journal of PRAGMATICS

Journal of Pragmatics 27 (1997) 361–386

Indirectness in L1 and L2 academic writing

Eli Hinkel*

ESL Program, Xavier University, 3800 Victory Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45207-2511, USA

Received August 1995; revised version May 1996

Abstract

Indirectness strategies and markers have been identified in written discourse in many languages, including English. However, in Anglo-American academic writing, explicit points and direct support are expected. In the view of specialists and ESL instructors alike, indirectness seems to characterize the writing of students raised in Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist societies. The reasons that non-native speaker (NNS) second language writing appears vague and indirect may lie in the specific and contextual uses of indirectness devices in English writing rather than in the fact that they are used. This study, based on corpus analysis, compares specific indirectness devices employed in native speaker (NS) and NNS student essays and focuses on NS and NNS uses of twenty-one rhetorical, lexical, referential (deictic), and syntactic indirectness devices. The results of the study indicate that speakers of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian utilized rhetorical questions and tags, disclaimers and denials, vagueness and ambiguity, repetition, several types of hedges, ambiguous pronouns, and the passive voice in greater frequencies than NSs did. However, NSs and NNSs did not differ significantly in their use of other types of indirectness devices and markers, such as point of view distancing, downtoners, diminutives, discourse particles, and understatements, as well as nominalization and conditional tenses.

1. Introduction: Indirectness in academic writing across cultures

Usually in written academic discourse, explicit discussion of the central ideas related to the text's thesis and overt explication of the writer's views are considered requisite (Matalene, 1985; Swales, 1990; Swales and Feak, 1994). In academic writing, English speakers expect an essay to contain explicit points explicitly supported and to demonstrate a great deal of structure, text progression, and clarity – characteristics which occupy a prominent place in the teaching and testing of non-native speaker (NNS) writing (Clyne, 1988). However, Anglo-American academic writing also requires a certain degree of indirectness and vagueness in some situations. As Channel (1994) indicates, in academic writing, indirectness

* E-mail: hinkel@xavier.xu.edu; Phone: +1 (513) 745 3712 (office); Fax: +1 (513) 745 3844.

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PII S0378-2166(96)00040-9

and vagueness are intended to avoid precision and are often used with discretion, depending on the context and on the writer's ideas of appropriateness. In her view, however, understanding the practical and appropriate ways of being vague in L2 writing represents a formidable but necessary task for a competent L2 learner, and a lack of this skill in higher education may reflect negatively on the NNS writer.

Research indicates that English speakers often consider the writing of NNSs digressive, vague, and insufficiently explicit if it does not follow the relatively rigid norms of essay writing and textual moves from proposition to proposition (Carlson, 1988; Clyne, 1988; Connor, 1987a). Experts on L2 writing specify that indirectness markers need to be used judiciously and that vagueness should be avoided because the writer seeks to create an impression of explicitness, accuracy, precision, and rational support (Swales, 1990; Swales and Feak, 1994). Myers (1989) and Cherry (1988) also found that politeness in written academic discourse may necessitate hedges, denials, impersonal constructions, and other markers of indirectness, when claims are advanced and supported.

This study examines the use of indirectness markers in native speaker (NS) and NNS essays and notes that speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian writing in English employ some types of indirectness markers more frequently and some types less frequently than NS of American English do. For other types of indirectness markers, however, there are no significant differences in the frequency of usage in NS and NNS writing. Whereas the prevalence of some indirectness devices in NNS writing can be traced to L1 rhetorical paradigms, the L2 use of such devices can be explicitly taught.

Notions of indirectness have been traditionally associated with speech acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) (hereafter B&L) provide an extensive definition of indirectness as a set of politeness strategies that have the goal of minimizing imposition on the hearer and/or creating solidarity between the speaker and the hearer. In the past few years, studies of indirectness and politeness in academic and persuasive writing in English have been making advances to explain how NS writers organize a text's rhetorical and sentence-level structures to convey their ideas without creating an imposition on the reader, akin to the way speakers attempt to avoid an imposition on the hearer.

Indirectness strategies and markers have been identified in written discourse in many languages, including English. Rhetorical, as well as lexical and syntactic, constructs play an important role in academic writing in Anglo-American university settings. Myers (1989) suggests that academic texts are built upon the basic frameworks of claims and denials of claims. He states that in academic discourse, politeness and indirectness strategies, as originally outlined by B&L, are manifested in stylistic variations and uses of such devices as passive voice, performative verbs, explicit and implicit lexical and syntactic hedging to modify statements, conditional tenses to posit hypothetical and indirect claims, as well as adverbs that serve to establish solidarity between the writer and the reader. Atkinson (1991) states that these and many other conventions of the academic writing in many disciplines have achieved a level of "normativity" in Anglo-American scientific writing.

On the other hand, according to Swales (1990: 24–27), definitions of a discourse community are vague and frequently encompass broad notions, such as a "set of common public goals", "mechanisms of intercommunication among its members", and "one or more genres of the communicative furtherance of its aims". He also indicates that different academic disciplines have developed diverse discourse conventions and distinguishes between the discourse paradigms accepted in business, engineering, journalism, legal, medical, and scientific varieties of "English" (ibid.: 3). In his view, students need to learn to work within the value-systems and norms of their "target communities" (ibid.: 230). Herrington (1985) and L. McCarthy (1987) similarly point out that students need to recognize and learn different discourse paradigms and the appropriate degrees of indirectness in writing in various disciplines; in addition, they must internalize the expectations of writing styles that differ even among academic courses.

What represents appropriate levels of indirectness in written and academic discourse is not always clear-cut. Gilbert (1991) reports that when students are instructed that English writing is expected to be direct, they often produce expository pieces so open and frank that they can be perceived as inappropriate. She notes that the composition teacher then edits the student text to make it "appropriately" direct and thus, artificial, contrived, and impersonal because "a concept of writing" (1991: 36) may be at odds with honesty and sincerity. Gee (1990) stipulates that when it comes to directness or indirectness in written discourse, dialect variations in English can be sufficiently great to obscure the differences: what is perceived to be direct in one dialect can be viewed as vague in another. He explains that discourse practices are intrinsic to the world views of particular social groups and are tied to social values and norms. Schooling and education in essence represent the apprenticing of learners to the social and discourse practices; for many "outsiders" (Gee, 1990: 66), this necessitates acquiring a new identity that may conflict with their initial enculturation and with the identities connected to other social practices.

In writing traditions based on Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophical precepts, rhetorical indirectness has the goal of maintaining harmony and avoiding impositions on both the writer and the reader. As is the case with Anglo-American written discourse, research dealing with the indirectness strategies and markers in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese writing has identified similarities between politeness paradigms in spoken and written discourse, such as inexplicitness, a lack of evidence to support claims, and indirectness. Direct argumentation and persuasion are not common in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese written discourse; rather, a piece of writing is structured around a theme, which constitutes the rhetorical purpose of an essay with an intention of causing the reader to contemplate an issue (Hinds, 1990). Scollon and Scollon (1995) mention that in Chinese essay writing, the communication between the writer and the reader is based on the politeness of facework and equally shared solidarity, and that politeness strategies play an important role in the development of written text. According to Matalene, "[t]o be indirect in ... written discourse, to expect the audience to infer meanings rather than to have them spelled out is a defining characteristic of Chinese rhetoric" (1985: 801), in which common background knowledge serves as the basis of interpreting a writer's meaning and implications. Similarly, in Korean discourse, persuasion and explicit description are rarely employed, and indirectness and ambiguity are used within the frameworks of Confucian ethics to safeguard human relationships (Yum, 1987; Hwang, 1987).

