purposive sampling procedures in choosing the interviewees (Miles and Huberman 1994). Specifically, we selected 10 Chinese authors and 10 Anglophone counterparts of the articles respectively through simple random sampling in each corpus. Then we contacted each of them through email to ask if s/he would like to participate in our interview. Five Chinese authors and four Anglophone counterparts responded actively and showed their willingness to be interviewed. In order to ensure the same number of interviewees for each group of writers, one of the authors of the present study sent an email to an Anglophone writer in the *AL* corpus (they had met each other at an international conference) and invited him to take part in the interview and received a positive reply. In the end, we interviewed five Chinese authors and five Anglophone counterparts, either face to face, by telephone, or on the internet, respectively. The semi-structural interview questions were intended to elicit information on the interviewees' metacognitive knowledge about the use of various categories of hedging devices in English-medium academic writing (see Appendix A).

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Frequency of use of categories of hedges

As Table 4 illustrates, the frequency of hedging (total) in *AL* is significantly higher than that in *CJAL* ($293 > 138$, $\chi^2 = 7.349$, $p = 0.007$). This result indicates that Anglophone academic writers used more hedges than Chinese academics.

Table 4: The frequency of use of various categories of hedges between the two corpora.

Categories of hedges	CJAL		AL		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Original frequency	Standard frequency		
H1	18	182	19	119	1.675	0.196
H2	90	911	182	1145	3.175	0.075
H3	6	61	15	94	0.844	0.358
H4	5	51	18	113	2.676	0.102
H5	18	182	52	327	4.714	0.030*
H5.1	1	10	20	126	10.010	0.002**
H5.2	17	172	32	201	0.272	0.602
H6	1	10	7	44	2.256	0.133
H (total)	138	1,398	293	1,843	7.349	0.007**

Note: Standard frequency is per 100,000 words; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (Hereinafter the same).

This finding is consistent with the previous studies (e. g., Hyland 2005; Hu and Cao 2011). Hence, we would suggest that Chinese academic writers tend to sum up their arguments in the conclusion section by taking a more self-confident and authoritative stance, which might be attributable to the inadequacy of their L2 sociopragmatic competence due to the transfer of L1 culturally-based rhetorical conventions (Connor 1996; Friedlander 1990; Hu and Cao 2011; Kaplan 1966). Rooted in Confucianism and Taoism, Chinese culture stresses that facts speak louder than words, with a consensus that “verbal debate and argumentation are not meaningful tools for understanding truth and reality” (Peng and Nisbett 1999: 747). Chinese people prefer to respect authoritative knowledge (Tweed and Lehman 2002) and objective facts, and often count on previous experience in solving problems. Chinese discourse (Jiang and Tao 2007; Wang 2008), as a rule, relies on appeals to history and tradition and authority, but not to the notion of logic, i. e., arguing from premises to conclusions (Bodde 1938; Matalene 1985). Thus, ideas or concepts are more likely to be framed in non-argumentative terms in the Chinese rhetorical values, different from Anglophone counterparts, which show more concern for potential counterarguments (Hu and Cao 2011; Liao and Chen 2009). It is no exaggeration to say that Chinese academic discourse is less an arena for constructing knowledge and approaching the truth than a venue for disseminating knowledge and asserting the truth (Hu and Cao 2011; Matalene 1985; cf. Mu et al. 2015). Therefore, unlike Anglophone scholars, who often display appropriate discretion and tentativeness in argument making, Chinese counterparts are expected to take on a tone of certainty in order to pass on authority and credibility.

As shown in Table 4, except for H5, the differences in the frequencies of the other categories of hedges in the two corpora did not reach statistical significance. Given that there is no statistical difference, it can only be speculated that these L2 English writers, in order to communicate interculturally, must have made tremendous effort to adapt to the norms of hedging in English (Jiang and Tao 2007; Mu et al. 2015; Wang 2008), as practiced by L1 academic writers, in all but one category of hedging, namely, H5. We would argue that the Chinese academic English writers have put great emphasis on L2 pragmatic competence development and made rhetorical and stylistic accommodations to a large extent, so as to achieve their intercultural communication goals, i. e., to make their RAs publishable in English-medium journals (Moreno 2010, 2013; Gea-Valor et al. 2014).

