

THE FUNCTIONS OF HEDGES IN THE CONCLUSION SECTION OF THESES WRITTEN BY THE INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

Elok Widiyati, M.Pd
elok_widiyati@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article provides the explanation about how hedges function in the conclusion section based on Hyland's hedges functions (1996). This study belongs to descriptive qualitative. The data sources of the study were conclusion sections of theses in English written in the year of 2000 to 2010. Based on the analysis of hedges function proposed by Hyland, the Indonesian EFL students mostly used hedges as writer-oriented hedges, 37 %. It seems that the students could not minimize mistake upon statement in the proposition, could not show less absolute statement, and also could not convey arguments or statements speculatively. English lecturers should take hedges as one of the learning materials so that the students will be familiar in applying them for the academic writings. Moreover, I think that hedges studies provide assistance for the students in employing hedges appropriately.

Keywords: functions of hedges, conclusion section of theses, and Indonesian EFL students.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menjelaskan tentang fungsi hedges di bagian simpulan berdasarkan teori hedges Hyland (1996). Penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini mengambil data dari bagian simpulan beberapa skripsi berbahasa Inggris selama tahun 2000 sampai 2010. Berdasarkan analisis fungsi hedges Hyland, mahasiswa EFL Indonesia sebagian besar menggunakan hedges sebagai hedges yang berorientasi pada penulis, 37%. Nampaknya, mahasiswa tidak bisa menghindari kesalahan pernyataan dalam proposisi, tidak dapat menunjukkan pernyataan yang kurang absolut dan juga tidak bisa menyampaikan argumen. Dosen Bahasa Inggris seharusnya memberikan hedges sebagai salah satu bahan ajar sehingga mahasiswa lebih bisa mengaplikasikannya. Selain itu, pembelajaran hedges bisa membantu mahasiswa untuk menggunakannya secara benar.

Kata kunci: fungsi hedges, bagian simpulan skripsi, mahasiswa EFL Indonesia

I. INTRODUCTION

People can express their ideas by writing as a means of communication. It belongs to the productive skill. People do not only say what they think in the form of

written texts. Moreover, they have special linguistic features included in their messages. Students of English graduate program are indicated to have a good skill in writing thesis. Because thesis is one of academic writings, a thesis writer sometimes gets difficulty to state arguments consisting claims. This condition also happens to the Indonesian EFL students of graduate program. Moreover, not all of the theses writers know about hedges dealing with writing strategies. Meanwhile, hedges have important roles in thesis as an academic writing in order to weigh evidence and draw conclusions from data.

1.1 Background of the Study

Hyland (1996) reveals that most of EFL writers lacked their capabilities in using hedges to make claims. They got obstacles in conveying commitments and detachment from their propositions in academic writings. Furthermore, he states that incapability to hedge claim effectively is a hindrance for the EFL writers to get in into academic atmosphere using English as the main language. Hidayati (2006) also shows that the inability of using hedges often lead to the production of poorly written academic works. This might result in a potential declining trend in academic works published internationally.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Some problems dealing with the topic discussed in this study are categorized as follows:

- (1) how do the Indonesian EFL students use hedges in the conclusion section of theses?
- (2) how do hedges in the conclusion section of theses written by the Indonesian EFL students function?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

There are two objectives in this study, they are:

- (1) to explain how the Indonesian EFL students use hedges in the conclusion section of theses.
- (2) to explain how hedges in the conclusion section of theses written by the Indonesian EFL students function.

1.4 Significance of the Study

There are some advantages can be derived from this study, they are:

- (1) theoretically, the result of this hedges study will contribute to EFL.
- (2) pedagogically, this study can be a supportive material for academic writing it requires a good writing skill in which hedges play a crucial linguistic feature.
- (3) practically, the writers of academic writings can modify their styles of writings by using functions of hedges.