According to Hinds (1983, 1984) and Tsujimura (1987), vagueness, ambiguity, and indirectness are also valued highly in Japanese written text, because they allow for the communication of minds rather than the communication of words. Indirectness devices can be used to hedge propositions, establish solidarity between the speaker/writer and hearer/reader, show that information exists as an independent fact not attributable to any discernible source, and, thus, depersonalize the speaker's/writer's position. Indonesian writing conventions also reflect their Confucian and Buddhist cultural heritage and the classical Chinese writing tradition (Prentice, 1987).

Researchers into the acquisition of L2 writing have observed that NNS writers transfer knowledge about writing concepts and conventions associated with writing from L1 to L2 (Carlson, 1988; Connor, 1987a,b; Hinkel, 1994; Kaplan, 1988; Scarcella and Lee, 1989). Most experts agree that learning to write focused academic papers in a second language is a complex process. Written discourse in different language and cultural communities is often conventionalized and is not necessarily shared in rhetorical paradigms outside a particular tradition (Kachru, 1988; Cushman and Kincaid, 1987). Poole (1991) also indicates that discourse practices are usually culturally dependent on rhetorical value systems and reflect cultural beliefs and assumptions. She further observes that the writing of NNSs is often evaluated according to the norms of a discourse community that NNSs do not share. Atkinson (1991: 57) refers to "the conventionalization of written language" and notes that Anglo-American written discourse conventions are particularly difficult for NNSs to acquire because the NNSs lack the shared knowledge of these conventions, of which rhetorical directness is a part.

However, the findings associated with indirectness in the L2 academic writing of Chinese students do not appear to be definitive. On the one hand, Mohan and Lo (1985) examined the organizational structure of ESL essays produced by Chinese students and compared it to that in both L1 English and Chinese rhetorical organizations. They found that the rhetorical paradigms and frameworks in English and Chinese texts are similar. In their view, following the Chinese organizational essay structure should help NNS students rather than hinder because Chinese writing does not exhibit "preference for 'indirectness' " (1985: 528). Similarly, Taylor and Chen (1991) compared three types of discourse strategies and indirectness markers found in the published articles of NS of American English, and those written by Chinese in English and in Chinese. The authors found that variations in rhetorical and discourse structure are genre-specific rather than language- or culture-specific and concluded that it may be futile to look for broadly different discourse, cultural, and rhetorical systems. On the other hand, these findings deviate from those of Bloom (1981), Clyne (1983, 1987), and Cushman and Kincaid (1987), who found that written discourse notions and paradigms may be culture- and tradition-specific.

The reasons that NNS second language writing appears vague and indirect may lie in the specific and contextual uses of indirectness devices in English writing rather than in the fact that they are used. The studies that have investigated indirectness in L1 and L2 writing have largely been impressionistic, based on rater judgment (Connor and Lauer, 1988; Connor, 1987a; Mohan and Lo, 1985), and few have examined the actual usage of indirectness markers in written discourse. The present study, based on corpus analysis, compares specific indirectness devices employed in NS and NNS student essays and focuses on NS and NNS uses of twenty-one rhetorical, lexical, referential (deictic), and syntactic indirectness devices identified in research.

2. The study

The indirectness devices discussed in the present study are largely based on those identified in earlier research on the characteristics of the Anglo-American written academic genre, as well as on those identified as commonly accepted in discourse communities that embrace Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophical precepts. To select rhetorical, lexical, referential, and syntactic constructs for inclusion in this study, the research on L1 and L2 writing and composition was surveyed with the goal of defining the array of features associated with indirectness in discourse. B&L's seminal study provided an extensive and detailed description of indirectness frameworks and markers in speech. The findings of Biber (1988), Swales (1990), Biber and Finegan (1991), and Quirk et al. (1985) described the specific features and markers associated with indirectness in Anglo-American academic writing.

The examination of these texts resulted in twenty-one devices identified as indirectness strategies and markers in three categories: Rhetorical Strategies and Markers, Lexical and Referential Markers, and Syntactic Markers and Structures. Each of the devices is discussed in section 3 below.

2.1. The data

The study data came from essays written by 30 NSs and 120 NNSs. Of the NNSs, 30 were speakers of Chinese, 30 of Korean, 30 of Japanese, and 30 of Indonesian. Each of these language groups represents a culture influenced by Confucian, Taoist, and/or Buddhist philosophy, cultural values, and written discourse traditions (Cushman and Kincaid, 1987; Yum, 1987). The NNSs had achieved a relatively high English language proficiency with a mean TOEFL score of 580. All NNSs had been admitted to graduate and undergraduate university programs and pursued studies towards their degrees. Their majors spanned a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from aeronautical and computer engineering to educational philosophy to dance and voice studies. Many of the undergraduate students had not as yet declared majors. The NNSs whose writing was analyzed were selected on the basis of their relatively high linguistic proficiency, as established by TOEFL scores, and their length of residence in the U.S. The NNS subjects had received extensive instruction in ESL and L2 reading and writing for a period of 4 to 20 years, with a mean of 13.1 years. Their residence in the U.S. typically fell within 1.5 to 3.1 years, with a mean of 2.1 years. Therefore, it follows that the NNSs had had a relatively extensive exposure to L2 reading and writing in L2 academic environments. The usage of indirectness strategies and markers in the NNS texts was compared to that in essays written by NSs of American English, who were graduates of suburban high schools in midwestern states (Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana) and who were first-year university students enrolled in required composition classes. Similar to the NNSs, the NSs were enrolled in various university departments, including arts, computer sciences, retail marketing, and criminal justice; at least a third had not chosen their majors. The topics of NS essays were selected to match those of NNS texts. In all subject groups, the thirty subjects comprised fifteen males and fifteen females to provide for a balanced representation of genders. Subjects' ages ranged from 18 to 26, with a mean of 23.4.

Both NSs and NNSs wrote the essays during one-hour required placement tests (see Appendix for a list of topics) in response to assigned prompts. The essay prompts were modeled on the Test of Written English, administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency Composition prompts, as well as those commonly found in ESL and L1 writing/composition textbooks. These prompts, based on student majors of study, are ubiquitous in many placement/diagnostic tests in U.S. universities and are administered to NS and NNS students alike. Although the intention of designing prompts around students' majors was to provide the writers context and sufficient background knowledge of the subject matter, it is not always possible to assure the essay contextualization (particularly, in the case of students without declared majors). All essays were written in the rhetorical mode of argument/exposition with the purpose of convincing/informing an unspecified general audience (Y. Park, 1988).

