Attitudes towards and Frequency of Multiple Hedging in Written Academic English

I. Introduction

Over the past 20 years or so, hedging has become an increasingly well-researched aspect of academic writing. As with any identifiable aspect of academic writing, much of the research on hedging attempts to define it, theoretically and functionally. Because of the negative treatment hedging has received in the past, many studies (e.g. Skelton 1988a and 1988b; Myers 1996; Channell 1990; Banks 1998; Hyland 1994 and 1998) aim to validate the presence and legitimacy of hedges in academic writing. Other research (e.g. Hyland 1994 and 1998) has offered advice on how best to teach hedging in an EAP context. Research has been undertaken on the pragmatics of hedging and its link to politeness, its social implications, and how it affects the negotiation of meaning between writer and reader (e.g. R. Lakoff 1972; Myers 1996; Salager-Meyer 1994). Several contrastive rhetoric studies have looked at hedging in different cultures (eg Martìn-Martìn & Burgess 2004) and the possible linguistic transfer that may result from attempts to hedge in the L2 (e.g. Clyne 1991; Hinkel 1997). Some attention has been paid to the strength and presence of hedging and the variations thereof in certain genres (such as the IMRD pattern for research papers) (Salager-Meyer 1994; Martìn-Martìn & Burgess 2004; Banks 1994b). However, one issue that has not received as much attention in the literature as it perhaps warrants is that of multiple hedging (using more than one hedge in a given statement, such as in "this may suggest..." or "this could perhaps be…"). The fact that multiple hedging does indeed occur is evident from a look at almost any piece of academic writing, and it has not been entirely ignored in the research. Many studies mention it in passing; however, few devote any significant amount of space or time to its study. What this lack of focused attention leaves unclear is just

how often multiple hedging occurs, whether or not it is considered acceptable (and if so how many hedges must be used before multiple hedging becomes overhedging), and what, if any, factors, such as level of education, native vs. non-native speaker status, etc, may affect the strength or amount of a given writer's use of hedges. In this paper, I will look specifically at multiple hedging as a phenomenon of academic writing. I will start by providing an extensive review of the literature on hedging, focusing first on how hedging has been defined, and gathering from these different definitions a working definition to apply to my own research; and focusing secondly on how the notions of overhedging and underhedging have been addressed in the literature, in order to see if multiple hedging has received any sort of value judgment by the academic community. After this literature review, I will turn to my own research: a look at multiple hedging in the Hyland Corpus of academic text (which attempts to answer the question of how often multiple hedging occurs) and a survey which attempts to assess the evaluation of hedging expressions of various levels of strength by different academic groups (this survey attempts to address the acceptability of multiple hedging and the factors that may affect the strength of a writer's hedging expressions). I conclude by summarizing the results of my research and exploring how these results may be useful to the academic community.

II. A Survey of Definitions of Hedging in the Literature and an Explanation of the Hedging Definition Used for the Present Research

George Lakoff introduced the term *hedging* in 1972 as a way to refer to "words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy." Lakoff's introduction of the term did not spark much research, however, and in 1988 the subject was still "scarcely touched on in ELT" (Skelton, 1988b, p. 98). But since then, hedges have been written about relatively frequently in the literature, with a significant amount of attention paid to both hedges in speech and hedges in

writing. Unsurprisingly, given the slippery nature of pragmalinguistic phenomena in general, an agreed-upon description of what linguistic devices count as hedges—and more significantly what do not—does not emerge from the substantial literature on this topic. What do exist are varied definitions of hedging, which of course result in correspondingly varied taxonomies. While the definitions given by most researchers are not always so different as to be mutually exclusive, and while all the taxonomies given have at least some corresponding items, it is nevertheless necessary to clarify which (if any) researcher's definition and taxonomy I will be using and to justify why I have chosen it. I will not necessarily be trying to construct the most sophisticated definition, but rather to give the concept sufficiently clear boundaries so that it can be operationalized in analytic practice. That is, I am by no means trying to construct my own definition of hedging; I wish simply to find a clear working definition to use for my research—research which, in part, involves the location and identification of hedging devices in academic text.

First, it is helpful to give an overview of how hedging has been looked at in the literature and what controversies or disagreements exist when it comes to finding a precise definition. George Lakoff's (1972) description of hedges, which, as I've mentioned, was the first to be introduced in the field of linguistics, as "words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy," is—though of course an important and useful one sparking years of research—itself problematic. One problem lies with Lakoff's use of the expression "more or less." All other research has considered hedges to be words which make things more fuzzy—not less fuzzy. Making things less fuzzy is now thought to be a different linguistic concept, with different pragmatic and linguistic properties; Hyland (eg 2004) calls these items designed to make words less fuzzy "boosters." If we disregard this part of Lakoff's definition, we are left thinking of

hedges as words which make things more fuzzy. This may appear to be a simple and straightforward definition on first glance, but with a bit of thought it becomes clear that the word *fuzzy* as it relates to hedging is, well, fuzzy. What is meant by Lakoff's little adjective and the linguistic phenomenon it attempts to describe has been a hot topic of debate in the research literature on hedging.

There is of course a certain level of correspondence in the research on hedging: all authors seem to be in agreement that written hedges express an attitude of uncertainty on the part of the author and/or a degree of non-commitment to the truth of a given proposition. However, the agreement stops with attempts at further, more precise definitions and to an even larger extent with attempts to come up with a definitive group of linguistic expressions to be considered as hedges. This can be seen by a quick examination of some of the principal research. The relatively early study by Prince et al. (1982) classifies hedges into two different groups: *approximators* which show uncertainty/non-commitment "within the propositional content proper" and *shields*, which show uncertainty/non-commitment "in the relationship between the propositional content and the speaker" (p. 86). While Prince et al. focus on spoken academic discourse, research in academic writing discusses similar types of hedges (see for example Salager-Meyer 1994).

Skelton (1998b), who prefers to call hedges "comments" (to avoid the "pejorative connotation" of the word "hedge"), presents three categories into which comments fall: Type one comments indicate tentativeness or levels of probability and include copulas other than *be*; modal auxiliaries; adjectivals and adverbials introduced by *It is*, *This is*, *There is*, or which are sentence or clause-initial and immediately followed by a comma; and lexical verbs. While Skelton focuses by far the most attention on Type 1 comments, he also discusses Type 2

comments which "are concerned with the way adjectivals and adverbials in general function in academic text," and Type 3 comments, which deal with the "association between commentative language and stylistic markedness" (p. 102).