As mentioned above, there exists a significant difference in the frequencies of H5 ($182 < 327$, $\chi^2 = 4.714$, $p = 0.030 < 0.05$). The frequencies of H5.1 are significantly different ($10 < 126$, $\chi^2 = 10.010$, $p = 0.002 < 0.01$). To put it in another way, Chinese writers, in contrast to their Anglophone counterparts, rarely used the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure to explicitly convey their commitments to propositions. Various English writing textbooks in China may have a great impact on this phenomenon. For example:

Excerpt 1. Therefore, the first person pronouns (“I” and “we”) should not be used frequently in academic papers. (from *A handbook of writing*, Ding 1997: 308)

Excerpt 2. Mostly, research papers are objective. Generally, this means that subjective expressions like “I think” and “I believe” are not good at all...the passive voice is a very effective vehicle to help develop research papers with an impersonal style. (from *English research paper writing: A practical coursebook*, Chen 2012: 4–5)

From the rhetorical norms set by the two authoritative and influential textbooks (to mention just two here), we can easily deduce why Chinese scholars are inclined to get around the use of the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure in English-medium academic writing.

More importantly, we postulate that the above-mentioned phenomenon is also a result of negative transfer of collectivism to the L2 academic writing of Chinese scholars. An Anglophone interviewee said, “When I write a research article, I am conscious of who I am and what I am writing about and for whom I am writing. So for the purpose of expressing my own voice, using *I* is a good way of presenting an argument, I think.” Just as what he said, the Anglophone

academics did not hesitate to employ the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure in the conclusion section, e. g., Example 12. With the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure (i. e., “I have suggested”) at the very beginning of the sentence, Example 12 implied that it was the writer who possibly found out vital clues or patterns of social processes with reference to discourse analysis, for language/discourse and social processes are closely related. Thus the writer provided her particular voice on the proposition, reflected her own stance and attitude, and highlighted the uniqueness, novelty and importance of her study (Harwood 2005). Moreover, the writer in Example 12 clearly identified the responsibility for her finding or inference so as to stress her own contribution to academic achievement. This practice, just from one side, projected the self-centred individualism, which spurs idiosyncrasy, independent thinking, and individual innovation. In sharp contrast, Chinese academic writers, due to the influence of collectivism in Confucian philosophy, give prominence to authors’ group attribute and weaken their individual characteristics. The Chinese informants all agreed that they, in order to avoid subjective expression of personal opinions, were prudent in using the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure to indicate clearly their authorial identity for propositions in academic writing. As some scholars (Hyland 2002; Ohta 1991; Scollon 1994) have suggested, the first person pronouns are not to be accepted in Asian cultural traditions to a large degree, because they are often associated with individual rather than collective identity. Apparently, Confucianism and collectivism have been transferred negatively to the L2 academic discourse of Chinese academics. In view of the above-mentioned phenomenon, it is necessary to modify our rhetorical norms in compilation of English writing textbooks in China, on the one hand; and we are supposed to enhance our L2 pragmatic awareness and ability to overcome the interference of Chinese cultural traditions in L2 academic writing, on the other.

4.2 Pattern of choice of various categories of hedges

Surprisingly, as revealed in Table 5, the Chinese academic writers and their Anglophone counterparts were extremely similar in the pattern of choice of various categories of hedges. Both groups of writers regarded H2 (epistemic modals) as the first choice, which accounted for a large proportion in both corpora, exceeding 60%. The second and third choices were H5 (non-factive verb phrase structures) and H1 (epistemic copulas), the total of which accounted for 26% and 24% in the two corpora, respectively. Other categories of hedges made up a small part in both corpora, especially H6 that was rarely used.

Table 5: The distribution of frequencies of various categories of hedges between the two corpora.

CJAL				AL			
Categories of hedges	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Percentage (%)	Categories of hedges	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Percentage (%)
H2	90	911	65	H2	182	1145	62
H5	18	182	13	H5	52	327	18
H1	18	182	13	H1	19	119	6
H3	6	61	4	H4	18	113	6
H4	5	51	4	H3	15	94	5
H6	1	10	1	H6	7	44	2
H (total)	138	1398	100	H (total)	293	1843	100

Notes: Frequency is ordered from high to low.

This suggests that both Chinese and Anglophone academics are likely to see modal verbs as the primary device for expressing epistemic modality, while keeping non-factive verb phrase structures as well as epistemic copulas as important means for doing so.