2.2. *Data analysis*

To determine whether NS and NNS similarly used indirectness devices, the number of words in each of the 150 essays was counted, followed by a count of the occurrences of each of the indirectness devices (see Table 1 for a complete list). For example, NS essay #1 consisted of 250 words and included one rhetorical question and three occurrences of conditional tenses. To ascertain the percentage rate of rhetorical questions used in the essay, a computation was performed, i.e. 1/250 = 0.4%, and then repeated for the three occurrences of conditional tenses (3/250 = 1.2%). The computations were performed separately for each of the indirectness devices and for each of the 30 NS and NNS essays per L1 group.

Non-parametric statistical comparisons of NS and NNS data were employed because the majority of percentage rates were not normally distributed, and the number of essays that did not contain all types of indirectness strategies and markers was high. The measure used to establish differences in indirectness device usage between NS and NNS texts was the Mann-Whitney U Test. The medians, ranges, and results of statistical tests are presented in Table 1. In cases where the reported median is 0, at least half of the sample essays written on the topic did not contain a particular indirectness marker. The ranges are reported to reflect a frequency of use for each indirectness device.

3. Results and discussion

The findings indicate that NS and NNS usage of indirectness markers differed to varying degrees but was also similar in some respects (see Table 1).

Table 1
Indirectness strategies and devices in NS and NNS essays (Median %)

Strategy/marker	NS	CH	KR	JP	IN
(i) Rhetorical strategies and markers					
Rhetorical questions/tags	[0.00	0.38]*	0.42]*	0.41]*	0.44]*
Range	0.63	1.94	2.72	1.94	3.43
Disclaimers/denials	[0.00	1.10]*	0.85]*	1.18]*	0.88]*
Range	2.50	3.33	2.72	5.21	2.59
Vagueness/ambiguity	[0.00	0.15]*	0.72]*	1.00]*	1.40]*
Range	0.71	4.84	3.25	5.36	6.25
Repetition	[0.00	0.00]*	0.00]*	0.00]*	0.00]*
Range	1.11	3.20	1.85	3.33	3.47
Irony	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Range	0.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
(ii) Lexical and referential markers					
Hedges					
Lexical	[0.75	0.68	1.41]*	1.70]*	1.38]*
Range	3.22	3.55	4.73	4.69	6.90
Possibility	[0.00	0.00]*	0.00]*	0.00]*	0.00]*
Range	1.35	0.93	0.41	1.53	0.00
Quality	[0.00	0.70]*	0.36]*	0.81]*	0.13]*
Range	0.65	2.53	2.94	4.69	2.33
Performative	[0.00	0.43]*	0.00]*	0.00]*	0.00]*
Range	0.42	2.13	4.55	0.69	0.86
Hedged performative verbs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.41	0.31
Range	1.29	1.61	1.35	2.86	2.27
Point of view distancing	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Range	0.90	0.00	1.42	1.53	0.00
Downtoners	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Range	0.54	0.00	2.47	0.22	0.31
Diminutives	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Range	1.03	0.74	0.57	1.07	0.00
Discourse particles	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Range	0.77	0.39	1.11	0.69	0.78
Demonstratives	[0.51	0.93]*	0.86]*	0.85]*	0.78]*
Range	2.16	2.22	1.60	2.27	2.69
Indefinite pronouns					
Universal and negative	1.00	1.52]*	1.17]*	1.01]*	1.16]*
Range	2.41	3.02	3.54	3.57	4.28
Assertive/nonassertive	[0.50	1.72]*	1.94]*	1.52]*	0.95]*
Range	2.63	4.10	3.82	6.07	5.68
Understatements	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Range	0.82	0.22	0.00	1.09	0.43
(iii) Syntactic markers and structures					
Passive	[0.00	0.83]*	0.81]*	0.42]*	0.79]*

Table 1 (continued)

Strategy/marker	NS	CH	KR	JP	IN
Range	1.61	2.75	1.48	1.00	1.56
Nominalization	0.25	0.33	0.00	0.56	0.49
Range	1.96	2.27	2.14	3.21	2.38
Conditionals	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.34	0.00
Range	2.05	2.32	2.78	3.30	1.72

2-tailed $p<0.05$

3.1. Rhetorical devices

(1) Rhetorical questions and tags

B&L identified rhetorical questions as a common indirectness strategy employed in a variety of contexts. Hübler (1983) asserts that rhetorical and tag questions in English are devices for expressing hesitation, uncertainty and indirectness because they include a proposition that performs the role of a statement but allows the writer to deflect potential objections. Furthermore, a writer who uses rhetorical questions seeks to solicit solidarity with and agreement from the audience, e.g. *What can people do to help their country?* and *Can any person meet this goal?*.[1] Myers also notes that rhetorical questions in writing are, in fact, politeness devices that are not commonly employed because they can be viewed as "obviously personal" (1989: 27) and artificial. In general, despite their pragmatic functions of hedging and indirectness, direct and tag questions are discouraged in Anglo-American academic writing because they are viewed as excessively personal and subjective (Swales and Feak, 1994; Wong, 1990). Tadros (1994) reported that in formal discourse, questions usually mark detachment from the proposition and that their use should be limited.

On the other hand, Hwang (1987) and Ohta (1991) stipulate that in Korean and Japanese discourse, respectively, questions are frequently employed to show hesitation and uncertainty of facts and may be compared to the use of hedging in English. Wong (1990) similarly observes that in Chinese, rhetorical questions perform various functions, such as hinting about the purpose of the text and emphasizing a point; in this way, the thesis may be stated without a direct assertion. She further stipulates that in the Chinese classical rhetorical tradition, questions assume audience participation and involvement and the reader's understanding of the writer's position. Furthermore, Biq (1990) specifies that question words often perform the role of hedges in Chinese discourse and represent a conventionalized indirectness device employed with the goal of avoiding the imposition on the reader that would be the result of stating ideas directly. Given the diversity of politeness functions that questions appear to perform in these discourse traditions, it is not surprising that the NNS subjects employed questions significantly more frequently than NSs did.

[1] All examples here and below are from student texts included in the corpus.

(2) **Disclaimers and denials**
do(es)/be-forms *not mean (meant) to/imply/intend/say, xxx is not yyy, not (+ adjective(s)), not (+ verb(s)), not (+ noun(s)), not (+ adverb(s)), not even, no way* (and contractions) distinguished from negatives and negation

B&L found that denying that a claim is being made and/or denying the truth-value of a proposition is a sophisticated indirectness strategy when a potential objection is anticipated and addressed. Quirk et al.'s (1985) definition of the differences between negatives and denials was adopted in the present analysis, where the former operate on the truth-value of a proposition and the latter on its syntactic elements. Quirk et al. indicate that denials are referentially bound to the context that precedes them and can be used to hedge the pragmatic force of earlier propositions. Typically, the NNS in the present study used disclaimers and denials significantly more frequently than NSs did.

