Hedging in EFL Academic Writing of Korean Postgraduates

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This study aims at investigating Korean postgraduates' hedging strategies in their academic writing compared with those of L1 expert writers. Using Crompton's definition and taxonomy of hedging, the study analyzed Korean students' research papers and master's theses in the field of TEFL/Applied Linguistics and L1 journal articles of the same field. The analysis of the frequency distributions of hedged sentence types revealed a similar frequency distribution and similar sentence structure patterns between the Korean postgraduates and the L1 expert writers; however, the former seemed to rely too heavily on modal verbs, a limited range of hedging expressions, and *it-that* clause structures, compared with the latter. They tended to make inappropriate stronger writer commitments using certain modal verbs, and some of them seemed ignorant of impersonal style of academic written English. Sentence adverbials and epistemic lexical verbs were not their favored hedging strategies, compared with those of the L1 writers. These findings imply the impact of L2 proficiency on hedging strategies. The results of the study also suggest disciplinary variations in the overall frequency of hedges and the frequency distributions of individual items for hedging.

I. INTRODUCTION

In academic writing writers are expected to present information in an objective way. This is why the passive is commonly used in academic writing to avoid expressions referring to the researcher such as 'we,' 'I,' or 'the researcher.' It is a way of deflecting "attention away from the people engaged in research activity" (Hewings & Hewings, 2002, p. 367) and paying attention to its outcomes. But academic writers have to provide their claims or statements on ongoing academic issues and successfully persuade the target reader community of the validity of their claims. Their statements indicate the extent of their conviction in the truth. If they present their position too strong or too weak, academic readers will have some doubt on the validity of their statements. Therefore, academic writers have to present their statements in an appropriate level of caution or uncertainty,

ranging from uncertain possibility to confident prediction (Salager-Meyer, 1994). For this purpose academic writers use certain types of linguistic devices including hedges such as modal verbs. The ability to express doubt and certainty appropriately, however, is not easy for English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to acquire, as pointed out in Hyland and Milton (1997). It is a skill that even native speakers sometimes fail to use effectively, or some native speakers do not have. What is worse is that it is ignored in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing textbooks (Hyland, 1994) and is not effectively dealt with in EAP writing courses.

Recently how second language writers state assertion in their academic English writing has been examined and compared with the work of expert writers or native speakers (Hewings & Hewings, 2002; Hyland & Milton, 1997). But most of the studies have dealt with scientific English. A few of them have investigated academic writing, for example, in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT)/Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or applied linguistics (Hyland & Tse, 2004). How Korean students hedge or boost their commitments has not also been explored yet. Therefore, this study aims at investigating how Korean EFL learners of ELT/TESL field tone down or boost their statements in their academic writing. It analyzes the sentence types used for hedging writers' commitments in two corpora of written academic text, L1 expert writers/native English speakers and Korean EFL learners, using the definition and taxonomy of hedging proposed by Crompton (1997). It focuses on how Korean postgraduates majoring in English education make assertions in their academic writing and whether their strategies differ from those employed by a group of L1 expert writers. The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. In what way do Korean postgraduates express their conviction in the truth of the statements? What type of linguistic expressions do they use most frequently?
2. In what way are their strategies for hedging different from those of expert English writers?

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

1. Definition of Hedging

Hedging refers to linguistic expressions "whose job it is to make things fuzzier" (G. Lakoff, 1972, p. 195). It was introduced by G. Lakoff (1972); however, he did not develop the concept clearly. It was R. Lakoff (1972) who introduced the subcategory of performative hedges, which were explored in relation to politeness (Crompton, 1997). Myers (1989) also argued that hedging in scientific writing could be a politeness strategy. It

is "a product of social forces" (Crompton, 1997, p. 275) between readers and writers. When academic writers present already known facts, they do not need to employ hedging devices. However, hedging is used to save the faces of the target readers as well as writers when new claims or finding is introduced. It is a device of downgrading the writer's commitment to the truth of the statement, as stated in Hyland (1994).

> It allows academics to take a rhetorical stance, to downplay their statements and anticipate audience response by adjusting the degree of certainty they give to their claims. Epistemic modality is therefore crucial in academic discourse as it is a central rhetorical means of gaining communal adherence to knowledge claims. (Hyland, 1994, p. 241)

In academic writing hedging is the speech act of "stating a proposition" (Crompton, 1997, p. 273). It indicates the writer's caution or uncertainty.

Skelton (1988) designated hedges as commentative language distinguishing comment from proposition. But Crompton (1997) stated, "there are kinds of comments on propositions which express attitudes other than uncertainty" (p. 274). He distinguished sentences (1a) and (2a) from sentences (1) and (2), which were formally similar but functionally different.

(1)   It's raining, unfortunately.
(2)   I'm afraid it's raining.
(1a) It's raining, probably.
(2a) I feel sure it's raining. (Crompton, 1997, p. 274)

Unfortunately in (1) and *I'm afraid* in (2) express attitude, but *probably* in (1a) and *I feel sure* in (2a) express more than attitude. They express the speaker's commitment to truth of the proposition. Therefore Crompton classifies only (1a) and (2a) as hedging.

Salager-Meyer (1994) included expressions of "authors' personal doubt and direct involvement" (p. 152) in her taxonomy of hedging. Sentence 3 illustrates avoiding personal involvement, but sentence 4 demonstrates how authors can project their involvement, minimizing threat to the target reader community, as Lado did in his writing (Crompton, 1997, p. 275).

(3)   Carroll's conclusion still stands.
(4)   As far as I can see, Carroll's conclusion still stands. (Lado, 1986, p. 138)

Crompton (1997) stated that hedging "may be used to display not only or necessarily the degree of confidence speakers have in their propositions but also how much confidence

they feel it is appropriate to display" (p. 281). Borrowing Lyons' original definition of epistemic modality, he proposed the following definition for hedges in academic writing.