In some contrast, a few authors focus on hedging's pragmatic function and its link to politeness, such as R. Lakoff (1972) and Myers (1989), who argues that hedges are a social phenomenon and are perhaps best understood as politeness strategies. Myers's taxonomy includes modal conditional verbs and modifiers and, perhaps a bit too broadly, "any device suggesting alternatives […] —anything but a statement with a form of 'to be' that such and such is the case" (p. 13). Salager-Meyer (1994), who adopts a functional approach in her attempt to define hedging, deals with the concept of modesty (related to politeness) and believes that research on hedging should give more emphasis to the fact that hedges are "the product of a mental attitude" (p. 152). She adopts for her research a definition that "goes beyond [...] mere association with speculation" and entails "purposive fuzziness and vagueness (threat-minimizing strategy); that which reflects the authors' modesty for their achievements and avoidance of personal involvement; and that related to the impossibility or unwillingness of reaching absolute accuracy and of quantifying all the phenomena under observation" (p. 153). Her corresponding taxonomy includes five categories: shields, which include modal verbs expressing possibility, "semi-auxiliaries" (or copulas other than *be*), probability adverbs and adjectives, and epistemic lexical verbs; approximators; words which "express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement"; emotionally charged intensifiers; and compound hedges (p. 154-155).

Hyland (1994, 1998) focuses on hedging's link to epistemic modality, defined by Lyons as "any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters" (cited in Hyland 1994, p. 240). Hyland also

acknowledges hedging's social function saying that it's "a central means of gaining communal adherence to knowledge claims" (p. 241). In other words, hedging is a way for scholars to situate themselves within their discourse communities. According to Hyland, hedging "reflect[s] a relation between a writer and readers, not only the degree of probability of a statement" (p. 241). Hyland's taxonomy of hedging devices is quite extensive (especially in Hyland 1998) and includes modal auxiliaries, adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal expressions, modal lexical verbs, IF-clauses, question forms, passivization, impersonal phrases, and time reference (1994, p. 240). Hyland (1994) also clarifies that "Many instances of hedging take unpredictable forms, for example by referring to the uncertain status of information, the limitations of a model, or the absence of knowledge" (p. 243). Hyland's taxonomy, then, does not just include specific linguistic forms, but a range of possible expressions.

Peter Crompton (1997), who believes that the lack of agreement among researchers when it comes to precisely defining hedging as a linguistic phenomenon is problematic, proposes a "narrower" definition of hedging: "A hedge is an item of language which a speaker uses to explicitly qualify his/her lack of commitment to the truth of a proposition he/she utters" (p. 281). In order to determine whether or not a given proposition involves the use of hedging, Crompton proposes the following diagnostic question: "Can the proposition be restated in such a way that it is not changed but that the author's commitment to it is greater than at present? If 'yes,' then the proposition is hedged" (p. 282). Crompton includes the following in his taxonomy of hedges: copulas other than *be*, epistemic modals, clauses and adverbials relating to the probability of the subsequent proposition being true, "reported propositions where the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for any tentativeness in the verbal group, or non-use of factive reporting verbs," and

"reported proposition[s] that a hypothesized entity X exists and the author(s) can be taken to be responsible for making the hypothesis" (p. 284).

Overall, we can see that, although the theoretical standpoint behind each may vary to a certain extent, the fundamental base of these researchers' definitions of hedging is essentially the same: all involve expressing degrees of uncertainty (I believe that both uncertainty used intentionally as a way to avoid responsibility and uncertainty expressed because more precise figures are unavailable require hedging devices, though some researchers would disagree); and all the definitions I examined give some attention to hedging's pragmatic and/or social functions. It is the terminology and the taxonomies of hedging expressions which differ to such an extent that I must pick and choose among them in order to do my own research. Because my work involves the use of a corpus and, more specifically, searching for instances of hedging within the corpus, it is helpful to come up with a list of which linguistic expressions I will be considering in my search. In an attempt to be as accurate as possible and to remain fairly neutral, I have chosen to accept as hedges those linguistic items listed in Crompton (1997) as discussed by two or more researchers (p. 280). These include copulas other than *be*, certain lexical verbs used in certain contexts, modal verbs, and probability adverbs and adjectives. It is also necessary to define more specifically which modal verbs and lexical verbs I will be using: I will consider only very "weak" lexical verbs (like *suggest*), so that I may be certain of their hedging content (for more discussion of this issue see Johns 2001), and only modal verbs which express epistemic uncertainty. Some further explanation is necessary here: One is able to say that something "can be done"—meaning that it has been done, or is factually able to be done; in this case *can* is not a hedging device. On the other hand, one is able to say that something "may be relevant," in which case, may is expressing epistemic uncertainty on the part of the speaker and is therefore a

hedging device. The same distinction applies to probability adverbs and adjectives: the expression "possible to" cannot be used to hedge, as it expresses factual ability; the expression "possible that" can be used to hedge, as it has epistemic content.

In addition to these more or less agreed upon linguistic categories, I will include several other items. The first of these is approximators, as described by Salager-Meyer (1994). I do so because, although Crompton claims Salager-Meyer is the only author to include this item in her taxonomy of hedging, many of the articles I've looked at (specifically those on vagueness in academic writing) also considered approximators as hedges. Also, approximators fit with the basic theoretical standpoint I'm adopting: the relatively agreed-upon idea that hedging is used to express degrees of (avoidable or non-avoidable) uncertainty. Next, I will include items which are semantically related to (but belong to a different word class than) the lexical verbs I consider as hedges (eg: *implication, suggestion*, etc). Crompton states that Hyland is the only researcher to do so, but I see no reason why I should not include these related words, as they have the same semantic content as the lexical verbs (and it is the semantic content of a word that creates a hedged effect, not that word's part of speech). Using the same reasoning, I will include words related to the copulas other than *be* (such as *appearance* and *seemingly*) and nouns of probability, when appropriate (such as *possibility* when clearly used in an epistemic sense). I will not include any other items mentioned by only one researcher, such as IF-clauses (Hyland, 1994, 1998) and "expressions of the authors' personal doubt and direct involvement" (Salager-Meyer, 1994).