Denials are requisite in Anglo-American academic writing because direct negative claims or criticisms are "almost inadmissible" (Myers, 1989: 30). Disclaimers, together with other syntactic markers, are used to mitigate the illocutionary force of a proposition or claim (Cherry, 1988) and diminish the writer's responsibility for the truth-value of a claim (Channel, 1994), e.g. *I don't mean to say that I am better than other people. I just think that if our country is the richest in the world, how come we have poor people and hunger.* Pagano's (1994) extensive analysis of denials in written discourse indicates that writers deny ideas or expectations that they assume on the part of the reader, or which are used to establish the limits of paradigms of knowledge (or beliefs) in their texts in order to refute potential objections and avoid a threat to their own or the reader's face. In her view, the pragmatic function of denials in academic writing serves as a means of attributing to the reader the "experience, knowledge, opinions, and beliefs on the basis of which the writer builds his/her message" (Pagano, 1994: 253). Coulthard (1994) stipulates that denials represent a part of the Assertion–Denial–Justification rhetorical structure frequently found in Anglo-American written discourse.

Although the use of disclaimers and denials is used in Anglo-American, as well as in Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist writing traditions, in the latter, group-oriented, societies, the writer's responsibility for avoiding an imposition on the reader and a threat to his or her face may be greater than in English-speaking societies. Experts on indirectness in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese written discourse have found that disclaimers and denials represent overt strategies for minimizing both the imposition on and face threat to a reader, and for referring him or her to the experience and world knowledge commonly shared in a language community. R. Scollon (1993a,b) found that in the English writing of Chinese students, disclaimers are employed to delineate the writer's referential focus and the experiential base of the message. He further observes that the NNS use of disclaimer constructions in English often creates ambiguities and is sometimes perceived to be excessive and inappropriate. In his view, however, Chinese students of English operate within different cultural assumptions pertaining to writer–reader face relationships; such assumptions extend to discourse notions far beyond the sentence structure. Lee's account of negating and denying in Korean stipulates that while different particles negate nouns, verbs, and adjectives, denials are often accomplished by means of whole-sentence disclaimers, which do not preclude additional negation of individual sentence components, such as nouns and verbs, e.g. *While my father was looking at the car, the salesman didn't even come over to help us. It's not that he is lazy, he simply doesn't care.* Ohta (1991) states that negatives and denials in Japanese evince an uncertainty of the facts and that their use has the goal of minimizing the responsibility for the truthfulness of a proposition. In addition, they serve to mitigate the pragmatic force of claims and "allow room for the opinions of others" (1993: 222).

(3) **Vagueness and ambiguity**[2]

- (a) **Numerical quantifiers:** *a lot (of)/lots of, approximately, around, between xxx and yyy, many/much, number of, piece(s), tons of, dozens/hundreds/thousands/millions, xxx or yyy (e.g. five or six), xxx or so, several*
- (b) **Non-numerical quantifiers:** *xxx aspects of, xxx facets of, at least, at best*
- (c) **Scalar qualifiers:** *excellent/good/bad, always/usually/often/occasionally/sometimes/never, large (extensive)/small, high/low, tall/short, hot/warm/cool/cold, wet/damp/dry*
- (d) **Classifiers:** *and all, and all that, and that, and so on, things/stuff (like that), who knows what/why, whatever* [pron] *want(s)/do(es), the whole bit/works*

A great deal has been written on vagueness and ambiguity in NS and NNS academic writing. According to B&L, being vague and ambiguous is an indirectness strategy in which the communicative intent is not well-defined and allows the writer to minimize the threat to the reader's face (B&L). The selection of vagueness and ambiguity devices in this study relies on those identified by Channel (1994). She notes that in English there are numerous ways to be vague and that vagueness often represents instances of ambiguity because neither can be clearly interpreted. In particular, vagueness in discourse can be an outcome of "vagueness by choice of vague words" (1994: 18) and/or by implicature when the information in a statement is insufficient for a proposition to be precise. According to her findings, vague claims and propositions are common in English academic writing because writers seek to accomplish two simultaneous goals, i.e. diminish their responsibility for the accuracy of the information/proposition and reduce the chances of creating an imposition on the reader, as in *Thousands of high school graduates begin their college life because their friends go to college, and they don't want to be outdone* and *When we learn about various aspects of life, we try to build a better world.*

Researchers of L2 writing have come to recognize that written discourse produced by NNSs usually contains a substantial number of vague and ambiguous statements, phrases, and words. Carlson (1988) found that NNSs employed a significantly higher number of vague words in their English essays, as did the subjects in the study carried out by Bickner and Peyasantiwong (1988). The NNSs in this study, congruent

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[2] Limited to the devices encountered in the corpus.

with conclusions in earlier research, employed significantly more devices associated with rhetorical vagueness and ambiguity than did the NSs.

(4) Repetition

Repetition is typically discouraged in Anglo-American academic writing, as it is often associated with redundancy (Tarone and Yule, 1987), e.g. *People want to succeed because they want to be successful and get the many benefits of success*. On the other hand, B&L note that repetition is a politeness strategy that serves to establish and maintain agreement, solidarity, and group belonging. In the view of M. McCarthy (1991), the tolerance for repetition in writing is culture-dependent, and in Chinese and Japanese repetition is commonly utilized to delineate theme–rheme relationships of ideas in text. Similarly, M. McCarthy and Carter (1994) specify that repetition can also be employed as a persuasion strategy that involves the reader in a co-creating role for constructing the argument. The authors further comment that in Indonesia, repetition can mark an appreciation for the thoughts and discourse in which it occurs.

M. McCarthy (1991) indicates that lexical cohesion in written discourse necessarily entails a certain element of repetition; however, the amount of repetition necessary for developing and maintaining cohesive ties is determined by the written discourse norms accepted in a language community. Matalene (1985) reports that in classical Chinese rhetoric, repetition represents one of the fundamental persuasion devices where argumentation is accumulative, rather than synthetic or analytic. Indrasuta (1988) compared the amount of lexical and sentence-level repetition in the writing of American students, as opposed to Thai students writing in English and their respective L1s. She found that although writers in the three groups employed repetition as a means of cohesion, NSs of American English employed it less than NNSs who wrote in English. However, NNSs' L1 essays contained the highest rate of repeated lexis and clauses. The findings of this study confirm Indrasuta's (1988) conclusion: in their writing in English, the speakers of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian employed significantly more repetition of lexis and phrases than did NSs of American English.

(5) Irony

Irony is an indirectness strategy that serves to give clues to the intended meaning without directly indicating what the intended meaning is (B&L), e.g. *Working in McDonald's after you graduate from college is the student's dream* and *If you receive education, you'll have a good life. You can work as a receptionist, make your boss coffee, and put up with his moods*. Because ironic statements have a literal meaning that is the opposite of the one that is intended, the hearer/reader has to infer the converse to remove the ambiguity. However, Leech (1983) mentions that irony makes for an awkward indirectness strategy because its goal is to circumvent the norms of socially appropriate discourse. Furthermore, in order to be effective, the employment of irony necessarily shifts the burden of inference to the hearer/reader and can be viewed as "negative uninformativeness" (Leech, 1983: 143). Quirk et al. (1985) describe irony as an implicit means of expressing disagreement, disbelief, and occasionally, criticisms. The findings of the present study indicate that neither NSs nor NNSs perceived irony to be appropriate in academic writing.