> A hedge is 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. (Crompton, 1997, p. 281)

His definition was adopted for the present study. It was used to identify hedging in Korean EFL students' academic writing.

2. Taxanomy of Hedges

Crompton (1997) claimed that there had been little consensus on the categories of hedging devices. Skelton's taxonomy (1988) included four categories of comment: copulas other than *be* (e.g., *appear* or *seem)*, modal verbs (e.g., *may* or *should*), (commentative) lexical verbs (e.g., *(I) believe* or *(we) propose)*, clause-initial adjectivals and adverbials (e.g., *Possibly)*, or adjectivals and adverbials like *There is, It is,* or *This is* (e.g., *There is apparently…)*. In addition to these categories, Myers' taxonomy (1989) included all devices suggesting an alternative. Salager-Meyer (1994) adds approximators (e.g., *roughly* or *somewhat*) and modal adjectives. Furthermore, Hyland (1994) included time adverbials, impersonal expressions, *if*-clause and modal adverbials, adjectives (e.g., *probable*) and nouns (other than probability) (e.g., *assumption*). Crompton claimed that identifying hedges as individual words seemed inappropriate, and rather it was needed to look at them as sentence patterns. Any utterance should be classified as hedges as long as it can qualify the author's commitment to the truth of the presented proposition.

Adopting Crompton's taxonomy, in this study hedged propositions were classified into six categories as follows (Crompton, 1997, p. 284):

1. Sentences with copulas other than *be*.
   e.g., The moon *appears to* be made of cheese.
2. Sentences with modals used epistemically.
   e.g., The moon *might be* made of cheese.
3. Sentences with clauses relating to the probability of the subsequent proposition being true.
   e.g., *It is likely that* the moon is made of cheese.
4. Sentences containing sentence adverbials which relate to the probability of the proposition being true.
   e.g., The moon is *probably* made of cheese.
5. Sentences containing reported propositions where the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for any tentativeness in the verbal group, or non-use of factive reporting

verbs such as *show*, *demonstrate*, *prove*. These fall in two sub-types:

a. where authors explicitly designate themselves as responsible for the proposition being reported;

e.g., *I suggest that* the moon is made of cheese.

b. where authors use an impersonal subject but the agent is intended to be understood as themselves.

e.g., It is therefore *suggested that* the moon is made of cheese.

6. Sentences containing a reported proposition that a hypothesized entity X exists and the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for making the hypothesis.

e.g., These findings *suggest* a cheese moon. (Adopted from Crompton (1997, p. 284))

As in Crompton (1997, pp. 284-285), this study excluded propositions expressed with approximators (e.g., *usually* or *mostly*), attribution shield (e.g., *Hyland (1994) suggests that…*), impersonal construction (e.g., *It has commonly been assumed that…*), *if*-clauses, time reference (e.g., *on clear nights*), lexis suggesting authors' personal involvement (e.g., *Encouragingly*), passive (e.g., *it has been shown that…*), and epistemic modal verbs used to perform speech acts (e.g., *We would finally like to suggest that…*).

3. Hedging in L1 Academic Writing

Hedging is commonly used in English academic writing, as shown in Skelton (1988), Adams Smith (1984), Butler (1990), Gosden (1993), and Hyland (1996). Skelton (1988) found one hedge every 2 or 3 sentences in his corpora. Adams Smith (1984) also found one hedge every 3.7 lines, but this increased to one every 2.2 lines in Discussion sections of the articles analyzed. Modal verbs were identified as typical means of marking epistemic comments in medical research articles (54%).

Similarly, Hyland (1996) found more than one word for hedging in every 50 words in his contextual analysis of a 75,000 word corpus of 26 research articles in cell and molecular biology. Hedging was most commonly signaled by lexical verbs (e.g., *This would appear to be…*, *I believe that*), epistemic adverbs (e.g., *Possibly, phosophorylation of ACC…*), epistemic adjectives (e.g., *... is likely to be due primarily to...*), and modal verbs (e.g., *These results may have…*) (Hyland, 1996, p. 480). Lexical verbs were the most frequent hedging devices (23.3% of the total), and then modal adverbials and adjectives followed by modal verbs. Hyland also examined the most be quently used hedges in ESP courses compared with hedging in diverse academic journal articles. The most common hedging items in the corpus were *indicate, would, may,* and *suggest*, which occurred far more frequently than many items that were far more emphasized in ESP courses. Furthermore, some differences were noted between science research journal articles and general academic English in Brown and LOB corpora. Certain expressions (e.g., *indicate,*

may, suggest, could, propose, and *should*) occurred far more often in science journal articles.

As for disciplinary variations, Moore (2002) investigated the extent to which textbooks from different disciplines illustrated variation between knowledge presented in a factive form and that presented in an attributed form through projection by a human agent. He analyzed approximately 10,000 words from each textbook of three disciplines (sociology, economics, and physics) which were prescribed in first-year undergraduate courses at an Australian university. He dealt with metaphenomenal construction, which was a "representation of a (linguistic) representation" (Halliday, 1994, p. 250). It consisted of a projecting clause A and a projected clause B (e.g., *She states* (projection A) *the moon is made of cheese* (projected clause B)). A greater degree of metaphenomenon in the sociology textbook was noted, which suggests "a higher degree of provisionality in the nature of knowledge in this discipline" (p. 354). Economics text was less metaphenomenal in the discourse than physics text. As for the nature of the verbs used in the textbooks, verbs of assertion were the most frequent in sociology. Finally, Moore concluded that the degree of the metaphenomenon varied with the disciplines, and sociology text was more considerably metaphenomenal in its discourse than other disciplinary texts.

