'This is not criticism, but...'

SOFTENING CRITICISM: THE USE OF LEXICAL HEDGES IN ACADEMIC SPOKEN INTERACTION

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1 INTRODUCTION

When people talk, is it just information that is being exchanged? A traditional view on language saw the exchange of information as the sole purpose of human communication. Nowadays, however, it is widely recognized that spoken language performs a variety of other tasks, too. These tasks can be divided into two broad categories, one covering the exchange of information and the other interpersonal aspects of communication. In other words, when we speak, our words do not only convey meaning but carry interpersonal messages as well.

One way of conveying interpersonal messages in spoken interaction is hedging. Hedging is a communicative strategy which enables speakers to, for example, soften the force of their utterances (Nikula 1997: 188) in order to make them more acceptable to the interlocutor. Certain speech acts such as criticisms are often hedged because in an unhedged form they might sound threatening to the hearer and therefore be likely to be rejected. This becomes clear when considering the following examples of criticism:

> You are mistaken.
> *I think* you *might* be mistaken.

The second example contains two hedges: a lexical expression *I think* and a modal verb *might*. These help to mitigate the content of the utterance thus making it less threatening to the hearer. As can be seen, hedging is closely related to politeness. When we hedge our utterances in order not to sound too direct or rude, we are performing 'facework'.

The concept of face in social interaction was first introduced by Goffman in 1960s and further developed by Brown and Levinson in 1970s and 1980s. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness includes the notion of face which is “something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (1987: 61). Thus when we hedge, we attend to the face wants of our interlocutor and of ourselves. I will return to the concept of face in more detail in chapter 4.

As hedging is such a central strategy in maintaining interpersonal relations, is it a universal feature of human languages? Face wants as such are claimed to be universal (Brown and Levinson 1987: 13) and therefore hedging can be assumed to be found in all languages. The surface forms hedging takes, however, vary considerably between different languages (Nikula 1997: 188). In today's world, where communication across language boundaries has become an everyday practice, this can create problems for many. We have internalized the conventions of our native tongue but do we know how to hedge in a foreign language? This question becomes especially important in settings in which fluent language use is the norm. Such settings include, for example, the academic world which has become increasingly international over the years.

For this Pro Gradu thesis, I have looked at the use of hedges in academic spoken interaction, more precisely the use of hedges when giving criticism in face-to-face interaction. I have compared two groups of English-speakers. One group consisted of native speakers of English who speak American English. The other group included non-native speakers of English who came from a variety of language backgrounds. The members of the latter group used English as a common language as they did not share a first language. English was thus used as a lingua franca (ELF). Henceforth I will refer to the non-native speakers as ELF-speakers.

The objective of my study was, firstly, to see how the two groups use hedges when giving criticism in face-to-face situations. Secondly, I wanted to see if there were any distinct features that characterized the way ELF-speakers used hedges as compared to the native speaker group.

It was interesting to compare the way these two groups used hedges. There are varying opinions as to how considerate and polite ELF-speakers in general are. On one hand, it is argued that ELF-speakers are content-oriented and therefore their language is lacking in interactional features, such as hedges (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 65 – 66). On the other hand, it has also been claimed that ELF-users are particularly sensitive and co-operative language users because of the unfamiliarity with the cultural norms of the interlocutors (Mauranen 2003: 517). A comparative study between ELF-speakers and native speakers

of English should be able to reveal which of the two views is valid when it comes to the use of hedges in academic spoken interaction.

The study consists of a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part first presents hedges: their forms and functions, focusing on the politeness function they have. The characteristics of hedging in the academic discourse community will also be discussed. Secondly, politeness theory and its view of hedging will be presented. The main politeness theory referred to in this thesis is that of Brown and Levinson (1987). Lastly I will discuss English as a lingua franca (ELF), its characteristics and role in today's international world.