Striking similarities in the pattern of choice of various categories of hedges between Chinese and Anglophone scholars are perhaps determined by the properties of the English language itself. As Varttala (1999) suggests, “Modal auxiliaries are the word-class most often associated with epistemic meaning” (p. 184). He then adds that epistemic main verbs are another canonical means to express epistemic possibilities (p. 185). Epistemic main verbs, in Varttala’s sense, actually consist of non-factive verbs (H5) and epistemic copulas (H1) (p. 185). Varttala’s opinion reflects a general principle for the expression of epistemic modality of the English language, which is corroborated by the results of this study. Another possible reason for the apparent similarities might well be that these L2 English writers have already made great rhetorical and stylistic accommodations to the preference of English as L1 academic writing in terms of the choice of hedging devices to be used (Abdollahzadeh 2011). Two of the Chinese interviewees informed us that they usually strived to hedge their arguments where necessary in ESL academic writing according to the hedging styles of native writers of English. We maintain that this is also substantial evidence that these Chinese academics, to a large degree, have developed L2 pragmatic competence in the choice of hedging devices in order to communicate interculturally, i. e., to make their RAs accepted by academic English discourse community (Gea-Valor et al. 2014; Moreno 2010, 2013). Last but not least, we cannot ignore the fact that the writers belong to the same disciplinary

community, and the fact that writers are used to reading, citing and using work written in English as an international language. So, it may be the context of publication in a particular disciplinary community that drives the same trend in the choice of various types of hedges.

4.3 Linguistic expressions of some categories of hedging

The linguistic expressions of hedges in this study refer to the lexical items or linguistic structures which function as hedging. Here we focus on three categories of hedges (namely, H1, H2, and H5), which show a number of differences in linguistic expressions between the two corpora. Incidentally, the linguistic expressions of H3, H4, and H6 in the two corpora are quite similar, which will not be enumerated due to limited space.

4.3.1 Linguistic expressions of H1

Overall, as Table 6 indicates, there did not exist any significant difference in the use of H1 between Chinese and Anglophone academic writers ($\chi^2 = 1.675$, $p = 0.196 > 0.05$). Specifically, however, Chinese academics used *tend* much more frequently, arriving at a statistically significant difference ($91 > 12$, $\chi^2 = 8.813$, $p = 0.003$), whereas Anglophone authors employed it marginally, which is fairly consistent with Varttala's (1999) finding that *tend* is not commonly used in American popular scientific and specialist RAs on medicine. It appears that RAs written by Anglophone authors in the field of applied linguistics show a similar pattern.

Table 6: The linguistic expressions of H1.

Epistemic copulas	CJAL		AL		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Original frequency	Standard frequency		
Tend	9	91	2	12	8.813	0.003**
Seem	5	51	11	69	0.338	0.561
Appear	4	40	6	38	0.012	0.913
H1 (total)	18	182	19	119	1.675	0.196

The lexical item *tend* is interpreted as “to be likely to do sth or to happen in a particular way because this is what often or usually happens” in

Oxford advanced learner's English-Chinese dictionary (6th edition). From this definition, we can see that *tend* indicates authors/speakers' greater grasp of propositions, with a tone of more certainty. In presenting the proposition in Example 3, the Chinese author already had a clear idea about the different ways of compliment responses between speakers of American English and Chinese speakers, with *tend* just to express a more definite attitude. While the two lexical items *seem* and *appear* in Examples 4 and 5 imply that an author just makes his/her personal speculations or inferences about propositions or claims, expressing some amount of hesitation and tentativeness.

Most of the Anglophone interviewees agreed that they used *seem* and *appear* more often than *tend*, which they thought was rarely used. "The reason for this might be that," one Anglophone interviewee informed us, "when research findings are presented, the author/researcher does not have to be over-protruding, I think. No matter how you write to report the findings, readers are the best judges, instead. Claiming too much on the basis of limited research design or data is unacceptable and contrary to the principles of scientific research." The responses of the Chinese interviewees formed a sharp contrast. One of our Chinese interviewees said, "I usually use *tend*, rather than *seem* and *appear*, to hedge my propositions, because *tend* has a higher degree of orientation. In this way I can take a more objective position in my academic papers." Hence, as discussed above, we maintain that Chinese academic writers prefer to employ *tend* in the conclusion section to summarise their opinions by assuming a more self-assured and authoritative identity. As mentioned before, it could also be attributed to their insufficiency of L2 sociopragmatic competence as a result of the negative transfer of L1 culturally-based rhetorical norms (Connor 1996; Friedlander 1990; Hu and Cao 2011). In order to communicate interculturally in a more efficient way, Chinese writers still need to boost L2 pragmatic competence and make appropriate accommodations to the English rhetorical conventions in academic writing.