Holmes (1988) analyzed 50,000 words of spoken and written English from a variety of contexts to examine relative frequencies of a wide variety of lexical items expressing doubt and certainty in written and spoken corpora. As for the definition of hedges, he used the term 'modal expression' rather than hedges, which suggests that it expresses the extent of the speaker's certainty about a proposition. He identified about 350 relevant lexical items. Then he scanned the 'Learned' sections of the Brown corpus of American written English, the matching LOB corpus of British English, and informal and semi-formal sections of the Lund corpus of English speech, using the Oxford Concordance computer program, in order to provide information on the frequency of identified items in different contexts. The results revealed that modal verbs (36.8 %) were the most frequent in the written English, and lexical verbs (35.9%), adverbials (12.8%), nouns (7.7%), and adjectives (6.6%) were in order. Unlike the findings of Hyland (1996), modal verbs were the most frequent, and noun class was added in the frequency grammatical group and occurred more often than adjectives.

The frequency distribution of hedging varies with academic research article sections. Adams Smith (1984), Skelton (1988) and Gosden (1993) noted a higher frequency of hedging comments or hypothesized viewpoints in Discussion sections than in the other sections. Butler (1990) also found the highest frequency of modal verbs in Discussions, similarly to the results of Hanania and Akhtar's study (1985) (as cited in Crompton (1997)). In the same way, Salager-Meyer (1994) illustrated that Discussion sections of research papers and Comment sections of case reports were the most heavily hedged sections in medical written discourse. He did a contextual analysis of hedges in a corpus of 15 articles (research papers and case reports) drawn from five leading medical journals. The results of

his study revealed that the three most frequently used hedging devices accounted for over 90% of the total number of hedges used in the sample and led to a conclusion that the degree of uncertainty is determined by the general discourse pattern, the communicative purpose, and the level of writer's claim.

The studies on hedging in academic written English, especially in scientific research writing in English, have revealed that hedging is a common phenomenon. But its frequency varies with journal article rhetorical sections as well as disciplines.

4. Hedging in L2 Academic Writing

Hedged writing is typicality of L1 academic discourse, as discussed before. It is a crucial ability for L2 academic writers to acquire for successful writing. Hedging has therefore been explored in academic writing of L2 learners, especially ESL learners. A number of studies have observed direct and unqualified L2 academic writing, though they have not specifically dealt with hedging. Hu, Brown, and Brown (1982) found that Chinese L2 writers were more direct and authoritative in tone in their English writing and made more use of strong modals than native speakers did. Allison (1995) also pointed out that Hong Kong ESL undergraduate writers frequently made "assertions and strong writer commitments that lack warrant" (p. 10). This problem was also noted in Ph. D. dissertations in Dudley-Evans (1991). Their supervisors often commented inappropriate degree of qualification and confidence in expressing claims.

A few studies have examined hedging in L2 academic writing, comparing with native speakers' writing. Hyland and Milton (1997) compared the expressions of doubt and certainty in the examination scripts of 900 Cantonese speaking school learners' (L2) writing in English with those of 770 British learners (L1) of similar age and educational level. They analyzed the range and frequency of lexical expressions of doubt and certainty in these corpora with an inventory of 75 lexical items used as hedging devices identified in L1 academic writing. The definition of hedges adopted was epistemic modality. The total number of lexical devices used to express epistemic meanings in the corpora revealed remarkable similarities in the overall frequencies, with both student samples employing one device every 55 words. In addition, expression including *will, may, would* and *always* occurred among the top six most frequently used devices of both L1 and L2 writers. But strikingly different frequencies were noted among these top frequent devices. Epistemic *will* occurred twice as often in the L2 writing while *would* was represented twice as frequently in the L1 writing. Hyland and Milton stated that "these distributions suggest conceptual differences, with L2 writers favouring confident predication and native speakers more tentative expression" (p. 188). On the other hand, *may* occurred about twice as frequently in the L2 essays and seemed to be the preferred marker of possibility for Chinese speakers. *Think* as an epistemic verb was used nearly three times as frequently in

L2 writing. Overall, the range of epistemic modifiers was more restricted in L2 sample with the ten most frequently used items constituting 75% of the total. In L2 data there was a higher incidence of claim modification. For comparison, Hyland and Milton used grammatical classes including lexical verbs, adjectives, nouns, adverbs and modal verbs. There was a broad agreement in the use of lexical verbs, adjectives and nouns but marked differences in adverbs and modal verbs between L1 and L2 sample. Both groups made substantial use of epistemic modal verbs, particularly *will, would* and *may* to convey epistemic meanings, although L2 writers appeared to depend far more heavily on these devices. L1 usage, however, exhibited a greater range and frequency of adverbials, with over 55% more occurrences. Hyland and Milton also analyzed hedging with a semantic classification: certainty, probability, possibility, usuality, and approximation. The findings from this analysis revealed that L2 writers employed about 60% more certainty markers than did their L1 counterparts while the L1 data contained 73% more items expressing probability. This clearly suggested substantial differences in the degree of certainty and tentativeness employed by L1 and L2 writers. L2 academic writing appeared to be characterized by firmer assertions, more authoritative tone and stronger writer commitments when compared with L1 sample, as noted in Hu, Brown, and Brown (1982) and Allison (1995).

Based on a corpus analysis of 240 dissertations written by L2 postgraduate students from five Hong Kong universities, Hyland and Tse (2004) examined 20 master's and 20 doctoral dissertations from the Departments of Electronic Engineering, Computer Science, Business Studies, Biology, Applied Linguistics, and Public Administration. They analyzed hedges as part of metadiscourse. The most frequent sub-category of metadiscourse was hedges, which consisted of 41% of all interactional uses. Hedges occurred in 86.1 per 10,000 words in master's theses and 95.6 in doctoral dissertations. Modal verbs including *may*, *could*, and *would* were the highest frequency items, which were used to present claims with "both appropriate caution and deference to the views of reader/examiner" (p. 171). Variations in the use of metadiscourse were also noted across disciplinary communities. Hedges occurred over twice as common in applied linguistics, public administration and business studies than the other fields. An account for this finding was that the three disciplines dealt with human subjects and data so that writers could not present their claims with the same degree of certainty as in engineering or biology.