The empirical part of the study consists of a comparative qualitative study in which I look at doctoral thesis defences of both native speakers and ELF-speakers. I analyse the language used at these thesis defences, focusing especially on the use of lexical hedges when giving criticism. The aim is to find out how many lexical hedges are used, which expressions are most frequently used, and how all the lexical hedges can be grouped into larger categories. Based on the findings I analyse how the use of lexical hedges between the two speaker groups differs and possibly try to establish any patterns that might characterize the language of ELF-speakers.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this study were the following:

1. How do ELF-speakers and native speakers of English use lexical hedges as a politeness strategy when giving criticism in doctoral thesis defences?
2. What characterizes the way ELF-speakers use lexical hedges as a politeness strategy in academic spoken interaction?

My preliminary hypothesis was that lexical hedges would be used when giving critical comments by both native speakers and ELF-speakers. This view is supported by Brown and Levinson (1987), who see politeness in language use as something universal and present in all human languages. Although ELF is clearly not a language of its own, there is no reason why this statement of Brown and Levinson could not be applied to ELF as well. In addition to the point of view of politeness, using hedges is also very typical of academic discourse, as it is “a world of uncertainties, indirectness, and non-finality” (Mauranen 1997: 115). Therefore I did not expect, for example, the language of ELF-speakers to be void of hedges despite its possible tendency to content-orientedness (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 65 – 66).

Furthermore, I expected ELF-speakers to hedge less than native speakers. However, I did not assume that this 'lack' of hedges would result in any pragmatic failure as native speaker interaction with scarce hedging might (see Nikula 1997: 188). Exactly what expressions would be used as hedges and what their amount would be was hard to predict. I expected native speakers to resort to a broader range of hedging expressions as they are using their first language and thus lack of language competence should not limit their choice of hedging expressions. ELF-speakers, on the other hand, might use novel expressions that do not exist in the native speaker data. Despite this, I expected there to be less variation in the ELF-data.

3 HEDGING

In this section, I first present the background and origins of the term 'hedge'. Secondly, I discuss what hedging exactly is in more detail, presenting both form-based and function-based definitions. Thirdly, I establish the working definition of a hedge used in this thesis. Lastly, some features of hedging in academic discourse are discussed.

3.1 Background

The origins of the term 'hedge' go back to 1970s and to G. Lakoff who first introduced the term in 1972. He used the term to refer to words that “make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (1972: 195). In this original sense of the word, hedging referred only to expressions such as *kind of, sort of* or *rather* which could be used to, for example, modify a degree of membership (Markkanen and Schröder 1997: 4). An example of this would be a phrase such as 'a rose is *kind of* a flower', in which the hedge *kind of* modifies the relationship between roses and flowers in general. As Clemen points out, Lakoff was mainly concerned with the logical relationships of words and the semantic aspect of hedging (1997: 238). Lakoff did not consider context to be important for giving hedges their meaning but saw hedges as independent lexical items with the capacity to make things 'fuzzier' (Clemen 1997: 238).

Lakoff's pioneering ideas have been further developed by a number of linguists. They have generally adopted a broader view on hedging, considering it not only a semantic phenomenon but also a pragmatic one (Mauranen 2004: 173). In other words, hedges are no longer seen as conveying only inexactitude (e.g. a rose is *kind of* a flower) but contributing to pragmatic strategies, such as politeness or mitigation, as well.

An illustrative example of this is the study by Prince et al. (1982) in which spoken medical discourse was analysed. First, all hedges in the material were identified. After that they were divided into two categories: *approximators* and *shields*. In their study, approximators were hedges that made the propositional content itself fuzzier. Shields,

on the other hand, were hedges that introduced fuzziness between the propositional content and the speaker, thus enabling the speaker to signal uncertainty and a lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition (Prince et al. 1982: 94). The division of hedges into approximators and shields that Prince et al. introduced resembles the semantic/pragmatic division referred to above. (For a more detailed discussion of the study by Prince et al., see e.g. Crompton 1997).

Over the years, hedging has been studied from various viewpoints (e.g. cross cultural comparisons, gender studies, translation studies, politeness theory, academic discourse). What these more recent studies have in common is the fact that they mostly emphasize the pragmatic aspects of hedging and see hedging as an important strategy in interpersonal communication. Some theorists even question the logic of splitting hedges into semantic/pragmatic categories such as approximators and shields in the example above. Markkanen and Schröder express their opinion as follows: "it can be asked what end this division serves - - [both] perform the same function of expressing indetermination, of making sentences more acceptable to the hearer and thus increasing their chances of ratification" (1997: 5).