3.2. Lexical and referential markers

(6) **Hedges and hedging devices**

- (a) **Lexical:** *(at) about, in a way, kind of, maybe, more or less, most, something like, sort of*
- (b) **Possibility:** *by (some/any) chance, hopefully, perhaps, possibly, in case (of), (if) you/we know/understand (what* [pron] *mean(s)) if*-structures distinguished from those used with conditional tenses (see below)
- (c) **Quality:** *as is (well) known, (as) you/everyone know(s), (as) people say, one/you may/might/can say, they say*
- (d) **Performative:** *apparently, basically, certainly, clearly, definitely, likely/ most likely/very likely, obviously, undoubtedly, seemingly, supposedly, surely*
- (e) **Hedged performative verbs:**
  Hedge: *want to/would like to/can/may* + Performative: *ask/call/comment/ discuss/explain/note/mention/point out/remark/speak/state/tell*

Because hedging devices are numerous and can be complex, various definitions and classifications have been developed to account for their meanings, contexts, and implications in discourse. The types of hedges discussed in this analysis are limited to those encountered in the students' writing. The organization of hedging devices relies on the systems outlined in B&L, Biber (1988), Hübler (1983), and Quirk et al. (1985).

While Biber (1988: 240) describes hedges as markers of possibility/probability and uncertainty, B&L attribute a great deal of importance to hedging as an indirectness strategy and discuss the diversity of its discourse functions. They define hedging as a means of delimiting and defining the extent of claims, the truth-value of a proposition, and the speaker's/writer's responsibility for the completeness of a proposition/claim. In their view, hedging has numerous purposes and can be employed to assure "cooperation, informativeness, truthfulness, relevance, and clarity which on many occasions need to be softened for reasons of face" (1987: 146). Similarly, according to Leech's account, hedges have the function of reducing the imposition of beliefs "which are costly" (1983: 114) to the reader/hearer.

In general, hedges are used extensively in Anglo-American academic writing to project "honesty, modesty, proper caution", and diplomacy (Swales, 1990: 174). Myers observes that hedging is conventionalized in academic discourse and appears to be requisite in constructions expressing personal points of view. He describes one function of hedging as a politeness and mitigating strategy in claims because hedging expresses "an appropriate attitude for offering a claim to the community" (1989: 13). In Hübler's (1983) view, the diversity of discourse functions associated with the many types of hedges makes them effective and flexible as a face-saving system of socially expected doubt, hesitation, indirectness, and politeness.

Hedging one's claims and propositions so as to avoid an imposition and project indirectness is expected in many rhetorical traditions. Biq (1990) indicates that in Chinese, hedging devices play an important role in conveying the speaker's/writer's attitude to the claim. She specifies that many hedges in Chinese are ambiguous and can perform several discourse functions simultaneously, thus increasing discourse ambiguity and shifting the responsibility for inferring the meaning of a proposition to the hearer/reader. According to Oliver (1971), hedges are requisite in Chinese written discourse because the writer is vested with authority and responsibility by virtue of writing.

McGloin (1984) and Kamio (1995) discuss an elaborate framework of hedges, softeners, and distancing devices in Japanese discourse. They find that hedges in Japanese perform many of the same functions that they do in English, but in addition serve to mark the speaker's/hearer's "territory of information" by increasing or decreasing the indirectness of claims through the choice of the type and amount of hedging in discourse. Ohta (1991) mentions that in Japanese discourse, hedges represent a very common politeness strategy to minimize the imposition on both the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader. As a consequence, the number and variety of hedges is considerable, and several can be employed in a proposition, depending on the degree of the perceived or potential threat to the writer and/or the reader. She mentions, for example, that adverbial hedges, such as those translated into English as *possibly* or *perhaps*, show the speaker's/writer's uncertainty of facts and thus reduce responsibility for the proposition. M. Park (1979) found that both Japanese and Korean usage of hedging is similar in that it often diminishes the burden of responsibility on both the writer's and the reader's face by making claims indirect and impersonal. He notes that Americans frequently find the requisite Korean hedging "intolerable" (1979: 94); for them, Korean texts appear to lack substance or significance, because the author's ideas may be perceived as overly indirect.

Quality hedges in English can have the function of shifting the responsibility for the factuality and the truth-value of the claim, and/or a potential threat to the reader's face from the writer to an external source of information. These particular functions of quality hedges seem to resemble those in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean discourse (Biq, 1990; M. Park, 1979). Therefore, it stands to reason that speakers of these languages may have transferred their hedging strategies from their L1s to English, using a significantly higher number of them than do NSs. Performative hedges in English are employed to convey the degree of truth and "the conditions under which" the claim/proposition is true, as well as the degree of doubt and hesitation (Quirk et al., 1985). The discourse functions of English performative hedges also seem to be similar to those of hedging in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. However, according to the discourse norms accepted in the Confucian and Buddhist rhetorical tradition, they are employed in contexts where hedging in English is not expected (Bloom, 1981; Wong, 1990).

Performative verbs often convey indirectness by shifting the deictic center of the claim/proposition to embedded clauses in an indirect speech construction (B&L;

Quirk et al., 1985). However, the purpose of hedged performative verbs is to soften "presumptuous" statements (B&L: 156) in the embedded clause by hedging the illocutionary force of the performative verb. For example, in the sentence *I want to say that education in this country has been going downhill, and good teachers are in short supply*, the writer hedged the performative verb to soften the criticism in the embedded clause and convey a degree of hesitation.

Leech (1983), in his discussion of performative verbs, voices caution: their use varies greatly from one culture to another, and they cannot be analyzed out of context and without regard to acceptability. It appears that the amount and type of hedging appropriate in written discourse is conventionalized (Myers, 1989) and depends on the norms of a particular language community and the context in which it is produced (Swales, 1990). Because written discourse conventions are often culture- and language-dependent, the amount of hedging in NSs and NNS student essays varied across language groups and according to the types of hedges. The use of lexical, possibility, quality, and performative hedges in NNS essays differed significantly from that of NSs. It should be noted, however, that the frequency of lexical hedges in the essays of Chinese was similar to that in NS writing. On the other hand, congruent with the findings of Biber (1988), NSs utilized possibility hedges in significantly higher rates than NNSs in any group. Although hedged performative verbs were found in the writing of both NSs and NNSs, they were employed in similar rates by all groups of student writers.

(7) Point-of-view distancing

I/we feel/hope/wonder/worry, I am concerned, I would like to/want to/think/believe/understand (tense markers and contractions)

Although there are numerous ways of expressing a point of view, B&L focus on one particular deictic indirectness construction that entails distancing the speaker from a claim or proposition by means of deictically removing the claim from him- or herself in space, time (and, therefore, tense), and origin. In written discourse, point-of-view distancing is accomplished by employing a complex strategy of initiating the face-threatening move and presenting the issue (or a problem) as if removed from the initiator and reported as an external speech act and/or reference, e.g. *I worry that if we don't do anything about pollution, the environment will be damaged forever*, and *Although I've heard enough speeches about improving education in this country, I want to understand why the politicians haven't done anything about it yet*. Although point-of-view distancing does not belong among indirectness strategies per se, B&L describe it as a face-saving device that works by decentralizing claims in discourse.