> The writer is unable to draw to the same extent on convincing proofs, empirical demonstration, or trusted quantitative methods as in the hard fields, and must work harder to build up a relationship with readers, positioning them, persuading them, and including them in the argument to turn them from alternative interpretations. (p. 173)

From the literature reviews on the frequency and distribution of hedging in L2 academic

writing, it could be concluded that there are differences of frequencies and distributions of hedges between L1 and L2 academic writing. L2 academic writers are generally more assertive and lack the skills to present their claims with an appropriate degree of caution and certainty, compared with L1 writers. Most of these studies have analyzed the writing of ESL or Chinese students in the field of science. Thus, not much information is available about Korean students' manipulation of English linguistic expressions in presenting their statements appropriately to the target reader community and about hedging patterns in the field of ELT or Applied Linguistics.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Corpus

Two corpora of written academic texts were analyzed: a 10,000-word corpus of L1 expert writers/native English speakers and that of Korean EFL postgraduates. For L1 corpus, Discussion sections of five research articles in ELT/Applied Linguistics were analyzed which were drawn from leading journals including *The Modern Language Journal* (MLJ), *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP)*, Journal of Second Language Writing* (JSLW)*,* and *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (SSLA) based on a corpus of 10,000 words as the expert writers' discourse. Two Discussion sections were derived from ESP; one from MLJ; one from JSLW; and one from SSLA. The two ESP articles were a quantitative and qualitative analysis of L2 written discourse in the field of applied linguistics; the MLJ article was a quantitative analysis of L2 listening comprehension; the JSLW one was a qualitative study on L2 writing process; and the SSLA article was a quantitative study on difficulty in L2 aural input. They were randomly selected from the articles of those journals written by native speakers of English. The Korean EFL learners' written discourse corpus of 10,000 words was seven Discussion sections of research papers or master's theses written by Korean postgraduates in TEFL. Three of seven Discussion sections were derived from master's theses (for Ed. M. degree) in TEFL/applied linguistics. They were selected from a graduate school of Education. They were all quantitative studies. One was a study on second language acquisition; another on teaching aids; and the third on listening comprehension. The rest of the Korean postgraduates' data was four Discussion sections of research papers written by doctoral candidates in their doctoral courses of English education of a graduate school.[1] Three of them were a quantitative study on L2 testing or reading; the other one was a qualitative study on English program evaluation. All

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[1] They were selected out of the research papers submitted in the doctoral courses which had a relatively long Discussion sections to analyze.

of the doctoral candidates have been teaching English for over 10 years and their TOEFL scores were over 600, which was the doctoral program requirement. As mentioned before, hedged writing is crucial in Discussion sections of research articles (Salager-Meyer, 1994). Thus, these sections were selected for the analysis.

2. Taxonomy of Hedges and Data Analysis

Crompton's definition and taxonomy of six categories were adopted for the analysis, since they provide a useful way of identifying hedging, as noted in Burrough-Boenisch (2005). With a corpus of 10,000 words respectively of L1 experts' and Korean postgraduates' academic written discourse, the frequency of the six categories of hedging, mainly the number of the sentences that are classified as hedged in Crompton's taxonomy, was counted.

Two Korean researchers independently identified hedging expressions in the Discussion sections of the L1 research articles and the L2 academic papers or theses. One of them is a discourse analysis and L2 writing specialist with a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics and the other is a doctoral candidate in TEFL with a MA degree in English Literature and also in TESL. After their independent analysis they had a meeting to deal with any disagreements in their identifications. Next, the frequency of the hedging devices in the Discussion sections was counted into the six categories in the taxonomy and their percentages were computed. When one sentence contained more than one hedging expression, all of them were counted. Moreover, linguistic structural patterns of hedging devices in each category were compared between L1 and L2 writing.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overall Frequency of Hedging Devices

The total number of lexical devices used to express epistemic meanings in the corpora is shown in Table 1. The analysis reveals striking differences in the overall frequencies: The L1 expert writers employed hedges less frequently than the Korean postgraduates. This is different from the findings of Hyland and Milton (1997) and Hyland and Tse (2004), which illustrated the similar frequency of hedged expressions between L1 and L2 writers of academic English. This might be due to the discrepancy of the categories used for the analysis. The previous studies were based on lexical devices such as lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, and modal verbs, while the present study was based on sentence types with hedging expressions, following Crompton (1997).

TABLE 1
Total Number of Lexical Devices Used to Express Hedges

	L1 Expert Writers	Korean Postgraduates
Total devices	123	202
Tokens per 100 words	1.23	2.02

The frequency of hedges in the L1 corpus of TESL/Applied Linguistics (every 81 words) was lower than that in L1 corpora of science (Hyland, 1996) (every 50 words), but not in the L2 corpus (every 50 words). These findings may be due to differences in academic disciplines examined. But the corpus of Applied Linguistics was the most heavily hedged in Hyland and Tse (2004). Thus further research is needed to provide a more explicit account for disciplinary variations.

Among those items occurring more than four times both in the L1 experts' and the Korean postgraduates' writing, the items in the samples of the Korean postgraduates occurred over twice as often: 152 (Korean postgraduates) vs. 70 (L1 expert writers) (see Table 2). Modal verbs were the most frequently used hedging device, which was in line with the findings of Holmes' (1988) analysis of the Brown corpus and the LOB corpus and of Hyland and Tse's (2004) analysis of Hong Kong and British learners' writing. The Korean postgraduates employed almost twice as frequently as the L1 writers: 69.8% of all hedges in the Korean postgraduates' writing and 39.8% of that of the experts' writing. *Can* was represented more than twice as frequently in the former corpus, though it was the most frequent hedging device in both corpora.