I would also like to point out that I believe Crompton (1997) is correct when he says that "to count all uses of certain linguistic tokens as hedges, is to run the risk of misrepresenting the discourse" (p. 279). For this reason, I will attempt to consider not only the lexical items I take to

be hedges, but their placement and meaning within their respective propositions, in order to verify that these expressions are indeed being used as hedges. By doing this, I hope to avoid some of the "misrepresent[ation of] the discourse" that Crompton speaks of. I of course acknowledge that introspection is not always a reliable form of data analysis, and is quite difficult when working with the large amount of data yielded by corpus research (especially research using Hyland's sizeable corpus of 240 academic research articles) but I believe it is better than somewhat blindly considering only surface forms without taking into account any of their semantic context.

The hedging categories, with some obvious linguistic realizations, are therefore as follows:

Copula verbs (and semantically related parts of speech) → *seem, appear, seemingly*

Modal verbs → *may*, *might*

Weak lexical verbs (and semantically related parts of speech → *suggest*, *suggestion*

Probability adverbs, adjectives, and nouns → *possibly, possible, possibility*

Approximators → *some, relatively*

From here, I will move on to a discussion of how multiple hedging has been looked at in the literature and how these explorations by other researchers relate to the current research.

III. Underhedging, Overhedging and Multiple hedging: Background and Treatment in Research Literature and EAP Textbooks

Views on hedging as a phenomenon of academic writing have undergone a dramatic shift within the past 15 to 20 years. Skelton (1988b) shows that at the point in time of his article, hedges were quite strongly looked down upon, the term *hedging* carrying "unfortunately pejorative connotations in ordinary language" (p. 98). In fact, the idea that hedges should be

used—not avoided—is presented by Skelton as an almost radical idea. (Today, at least among academic researchers "in the know," this idea is accepted without question, perhaps even taken for granted.) Over time, more and more articles justifying the legitimacy of hedging in academic writing have been published and today the term *hedging* does not carry as strong of a "pejorative connotation." Unfortunately, all is not as well as it should be. To this day, many style guides still advise strongly against hedging; the widely used Strunk and White (1979), for example, calls qualifiers (another words for hedges) "the leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words" (p. 73). This comment could perhaps be appropriate in talking about business or technical writing, which aims for clarity, precision, and conciseness, but it hardly seems appropriate for academic genres, where hedges often have an essential role (for more examples of this inappropriate type of negative treatment, see Hyland 1994 and 1998). And, according to Hyland, at least as of 1998, many ESP/EAP textbooks have failed to give an adequate amount of attention to hedging (see Hyland 1994 and 1998). If our view of what constitutes good academic writing are based on authentic texts and the discourse practices involved with those texts rather than prescriptive rules determined by some (often unknown or unnamed) authority's idealized version of a language (and I quite think they should be), then we cannot ignore or deny the legitimacy of hedging's presence, whether in speech or writing. Indeed, the importance of hedging has been demonstrated, with increasing frequency over the last 20 years or so. The most extensive of these works devoted to demonstrating the validity of hedging and to defining some of its characteristics is Ken Hyland's book *Hedging in Scientific Research Articles* (1998). Other works include Banks (1998), Myers (1996), Hyland (1994), Skelton (1988a), and the previously mentioned Skelton (1988b).

It will be useful at this point to see where multiple hedging fits in through a further examination of some of the justifications of hedging provided in the literature. Hyland (1994) focuses on arguing that the strong presence of hedging in academic writing requires an equivalently strong amount of attention in EAP textbooks—an amount of attention which, in Hyland's view, is rarely found. By this point in time, hedging has found its place in the research literature, but according to Hyland, not much has been done to place the research done into practice. Hyland stresses that teaching materials should be revised to place an appropriate amount of emphasis on hedging. In his view, the problem students face is that they underhedge; he does not mention overhedging as a potential problem. One might feel here that Hyland is perhaps overstating the need for focus on hedging in EAP textbooks. While hedging does occur very frequently and should, of course, be given some attention in any well-developed set of language teaching materials, it is possible that hedging does not receive more focus because it is not extraordinarily difficult for students to accomplish some base level of hedging, like the use of modal and lexical verbs, for example. It's likely that a relatively short amount of coverage would suffice. This does not take away, however, from Hyland's point that the negative attitude towards hedging readily encountered in the past is problematic and that EAP materials should work to counter any negative associations with this useful phenomenon. Also, his point that a lack of attention may lead to underhedging is potentially valid and should be taken into consideration.

Other justifications are provided by authors' work on vagueness (which is not quite the same as hedging, though definitely related, as it can be used to moderate levels of certainty). David Banks (1998) writes about the importance of vagueness, focusing on quantification in scientific journal articles. Here, the focus is on dispelling the myth that scientific writing should

strive for total objectivity and should avoid vagueness. According to Banks, a certain level of vagueness is not only acceptable in scientific discourse, it is necessary. He implies that previous assumptions which do not consider vagueness as an essential part of scientific writing should be reconfigured, stating that "it is of upmost importance that we do not allow our understanding of vague quantification in the scientific journal article to remain vague" (p. 26). He does not, however, mention the use of multiple expressions of vagueness or being overly vague.

Myers (1996) also discusses the legitimacy of vagueness, arguing that vagueness can be used strategically in academic writing. Instead of teachers telling students and editors telling authors that vagueness is to be avoided at all costs, an attempt should be made to understand how vagueness can work as a useful technique that extends the scope of a text through time and space, thus giving the writer a larger role in the reader's interpretation. Myers points out that there is such a thing as being too vague, but it's difficult to pin down. As he says "Vagueness is appropriate in some contexts, but writers have to understand how and why they are using it." (p. 12) He claims that people, especially teachers, need to take time to better define the notion of vagueness, allowing room for its intentional and appropriate use: "The question to ask in teaching is not whether an expression is vague but: For whom is it vague? Vague as opposed to what other expression? To what end is it vague?" (p. 12).

Channell (1990) also argues in favor of vagueness, saying that "the view that the precision of science and scientific language depends upon the precision of its terms is certainly very plausible, but it is none the less, I believe, a mere prejudice" (p. 95). While she does not specifically deal with multiple hedging, or over/underhedging, Channell stresses the need for a clear understanding of using vagueness appropriately to be imparted to students: "Clearly, prospective writers […] need to develop a […] sensitivity to the conventions relating to precision

versus vagueness" (p. 117). In her view, what is most important is emphasizing to students that "vagueness *is* appropriate in certain circumstances" (p. 117).