1.5 Definition of Terms

- (1) hedges are linguistic features used to signal distance and to avoid absolute statements which might put scientist in an embarrassing situation if subsequent conflicting evidence nor contradictory finding arise (Kubui and Fand in Salager-Meyer, 1997: 107).
- (2) functions of hedges refer to the Hyland's (1996: 433-54). They are content oriented hedges and reader oriented hedges. The first consists of accuracy oriented hedges and writer oriented hedges. Furthermore, accuracy oriented hedges are divided into attribute hedges and reliability hedges.
- (3) conclusion section belongs to the theses written by the English native students and the Indonesian EFL students.
- (4) the writer(s) refers to the student(s) writing the theses. I use the word writer(s) in the discussion in order to avoid misunderstanding because some of the data contain the word student(s).

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Hedges as Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers

Interpersonal metadiscourse refers to aspects of a text which reflect the writer's position towards both the content in the text and the readers. Gerot and Wignell (1995: 13) state that interpersonal meanings are meanings which express a speaker's attitude and judgement. In line with this definition, a writer can also convey his attitude and judgement through his text. The meanings of the context are realised in wording through modal auxiliary verbs.

In the establishment of the appropriateness of the stance of a writer, Hyland (2005: 49) ascribes an important role to a category of linguistic features that he terms metadiscourse. He defines metadiscourse as the means by which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible and persuasive to a particular audience. Hyland presents a model for interpersonal metadiscourse features involving interactive and interactional resources.

2.2 Conclusion Section of Thesis

Academic writing uses formal and mainly academic writing style. Therefore, academic writers can not apply informal spoken English containing a number of colloquialisms (conversational expressions) that are inappropriate for formal written English. It is very crucial for not mixing this style. Generally, written English contains less hedged statements compared to spoken English.

Dealing with some specific procedures in academic writing, Jordan (1989: 18) argues that the written academic English will not normally contain: contraction (didn't, they've), hesitation fillers (er, um, well, you know), and familiar language (carry out, find out, look into).

Conclusion can be the most difficult part to write. It frames thought and bridges ideas for the readers. Besides, it can provide a bridge to help readers in the matter of analysis and information. Moreover, it summarizes thought, demonstrates the importance of ideas, propels readers to a new view of the subject, makes a good final impression, and ends on a positive note.

2.3 Hedges in Academic Writing

Hedges are kinds of linguistic features which are not always used by writers of academic writings. The main theories related to the hedges in linguistic study are few. Hedge is defined as degree of doubt or skepticism on scientific facts. Generally, all people and particularly scientific scholars use hedges, which also called strategic stereotype. According to Lakoff, (1972:175) hedges are words or phrases whose job is to make things fuzzy or less fuzzy. It implies that writers are less committed to the certainty of the referential information they present in their writings.

In line with Lakoff's statement, Kubui and Fand in Salager-Meyer (1997:107) argue that hedges are used to signal distance and to avoid absolute statements which

might put scientist in an embarrassing situation if subsequent conflicting evidence or contradictory finding arise. In this case, hedges can give maximum protection to against challenge. They become important media by which writers report their claims to their academic community while at the same time they anticipate an acceptance or rebuttal from others. Thus, writers need to employ appropriate hedges as strategies to mitigate their claims and to achieve distance from what they write.

The above definition deals with the main reason to use hedges in academic writing. The most widely accepted view is that hedges become central rhetorical means in academic writing. Writers can probably done town their statements in order to reduce the risk of opposition and minimize the threat to face that happens in every act of communication, even in written communication to their readers. This position associates hedges with scientific imprecision and defines them as linguistic cues of bias which avoid accountability for statements. For example, one could state a proposition as a fact by saying “This medicine will help you recover quickly”. However, one could use a hedge to distance himself from his statement by saying “I believe that this medicine could help you recover quickly”. I prefer to use definition of Kubui and Fand’s in Salager-Meyer (1997: 107) because academic writing is now generally seen as a purposeful interaction between writers and readers in which the writers try to construct their coherent and credible representations and their researches.

2.4 Hyland’s Hedges Function

Hyland’s hedges functions suggest the following tentative generalisations in determining core cases: content-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. The former consists of attribute hedges, reliability hedges and writer-oriented hedges. The two first are grouped as accuracy-oriented hedges.