TABLE 2
Most Frequent Items Expressing Hedges in Rank Order

L1 Expert Writers			Korean Postgraduates		
Rank	Item	Raw no.	Rank	Item	Raw no.
1	can	18	1	can	46
2	may	13	2	should	33
3	seem	6	3	will	20
4	should	6	4	may	11
5	could	5		must	11
	might	5	5	seem	9
	suggest	5	6	might	7
6	appear	4		suggest	7
	confirm	4	7	have to	4
	tend to	4		had better	4
Totals		70			152

Strikingly, *should* in the Korean postgraduates' was used more than five times as frequently as in that of the experts. These findings suggest that Korean postgraduates

prefer modal verbs for expressing the epistemic meanings, which could give justification to the fact that modals are the most easily identified and widely used means of hedging in academic writing (Hyland, 1994). Interestingly, the L1 experts employed *could* for hedging, but not *will*, whereas the Korean postgraduates often used *will*, but not *could.* Furthermore, the Korean writers used *must, have to*, and *had better*, which never occurred in the L1 corpus. The Korean postgraduates seem to express epistemic modality stronger than the experts, as noted in Hu, Brown, and Brown (1982) and Allison (1995).

In addition, the verb *suggest* was of the highest frequency among lexical verbs in both samples, as Hyland (1996) noted it in both L1 science journal articles and general academic English; *seem* was also frequently used. The L1 writers used *appear* as frequently as *seem*, but the Korean postgraduates mainly used *seem.* Overall, the Korean postgraduates' research papers contained a more restricted range of epistemic modifiers, with the ten most frequently used items accounting for 75.2% of the total, which was similar to the results of Hyland and Milton's analysis of Hong Kong students' writing (1997).

2. Taxonomy of Hedges

As for Type 1 'sentences with copulas other than *be*,' there were remarkably similar items such as *seem* and *appear* in the academic writing of both the L1 experts and the Korean postgraduates. The total number of this type was the same, though the percentile distributions were 8.9% and 5.4%, respectively of the experts and of the Korean postgraduates (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Frequency of Sentences with Copulas Other than *be* (Type 1)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
seem	6	seem	9
appear	4	appear	2
remain	1		
Totals	11		11

From the results, it could be assumed that both the experts and the Korean postgraduates preferred lexical verbs *seem* and *appear* to express the sentences with copulas other than *be.* However, the Korean postgraduates preferred the word *seem* to *appear,* employing about 81.8% of the total items in Type 1, while the experts employed *seem,* accounting for 54.5% and often used *appear*, as discussed before. This was also noted in Burrough-Boenisch (2005), in which Dutch academic writers frequently used *seem* rather than *appear* in their science research journal articles, and nonnative English reviewers changed

appear to *seem* in their amendments while native English reviewers did just the opposite, changed *seem* to *appear*. The equivalence between *seem* and *appear* as hedging devices in academic English did not seem apparent to nonnative speakers including both Korean writers and Dutch writers.

As for sentence patterns with Type 1, both the L1 writers and the Korean postgraduates tended to prefer the *subject+to infinitive* structure (each 45.5% and 63.6%), as shown in (5)-(12), rather than that of *it-that* clause (27.3% and 18.2%).

L1 writers

- *it-that* clause: 3 cases (27.3%)

(5)   *It appears that* paying attention to both...

(6)   *It appears* from these findings *that*....

- *subject+to infinitive*: 5 cases (45.5%)

(7)   *This seems to imply* that....

(8)   *The occurrence of L1 seems to depend* on...

Korean postgraduates

- *it-that* clause: 2 cases (18.2%)

(9)   *It seems that* the students did not use...

(10)   *It seems that* the students' strategy usage pattern was not....

- *subject+to infinitive*: 7 cases (63.6%)

(11)   *Students seem to* maintain...

(12)   *The task condition seems to* affect...

There was no marked difference in the syntactic structures of Type 1 sentence patterns between the L1 and the Korean writers. Both groups used Type 1 for hedging; however, the distribution of individual copula items was distinct between them.

Concerning Type 2 'sentences with modals used epistemically,' both groups of the writers made substantial use of epistemic modal verbs with the total number of 141 accounting for 69.8% of all the hedges in the corpus of the Korean postgraduates, and that of the experts in 49 accounting for 39.8% (see Table 4). Given the fact that modal auxiliaries provide the least marked and thus the most straightforward means of expressing modality in English, there is no wonder that both groups relied on modal verbs more than any other devices. However, the Korean postgraduates used them almost twice more frequently than the L1 writers, as discussed before. According to the results of Hyland and Milton's study (1997), Hong Kong students used 50% of the total epistemic expressions and 37% for British students. On the contrary, the present study illustrated the Korean

writers' higher use of modal verbs. This might be due to the easiness of modal verbs or L1 transfer.

TABLE 4
Frequency of Sentences with Modal Verbs Used Epistemically (Type 2)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
can	18	can	46
may	13	should	33
should	6	will	20
could	5	may	11
might	5	must	11
will	1	might	7
would	1	had better	4
		have to	4
		would	3
		shall	1
		could	1
Totals	49		141

As noted in Hyland and Milton (1997), it could attest to the disproportionate attention of these devices in L2 writing textbooks (Hyland, 1994). Besides, L2 learners including Korean postgraduates may be exposed to English modal verbs as hedging strategies more than any other grammatical device, as suggested in Hyland (1994). From the analyses of Hyland (1996), Hyland and Milton (1997), and Hyland and Tse (2004) focusing on science articles, Cantonese L2 and British L1 learners' corpora, and Chinese L2 learner corpus respectively, it was noted that the most commonly used modal verbs were *may* and *would*. *May* was frequently used in the L1 journal articles of Applied Linguistics, but the frequency of *can* was the highest and that of *would* was very low. The Korean postgraduates also tended to favor *can* more than other modals. These findings suggested further research to see whether such a frequency distribution of modal verbs would be discipline-specific. As mentioned before, a marked discrepancy between the two corpora was the frequency of individual modal verbs between the L1 samples and the Korean postgraduates' samples: relatively more frequent use of *could* in the former and markedly more frequent use of *should*, *will,* and *must* in the latter.

