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Hedging in Social Scientific Research Articles

社会科学论文中的模糊限制语

黄 丽 香

指导教师姓名: 张秀明 副教授

专业名称: 英语语言文学

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Synopsis

The concept of hedging finds its way from logic and semantics into the study of discourse in the 1960s and has since been developed further in pragmatics and discourse analysis. As a linguistic concept, hedging has received much attention in literature. Research on hedging phenomenon has been conducted within areas such as logic, semantics, linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis, etc. In each of these areas, the concept of hedging is referred to in a different way. In pragmatics and discourse analysis, hedging is generally regarded as a textual strategy of using linguistic devices as hedges in a certain context for particular communicative purposes such as politeness, mitigation, vagueness, etc.

The role of hedging in oral discourse was much discussed in the 1980s. However, only in the late 1980s or early 1990s did attention begin to shift onto hedging in academic discourse. This may be because academic discourse is often believed to be highly objective and impersonal characterized by linguistic features such as passive voice and impersonalized expressions. In fact, academic writing, like any other type of discourse is interactive involving the writers trying to persuade readers of the validity of their statements. Hedging, therefore, is a crucial means to enable writers to present their statements with caution and to enter into a dialogue with their readers. The role of hedging in academic discourse, especially in natural science, has been well studied in literature. However, little attention has been paid to hedging in social science, so the present study attempts to investigate hedging in social scientific research articles through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The corpus used consists of 20 research articles taken from international journals in applied linguistics, which are *Applied Linguistics*, *Discourse Studies*, *Language Learning* and *Journal of Pragmatics*. Based on the previous hedging models, this study proposes a dual-function model of hedging. On the basis of this model, a taxonomy of hedges is put forwards, which includes epistemic lexical verbs, epistemic modal verbs, epistemic adjectives, adverbs and nouns, discourse-based hedges and other forms of hedges.

The quantitative analysis has demonstrated the numerical significance of hedges in social scientific research articles. The frequencies of hedges show that epistemic

lexical verbs are the most common means of expressing mitigation in research articles. The distributional information of hedges among four sections of a research article reveals that the Discussion section has the highest frequency of hedges, while the Method section the least. Such a difference is related to different rhetorical functions of these two sections. A comparison of hedges between social science and natural science demonstrates that epistemic lexical verbs and epistemic modal verbs concerning the tentativeness of propositions are more frequently employed in social science than in natural science; while epistemic adjectives and adverbs concerning the accuracy of propositions are used less frequently in social science than in natural science.

The qualitative analysis which is based on the dual-function model has illustrated the important role of various hedges in realizing the epistemic function and interpersonal function in social scientific discourse.

It is hoped that through such analyses, the present thesis would help to raise Chinese students' awareness of hedging and help to develop their ability in applying hedges in academic writing.

Key words: hedging and hedges; social scientific research articles; dual-function model

摘要

模糊限制语这一概念由逻辑学及语义学发展到语篇研究，此后又在语用学领域得到进一步发展。模糊限制语作为一个语言学的概念颇受关注。关于模糊限制语现象的研究已在一系列领域展开如逻辑学、语义学、语用学及语篇研究。在不同领域中模糊限制语所指的概念是不同的。语用学中的模糊限制语一般是指一种语篇策略，旨在特定语境中达到某种交际目的如礼貌需要，削弱语气或表达含糊等。

模糊限制语在口语语篇中的作用在 80 年代初已被广泛研究，然而它在学术语篇中的重要性却在 80 年代末 90 年代初才开始引起人们的关注。这或许是因为以被动语态及非人称表达为特征的学术语篇通常被认为是高度客观化、非人称化的产物。但实际上，学术语篇也和其他语篇一样是说服性的、互动性的。学术语篇的作者试图说服读者关于命题的有效性。在学术语篇中模糊限制语能起到帮助作者谨慎地陈述命题并带动读者参与对话的作用。自然科学类语篇中的模糊限制语已经得到广泛研究，然而在社会科学类语篇中模糊限制语的作用却鲜为关注。因此，本研究选取了 20 篇应用语言学领域的学术论文作为语料进行定量和定性分析。这 20 篇论文分别来自 4 种国际上应用语言学领域的权威刊物：《应用语言学》、《语篇研究》、《语言学习》以及《语用学期刊》。

在评析前人的模糊限制语研究模式的基础上，本研究提出了模糊限制语的双功能模式并由此提出了对模糊限制语的分类。分类包括了认知型动词、认知型情态动词、认知型形容词、副词以及名词、基于语篇的模糊限制语和其他形式的模糊限制语。