It seems that these articles, especially Hyland (1994) and Banks (1998), are so intent on arguing against the contention that hedging is to be avoided (an understandable position since, as we have seen, hedging still needs a lot of arguing for) that overhedging isn't really mentioned. John Skelton (1988a), who suggests that hedges should be broken down into two distinct classes, comments and propositions, also argues for the general importance of hedging to academic discourse. However, unlike the previously discussed authors, Skelton is quick to point out that, although a lack of sufficient attention given to hedging can certainly lead to underhedging, it may, just as importantly, lead to overhedging as well. Undergraduate students in the sciences may underhedge because they are told to be "objective and propositional," resulting in overconfident-sounding claims like "The jump in the reading was enormous and a great surprise" (p. 40). On the other end of the spectrum, the "contract of inexactitude" that hedges (or for Skelton "comments") attempt to create between writer and reader can fail to be upheld by a writer who presents a large number of comments in a given chunk of text. He cites the following example from the textbook *Reading and Thinking in English* (British Council 1980):

> Before we consider what mechanisms could possibly underlie the metal-bending effect, we must first help ourselves by starting with a brief summary of what it is that we shall have to try to explain. The multitude of the accounts make it clear that we are dealing with a genuine effect which can happen sometimes as a result of direct contact with a subject, and sometimes without it. The main action in the case of direct contact appears to be that of gentle stoking by the fingers of one hand. The length of time taken to cause an appreciable bend seems to vary, but it is normally less than thirty minutes and more than two or three; moreover, for a particular subject it can vary considerably from one day to the next. (cited in Skelton 1988a, p. 40).

It's interesting to note here that not only are a large number of hedging expressions used, but the presentation of the data is also quite inconclusive and unhelpful. One can also see that the writer uses hedging devices when they are not at all necessary, for instance by saying that the length of

time "seems to vary" and then giving direct evidence that it does indeed vary. Skelton clarifies that this overhedging is not as apparent or as off-putting to the reader as underhedging but is still problematic as it will tend to give the reader the impression that the writing is too vague. Skelton cites a "typical student response" to the previously quoted passage: "It's all up in the air, no facts, real…it's all maybe this, maybe that, he never gets down to it. It's just vague" (p. 41). As far as how much and what kinds of uncertainty are acceptable/appropriate, Skelton can only say that it is an area needing future research.

While the previously discussed articles have suggested that the lack of sufficient attention given to hedging in English style guides and EAP textbooks (and the assumption that scientific prose should be completely objective) mainly leads to underhedging, various contrastive rhetoric based studies (eg Clyne, 1991; Hinkel, 1997) suggest that NNSs writing in English have a tendency to hedge more than NS writers and that this may create an impression of excessive indirectness for NS readers. Clyne (1991), for example, shows that German-speaking scholars hedge more when writing in English than do English-speaking scholars. He claims that this is likely due to both the strong presence of hedging in German and a lack of comfort when writing in a foreign language. According to Clyne, the abundance of hedges in German authors' written English is not wrong, per se, but it can be problematic, for German-speaking author and English-speaking reader, because it does not meet the "expectations of discourse" of academic written English. (Whether or not NNSs *should* be expected to conform to the discourse expectations of academic written English is another issue—undoubtedly important, but beyond the scope of this paper).

Hinkel (1997) also provides evidence supporting the idea that NNSs L1 hedging habits may interfere with their use of hedges in English. Her article posits that NSs and NNSs use

different types of hedges at different rates, so that, while NNs use possibility hedges more than NNSs, and hedged performative verbs are used at the same rate by both groups, performative, lexical, and quality hedges are used more by NNSs. Hinkel seems to be in agreement with the consensus in saying that "what represents appropriate levels of indirectness in written and academic discourse is not always clear," (p. 363) also mentioning 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" (p. 363). Hinkel's research highlights the bind that many NNSs writing in English doubtless find themselves in: on the one hand, the hedging practices for NNSs whose native languages are indirect and vague may influence these writers to transfer these qualities onto their English prose, resulting in a piece that might strike the reader as overhedged; on the other hand, these same students may underhedge because of attempts to change made by teachers to lessen the degree of these students' indirectness—that is, precisely because they are told not to overhedge.

Level of education may also have an effect on strength and frequency of hedging, though there is no conclusive evidence. Shaw (2000) for example discusses a group of dissertation writers who tended to hedge claims that were already hedged (in other words, to use multiple hedges). For example, Shaw points out that the dissertation writers may be more likely to use phrases such as "suggesting that X may be Y" rather than "suggesting that X is Y" (p. 52). Although Shaw does not explicitly say so, this is perhaps worth remarking on because it may indicate that writers at different levels in their education may hedge with a different level of strength and frequency. In this case, the dissertation writers may be hedging more than their colleagues who have already attained a PhD. But Shaw doesn't say whether or not more experienced writers have the same tendency to add more hedges to already hedged claims, so it

is difficult to tell if this is significant. It is also interesting to note here that, as mentioned above, Skelton (1988a) shows that undergraduate students in the sciences may tend to make overconfident-sounding claims. Suggestions have been made, then, though it remains to be seen how valid they are, that lower standing on the academic totem-pole can result in both underhedging and multiple/stronger levels of hedging (perhaps overhedging as well, though the hedging that Shaw discusses is not talked of as problematic). But again, one cannot draw conclusive claims from this somewhat sparse evidence.

The situation seems quite problematic, thus, for NNSs writing academic English and/or for inexperienced writers of academic English: on the one hand these not-yet-expert (but, for the most part, not-quite-novice) writers are expected to express uncertainty appropriately, without seeming overconfident or unable to see the validity of opposing evidence; on the other, they are expected to do so without going overboard and hedging all of their claims into obscurity. Exactly where this narrow margin of correct amount/intensity of hedging is found is difficult to determine. In fact, it seems that not even experienced linguists and discourse analysts seem to be able to pin it down precisely--let alone relatively inexperienced writers (this is not a fault on the part of the experts: language itself does not take very well to matters of precision). In other words, the level of uncertainty a writer should adopt towards his or her expressions is just that: uncertain.