4.3.2 Linguistic expressions of H2

As revealed in Table 7, except for *should*, the differences in the frequencies of the use of the other epistemic modals in the two corpora did not reach statistical significance. Hence, we could suggest that these L2 English authors have largely adapted to the conventions of epistemic modals in English, as practiced by L1 academic writers, in all but one, i. e., *should*. Thus we have reason to believe that a certain homogeneity in international academic publishing in English seems to be taking place with reference to the use of epistemic modals.

Table 7: The linguistic expressions of H2.

CJAL	AL				χ^2	<i>p</i>	
	Epistemic modals	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Original frequency			Standard frequency
May		32	324	62	390	0.728	0.394
Can		19	192	19	119	2.199	0.138
Might		13	132	26	164	0.410	0.522
Could		11	111	24	151	0.703	0.402
Would		11	111	31	195	2.616	0.106
Should		4	41	20	126	4.763	0.029*
H2 (total)		90	911	182	1,145	3.175	0.075

As is known to all, modals are the main form to express modality, which can be roughly divided into two categories: deontic and epistemic (Biber et al. 1999; Larreya 2004; Quirk et al. 1985). Broadly speaking, deontic modality expresses the speaker's duty or behaviour that s/he is required or permitted to perform, whereas epistemic modality shows the speaker's commitment to the truth of a proposition. As regards *should*, its usage as an epistemic modal is a kind of hedge. Overall, as shown in Table 8, Chinese academic writers overused *should* in the conclusion section ($405 > 157$, $\chi^2 = 14.873$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). Specifically, they overused *should* as a deontic modal ($364 > 31$, $\chi^2 = 42.560$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$), while underusing it as an epistemic modal, viz., a hedge ($41 < 126$, $\chi^2 = 4.763$, $p = 0.029 < 0.05$).

Table 8: Frequency of *should* used as epistemic and deontic modals between the two corpora.

should	CJAL			AL			χ^2	<i>p</i>
	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Percentage (%)	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Percentage (%)		
Epistemic modal (A hedge)	4	41	10	20	126	80	4.763	0.029*
Deontic modal	36	364	90	5	31	20	42.560	0.000**
Total	40	405	100	25	157	100	14.873	0.000**

In academic discourse, *should*, when used as an epistemic modal (a hedge), can achieve interpersonal metafunction (Halliday 1985), expressing a more moderate and polite tone (Biber et al. 1999; Quirk et al. 1985). For instance,

in Example 8, the Anglophone co-authors employed *should* to hedge the evaluation on their study that the findings play a role in L2 vocabulary research, so as to reveal appropriate tentativeness and commitment. Thus the contribution of their study would be more likely to be accepted by the academic community. Regrettably, Chinese writers overused *should* as a deontic modal when writing in L2 English, and their position appeared to be too sure, even so blunt as to sound dogmatic and pushy (Liang 2008), thus impeding the implementation of interpersonal metafunction and decreasing the persuasive power of their research articles.

The phenomenon above would imply that there is still space for Chinese academic English writers to hone their L2 pragmatic competence. On the one hand, their underuse of *should* as an epistemic modal might well result from the lack of pragmalinguistic competence as L2 learners and users. Some scholars (e. g., Gabrielatos and McEnery 2005; Liang 2008; McEnery and Kifle 2002) have found that native speakers of English employ significantly more epistemic modals than ESL/EFL learners or users. These studies seem to suggest that the frequency of use of epistemic modals is one of the important parameters of ESL/EFL learners' L2 pragmalinguistic competence. Chinese writers of L2 English in our study seldom used *should* as a hedge, implying that they have not fully mastered its usage as an epistemic modal. One Chinese informant reported, "to my knowledge, *should* means giving suggestions to somebody, which was what I've been taught by my English teachers when I was a student. I'm not quite familiar with its usage for expressing possibility." So we can see that her pragmalinguistic resources are relatively limited, although she is an advanced user of English.

On the other hand, Chinese L2 English writers' overuse of *should* as a deontic modal is partly attributable to the insufficiency of L2 sociopragmatic competence with the interference of culturally-based L1 writing conventions (Connor 1996). As Hinkel (2009) points out, Chinese social norms have primarily remained "post-Confucian." In other words, in sociocultural values and language uses, there is a strong carry-over from Confucian philosophy with its view of social roles, responsibilities and obligations. Chinese people incline to use such structures as "wo men ying gai" (we should; it is imperative that we...) and "wo men yao" (we should; it is imperative/necessary that we...) to offer their suggestions and/or recommendations in Chinese writing, so as to show their positive attitude and firm stance. If this writing style was transferred to English writing, it would be inevitable that *should* be overused as a deontic rather than epistemic modal. In some sense, Chinese EFL learners and users therefore need to raise their pragmatic awareness of epistemic modality in L2 academic writing in order to minimize pragmatic failure.