The most typical syntactic structure of Type 2 was *subject+modal+verb* in both corpora; however, the *modal+passive verb* pattern was frequently noted, as shown in (13)-(16). This syntactic pattern occurred more frequently in the L1 samples.

L1 writers
- *modal+passive verb*: 16 cases (32.7%)

(13) The effects *could be* also *founded* in...

(14) This relative absence *can be explained* by...

Korean postgraduates

- *modal+passive verb*: 38 cases (18.2%)

(15) It *can be said* that the answers...

(16) It *should be acknowledged* that...

   Sentences with clauses relating to the probability of the subsequent proposition being true (Type 3) occurred similarly in both groups in terms of items and the total number of the hedges, with *be likely* representing 50.0% in the experts' discourse and 33.3% in the Korean postgraduates' discourse in the total numbers of Type 3 (see Table 5). Overall, Type 3 occurred only 3.3% among the total hedges in the expert corpus and 2.5% in the Korean postgraduates' corpus. This did not seem a preferred hedging strategy of both groups of writers, which was similar to L1 data in Holmes (1988), but opposite to the results of Hyland (1996). Hyland argued that adjectives were expressed frequently in hedging expressions. However, he just focused on lexical items rather than hedged sentences with adjectives. There could be thus some room to be discussed whether academic writers of English would prefer hedged sentences with adjectives to other hedged sentences with other lexical devices.

TABLE 5
Frequency of Sentences with Clauses Relating to the Probability
of the Subsequent Proposition Being True (Type 3)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
be likely	2	possible	2
possible	1	probable	2
allow	1	be likely	1
Totals	4		5

   The L1 expert writers seemed to prefer *subject+to infinitive* pattern to *it-that* clause in expressing the possibility of the following propositions, while the Korean postgraduate students tended to use *it-that* clause in Type 3. This might be due to Korean students' experience with learning these English structures. They were more frequently exposed to *it is possible+that*-clause than *be likely to*+infinitive. They also seemed to favor *it-that* clauses over other structures in the other hedged sentence types, as illustrated in (9)-(10) and (15)-(16).

<u>L1 writers</u>
- *subject+to infinitive*: 3 cases (75.0%)

(17) *L1 is more likely to* occur in process-controlling...

(18) *As appropriate hedging strategies are likely to* be introduced at...

- *it-that* clause: 1 case (25.0%)

(19) *It is possible that...*

<u>Korean postgraduates</u>
- *subject+to infinitive*: 1 case (25.0%)

(20) *This situation is likely to* call on the speaker to use...

- *it-that* clause: 3 cases (75.0%)

(21) *It is possible that...*

   Type 4 'sentences containing sentence adverbials which relate to the probability of the proposition being true' was not a preferred hedged sentence pattern in both corpora, as shown in Table 6, unlike the finding of high frequency of modal adverbials in L1 studies (Holmes, 1988; Hyland, 1996). However, the L1 writers used twice as frequently as the Korean postgraduates did: 7 out of the total (5.7%) in the former and 4 (2.0%) in the latter. The L1 group employed a variety of adverbial expressions such as *clearly, obviously, undoubtedly,* and *in fact* to express their certainty, as in Hyland and Milton (1997).

TABLE 6
Frequency of Sentences Containing Sentence Adverbials
Which Relate to the Probability of the Proposition Being True (Type 4)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
clearly	2	overall	2
obviously	1	clearly	1
undoubtedly	1	as a matter of fact	1
in fact	1		
generally	1		
overall	1		
Totals	7		4

   These results were contrary to those of Hyland and Milton (1997), which exhibited a greater range and frequency of adverbials in their corpus of Chinese writers as well as that of British students. Besides, Holmes (1988) suggested that adverbials, around 13% of the devices, were used to express epistemic modality in written discourse and *probably, possibly, apparently*, and *unlikely* occurred most frequently in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials. The lack of sentence adverbials for hedging in the Korean

postgraduates corpus, unlike that of Chinese writers in Hyland and Milton (1997), might result from using the different analysis methods. But it may be due to differences from L2 writing proficiency levels of the writers, as the advanced Hong Kong students used adverbials more frequently even in Hyland and Milton (1997). The incidences found in the Korean students' corpus were exclusively from only one writer who did her master studies in the USA and had relatively higher English proficiency than the other Korean postgraduates (her TEPS (Test of English Proficiency developed by Seoul National University) score was 927). Appropriate use of sentence adverbials is not easily acquired by L2 learners including Korean students, except for a few adverbials such as *unfortunately, generally* or *overall,* to which Korean learners are often exposed. Thus using them as a hedging strategy could be a challengeable task for them.

Sentence adverbials occur at the beginning of a sentence or after copula verbs or before the main verb. As illustrated in (22)-(25), sentence adverbials were often employed with other hedging devices like modal verbs. In the L1 sample, sentence adverbials were posited after the subject (within a sentence) as relatively frequently as in the sentential initial position, while a Korean postgraduate mainly used them in the latter position. This might be accounted for by syntactic complexity of these structures: Sentential initial positions are salient and might be easier for L2 learners to acquire.

L1 writers
- *sentence adverbials+sentence*: 4 cases (57.1%)
(22) *Clearly,* no textbook can be globally comprehensive…

- *subject+be+sentence adverbials+adj/noun*: 3 cases (42.9%)
(23) This finding is *clearly* indicative of...