According to Maynard (1993), special interactional particles mark a point of view that make an utterance appear removed from the speaker and external to the proposition and the setting in which it is made. In fact, she indicates that such markers play an important role in conversations when all speakers interactionally accommodate one another's burden of mutual cooperation. However, external point-of-view particles are not typically used in Japanese writing. Chao (1968) makes similar observations about Chinese pre-pivotal verbs that have many discourse functions, one of which is to remove an expression of an opinion from the speaker who expresses it. In Chinese, as in Japanese, such constructions are employed in spoken rather than written discourse. The NNS and NS essays showed no significant differences in the use of point of view distancing.

(8) Downtoners

at all, almost, hardly, mildly, nearly, only, partially, partly, practically, slightly, somewhat

The purpose of downtoners is to indicate the degree of probability in an assertion (Biber, 1988); they typically serve to lower the effect of the verb force and can be used on a scale with gradable verbs (Quirk et al., 1985). While Hübler (1983) and Biber (1988) distinguish between the functions of downtoners and hedges, B&L do not. Biber specifies that hedges simply mark "assertions as uncertain" (1988: 114) without an implied degree of probability. In Hübler's (1983) view, downtoners can lower the force of the verb substantially, beyond the effect of hedges, and are employed to convey indirectness in claims. Hübler further comments that an extreme outcome of downtoning may represent a claim that practically cannot be refuted, as is implied in the use of *partly* and *partially* (e.g. *The government partly controls the standard of living for the middle class in my country* and *Parents are partially responsible for the education of our future generation*). Biber (1988) and Myers (1989) identify downtoners as markers of academic discourse and comment on their prevalence in writing; Holmes (1984) states that downtoners convey politeness and deference by marking uncertainty of the claim/proposition. Few NNS and NS subjects employed downtoners in this study.

(9) Diminutives

a little, little, a bit, a little bit, a few, few

B&L attribute diminutives to the general class of hedges that have the goal of reducing the speaker's/writer's responsibility for the claim/proposition and the extent of its implications and, thus, the imposition on the hearer/reader (e.g. *The examination level is a little bit high, and whether you pass or not depends on your luck, as well as knowledge*, and *In my country, I've heard these and many other complaints, but few people dare to complain directly to the Ministry of Education*. In addition, diminutives often serve as an in-group marker to promote solidarity between the writer and the reader (Quirk et al., 1985). According to Hübler, the use of diminutives implies "a smaller risk of negatability" (1983: 76) and refutal and contribute to the indeterminacy of the structure that follows them, with the function of reducing the validity-condition of the statement. Quirk et al. (1985) and Hübler (1983) indicate that diminutives tend to occur in speech but not in writing. As with downtoners in the present study, NNS and NS did not differ significantly in their use of diminutives.

(10) Discourse particles

well, now, anyway, anyhow, anyway(s)

Similar to downtoners and diminutives, discourse particles are often attributed to the general category of softeners that serve to decrease the writer's responsibility for an assertion and, thereby, decrease a potential imposition on the reader (B&L), as in *Well, after I thought about it, I decided that I probably wouldn't be happy as an engineer, even though engineers make a lot more than teachers*, and *Anyway, I told my French teacher that I didn't want the book, but he gave it to me for my birthday.* On the other hand, Levinson (1983) observes that the function of discourse particles is particularly ambiguous and appears to be indeterminate; some, such as *well*, have more distinct softening features than, for example, *anyway*, that can serve as a relevance hedge. Schiffrin's (1987) substantial work on discourse particles demonstrates that they play a prominent role in discourse coherence, the linking of frames, and frame orientation. In her view, particles serve so many discourse functions that they are ambiguous in almost any context. Biq (1990) and Chao (1968) also mention that discourse particles in Chinese have a wide variety of functions, of which hedging and softening the writer's claims is a part. Biber (1988), Chao (1968), Ohta (1991), and Schiffrin (1987) indicate that in English, Chinese, and Japanese, discourse particles are largely a characteristic of spoken discourse, are rarely encountered in written text, and may appear to be somewhat inappropriate in formal writing. In the present study, NNS and NS did not differ significantly in their use of discourse particles.

(11) Demonstratives

that, this, these, those, excluding *that* used as a relative pronoun, compliment, or subordinator

Although B&L describe demonstratives as markers of involvement and empathy, Biber's (1988) corpus-based analysis identifies them as referential and deictic markers that are more commonly used in spoken than in written English. Quirk et al. (1985) define several functions of demonstratives in discourse, and mention that they can be ambiguous because their referential and situational roles are similar to those of determiners (e.g. *All I can say to those people who do not want to pay taxes and contribute to the funding for schools is that they don't have a vision of the future*). On the other hand, M. McCarthy (1994) found that *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* are often found in academic discourse in English and perform the role of referential hedges because they lack precision and can be utilized to convey tentativeness and indirectness. He also notes that because they are imprecise, demonstratives are largely discouraged in Anglo-American written discourse. However, Myers' (1989) findings are somewhat at odds with M. McCarthy's (1994) observations. Myers (1989) demonstrates that it is because of their imprecision that determiners are frequently used in academic writing as hedges of claims and denials, i.e. they serve to attribute an assertion to an impersonal agency external to the writer.

Levinson (1983) specifies that a shift from *that* to *this* outlines an empathetic deixis, which in languages such as Chinese and Malagasy, can be a great deal more elaborate. He also cautions that in languages other than English, demonstratives can be organized with respect to the role of discourse participants, e.g. the writer and the reader, and have meanings far more pragmatically and contextually marked than in English. For example, in Japanese, demonstratives are not deictic, but are objects of singular reference and can refer only to certain designated "objects in the world", rather than in context (Watanabe, 1993: 304). According to M. McCarthy (1991), L2 learners frequently transfer the meanings of determiners from L1 and may attribute to these markers a great deal more referential implications than they actually have in English. The results of the present study indicate that speakers of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian used demonstratives significantly more frequently in their writing than did NSs of American English. An implication of this finding can be that NNS employed demonstratives in contexts where NSs would not; possibly, the NNSs did so in accordance with their understanding of the appropriate meanings and functions of these markers.

(12) **Indefinite pronouns and determiners**
- (a) **Universal and negative:** *all, both, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, none, no one, nothing, every, each*
- (b) **Assertive and nonassertive:** *anybody, anyone, anything, any, either, somebody, someone, something, some*

Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) and Quirk et al. (1985) define two main types of indefinite pronouns – universal and partitive – and state that these types have a wide range of meaning and discourse purposes. Universal and negative indefinite pronouns represent the extremes of the continuum of meanings expressed by indefinite pronouns (Quirk et al., 1985). B&L comment that choosing a point on a reference scale that is "higher than the actual state of affairs" (1987 219) and/or extremes of the deictic continuum may be associated with overstatement. In their examples, such pronouns as *all* and *no one* represent an indirectness strategy used to make a point by exaggerating contextual circumstances and thus avoiding an overt imposition and/or a threat to the hearer's face.