4.3.3 Linguistic expressions of H5

4.3.3.1 Linguistic expressions of H5.1

As Table 8 shows, in the linguistic expressions of H5.1, i. e., the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure, Anglophone academics preferred phrases such as *I/we suggest*, *I/we argue*, *I/we conclude*, which accounted for 70 % of the total of this structure.

From Examples 12, 13 and 14, we can see that the authors, with these phrases, made claims, generalizations, or judgments according to their investigations. Such phrases as *I/we suggest*, *I/we argue* implied that the stated propositions were not truth but the authors’ insights, which invited readers and peer specialists to join in the discussions. Most of our Anglophone informants agreed that these phrases were to highlight researchers’ critical thinking and their capabilities for making inferences, and therefore became an effective way to convey individuality and creativity (Gonzalez et al. 2001; Liao and Chen 2009; Matalene 1985). In this way the authors could also establish some relationship with their articles, and construct dual identity of follower and initiator in a research field, focusing on individual prestige and contributions to related disciplines (Li and Wei 2013). Clearly, Chinese academic writers, as indicated in Table 9, seldom used the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure to voice their personal opinions in a direct manner. This writing style of theirs, as discussed

Table 9: The linguistic expressions of H5.1.

I/we + non-factive verb	CJAL			AL		
	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Percentage (%)	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Percentage (%)
I assume	1	10	100	0	0	0
I/we suggest	0	0	0	6	39	30
I/we argue	0	0	0	4	25	20
I/we conclude	0	0	0	4	25	20
I/we believe	0	0	0	2	13	10
I hypothesize	0	0	0	1	6	5
We presume	0	0	0	1	6	5
We can say	0	0	0	1	6	5
I take the position that	0	0	0	1	6	5
H5.1	1	10	100	20	126	100

above, is possibly symptomatic of a lack of L2 sociopragmatic competence under the influence of L1 writing cultures based on Confucianism and collectivism inherent in Chinese educational thought and L1 language and literacy practices.

4.3.3.2 Linguistic expressions of H5.2

By examining the corpora, we have found that H5.2 (“impersonal subject + non-factive verb” structure) can be divided into three subcategories:

- (1) H5.2.1 The passive voice of non-factive verb
It is suggested/concluded/argued, etc., [by the author(s)] that-clause (see Example 15)
- (2) H5.2.2 NP + non-factive verb + that-clause
The findings/This study suggest(s)/imply(s), etc., that-clause (see Examples 16 and 17)
- (3) H5.2.3 NP + non-factive verb + N + that-clause
The findings/results support/lend weight to the view/claim/argument, etc., that-clause (see Example 18)

As shown in Table 10, the Chinese academics revealed the same inclination as the Anglophone counterparts in the use of H5.2.1 and H5.2.2. In other words, Chinese academic writers could also be proficient in the use of “the passive voice of non-factive verb” and “NP + non-factive verb + that-clause” structures as hedges, expressing their attitudes or commitments to propositions in an indirect way. However, Chinese writers employed H5.2.3 much less, reaching statistically significant difference ($0 < 57$, $\chi^2 = 5.592$, $p = 0.018 < 0.05$). Some of the Chinese interviewees admitted that they were not quite accustomed to the use of the complex structure (“NP + non-factive verb + N + that-clause”) as a hedging device. The reason for this would be that Chinese academics, to some degree, are short of L2 pramalinguistic resources concerned.

Table 10: The linguistic expressions of H5.2.

impersonal subject + non-factive verb	CJAL		AL		χ^2	P
	Original frequency	Standard frequency	Original frequency	Standard frequency		
H5.2.1	7	71	8	50	0.443	0.506
H5.2.2	10	101	15	94	0.030	0.862
H5.2.3	0	0	9	57	5.592	0.018*
H5.2	17	172	32	201	0.272	0.602

5 Conclusion

We took a corpus linguistics approach to investigate the use of hedges in the conclusion section of applied linguistics RAs written in English by authors of two distinct groups. We then attempted to triangulate the findings with qualitative interview data. We found that the Anglophone academic English writers, as a whole, used more hedges than their Chinese counterparts. Nevertheless, both groups of writers demonstrated the same tendency in the frequency of use of various categories of hedges except for only one subcategory, viz., H5.1. We also found that the two groups of writers displayed a similar pattern in the choice of various categories of hedges. Both groups saw epistemic modals and non-factive verb phrase structures as very important hedging devices. The two groups differed somewhat in the linguistic expressions of some categories of hedges. In the first category of hedges, Chinese L2 English writers used *tend* more often than Anglophone counterparts. In the second category, Chinese writers underused *should* as an epistemic modal. In the fifth category, Chinese writers rarely used the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure.