2.4.1 Content Oriented Hedges

Content oriented hedges mitigate the relationship between content and a representation of reality. They hedge the correspondence between what writers say about the world and what the world is thought to be like. The motivation for these hedges fall into two overlapping categories, concerning the writers’ focus on

propositional accuracy or on self protection from the consequences of poor judgement. Nevertheless, there may be an element of both purposes of any particular occasion.

1) Accuracy –oriented hedges

Accuracy oriented hedges involve the writers' desire to express propositions with greater precision in areas often subject to revision. Here, hedge is an important means of accurately stating uncertain scientific claims with appropriate caution (Skelton, 1988). It aims in reducing the risk of negation on objective grounds. Almost all of academic discourse have balance of fact and evaluation as writers try to present information as fully, objectively and accurately as possible.

a) Attribute hedges

Science is predicted on the assumption of an independent world of language. However, the ability of words to represent a non-linguistic domain of objective facts is heavily dependent on a shared, conventionalized, and cognitive scheme of what the world looks like. The use of attribute hedges allows deviations between idealised models of nature and instances of actual behaviour to be accurately expressed. They enable writers to restructure categories, to define entities, and to conceptualise processes more exactly in distinguishing how far results approximate to an idealised state by specifying more precisely the attributes of the phenomena described.

Hedges in this type aim to indicate variability with respect to certain descriptive terms. Hyland (1996: 442) gives some examples of attribute hedges as follows.

- The response of the assembly of PSII proteins to be the solute environment is **unique in some ways, but quite normal and predictable in others.**

(In the degree to which the detected response is considered normal for the behaviour of those protein).

b) Reliability Hedges

Reliability hedges indicate the writers' confidence in truth of a proposition. They acknowledge subjective uncertainties and are motivated by the writers' desire to explicitly convey an assessment of the reliability of propositional validity. Reliability hedges suggest the writer's reservations concerning whether the situation

actually obtains. Claims may be less tenous to keep interpretations close to findings, for example:

- **However, the opposite is also possible**, and it **cannot be ruled out** that the polypeptides seen in the bacteroid lane and in the soluble proteins lane are....

2) Writer –oriented hedges

Writer oriented hedges limit the writers' commitment to statements. They enable writers in referring speculative possibilities while at the same time guard against possible criticism. They are, therefore, often associated with higher level claims than accuracy oriented because the writer is seeking to put results in a broader context and to demonstrate a contribution to the scientific pool of knowledge rather than simply interpret findings, such claims carry a greater risk and an element of self-protection may be necessary. Simply, greater generalisation and interpretation require a greater degree of hedging (Hunston, 1994).

Writer oriented hedges, therefore, create a clear pragmatic contrast with other content hedges. Accuracy oriented hedges are proposition focused and seek to increase precision by referring to the exact state of knowledge or to how proposition is to be understood. Writer oriented hedges are writer focused and aim to shield the writers from the consequences of opposition by limiting personal commitment. While Lakoff (1972) associates hedges with 'fuzziness', scientific writers do not seek acceptance for claims through purposive vagueness or fudging. What made fuzzy is the relationship between the writers and the proposition, rather than the claim. These hedges help minimize the scientist's personal involvement and thereby reduce the probability of reputation. This allows writers to anticipate and discountenance negative reactions to the knowledge claims being advanced (Swales, 1990:175). Prince et.al (1982), Powell (1985) and Nash (1990) have all suggested that hedges may serve as an insurance in helping writers to protect their reputations and to limit the damage which may be incurred from categorical commitment.

In core examples, care is taken to avoid assuming explicit responsibility for an assertion while seeking to secure by moving the reader to the writer's standpoint, for example:

- **The present work indicates** that the aromatic ring to which the carboxyl group is bound is not necessary, **provided that** a bulky substituent is present...