Korean postgraduates
- *sentence adverbials+sentence*: 3 cases (75.0%)
(24) *Overall,* it can be concluded that…

- *subject+sentence adverbials+modal verb*: 1 case (25.0%)
(25) … L2 *clearly* can be an exciting...

Type 5a refers to sentences containing reported propositions where the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for any tentativeness in the verbal groups, or non-use of factive reporting verbs such as *show, demonstrate, prove,* where they explicitly designate themselves as responsible for the proposition being reported. There were no data in the L1 corpus while 5 cases were identified in the Korean postgraduates' corpus, accounting for 2.5% in the total of all the hedges, as shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Frequency of Sentences Containing Tentatively Reported Propositions for Which the Authors
Explicitly Designate Themselves as Responsible for the Proposition Being Reported (Type 5a)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
		I	2
		we	1
		the experimenter	1
		the writer	1
Totals	0		5

It is often assumed as undesirable in academic writing for authors to represent themselves explicitly; rather their writing needs to be objective and informational in an impersonal style. This could provide an account for the absence of Type 5a in the L1 experts' discourse. Despite the low distribution in the Korean postgraduates' corpus, there was a little bit range and frequency of personalization of the statements noted, which suggested that some of them were not aware of preference of impersonalization in academic written English. The use of the first person pronoun with an epistemic verb was also noted in the discourse of Hong Kong students, but not in that of British students, in Hyland and Milton (1997). As shown in (26)-(27), similarly, epistemic verbs co-occurred in this type of hedged sentences in the Korean postgraduates' discourse.

  (26) *I* suggest creative repeating…
  (27) *We* can say that...

Type 5b constitutes sentences where authors use an impersonal subject but the agent is intended to be understood as themselves. Various lexical verbs were identified in both corpora. But *suggest* and *reveal* were most frequently used in both groups, accounting for 50.0% of the lexical verbs of Type 5b in the L1 data and 28.6% in the Korean postgraduates' corpus, as in Table 8. Myers (1989) claimed that Type 5b was the most common form for stating a knowledge claim and the verb *suggest* was commonly used. Overall, the expert corpus in Type 5b represented 13.0% in total of all the hedges and those of the Korean postgraduates occupied 10.4%. No marked difference was noted between the two groups. In the present study, epistemic verbs were also identified from other types such as Types 5a and 6, as shown in (26).

The L1 expert writers predominantly used *subject+epistemic verb+that*-clause pattern (93.8%), as in (29)-(30). But the Korean postgraduates adopted *it+passive verb+that-*clause pattern much more frequently (61.9%), as shown in (31)-(32), which was in line with the high frequency of modal verbs and *it-that* structures noted before.

TABLE 8
Frequency of Sentences Containing Tentatively Reported Propositions Where Authors Use
an Impersonal Subject but the Agent Is Understood as Themselves (Type 5b)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
suggest	5	suggest	4
reveal	3	indicate	3
explain	1	reveal	2
imply	1	explain	1
assure	1	reflect	1
convey	1	regard	1
reflect	1	acknowledge	1
confirm	1	realize	1
mention	1	conclude	1
indicate	1	predict	1
		assume	1
		mean	1
		say	1
		posit	1
		provide support	1
Totals	16		21

L1 writers

- *subject+to infinitive of epistemic verb*: 1 case (6.3%)

(28) *This* seems *to imply* that...

- *subject+epistemic verb+that clause*: 15 cases (93.8%)

(29) *Findings of this study confirm that* L2 writing...

(30) *These results suggest that*....

Korean postgraduates

- *it+passive verb+that-clause*: 13 cases (61.9%)

(31) *It can be regarded that...*

(32) *It should be acknowledged that...*

- *subject+epistemic verb+that clause*: 4 cases (19.0%)

(33) *The close investigation of Figure 1 suggests that...*

The distributional frequency of sentences containing a reported proposition that a hypothesized entity X exists and the authors can be responsible for making the hypothesis is shown in Table 9. Marked differences were noted between the two corpora. This type represented 25.2% out of the total hedging devices in the L1 discourse, but only 7.4% in

the discourse of the Korean postgraduates. These findings were distinctive from those of Hyland and Milton (1997), where a similar distribution pattern was noted between L1 and L2 writing. In addition, the L1 expert data exhibited a greater range of lexical verbs. The crucial elements for Type 6 seem to be an entity of hypothesized proposition as a form of nominalization. It is presumed difficult for L2 learners to acquire such a grammatical device. As illustrated in the L1 corpus, hypothesized entities were often represented in the form of nominalization in academic written English; however, the Korean postgraduates seemed to have failed to notice such kind of feature.

TABLE 9
Frequency of Sentences Containing a Reported Proposition that a Hypothesized Entity Exists and Authors can Be Taken to Be Responsible for Making the Hypothesis (Type 6)

L1 Expert Writers		Korean Postgraduates	
Item	Raw no.	Item	Raw no.
tend to	4	consider	5
confirm	3	lead to	2
lead to	3	suggest	1
describe	3	represent	1
illustrate	2	propose	1
consider	2	confirm	1
be in line with	2	require	1
lend support	1	perceive	1
provide support	1	report	1
presume	1	agree with	1
assume	1		
propose	1		
stress	1		
make claims	1		
present	1		
reflect	1		
be indicative of	1		
under-represent	1		
represent	1		
Totals	31		15

Both L1 and Korean writer groups appeared to prefer noun phrases after epistemic verbs rather than *to*-infinitive or gerund in Type 6 (each 77.4% and 73.3%). The high frequency of *to*-infinitive was due to the epistemic verb *tend* in the L1 corpus, as shown in (34).

L1 writers
- *subject+epistemic verb+to infinitive*: 6 cases (19.4%)
(34) Higher level writers tend *to depend* less...