定量分析的结果表明了模糊限制语在数量上的显著性。从模糊限制语的使用频率看，认知型动词在语料库中的出现频率最高，这一类别的模糊限制语能起到缓和作用。从模糊限制语在学术论文四个组成部分的分布看，讨论部分分布最多，而方法部分分布最少。此种分布情况与和它们各自在修辞上的作用有关。本论文对自然科学类语篇和社会科学类语篇中模糊限制语的使用频率进行了对比，发现涉及命题不确定性的认知型动词和认知型情态动词在社会科学类语篇中

的使用较自然科学类语篇多；涉及命题准确性的认知型形容词和副词在社会科学类语篇中的使用较自然科学类语篇少。

定性分析的结果表明了模糊限制语在社会科学类语篇中起到了实现认知功能和人际功能的重要作用。

通过分析，笔者希望本研究能有助于提高中国学生的模糊限制语意识以及他们在学术论文写作中恰当使用模糊限制语的能力。

关键词：模糊限制语；社会科学类论文；双功能模式

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Aims and Significance

It is widely believed that academic writing is highly objective, informational and impersonal with an attempt to disguise the writer and present the facts or truth of research directly. In light of this traditional view, research article is often seen primarily as a channel to transmit new information in an objective and impersonal manner without any involvement of the writer's personal opinions. However, recent studies on academic research articles (e.g. Markkanen and Schroder, 1989; Myers, 1989; Hyland, 1996, 1998) show that effective academic writing is like any other kind of discourse in that it is interactive and involves writers trying to influence their readers by persuading them of the validity of their claims. In seeking agreements of claims, writers need to take into consideration the objectivity of knowledge claims and the impact of language on their readers. Hedging plays an important role in academic writing. It enables the writer to express doubt and certainty in the information presented, to intrude into the text and initiate a dialogue with readers.

At present, considerable amount of research has been conducted in the study of hedging phenomenon in the context of English for academic purposes. However, most of these studies have been confined to natural scientific writing. There was surprisingly little empirical study dedicated to describing or explaining hedging in social scientific discourse. Therefore, the present study chooses social scientific research articles in applied linguistics as the data for analysis. A further justification of studying social scientific research articles is that this will enable us to determine how far the features observed in the natural science are generalizable to other written academic discourse.

Based upon the insights of hedging models proposed by previous researchers such as Lakoff (1972), Prince et al (1982), Myers (1989) and Hyland (1998), the present study sets up a dual-function model of hedging and puts forwards a taxonomy of hedges. A quantitative analysis attempts to investigate the frequencies of hedges in social scientific discourse and their distribution in the textual macrostructure of a research article. A comparison of hedges used in social science and in natural science will also be conducted to see how hedges distribute in these two genres.

A qualitative analysis attempts to explore the dual-function — epistemic and interpersonal functions — of hedging in social science. The primary concern is to examine how hedging is encoded through the multiple linguistic resources as hedges to convey their attitudes towards both their propositions and readers, or how they function to hedge the relationship between writer and reader, between propositional content and the reality.

The information on hedging in social scientific discourse is of great significance. Firstly, the numerical significance and the pragmatic functions of hedges demonstrate the hedging as an essential element in presenting new knowledge claims for ratification in research articles.

Second, it contributes to our understanding of how writers use hedges to move between ground and claims in gaining reader's acceptance of statements.

Finally, it also has implications for the teaching of academic writing to students in both ESL and EFL contexts. The more teachers understand the use of hedging in academic writing, the more they can assist students to write more effectively.

1.2 Methodology and Data Collection

Since the aim of this study is to examine the use of hedging devices in research articles, both quantitative and qualitative approaches will be adopted for data analysis. As is known, there is a potential complementarity in the two approaches. First of all, the quantitative approach that bases on corpus study is objective in nature. The data yield from statistical analyses of frequencies and distribution can provide a basis for subsequent inference and interpretation. Second, the quantitative approach can be productively informed by a qualitative approach based on a detailed contextual analysis. The quantitative data can be supplemented by a detailed interpretation of the functioning of specific linguistic features in instances of discourse. In the case of present study, the quantitative analysis will provide us numerical data about the features of different hedges in research articles thus enables us to get an overview of them. This is not available through qualitative studies. Then, a qualitative analysis of the pragmatic functions of hedging allows insights into how these linguistic forms of hedges interact with other linguistic features to acquire their meanings in the context of discourse. By combining the strength of both qualitative and quantitative approaches

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