To sum up, similarities in the two groups of writers’ use of hedging strategies imply that the Chinese academics, to a large extent, have developed L2 English pragmatic competence and made rhetorical and stylistic accommodations to academic English discourse norms so as to communicate interculturally and publish their RAs in English-medium journals. Nonetheless, there are still some differences. Admittedly, we would like to contend that academic English discourse norms or conventions are not static but dynamic and changing (Connor 2011; Gillaerts and Velde 2010), which is why we built our corpus within a time frame (i. e., 2009–2011). Causes of the differences mentioned above might be quite complex, but different social cultures, rhetorical traditions, and levels of pragmatic competence of these academic English writers are probably vital factors that contributed to such findings. It can be argued that non-native English-speaking writers of academic English ought to have written in their own style so that their own authorial voice could have been better projected (Zhang 2013). Nonetheless, for purposes of presenting their ideas clearly to their readers, who are not particularly familiar with the discourse of argument or rhetorical style, they had to adapt to the “common core” (Canagarajah 2015) of Anglophone academic discourse norms and be considerate of their readers’ experiences.

Based on the findings we may conclude that the present study, in a sense, has enriched our understanding of L2 pragmatic acquisition, especially as regards using written academic English for international publishing. For various reasons (e. g., limited research design, small sample size, or limited data), academic writers often

have difficulty in providing more precise and definitive information. Thus, hedging the conclusions appropriately in L2 academic writing could mitigate the force of the claims, leave room for negotiation with the audience, reduce the risk of opposition, and minimize face-threatening acts involved in argument making; doing so would enable L2 academic writer(s) to make claims moderately and more politely for convincing the academic English discourse community more forcefully on reasonable grounds. In our view, these are significant manifestations of L2 pragmatic competence.

We anticipate that the findings of this study would help to improve ESL/EFL learners' and users' pragmatic awareness and ability so that they will be enabled to make use of hedging devices more felicitously. Furthermore, we think that our findings will not only deepen our understanding of academic discourse, but also shed some light on L2 academic writing, especially in relation to writing academic English textbooks and enhancing academic English instruction.

Frankly, our study is exploratory in nature and a statement on its limitations is in order. Due to limited time and constraint of resources we analysed only 60 RAs that spread across three years in two applied linguistics journals, *AL* and *CJAL*. The findings, therefore, might be skewed by the small size of data to some extent. Obviously, further work needs to be done in this area of research, particularly when a larger sample size is possible. We believe that the findings from a larger sample size will be more illuminating of the phenomenon in question.

Acknowledgements: It must be acknowledged that our research is limited in both genre and the disciplinary scope, as we centred on only one discipline, i. e., applied linguistics. We speculate that academic writers of other genres and/or in other fields should build up their authorial voices in different ways (Ivanic and Camps 2001; Matsuda and Tardy 2007). Specifically, vital factors for further investigation might include sociocultural contexts and academic and professional genres, such as L1/educational background and sex/gender of writers, discipline (e. g., soft/hard science), institution, as well as intended audience (Hyon 1996). We appreciate one reviewer for highlighting the significance of the issue explained here.

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Appendix A: An Interview Guide

Semi-structural interview questions on the use of hedging devices

- 1) When you engage yourself in academic writing, do you
 - use some hedging (mitigating) devices? Why?
 - employ *tend*, *seem*, or *appear* as a hedging device? Which of them do you prefer to use? Why?
 - employ modals as a hedging device? Which modals (*may*, *can*, *might*, *could*, *would*, *should*) do you prefer to use? Why?
 - employ *should*? Which usage of *should* do you often use, deontic or epistemic? Why? (Note: As regards *should*, its deontic usage means giving suggestions to somebody, for instance, “An SL learner should

- combine reading and writing”; and its epistemic usage means possibility, for example, “This study should be beneficial to ESL writing.”)
- employ non-factive verb phrase structures as a hedging device? If so, which type of non-factive verb phrase structures do you prefer, the “I/we + non-factive verb” structure (e.g., I suggest/argue that-clause) or the “impersonal subject + non-factive verb” structure (e.g., it is suggested/argued that-clause)? Why?
- 2) Which “impersonal subject + non-factive verb” structure do you often use when you hedge your propositions in academic writing?
- the passive voice of non-factive verb (e.g., it is suggested that-clause)?
 - NP + non-factive verb + that-clause (e.g., this study suggests that-clause)? or
 - NP + non-factive verb + N + that-clause (e.g., the findings support the claim that-clause)?
 - Why?