In this thesis, hedging was studied as a politeness strategy in interpersonal communication. I adopted a similar approach to that of Markkanen and Schröder in the above quote, which means that hedges encountered in the material were not classified by semantic/pragmatic grounds. All hedges were seen as increasing indetermination and thus contributing to interpersonal concerns.

3.2 What is hedging?

Hedges are an interesting linguistic category in the sense that it is extremely difficult to narrow down what hedging expressions are. In the field of hedging studies, there is little clarity or agreement as to what counts as a hedge. In different studies hedges are defined differently, which reflects the difficulty of pinpointing what exactly a hedge is. As Brown and Levinson conclude:"hedging can be achieved in indefinite numbers of surface forms" (1987: 146). These surface forms can range from single lexical items to

syntactic structures, which does not ease the task of establishing a definition. Hedges can also appear alone or in clusters. They get their meaning from context and therefore it is not possible to make any 'lists of hedges' (Clemen 1997: 236, 243; Nikula 1997: 190). This is why in this study hedges were also studied with discourse analysis which enabled the analysis of the context as well.

Despite the difficulties in establishing definitions of hedges, there is some agreement in the field as to which words or expressions are often used as hedges. In the following the most prominent definitions are presented. Hedges have been defined both according to their forms and functions. I will first present definitions based on the forms of hedges and then go on to discuss definitions based on the functions hedges perform.

In his article on hedging in academic writing, Crompton (1997) provides a comprehensive overview of the forms generally considered to be hedges. The researchers whose work Crompton discusses are Skelton (1988b), Myers (1989), Salager-Meyer (1994) and Hyland (1994). In his overview, Crompton distinguishes between forms recognized by several of these researches and those recognized by only one (1997: 280). The forms several researchers agree upon are

- copulas other than *be* (e.g. The result *appears to be* that..)
- lexical verbs (e.g. The result *suggests* that...)
- modal verbs (e.g. The result *might* be that...)
- probability adverbs (e.g. The result *possibly* is that...)
- probability adjectives (e.g. It is *possible* that the result...)
  (Crompton 1997: 280, examples added).

In addition to these core forms, hedging has also been thought to occur in, for example, all clause initial adverbs (Skelton 1988b), all devices suggesting an alternative (Myers 1989), lexis expressing personal involvement (Salager-Meyer 1994), *if* clauses, time adverbials, and passives (Hyland 1994). As can be seen even from this small sample of references, the scope of what is considered to be a hedge varies considerably. This is the case even if all the above researchers were mainly focused on hedges used in academic

written discourse. In spoken discourse, hedging adopts slightly different forms again. The core forms mentioned above are found in spoken discourse, but in addition to those, forms such as tag questions, hesitation markers and prosodic strategies come into play as well (Hyland 1998: 3).

Resulting from the difficulty of establishing a comprehensive definition of the forms hedges can take, several function-based definitions have been put forward by linguists. In fact, a function-based approach might be the only way to grasp the essence of hedging. As Crompton points out: “without such a [function-based] definition, the term designates a 'rag-bag' category of features - - understood by different people in different ways” (1997: 281). In the literature, hedges are most commonly thought to either express a lack of commitment to the truth of something the speaker utters (e.g. Lyons 1977: 797; Coates 1987: 112; Markkanen and Schröder 1989: 172; Hyland 1998: 3) or alternatively to soften the force of the speaker's utterance in order to make it more acceptable to the hearer (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987: 146; Nikula 1997: 188). The latter function emphasizes the interpersonal politeness aspect of hedging.

Although the different functions of hedging can be separated from one another, it is important to remember that these functions can, and in fact often do, overlap (Mauranen 2004: 176). Some linguists even prefer to see the functions of hedging as overlapping without any clear-cut distinctions. This kind of an approach has been adopted at least by Luukka and Markkanen who see hedging as a superstrategy with several sub-strategies (1997: 168) in their study on impersonalization as a form of hedging.