Some authors have attempted to delve into this subject by looking directly at levels of uncertainty in academic text. Françoise Salager-Meyer (1994) devotes some attention to the level of hedging considered acceptable in academic discourse (more specifically medical discourse, though her results can most likely be generalized, at least to other disciplines with a tendency to follow the IMRD pattern for writing research papers), claiming that “the choice of expression of

tentativeness and flexibility is dictated by the general structure of the discourse" (p. 149). In other words, the level of acceptable hedging depends on the area of the paper and the type of publication. The results of her study indicate that the Discussion section is the most heavily hedged section of a paper and the Introduction section second most heavily hedged (the Methods and Results section tend to use much less hedging). She also discusses multiple hedging, which she refers to as "compound hedges." Though she does not explicitly discuss the question of whether or not compound hedges are acceptable, her treatment of the subject indicates that she believes they are (they are certainly used in the research papers and case reports that she uses for her study). In fact, she considers compound hedges as a category of hedging, that is as a type of hedge, and places them alongside other types of hedges (such as shields, approximators, and emotionally-charged intensifiers). Why she chooses to define these compound hedges as a separate category of hedging, despite the fact that compound hedges are made up of other categories, like shields and approximators, and have no distinguishing semantic features of their own, is unclear. Compound hedges follow the general trend she establishes, occurring most frequently in the Discussion section, relatively frequently in the Introduction section, and not very frequently in the Methods and Results sections. The reason for the strong presence of compound hedges in the Discussion section is, according to Salager-Meyer, due to the fact that, "It is in this last section of research papers that writers speculate, argue, contrast, and extrapolate from the described results, and at the same time avoid stating results too conclusively"(p. 163). The stronger need to demonstrate levels of uncertainty which occurs in the Discussion section calls for a greater amount of hedges. A strong level of uncertainty, thus, seems to be acceptable and even expected in research papers, but, Salager-Meyer points out, popularization articles and texts-books are expected to avoid any strong levels of hedging (she cites an example: " 'this

suggests the possibility' is replaced by 'they discovered' " (p. 165)). Evidence supporting Salager-Meyer's proposal that the strongest and most frequent use of hedging appears in the Introduction and Conclusion/Discussion section is also validated by research done Martìn-Martìn and Burgess (2004) in their study on academic criticism in research article abstracts and by David Banks's (1994b) book chapter "Some Hedges."

In addition to Skelton (1988a) and Salager-Meyer (1994), several other researchers have dealt directly with multiple hedging. Clyne (1991), for example, directly focuses on multiple hedging, which he refers to most often as "double hedging" (also mentioning "triple hedging" once or twice). Clyne looks at the use of hedging in a corpus of 52 texts, a compilation of English texts written by both English-speaking and German-speaking authors and of German texts by Germans. As mentioned previously, the German-speaking authors hedge more than the English-speaking authors, both when writing in English and when writing in German, and this trend is the same for the use of multiple hedges. In fact, the results of Clyne's data indicate that the use of multiple hedging is a great deal lower for English-speaking authors. This is surprising, seeing as, for example, multiple hedges occurred so frequently in Salager-Meyer's (1994) study that she designated them as a distinct category of hedges and that David Banks (1994a and 1994b), as will be discussed in more detail later, sees double hedges so frequently that he is able to determine their collocation patterns—certainly such an uncommon phenomenon as Clyne makes double hedging out to be wouldn't have its own set of collocations . One might guess that the large difference between use of hedging for German-speaking and English-speaking scholars results from extremely large amounts of hedges in German authors' work, but this is not the case, according to Clyne; hedging devices in texts by English speakers occurred an average of only 6.25 times (with the German authors' texts at a much higher average of 24 instances). Clyne does

not clarify what percentage of the texts is made up of hedges, but as he is examining published works, including articles and conference papers, it is reasonable to assume that the percentage rate of hedging expressions for English-speaking authors would come out to be quite low, especially in comparison to the percentages given elsewhere: Salager-Meyer (1994) gave hedging expressions an occurrence rate of 13% "with respect to the total number of running words in each division" for the Discussion section of research papers (p. 155-157). Clyne also claims that multiple hedges of greater than two hedging expressions ("triple hedges", etc) were completely absent from the texts by English speakers, though not from the texts by German speakers, which is a bit difficult to believe and, if true, is probably a result of the small size of the corpus. Hyland's large corpus corpus of 240 research articles provides a significant number of triple hedges, such as "This might seem to help explain why it is that (2) is true but (2*) is not" and "While teachers might be able to suggest a number of strategies that students may find helpful…" (depending on one's definition of hedging, these examples could contain even more than three hedges). However, while Clyne's figures on hedging in the texts of English speakers may be a bit hard to accept (given the conflicting results of other studies), his point that German speakers hedge more frequently and more strongly than English speakers is well-taken. We have already seen that hedging may not be adequately explained to non-native English speakers, so it is completely understandable that German authors attempt to transfer their knowledge of hedging in German (which is strong and frequent, according to Clyne) into English, and perhaps in doing so they end up overhedging their claims. The idea of linguistic transfer leading to overhedging (or at least a greater occurrence of multiple hedges) is also demonstrated by Hinkel (1997), as discussed previously.

Perhaps the most direct address of multiple hedges occurs in David Banks' (1994b) book *Writ in Water: Aspects of the Scientific Journal Article* and in his article "Hedges and How to Trim Them" (1994a). Chapter 8 of Banks (1994b), "Some Hedges" discusses certain multiple-hedge collocations that may be noted. (These collocations are also discussed in Banks 1994a). Banks lists the following a typical combinations of hedging devices: lexical verbs linked to modal auxiliaries by the use of the modal in a subordinate clause following the lexical verb; a lexical verb and an adverb; a verb plus complement reinforcement; a modal auxiliary and an adverb; a periphrastic modal and an adverb; a complex noun group; and, most commonly, a lexical verb with hedging content combined with a modal auxiliary. In "Hedges and How to Trim Them" (1994), the results of Banks's corpus study of eleven scientific articles results in "58 sentences which possess more than one hedging device" (p. 587). He calls these multiple hedges "fertilized." He also speaks of "trimmed" hedges, which are de-emphasized hedges or combinations of hedges and "boosters" (as defined in Hyland 2004). According to his research, fertilized hedges are much more common and occur in many more varieties than do trimmed hedges. He sums up by saying "A hedged style has become a requirement of scientific journals" (591). One can assume that Banks' descriptive study of multiple-hedge collocations carries with it the implication that using double hedges is perfectly acceptable, and this last citation seems to affirm the idea. Indeed, most of the research examined here which mentions double or multiple hedging in one way or another (except that done by Clyne) carries a similar implication; however, neither Banks nor any of the other researchers make any judgment as to how much hedging is acceptable in a given proposition.