2.4.2 Reader-Oriented Hedges

There are two types of reader-oriented hedges. They are motivation for reader-oriented hedges and forms of oriented hedges (Hyland, 1996: 450). Hedges are traditionally linked with the objective dimension, securing ratification of scientific claims, and reducing the risk of negation on subjective grounds. Core examples of reader oriented hedges confirm the writers to give the interactional effects of their statements.

1) Motivation for reader-oriented hedges

The functional similarities of illocutionary mitigation in conversation and research writing suggested by Myers (1989) neglects important differences between two domains. A straight forward application of imposition, distance, and social power can not fully explain scientific hedges. Hyland (1996: 450) suggests that collegiate deference occurs both as a response to discourse norms of communication and the fact of apodictic statements are inherently face threatening to peers.

2) Forms for reader-oriented hedges

Core cases of reader-oriented hedges are the most obvious in managing substantive disagreement and avoiding conflict, for examples:

- **We do not know the reason for the discrepancy** between our results but **it might reflect** genetic differences in the cultivars employed.
- **Our results** do not support the latter observation because conductance decreased with increasing p1 in both control and anti-Ssu plants.

A variety of devices is used to soften the effect of criticism. Meanwhile, modal auxiliaries and an admission to a lack of knowledge express an uncertainty which avoids direct criticism. It is the choice of personal subjects which is critical. The frequency of first pronouns in science is confirmed by Banks (1993) who found they occurred with hedges verbs four times more than other verbs. However, he believes that this serves to trim or reduce the force of the hedge. Hyland (1996: 452) interprets that an overt acceptance of personal responsibility mitigates the expression of a proposition and signifies a reader-oriented hedge.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research is descriptive qualitative analysis. Consequently, the result is in qualitative data. This study was conducted to describe the functions of hedges in the conclusion section of theses written by graduate students. Due to the essential roles in using hedges in the conclusion section, I used qualitative data gathering and interpretation techniques.

3.2 Data Source

I got the texts written by the Indonesian EFL students from campus libraries. The data source of this study were the conclusion section of theses in English in the year of 2000 to 2010. The data were twenty texts consisting ten texts.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is word or phrase in the sentences of the conclusion section. The conclusion section of thesis consists of conclusion, suggestion, and pedagogical implication. Those three parts have different aspects to present according to the points of information stated in sub chapters. Thus, it seems to be very interesting object to analyze.

3.4 Technique of Collecting Data

In this study, the data were collected by using written reports in the form of conclusion section of theses written by graduate students. Thus, the research instrument is in the forms of written reports.

3.5 Procedure of Collecting Data

I used conclusion section of theses written by the graduate students as the data of the study. I divided the procedures of collecting data into:

- (1) collected theses in the year of 2000 to 2010 written by the Indonesian EFL students from the campus libraries.
- (2) selected the conclusion section.

3.6 Technique of Analyzing Data

The steps of analyzing the data in the qualitative research are based on Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007: 470-80):

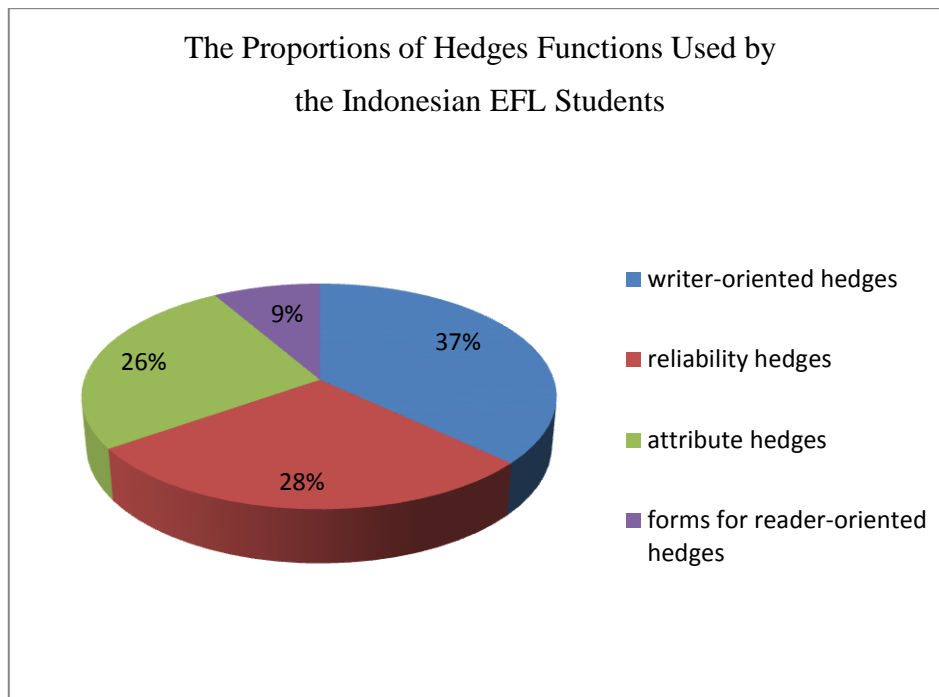
- (1) coding
- (2) identifying
- (3) classifying
- (4) comparing
- (5) synthesizing
- (6) interpreting
- (7) drawing conclusion