Pronouns such as *everything, everybody, nothing*, and *nobody* are marked exaggeratives (B&L) that are seldom used in Anglo-American academic writing (Biber, 1988). On the other hand, Cherry (1988) found that in certain contexts, student writing displayed a relatively high rate of overstatements, used in order to add the power of conviction to the writer's rhetorical stance. Exaggerations and overstatements, as in *Everybody always wants to be educated*, and *Today, everybody grades on everything, and so we don't realize the importance of grading*, can be utilized as a discourse device that is inverse to understatement and is not intended to be taken literally. Creating a hyperbole (Channel, 1994) allows the speaker/writer to make a point without being precise. Leech (1983) cautions, however, that although overstatements are prevalent in speech, they do not necessarily enhance politeness, and some may serve the purpose of embellishing the truth for the benefit of the speaker or context.

While exaggerations and overstatements are rarely considered appropriate in Anglo-American written discourse, they are often considered acceptable in certain contexts in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean writing. In the classical Chinese writing tradition, exaggerations and overstatements may be viewed as a mark of implicit persuasion and even eloquence (Oliver, 1971) because the purpose of discourse is "to enlighten" (1971: 267) the audience by almost any means. Matalene (1985) comments that her Chinese students routinely used exaggeratives in their writing and were surprised to discover that these are considered inappropriate in English academic environments. Hinds (1984) and Tsujimura (1987) note similar characteristics in Japanese discourse. Yum (1987) explains that in traditional Korean rhetorical practice, the writer is vested with the authority to convince and, therefore, can rely on various forms of ethos and overstatement, if necessary. Not surprisingly, the NNSs in the present study used significantly more universal and negative indefinite pronouns than did NSs.

NNSs also used more assertive and nonassertive indefinite pronouns than NSs did. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) and Quirk et al. (1985) stipulate that assertive and nonassertive indefinite pronouns, which they also call partitive, are contextually and deictically marked with respect to a noun phrase and that assertive forms can be largely used with positive presuppositions. Partitives are distinct from universal or negative pronouns in the sense that their meanings imply a partial rather than a total inclusion or exclusion, for example, *Teachers try to hide some social problems from young people, and some teachers who teach in women's colleges tend to set up a kind of reality that does not really exist*, and *It is impossible to live all by yourself and live without asking for help. There is always someone who gives you some advice and leads you to a better way to your destination*. Biber's (1988) corpus analysis shows that relative to other structures, indefinite pronouns were not prevalent in academic writing.

In general terms, in many contexts and particularly in writing, the use of fronted personal pronouns and direct pronoun references is not considered appropriate in discourse communities other than Anglo-American. Considerable variations in the utilization of indefinite pronouns are found even in comparisons of British and American written texts (Quirk et al., 1985). Because indeterminacy in pronoun use constitutes one of the indirectness markers in Chinese (Oliver, 1971), Japanese (McGloin, 1984; Ohta, 1991), and Korean (Hwang, 1987), they serve diverse discourse functions, such as decreasing the speaker's/writer's responsibility for the truth-value and factuality of the claim/proposition, attributing the claim to someone else, presenting it as a general truth or a commonly held opinion, and displaying hesitation and uncertainty. Furthermore, Chafe (1994) demonstrates that the issue of indefinite references is a great deal more complex in such languages as Indonesian and Japanese, in which only those entities that are important to the discourse flow are identified and definitively marked, and in which indefiniteness markers can undertake many forms. It appears that in comparison, universal and partitive meanings of English indefinite pronouns are substantially less involved and elaborate and may not be suitable for expressing a wide variety of contextual implications found in other languages.

(13) Some understatement markers

fairly, pretty (+ adjective), quite (+ adjective), rather (+ adjective), not (too) bad, not half bad

Hübler defines understatements as "non-direct sentence strategies of saying less than one means" in order to make propositions and claims "acceptable and thus to increase their chance of ratification" (1983: 23) by the audience. He further notes that understatements are not stylistic strategies but pertain to content because they operate within and on the proposition. From this perspective, understatements serve to delimit "a liability commitment" (ibid.: 14) for the demand imposed by a claim. B&L identify understatements as indirectness and politeness markers that can be contextually ambiguous in order to circumvent a threat to the hearer's/reader's face. According to Leech (1983), the ambiguity created by an understatement makes it difficult to interpret a proposition at face value.

Clyne (1987) and Quirk et al. (1985) note that understatements and their markers are typically colloquial and are used predominantly in spoken English. In Lii-Shih's (1988) observation, Chinese and Japanese expressions that can be translated in English as *quite/pretty* (+ adjectives/adverbs) and *not (too) bad* are used in spoken and colloquial contexts similar to those in which they are used in English and are also employed to understate and hedge a proposition. M. Park (1979) explains that in speech, Koreans tend to employ a variety of particles similar to the colloquial understatements in English, such as *fair(ly)* and *not bad*. Not surprisingly, the NNS and NS in the present study did not differ significantly in their use of understatements.

3.3. Syntactic markers and structures

(14) Passive voice (+ by-phrase)

The passive voice is a relatively common indirectness device that serves to remove direct reference to the speaker and the hearer, and is used to avoid a potential imposition or a threat to the speaker's/hearer's face (B&L). The passive voice often serves as one of the more typical markers of academic writing and a detached style that is intended to convey distance and uninvolvement (Biber, 1988; Myers, 1989). Agentless passive can also be employed to front thematic information or remove the agent from the prominent sentence position (Jacobs, 1995). In fact, Atkinson stipulates that "'scientific' passive" (1991: 68) is closely associated with the conventionalized rhetorical constructs specific to Anglo-American academic writing.

Using the passive voice appropriately, however, appears to be complex because of its contextual, lexical, and semantic constraints. In the discussion of passive constructions in academic writing, Swales and Feak (1994) present a series of examples when, in context, the passive voice is more suitable than the active voice but add that certain verbs, customarily used in academic discourse (e.g. *show*, *provide*, *reveal*), should not be used in the passive. Master (1991) devoted a study to contexts in which passive verbs are used in academic writing in English and observes that they can function as hedges and most frequently occur with inanimate and abstract subjects. However, as Master also indicates, animacy and inanimacy of subject nouns is a lexical notion that cannot be systematically translated from one language to another; in Japanese, inanimate subjects are not used with passive verbs. Although

Master (1991) provides detailed descriptions of types of academic discourse where the passive voice is more appropriate than the active, Owen (1993) shows that the usage of the passive in English is severely lexically constrained and frequently idiomatic and, therefore, not necessarily learned from demonstrations and textbooks.

Carlson (1988) found that the use of the passive in compositions of Chinese ESL students appears to be topic- and subject-matter dependent; however, it is not always clear which specific topics induce a greater rate of passive usage or what causes the divergencies. On the other hand, Hoshi (1993) distinguishes between direct and indirect passives, both of which can have resultative and theme-fronting meanings. In addition, a certain class of Japanese subject-oriented adverbs require the passive in rheme-fronted constructions so as to avoid the usage of direct subject reference and project imprecision and indirectness. In Korean, the passive voice is also employed for the purposes of theme–rheme fronting and differentiation, thus marking indirectness and avoiding direct references. However, the Korean passive voice is largely lexical and often idiomatic (Kitahara, 1993). In Indonesian, passive constructions necessarily entail a distinction between the beneficiary and the recipient of the action expressed by the verb (Palmer, 1994).