- *subject+epistemic verb+noun phrase*: 24 cases (77.4%)
(35) L2 prompt in the argument task leads to *more use of L2*

Korean postgraduates
- *subject+epistemic verb+gerund*: 1 case (6.7%)
(36) Repeating might lead to *being* mechanical and boring…

- *subject+epistemic verb+noun phrase*: 11 cases (73.3%)
(37) The tests lead to *conflict* between...

Overall, the distribution of hedges according to the taxonomy is shown in Figure 1. Both writer groups illustrated a relatively similar frequency distribution of the six sentence types. The most frequent sentence type used by both the L1 experts and the Korean postgraduates was Type 2 sentence and the order of the sentence types which both groups used frequently among six sentence types was relatively similar: Type 2-Type 6-Type 5b-Type 1-Type 4-Type 3-Type 5a in the L1 expert discourse; Type 2-Type 5b-Type 6-Type 1-Type 4-Type 5a-Type 3 in the Korean postgraduates' writing.

FIGURE 1
Relative Frequency of Categorical Classes Used for Hedges in the Corpora
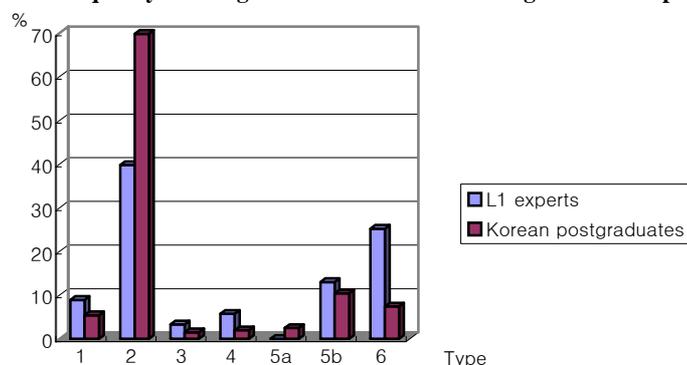
As discussed before, however, Types 2 and 6 were distinctively marked between the L1 experts and the Korean postgraduates. The Korean postgraduates tended to use modal verbs noticeably more frequently than any other device, while Type 6 occurred frequently in the corpus of the expert L1 academic writers.

V. CONCLUSION

The Korean postgraduates of TEFL employed epistemic expressions almost twice more frequently in their academic writing than the L1 expert writers. Some shared patterns were,

however, noted between their hedging strategies. Epistemic modals were the most commonly used hedging devices, as noted in other studies of academic written English. The verb *seem* and epistemic verbs such as *suggest* and *lead to* were often used for hedging.

Between the two corpora, however, some marked discrepancies were identified not only across hedged sentence types, but also within each type. Type 2 with modal verbs was more predominant in the Korean postgraduate's corpus. Type 2 was also highly frequent in the L1 data, but not as much as in the Korean students' samples; rather, Types 6 and 5b also occurred relatively frequently. The hedged sentence types expressed by the L1 experts were more relatively balanced than those by the Korean writers. Moreover, certain types of modal verbs were rarely used by the L1 writers for their hedged writing that did not suggest any caution in presenting a knowledge claim, but they were often adopted by the Korean postgraduates. This implies that the latter group might not be aware of accurate functions of individual epistemic modals. What they have to learn is which modal verb as a hedging device they should use for what context when presenting their tentative propositions. While the L1 writers never explicitly represented themselves, some of the Korean postgraduates sometimes did (Type 5a). This discrepancy might depend on whether they share the impersonal style favored in academic written English. Besides, different patterns of using sentence adverbials (Type 4) between the two groups and also of nominalized phrases after epistemic verbs (Type 6) suggest that L2 proficiency is one of the key triggers determining hedging strategies, as discussed before. That is, L2 learners including Korean EFL writers seem to lack a training of appropriate use of a variety of sentence adverbials and also of the function of nominalization in academic written English.

The analysis of the syntactic structures of each type has also illustrated similarities and discrepancies between the two groups of academic writers. *It-that* clause pattern was favored by the Korean postgraduates in almost all hedged sentence types. This leads to several plausible accounts: The impact of the degree of exposure to this sentence structure, that of English instructions, L1 transfer, or easiness of its acquisition. Further research is needed to see which factor is the most influential. What was noticeable in the hedging strategies of the Korean postgraduates compared with the L1 writers is their highly reliance on certain types of expressions, for example, their favor of modal verbs and the verb *seem*, in other words, their limited range of hedged expressions. They sometimes failed to convey an appropriate degree of certainty. As pointed out in Hyland (1994, 1996) and Hyland and Milton (1997), hedging is a crucial area of pragmatic competence that academic writers acquire to create appropriate interaction with the target discourse community as well as to indicate the precise extent of their commitments to the truth of the proposition. The Korean postgraduates have illustrated that they have hedging strategies, but they sometimes do not adopt proper expressions and they lack an ability to select appropriate devices in a given context. These results do not directly lead to the necessity of explicit instructions of hedging for academic writing. Rather, it may sound effective that L2 writing teachers need

to teach the hedging strategies to student writers implicitly. That is, L2 academic writers and their L2 writing teachers should be aware of functions of hedging strategies and hedging devices. They may use certain types of activities using concordances or doing some text analysis to identify hedged expressions and gain some appreciation of their appropriate use, as Hyland (1996) suggests.

The comparison of the findings of the study with those of other studies (Hyland, 1996; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Hyland & Tse, 2004) has suggested disciplinary variations, especially in the overall frequency of hedges and also of individual hedging devices. Further research should be done to see whether such variations are accounted for by discrepancies in the analysis methods or by discipline-specific features. Some variations across individual writers have also been noted so that further studies are needed to examine a larger sample to see in what way the findings of the present study can be generalized to the EFL academic writing of Korean postgraduates in Applied Linguistics/TEFL. The present study did not control types of study: Quantitative and qualitative. They may have a significant impact on academic writers' hedging strategies in L1 and L2. This needs to be explored in the future studies.

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