Now that we have considered the treatment of multiple hedging in the research literature, let us move to a brief overview of some textbooks used for teaching academic writing, which

will not only give examples of the different extents to which hedging is covered in textbooks (which is explained in much more detail by Hyland 1994) but will also give an indication of whether or not textbooks devote time or focus to multiple hedging and the question of its acceptability or to underhedging and overhedging as potential problem areas for students. *Writing in the Sciences* (1998) gives a comparatively large amount of attention to hedges which it refers to as "qualifiers." The book places emphasis on the importance of careful conclusions and acknowledging uncertainty giving examples of verbs, adverbs and adverbial phrases, and modal auxiliaries which can be used for this purpose and providing several practice exercises. It mentions underhedging as a problem but not overhedging. There is also no mention of multiple hedging mentioned.

Another text, *Responses to ESP* (1997), does briefly mention hedging, though it does not give as much attention to the phenomenon as does *Writing in the Sciences*. In the section "Some features of scientific English" Alastair Sharp provides a list of "some of the features generally recognized as being important in scientific discourse" one of which is modals. Modals are mentioned as essential for hedging (which is very briefly explained as "the modification of language to limit the strength of a knowledge claim") but there is no mention of other types of hedges. A short exercise is given, but there is no mention of underhedging or overhedging.

Perhaps the best overall coverage of hedging that I found occurs in *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* by Swales and Feak (2004). Unit 4 of the book, which focuses on data commentary, has a section explaining qualification and strength of claim (which includes hedging devices, though the term *hedging* is not directly used). The book clarifies that it is problematic to describe rather than comment, but it is also problematic to "draw unjustified conclusions," and therefore it is important to find the right strength of claim, to be cautious in

expressing a claim, and to know what expressions to use. Words which can be used to express probability, distance, and generalization are given and discussed, and there is also a section on "weaker verbs" (examples are given). The book also mentions that these expressions can be combined (multiple hedging)—that is, multiple hedging is an acceptable and useful strategy—but it should not be overdone, or no claim will be made at all, as in "It could be concluded that some evidence seems to suggest that at least certain villagers might not have traded their pottery with others outside the community" (p.129). It is the only textbook of those that I've examined which mentions multiple hedging (as an acceptable strategy) and discusses both overhedging and underhedging.

But again the question arises: where do we draw the line between being "confidently uncertain" (Skelton 1988b, cited in Swales and Feak) and overdoing it? So far, we have examined the treatment of multiple hedging and its link to overhedging and underhedging in research literature and EAP textbooks, yet we have found no concrete answers to these questions. This brings me at last to my research, which attempts to provide some sort of answer to this question of how often multiple hedging is done and to examine the judgments of different groups within the academic world on how seldom or frequently hedging should occur. To get an idea of how often multiple hedging is done, I've looked at select expressions in the Hyland Corpus, which contains 240 research articles coming from 8 different academic fields. To get an idea of the level of hedging people consider appropriate and to see if level of education or native/non-native speaker distinction affects attitudes towards hedging (and, one can assume, therefore use of hedging) I've conducted a survey of 3 different academic groups at the University of Michigan: teachers of academic writing, NS undergraduate students, and NNS graduate students. It is now appropriate to explain these in more detail and provide the results of my research.

IV. Methods, Results, and Analysis

To get an idea of the frequency with which multiple hedging occurs, I turned to the Hyland Corpus. Since examining every proposition of each of the 240 articles in the corpus for the presence of hedging devices is not a realistic goal, it was necessary for me to choose certain expressions and examine their overall frequency and the presence of hedging expressions in their immediate context using the Wordsmith concordance feature. First, in order to get an indication of how frequently hedged expressions occur in the environment of at least one other hedge, I examined the modal verb *might* and the probability adverb *perhaps*. I chose these two expressions because, unlike some of their counterparts, they are almost always used as hedges and thus should give a good starting ground to the present research. The results follow. A Wordsmith search yielded a total of 868 entries for the word *might*. I examined these 868 and deleted the irrelevant entries: there are some transcripts of speech in the corpus, which I chose not to include in my analysis as I am attempting to focus on academic writing; there a number of instances in which the given hedging expression occurs within a citation (I chose not to include these in my analysis because they don't really contribute to the overall strength of hedging in the claim); and finally, it seems that a Wordsmith search turns up a few repeated examples, which I tried to be aware of and exclude. After deleting these entries I was left with 810 examples, of which I examined the surrounding context (attempting to read at least the sentence the word occurred in), searching for other hedging expressions. My criteria as to what linguistic devices I included as hedges are defined earlier in the paper. It is also worth mentioning at this point that, although there has been some suggestion that hedging devices can carry over from one expression to another (Skelton 1988b), to avoid inflating the results of my data, I included only

those hedges which fell in the same sentence as the word *might*. I was able to find another expression of hedging in the same sentence as the word *might* for 328 of the 810 *might* entries; this yields a percentage rate of 40.49%. I followed the same criteria in my examination of the *perhaps* entries, and found that 103 of the 282 relevant examples contained an instance of another hedging expression within the same sentence as the word *perhaps*—a percentage of 36.52. In other words, around 40% of the hedged *might* and *perhaps* expressions were in fact instances of double hedging—a much, much larger figure than that given by Clyne (1991). This is a substantial figure, examining over 1000 corpus entries. Even if I had been using a very broad definition of hedging, which I have been clear to point out I did not in fact use, 40% is a significantly large enough amount to warrant the claim that, not only is double hedging acceptable, it is quite common. The results of the *might* and *perhaps* search give us the beginning of an awareness of the rate of occurrence of double-hedges among already hedged expressions, but what of stronger types of hedges? How common or rare are triple hedges, for example? In an attempt to answer these question, I chose to look directly at an expression of double hedging—the "may + hedging lexical verb" feature mentioned as one double-hedge collocation by Banks (1994a and 1994b) to see both how often this collocation appears in the total number of *may* entries, and to see if it tells us anything about triple hedging. The results of my findings are as follows. A Wordsmith search produces a total number of 2256 entries for the word "may"; after narrowing down these entries so that I was left only with the entries where *may* was followed by a weak lexical verb, I was left with 87 entries. This puts the percentage of *may* entries taking the "may + weak lexical verb" form at approximately 4%. It is important to emphasize here that this percentage is in no way meant to suggest the overall percentage of double or multiple hedging in the *may* entries; many of the entries deleted in this specific analysis contained other hedging