Appendix B: Corpus contents

APPLIED LINGUISTICS	Coding
Borg, S. (2009). English language teachers' conceptions of research. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 358–388.	AL 1
Brooks-Lewis, K. A. (2009). Adult learners' perceptions of the incorporation of their L1 in foreign language teaching and learning. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 216–235.	AL 2
Bushnell, C. (2009). ‘Lego my keego!': An analysis of language play in a beginning Japanese as a foreign language classroom. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 49–69.	AL 3
Ellis, R. (2009). The differential effects of three types of task planning on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy in L2 oral production. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 474–509.	AL 4
Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2009). Towards an organic approach to investigating CAF in instructed SLA: The case of complexity. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 555–578.	AL 5
Rizza, C. (2009). Semantically redundant language — A case study. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 276–294.	AL 6
Robinson, P., Cadierno, T., & Shirai, Y. (2009). Time and motion: Measuring the effects of the conceptual demands of tasks on second language speech production. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 533–554.	AL 7
Skehan, P. (2009). Modelling second language performance: Integrating complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexis. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 510–532.	AL 8

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APPLIED LINGUISTICS	Coding
Webb, S., & Rodgers, M. P. H. (2009). The lexical coverage of movies. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 30, 407–427.	AL 9
Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2010). The Contribution of written corrective feedback to language development: A ten month investigation. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 193–214.	AL 10
Cameron, D. (2010). Sex/gender, language and the new biologism. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 173–192.	AL 11
Friedman, D. A. (2010). Speaking correctly: Error correction as a language socialization practice in a Ukrainian classroom. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 346–367.	AL 12
Hamada, M., & Koda, K. (2010). The role of phonological decoding in second language word-meaning inference. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 513–531.	AL 13
King, K. A. (2010). Language policy and Latina immigrants: An analysis of personal experience and identity in interview talk. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 651–670.	AL 14
Johnson, D. C. (2010). The relationship between applied linguistic research and language policy for bilingual education. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 72–93.	AL 15
Lam, P. W. Y. (2010). Discourse particles in corpus data and textbooks: The case of <i>Well</i> . <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 260–281.	AL 16
Larson-Hall, J., & Herrington, R. (2010). Improving data analysis in second language acquisition by utilizing modern developments in applied statistics. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 368–390.	AL 17
Radford, J. (2010). Practices of other-initiated repair in the classrooms of children with specific speech and language difficulties. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 25–44.	AL 18
Sealey, A. (2010). Probabilities and surprises: A realist approach to identifying linguistic and social patterns, with reference to an oral history corpus. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 215–235.	AL 19
Timmis, I. (2010). ‘Tails’ of linguistic survival. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 31, 325–345.	AL 20
Forman, R. (2011). Humorous language play in a Thai EFL classroom. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 541–565.	AL 21
Macintyre, P. D., & Legatto, J. J. (2011). A dynamic system approach to willingness to communicate: Developing an idiodynamic method to capture rapidly changing affect. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 149–171.	AL 22
Mann, S. (2011). A critical review of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 6–24.	AL 23
Millar, N. (2011). The processing of malformed formulaic language. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 129–148.	AL 24
Miller, E. R. (2011). Indeterminacy and interview research: Co-constructing ambiguity and clarity in interviews with an adult immigrant learner of English. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 43–59.	AL 25

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APPLIED LINGUISTICS	Coding
O'Halloran, K. (2011). Investigating argumentation in reading groups: Combining manual qualitative coding and automated corpus analysis tools. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 172–196.	AL 26
Pounds, G. (2011). 'Foreignizing' or 'domesticating' the ideology of parental control in translating stories for children: Insights from contrastive discourse analysis. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 277–298.	AL 27
Prior, M. T. (2011). Self-presentation in L2 interview talk: Narrative versions, accountability, and emotionality. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 60–76.	AL 28
Richards, K. (2011). Using micro-analysis in interviewer training: 'Continuers' and interviewer positioning. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 95–112.	AL 29
Talmy, S. (2011). The interview as collaborative achievement: Interaction, identity, and ideology in a speech event. <i>Applied Linguistics</i> , 32, 25–42.	AL 30