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Functions of Hedges Used by the Indonesian EFL Students

The Indonesian EFL students employed various hedges which represent certain functions. They employed two categories: content oriented hedges and reader oriented hedges. The chart below shows the proportions of hedges functions in detail.

Chart 4.1 The Proportions of Hedges Functions used by the Indonesian EFL Students



Based on the chart above, the Indonesian EFL students mostly used hedges function as writer-oriented hedges, 37 %. The second frequent function is reliability hedges, 28 %. The third mostly used hedges function is attribute hedges, 26 % and the least function is forms for reader-oriented hedges, 9 %.

4.1.1 Writer-Oriented Hedges

Writer oriented hedges enable writers to refer speculative possibilities while at the same time guard against possible criticism. They limit the writer's commitment to statements. Therefore, they are often associated with higher level claims than accuracy oriented hedges. The Indonesian EFL students tended to use passive voice to express writer oriented hedges as the examples below:

- (1) They **are also suggested to** use the new model approach to teaching writing i.e. process-based orientation to genre approach.

The most distinctive signal of writer oriented hedges is the absence of writer agency. The writer's responsibility can be decreased by the employment of passive voice and clausal subjects. The writer applies passive voice in sentence (1) to diminish his presence in the sentence. Viewed from this linguistic evidence, the writer avoids personal involvement in conveying proposition. He seems to decrease the absolute level for the suggestion that the teachers have to use the new model approach to teaching writing.

- (2) **It indicates** that the students have created recount texts in a good structure since personal reference and temporal conjunction are the lexico grammatical features a recount text.

It can be seen that the writer diminishes personal involvement in sentence (2). He avoids assuming explicit responsibility for an assertion. In this context, he moves the reader's standpoint to the writer's standpoint. The writer argues that there is an indication that the students have created recount texts in a good structure. However, he protects his stance by proposing a factual reason to support his proposition. Later, he explains what matters make he believe to the made proposition.

4.1.2 Reliability Hedges

Reliability hedges deal with the epistemically possible and contingent although subjective inferences which can be confused with objective possibilities and often only participant understandings can disambiguate a hedge from a verifiable possibility. They suggest the writer's reservations concerning whether the situation actually obtains and keeps interpretations close to the findings. The Indonesian EFL students expressed reliability hedges by adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases as explained below:

- (3) The value of describing text in terms of its cohesion and coherence makes it **possible** for English teachers to introduce how to create a good text in a cohesive and coherent for the students.

The writer expresses reliability hedges in the form of epistemic adjective modal phrases, possible, in sentence (3). It is one of hedges forms expressing reliability used by most of the writers. Here, he seems to show his confidence in expressing possibility of the English teachers in introducing to create a good text for the students.

- (4) **Perhaps**, this constitutes one way to challenge the negative effect of the excessively commercial textbook use which **could** result the deskilling of teachers by which happens reduction in the teacher's role and reduction in the quality of teacher's decision making and pedagogical reasoning.