devices than weak lexical verbs and thus, though they provided examples of multiply-hedged constructions, were not included in the present results. The overall percentage of *may* expressions which are doubly or multiply-hedged is therefore much higher than 4%--likely somewhere closer to 40%, as suggested by the *might* and *perhaps* entries results. It is also important to point out here that I considered only a rather narrow set of verbs to be "weak" and therefore hedges. That is, my decisions regarding whether or not to consider a lexical verb as "weak," were quite a bit more selective than other researcher's have been, and only included verbs with a very weak level of assertion. For example, I did not include *indicate*—the hedging status of which has been debated (Johns 2001) or other more "questionable" verbs. Had I included every non-factive verb encountered in the data (as Crompton1997) does in his taxonomy of hedging), I would have had a much higher figure of between 300 and 400 entries (13.3 % of all *may* entries for 300 entries) fitting the "may + hedging lexical verb" structure. As it is, though, I selected only 87 "may +lexical verb" entries, and of these 87, 26 entries—29.9%—had an additional hedging device in the same sentence. Again, this is quite a significant number. The data set is perhaps a bit too small to allow for any definite conclusions, but this preliminary analysis places the rate of triple hedging at around 30% of all double-hedged expressions. It would be interesting to examine as well the occurrence of even larger congregations of hedging expressions (i.e. quadruple hedging) to see where this relatively strong occurrence rate drops off). These results show that, despite the narrow criteria I assumed in looking at the data, the presence of multiple hedges in academic text is quite strong; double hedging may occur as commonly as in 40% of hedged expressions, and triple hedging seems to occur at around a rate of 30% of double hedged expressions.

Next, let us turn to the survey. For this, an authentic academic article (Martìn-Martìn & Burgess 2004) that makes use of hedges was chosen and each of the hedges in the first 7 paragraphs of the Discussion/Conclusion section was highlighted and dropped into a multiple-choice format where hedges of greater and lower strength framed the original. Survey respondents were then asked to choose which of the multiple-choice expressions seemed most appropriate to the sentence, without knowing what expression actually occurred in the original. There were a total of 29 multiple-choice sets, a double-hedged choice was given in 17 of these 29 sets. There were 4 double-hedge expressions in this section of the original article and all 4 were presented as options in the relevant multiple-choice set. There were three groups of respondents (all of which work or study at the University of Michigan): four undergraduate students in the school of LS&A, all of which are native speakers of English; nine non-native English speaker graduate students from various fields; and eight teachers of academic writing at UofM's English Language Institute (a center for ESL teaching, testing, and research). In considering the completed surveys, I attempted to assess several elements: one is how likely the respondents were to choose double-hedged expressions as an appropriate choice (and to compare these choices to the double-hedged expressions in the original; another is the level of conformity among the respondents' answers (in other words, were the respondents' answers likely to match up? Or were the respondents at least likely to consistently choose a weak rather than a strong expression or a strong expression rather than a weak expression for a given multiple-choice set); another is whether or not any of the groups had a strong tendency to consistently choose stronger or weaker expressions than the original expression (this could indicate a tendency to underhedge or overhedge); and, of course, I did my best to note any other interesting trends in the data. The results from each group are given, followed by a comparison of the different groups' results.

We start with an examination of the NS undergraduate group. The four undergrads picked a total of 5 double-hedged expressions (several of which were picked by more than one person for a total of 11) as an appropriate choice; three of the respondents chose 2 double-hedges and the other respondent chose 5, giving a group average of 2.75 double-hedges chosen as acceptable by each person. Of the 11 chosen as acceptable, only 2 were not double hedges in the original. In other words, the undergraduates usually chose double-hedged expressions where a double-hedge appeared in the original. However, only 3 of the 4 originally double-hedged expressions resulted in a double-hedged choice by the undergrads. Specifically, the double hedge "may imply" which appeared in the original was never chosen, and a stronger expression always selected instead. It is interesting to note as well that the undergrads had a strong tendency to correspondingly select expressions that were either weaker/same or stronger/same than the original. In other words, for only 3 of the 29 multiple choice selections was there disagreement over whether the appropriate expression should be stronger or weaker than the original. In addition to the 3 expressions over which there was conflict, 12 of the expressions were chosen as weaker or the same, 12 were chosen as stronger or the same, and for 2 of the expressions, only the exact same expression was chosen as appropriate by the undergrads. Although the undergraduate sample may be a bit too small to offer definite conclusions, one can note some interesting features of this data. One is that, overall, the undergrads seem to have a sense of how much hedging is appropriate in a given clause, with many of their answers matching the original expression and most others differing from the original only by one or two degrees of strength. Another is that, given their equal tendency to choose a stronger or weaker expression, they seem unlikely to suffer from a tendency to underhedge or overhedge. Indeed, if anything, the undergraduates may have a tendency not necessarily to underhedge, but perhaps to avoid the use of double-hedges, as their

average number of double-hedged expressions chosen was a bit lower than the number of double-hedged expressions in the original. However, the general results of the study show that the undergraduates have a fairly good grasp on hedging techniques (at least in recognition, one can't conclude in regards to production from the results of this survey) and the fact that they have chosen a few double-hedge expressions here and there shows that, though they may not always believe it the best option, they consider double-hedging the appropriate choice in some cases.

Next, let's turn to the NNS graduate students. It is worth mentioning that all of the graduate students in this group are presently taking an ELI class to help with their dissertation writing, indicating that they have either a need for or an interest in ameliorating their EAP skills. The nine graduate students picked 4 double-hedged expressions as the most appropriate choice (several which were chosen more than once for a total of 15), with an average of 1.666 double-hedges selected as appropriate by each person. Only 2 double-hedged expressions which were not double hedges in the original were chosen as the most appropriate. Just as with the undergraduate group, the majority of the double-hedge selections were double-hedges in the original article as well. However, 2 of the 4 expressions which were double-hedges in the original were never chosen by the grad students; instead, a stronger selection was always chosen in its place: "may imply," which was also never chosen by the undergrad group, and "would seem." Perhaps the modal complexity of the expression "would seem" was a bit difficult to interpret for the NNSs, leading them to instead choose a more straightforward option like "seems." The grad students also evidenced a tendency to agree on whether an expression, if it differed at all from its original, should be weaker or stronger than the original. In 6 of the 29 expressions there was some disagreement—at least one person chose a stronger option while at

least one other chose a weaker option, but the other 23 expressions showed agreement. For 13 of these, the grad students chose the same expression or a stronger one, for 9 of these the grad students chose a weaker expression, and for 1 of these, every grad student chose the same expression as that in the original.