It appears that in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian, the passive voice and its uses carry meanings, implications, and discourse purposes not ordinarily encountered in the usage of English, and which can be employed to convey group belonging and solidarity by avoiding pronoun references and demonstrating the author's respect for the audience's opinions and perceptions. Because in these languages, the meanings of the passive voice seem to be more diverse and contextually involved than in English, NNSs possibly used passive constructions significantly more frequently than NSs in this study in order to express discourse constructs that do not necessarily exist in English.

(15) Nominalization

Words ending in *-ance*, *-(s)/-(a)tion(s)*, *-ment(s)*, *-ness*, *-ity(s)*

In English, nominalization of verbs and adjectives in written discourse is often associated with politeness and indirectness. By nominalizing verbs, the writer can remove the "active 'doing"' from the meaning and, thus, soften a threat to the reader's face considerably and reduce a directive to a suggestion (B&L: 207). Bhatia asserts that nominal expressions in the academic genre "have gained a certain degree of notoriety" because of their prevalence but also due to their perceived "pomposity" (1991: 217). In his view, nominalization represents one of the conventions of academic writing, is employed for a specific communicative purpose, and requires a shared knowledge of discourse norms.

As B&L indicate, the indirectness and politeness of nominalized forms exist in many languages other than English. Iwasaki (1993) and McGloin (1984) explain that in written Japanese, nominalization is discourse-dependent: in explanatory and descriptive contexts, nominalization conveys indirectness and politeness. On the other hand, assertions and directives cannot be nominalized, and such constructions can rarely be softened or hedged. Heycock and Lee (1990) similarly found that nominalization in Korean depends on the type of the illocutionary force in the context: verbs and adjectives can be nominalized when an illocution is indirect and non-specific, but cannot be in other contexts. The results of Carlson's (1988) study demonstrate that although NSs of American English and Chinese employed nominalized constructions in their academic essays, no marked differences in their usage were identified. Similarly, the present study found no significant differences in nominalization usage in NS and NNS writing.

(16) Conditional tenses

(if) + conditional tense, *(unless)* + conditional tense

Hypothetical constructions are often associated with indirectness, ambiguity, and politeness, when the speaker hedges the illocutionary force and presents propositions and claims as if they would be denied or refused (B&L). Conditional tenses can occasionally be employed in written academic discourse, when the author attempts to solicit the reader's agreement with a proposition that he or she perceives to be risky (Myers, 1989). The use of conditional tenses is an ambiguous indirectness strategy that can preclude a threat to the writer's and the reader's face. Conditional tenses can also be employed as an indirect solidarity strategy when the author advances a claim with which everyone can potentially agree (Myers, 1989). However, Ford (1993), who identified conditionals as a structure predominantly found in conversational discourse, states that the use of conditional tenses rarely makes for an effective persuasive device and that it tends to mark the proposition as problematic, questionable, or delicate.

Bloom's (1981) findings show that although hypothetical structures are commonly used in Chinese, they include a precise presupposition marker to indicate the distinctions between hypothetical and counterfactual statements, thus disambiguating conditional constructions. In addition, the discoursal implications entailed in English hypothetical and/or counterfactual propositions are not common in Chinese. Both Bloom (1981) and Matalene (1985) reported that their Chinese students of English had difficulty understanding the meanings of English conditional tenses and did not use them appropriately in their writing. M. Park (1979) notes that although hypothetical and counterfactual particles exist in Korean, they characterize conversational rather than written discourse. According to Fujii, conditionals in Japanese as in Chinese, are typical of spoken discourse and are distinctly marked for counterfactual and hypothetical meanings; the pragmatic frame of the meanings is "based on common world knowledge" (1991: 356) and does not entail implications beyond those stated in the proposition. In the present study, NNSs and NSs use of conditional tenses did not differ significantly.

4. Conclusions

To summarize, the outcomes of this study have confirmed earlier findings (Cherry, 1988; Myers, 1989; Swales, 1990) that indirectness strategies associated with spoken discourse are also employed in written academic prose. In particular, NS and NNS writing has been examined with regard to contextual usage of twenty-one types of indirectness devices and markers. Although the frequencies of their utilization varied to a smaller or greater degree, most of these have been identified in the writing of university students, who were speakers of American English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian. The results of this study further indicate that whereas a number of indirectness markers in NNS compositions were used at significantly greater rates than in NS essays, other indirectness devices were not.

The rhetorical traditions based on Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophical precepts operate within frameworks and paradigms recognizably different from those accepted in the Anglo-American writing tradition which is structured around Aristotelian notions of directness, justification, and proof. Although the writing of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian students frequently appears vague and indirect to NSs of American English, the findings of this study, based on a corpus analysis, demonstrate that such perceptions are only partially justified. The numerous rater-based investigations that were centered around impressionistic judgments of writing samples may be biased or otherwise unreliable with regard to the specific characteristics of NNS writing. Although the validity of raters' impressions is usually supported by statistical correlations of the judgments on a numerical scale designed for a particular investigation, such statistical analyses do not preclude the possibility that two or three raters (typically NSs of American English) can display similar, but nonetheless subjective, judgments of complex and multi-faceted rhetorical notions, such as indirectness in written discourse.

Such prominent sentence- and phrase-level textual features as questions, denials, repetition (and redundancy), and the passive voice have long been discouraged in L1 compositions, and essay evaluators are usually aware of these undesirable features of writing. Similarly, the use of demonstrative and indefinite pronouns is routinely associated with a colloquial style inappropriate in formal and academic writing (Swales and Feak, 1994). For example, in Connor's (1987b: 82) study, L2 essays written by speakers of Japanese were rated lower than those by NSs and speakers of Spanish because the writing of the Japanese was "too informal", and included "inappropriate ... discourse makers". The essays of Chinese students seem to be rated lower than those of NSs and speakers of Spanish because, among other features, they include inappropriate qualifiers, vague words, and abstract nouns (Carlson, 1988). As Reid (1990: 202) asserts, "native-speaker raters give higher scores to native-speaker students who present their ideas concisely and use precise diction".

Liebman (1992) states that NNSs who received writing instruction in L1 educational settings may misinterpret the goals of the teaching of L2 composition. She found, for example, that Japanese students perceived writing as serving primarily expressive functions, while speakers of Arabic expected writing to be transactional. It appears that the expectations of writing in English-speaking academia should be addressed explicitly. In addition, students may need to be taught how rhetorical and linguistic constructs can be employed in writing to further the goals with which composition is taught in English-speaking environments. ESL writing and composition instruction frequently focus on textual organization and the grammaticality of linguistic structures. The findings of this study indicate a need to address such issues as style, tone, colloquialisms, appropriateness, vagueness, and textual directness. It may be that training students how to use a particular structure needs to be supplemented with when, where, and why such a structure should (or should not) be used. Furthermore, L2 writing pedagogy can specifically contrast discourse functions and implications of certain rhetorical and linguistic features in academic writing in English and other languages.

Appendix: Prompts for NS and NNS essays

NSs

(1) What is your major? Describe your values and characteristics that caused you to make this choice.
(2) Describe how you or your chosen career can benefit our country.

NNSs

(1) What job or profession are you preparing for? What are your personal views and qualities that made you choose this field of study?
(2) Discuss how you or your training in your major can contribute to the development of your country. Use detailed reasons and examples.

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