CHINESE JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS	Coding
Chen, M., & Li, S. (2009). Dictionary use in vocabulary learning: Focus on RUC freshmen's reading practice. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (1), 65–76.	CJAL 1
Fan, J., & Yu, L. (2009). An empirical investigation of the washback of IIT (Phase II) to college and university students' English learning. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (1), 89–98.	CJAL 2
Lin, S. (2009). A review of recast in SLA and its implications for L2 teaching. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (2), 40–52.	CJAL 3
Luo, C. (2009). Investigation on the inadequate training for interpreters in Chinese universities. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (5), 108–119.	CJAL 4
Qiu, D., & Cheng, Y. (2009). A data-based investigation into Chinese EFL learners' metaphorical competence. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (4), 96–103.	CJAL 5
Weng, K., & Li, Q. (2009). Synchronous learning network: How college students use peer assessment techniques in evaluation of their writing. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (6), 52–64.	CJAL 6
Xie, B., & Wei, L. (2009). A study on the interactive approach to the teaching of English reading in senior high schools. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (3), 111–126.	CJAL 7
Xu, H. (2009). An empirical study of integrating EFL Learners' learning styles into the classroom interaction. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (5), 3–15.	CJAL 8
Zhao, F. (2009). Synchronous learning network: An empirical study on the learning difficulty order of English root and epistemic modals. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (2), 75–91.	CJAL 9
Zhu, M. (2009). Web-based autonomous English learning: An investigation of students' attitudes and behaviors. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 32 (4), 72–83.	CJAL 10

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CHINESE JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS	Coding
An, M., & Nathalang, S. S. (2010). Use of communication strategies by Chinese EFL learners. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (3), 110–125.	CJAL 11
Cai, J. (2010). The influence of Chinese aspect marker <i>le</i> on the simple past marking in English interlanguage: An empirical study of university students in China. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (2), 35–47.	CJAL 12
Guo, C. (2010). The application of the semantic field theory in college English vocabulary instruction. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (3), 50–62.	CJAL 13
Guo, Y. (2010). L2 vocabulary acquisition through reading — Incidental learning and intentional learning. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (1), 74–93.	CJAL 14
Li, X. (2010). The influence of Chinese topic-prominent features on the acquisition of four types of English subjects. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (5), 80–94.	CJAL 15
Liu, A. (2010). On pragmatic “borrowing transfer”: Evidence from Chinese EFL learner’s complement response behavior. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (4), 26–44.	CJAL 16
Wu, Y., Wang, J., & Cai, Z. (2010). The use of <i>I think</i> by Chinese EFL learners: A study revisited. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (1), 3–23.	CJAL 17
Yang, L. (2010). A study of ethnic Mongolian university EFL teachers’ beliefs and decision making. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (2), 60–75.	CJAL 18
Zhang, F. (2010). The integration of the know-want-learn (KWL) strategy into English language teaching for non-English majors. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (4), 77–86.	CJAL 19
Zheng, Q. (2010). Modality and generic features in Chinese EFL writings. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 33 (5), 40–51.	CJAL 20
Chang, J., & Xia, Y. (2011). A study of the effects of the content-based instruction for English majors in the Chinese context. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (3), 25–38.	CJAL 21
Guo, J. (2011). Empirical studies on L2 communication strategies over four decades: Looking back and ahead. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (4), 89–106.	CJAL 22
He, Z. (2011). Job burnout of English teachers in secondary schools in western China. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (1), 35–46.	CJAL 23
Li, D. (2011). Scaffolding in the second language learning of target forms in peer interaction. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (4), 107–126.	CJAL 24
Li, H. (2011). An investigation into the L2 mental lexicon of Chinese English learners by means of word association. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (1), 62–76.	CJAL 25
Li, Y., & Shi, Y. (2011). Conceptions of oral English teaching: A case study of teacher cognition on oral English teaching and classroom practice. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (1), 22–33.	CJAL 26
Ren, Q., Liang, W., & Xun, Y. (2011). Teachers’ stated beliefs about focus on form and their classroom practice: A comparison. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (2), 83–93.	CJAL 27

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CHINESE JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS	Coding
Wang, D. (2011). Language transfer and the acquisition of English light verb + noun collocations by Chinese learners. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (2), 107–125.	CJAL 28
Wang, Y. (2011). Relative clauses in Hong Kong English: A corpus-based perspective. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (4), 15–30.	CJAL 29
Xiong, S., & Zou, W. (2011). Developing Chinese undergraduate English-majors' research article writing competence. <i>Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 34 (3), 5–24.	CJAL 30

Bionotes

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