Let us turn finally to the ELI writing teachers, eight of whom responded to the survey. 12 different double-hedges were picked as appropriate by the teachers (as with the other groups, several of these expressions were picked by more than one person for a total of 32 double-hedge expressions selected). In the case of the teachers, all 4 of the originally double-hedged expressions were selected as appropriate by at least one person—though the groups of teachers conformed with the other groups in that "may imply" was chosen very infrequently—only twice. The other 3 originally double-hedged expressions appeared quite often among the double-hedge selections, and in addition to these 4 originally double-hedged expressions, 6 other double-hedges were chosen by at least one person (and, interestingly, in many cases by more than one person). The average number of double-hedge expressions per person for the teachers is 4.125—much higher than both other groups and very close to the original number of double-hedges. It is interesting to note here, however, that while the average fell at around 4 double-hedged expressions, only a couple of teachers' choices fell in range of this number. In other words, while some teachers picked 6, 7, or as many as 8 double-hedged expressions as appropriate choices, others chose only 2 double-hedges as good options, and in two cases, only 1 double-hedge was selected. This indicates that personal style perhaps plays a role in hedging, though to what extent, and whether this is a feature only of EAP teachers and not EAP students is not clear. Moving on, the teachers also, unsurprisingly, showed a strong likelihood to agree, in the case of difference from the original, on whether an expression should be stronger than the original expression or

weaker than it. For 5 of the multiple choice sets there was some disagreement, but the remainder showed consensus: in 9 sets, the appropriate expression was chosen as stronger than or the same as the original, in 13 cases, a weaker (or the same) expression was chosen, and in 2 cases, only the original expression was chosen as the appropriate option. This falls in interesting contrast to the ELI students, whose results were the exact opposite: 9 were chosen as weaker or the same and 13 as stronger or the same.

In sum, the average number of double-hedged expressions selected as appropriate choices was highest for the teachers, a bit lower for the undergraduate native speakers, and lowest for the ELI students. No group had a significant tendency to choose stronger expressions rather than weaker expressions or the original (which could indicate a tendency to underhedge) or vice versa (which could indicate a tendency to overhedge)—though the small differences pointed out above may have some significance; for example, if we can consider the tendency to choose expressions of a certain level of strength as evidence of use, it is possible that ELI students use stronger language/less hedging in their writing than ELI teachers. It is not clear if this stronger use of language would be a problem, but it would not hurt to make the ELI students aware of this tendency and to clarify that multiple hedges are a useful and acceptable strategy. We have seen also that each group has a tendency to follow the same patterns (all going strong/same or weak/same the majority of the time); the ELI students have the strongest level of disagreement, but they are closely followed by the ELI teachers, so it's probably not a result of their lack of knowledge of the language (the disagreement among ELI teachers may also be a result of stylistic preferences, as discussed earlier in connection with the average number of double-hedges chosen by the ELI teachers). Assuming that teachers have authority on the subject, (which, it must be emphasized, is indeed an assumption) the fact that the ELI teachers chose

double hedges more than any other group may indicate that both groups of students are not using double hedges as much as they should, or at least could. Also, the ELI teachers' double-hedge selection average is the closest of the three groups' averages to the actual number of double hedges in the original article—a bit of evidence for their perhaps greater understanding of the phenomenon, though one can not draw conclusions on rights to authority from this little bit of evidence. Although not many options were given, triple hedges were never chosen by any of the groups, indicating that they're not terribly common (recall that the Hyland data showed they were certainly acceptable—that is, they occurred, but that they occur significantly less frequently than double hedges. While the undergrads and ELI students would likely benefit from a clearer understanding of hedging practices, it is not my intention here to give the impression that the situation is grave and serious for these students. First of all, although the student respondents examined here tended to select multiple-hedges as appropriate options at a lower rate than the teachers and at a lower rate than that which occurred in the actual article, the rate of difference was not so large as to be alarming, and, although I'd like to think that the results of the survey give some indication of actual use in the respondents' own writing, this does not necessarily mean the students will be perceived as underhedgers. Secondly, although the rhetorical culture of the US has tendency to put a lot of the onus, in the case the communicative burden, onto the writer, we should remember that many readers make allowances and would likely not be overly disturbed by a bit too much indirectness or a bit too much directness; as long as students aren't making unwarranted dangerous claims in their writing or hedging so much they make no claim at all, no great damage has been done.

In this section we have examined the frequency of double-hedging among hedged expressions and the presence of triple hedging among double-hedged expressions through a

corpus search, and we have looked at attitudes towards multiple hedging by both students (native and non-native English speakers) and teachers of EAP and have made some inferences about levels of multiple-hedge use among these groups.

V. Conclusion

We have established quite strongly that, no matter what beliefs were held in the past, and no matter what disapproving attitudes remain today, hedging is a common, legitimate, and useful rhetorical strategy. We have also established that multiple hedging, though it can be overdone, occurs quite frequently and is a useful technique for expressing strong degrees of uncertainty. Hyland's corpus of academic research articles has shown us that hedged expressions occur in the presence of another hedge up to 40% of the time, and that these double hedges are in fact triple hedges somewhere around 30% of the time. We have also seen that, although students may use multiple hedging less, double-hedges are considered acceptable options by students and teachers of academic writing. Further research could attempt to assess students writing, looking to see if multiple hedging does indeed occur less than in the writing of so-called experts; research into the influence of stylisitic preference on the use of hedging could also be beneficial. Pedagogical theories and their practical counterparts, textbooks, should take research such as the present into account, and more textbooks would do good to follow in line with *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* by mentioning multiple hedging as a useful and appropriate option. In the end, it seems that, despite what some researchers may think and despite any lingering pejorative connotations associated with hedging, hedged expressions, including multiply-hedged ones, are, as Banks (1994) says "a requirement of scientific journals" and an important technique for any scholar of EAP to have up her sleeve. As it may be difficult for less experienced writers to

consistently select an appropriate level of hedging (due to the nuances of lexical selection), teachers and EAP teaching materials must strive to make it as clear to students as possible where this comfortable middle ground is found. It is my hope that studies like the current one will help to turn this goal into actuality.

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