The writer employs reliability hedges in sentence (4) to reduce a claim. He reduces the strength of the proposition about teachers' deskilling caused by excessively commercial textbook use.

4.1.3 Attribute Hedges

Attribute hedges are generally used to seek the level of precision in expression. Ernst (1984) states that attribute hedges generally cluster around the pragmatic core and involve the use of a finite set of items which are labeled degree of precision adverbs. Some of attribute hedges made by the Indonesian EFL students are as follow:

(5) Students have **some** good positive perception towards the use of Microsoft Word in improving their writing skills.

Attribute hedges indicate a difference between actual results and an expected state or the concept routinely available to explain it. In sentence (5), the writer uses **some** as attribute hedge which functions as rounder and reduces generalization.

(6) **From the research findings and data analysis**, the researcher found that the use of Microsoft Word in writing class applied to the experimental class was **generally** effective than using handwriting and paper applied to the control class in improving students' writing skills.

The writer judges the use of Microsoft Word becomes generally effective from the research findings and data analysis point of view. The words in bold type in sentence (6) indicate the precise standpoint from which to judge the truth of the claim.

4.1.4 Forms for Reader-Oriented Hedges

Reader oriented hedges recognize the need for reader acceptance in responding the possibility of opposition to claims on interpersonal grounds. Writers consider the readers' role in confirming knowledge and the need to conform the readers' expectations regarding deference views. The Indonesian EFL students generally used fewer reader oriented hedges than the English native students.

(7) Thus, **the researcher again suggests** those [teachers] who are interested in this field to give more models of the texts and be **a good model** for the students.

The writer suggests alternatives in sentence (7). It can be indicated by the use of indefinite article. The writer offers a claim as one suggestion. He suggests two alternatives. Firstly, teachers give more models of the texts to the students. Secondly, teachers become good model to the students.

(8) **I propose** that a study well investigates the teachers' points of view as well as their actual pedagogical practices regarding the subject.

Personal involvement or personal attribution is used to soften claims. Besides, it also weakens criticism. In sentence (8), the writer use verb of judgement.

The proposition in this sentence deals with an opinion proposed by the writer because it does not seem to function as a judgement.

4.5 The Indonesian EFL Students' Tendency in Using Hedges

Every language has certain linguistic features so that there are some differences between English and Indonesian. The use of hedges in academic writing is one of those differences. It can be seen clearly from the tables and charts above indicating the relative frequency of hedges used by the Indonesian EFL students. The characteristics of Indonesian academic writing are educated, simple, clear, formal, objective, consistent, and based on the idea (Basuki: 1995). Therefore, it does not really emphasize the use of hedges.

Based on the function of hedges, the Indonesian EFL students used hedges as forms for reader-oriented in the least percentage, 9 %. This happens because one of the characteristics in Indonesian academic writing is the use of idea oriented. It asks writers to avoid the personal pronoun and to use passive sentence.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion

Referring to the functions of hedges, the Indonesian EFL students mostly used hedges which function as writer oriented hedges, 37 %. The writer oriented hedges protect the writers from risk of possible mistake coming from a confirmation stated in the proposition, and anticipate the negative consequence if the writer will be proved wrong in giving certain information by limiting his personal commitment to what he claims as his knowledge.

The characteristics of Indonesian academic writing are simple, clear, formal, objective, consistent, and based on the idea. Therefore, it does not really emphasize the use of hedges. It is because the culture of Indonesian academic writing does not require hedges as one of the important linguistic features. One of the characteristics in Indonesian academic writing is the use of idea oriented. It asks writers to avoid the personal pronoun and to use passive sentence. Consequently, the Indonesian EFL students used hedges as reader oriented in the least percentage.

5.2 Suggestion

Regarding the significance of hedges in academic writing especially in the conclusion section of thesis, I propose that Indonesian EFL students as EFL writers need to be taught how to recognize and use effectively the hedges in their writings. I also think that hedges studies have important roles in EFL teaching, particularly academic writing. It is because writing is regarded as one of the priorities in language learning as graduate students are supposed to be able to write it properly.

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