Considering the array of different definitions of hedges, it is hardly surprising that studies of hedging generally begin with an elaborate account of what is considered a hedge in that particular study. These definitions often incorporate limitations of both the forms as well as functions to be studied, which is necessary as the forms are an open-ended category and the functions are manifold, too.

3.3 Hedges in this study: a working definition

For this study, I have also established a working definition of a hedge. In this study, I am looking at hedges that can be called *lexical hedges*. Lexical hedges are expressions that carry a lexical content. The word lexical also helps to differentiate hedges with a lexical content from, for instance, prosodic or syntactic hedges (for a similar use see e.g. Nikula 1997), which will not be studied in this paper. Some examples of lexical hedges would be *I think, maybe, kind/sort of, might, or something like that, more or less*, to name but a few. Lexical hedges can thus consist of a single word or be multiword constructions. As noted in the beginning of the discussion on the definitions of hedges, it is important to remember that hedges get their meaning from context and therefore no expression can be said to always occur as a hedge (Clemen 1997: 236, 243; Nikula 1997: 190).

The term *lexical hedge* derives from earlier research, namely that of Nikula (1997). She used the scope of lexical hedges to study the use of hedges by Finnish non-native speakers of English. Nikula points out that "focusing on lexical devices provides a good starting point for analysing hedging behaviour of non-native speakers" (1997: 190). I agree with Nikula and therefore chose to analyse precisely lexical hedges in this study as well. The analysis of lexical hedges provides a broad view on language used to soften critical comments. Therefore it enables the researcher to form an understanding of how non-native use of hedges might differ from that of native speakers. Focusing on, for example, prosodic hedges or even syntactic hedges, such as passives or *if* clauses, would not offer such an elaborate account of hedging as concentrating on lexical hedges does.

For determining which lexical items in my data are in fact lexical hedges, I will use discourse analysis as a method. In addition to that, I will also use a test similar to the 'test of a hedge' presented by Crompton (1997: 281-282). Crompton's test is very simple but can be helpful in determining whether a lexical item is a hedge or not. The test consists of the following 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. (The *hedges* are any language items in the original which would need to be changed to increase commitment.)"(Crompton 1997: 282)

Crompton wrote this test especially in connection with academic writing and therefore discusses 'author's commitment'. However, the test is valid for spoken discourse as well. It has been used for example by Burrough-Boenisch in her study on hedging in Dutch scientific English (2005).

This test Crompton devised serves as a model for the test I am using in my own research. I cannot use Crompton's test as such because it focuses only on propositions and hedges that make them fuzzier. This category would be similar to the 'approximators' used by Prince et al. (1982). In my study, I am not only interested in lexical hedges that make the propositions themselves fuzzier but also in those that make the relationship between the speaker and the utterance fuzzier. In the terminology of Prince et al. (1982) these would then be 'shields'. The test I am using for the present study is thus the following:

> "Can the potential lexical hedge be removed without the core meaning of the utterance changing? Does removing this potential lexical hedge make the utterance sound more direct? If yes, then the lexical item is used as a lexical hedge."

In my analysis of lexical hedges found in the material, I focus on the politeness function they have. All lexical hedges are analysed in relation to politeness theory.

3.4 Hedges in academic discourse

As the academic world is that of "uncertainties, indirectness, and non-finality" (Mauranen 1997: 115), it is hardly surprising that hedges play a major role in academic discourse. Even though traditionally especially academic writing was thought to be purely impersonal and informational, nowadays it is generally recognized that academic discourse is, in fact, interactional (Hyland 1998: iix). Scholars do not argue for their results or criticisms in isolation but need to address the rest of the academic community as their audience.

Therefore to effectively present arguments, scholars must formulate their claims to be as acceptable as possible to their colleagues (Hyland 1998: iix). This practice is what Meyer (1997) has called 'strengthening the argument by weakening the claim' in his study of written academic discourse. This 'weakening of the claim' is achieved primarily through hedging. In a hedged form even radical claims sound more cautious and tentative, which enhances their chances of ratification. This is again closely related to the interpersonal politeness aspect of hedging discussed above. Academic discourse is thus by no means free of interpersonal concerns – quite the contrary.

The academic world thus offers an interesting environment for studying hedging in its interpersonal functions. In my study, I have chosen to look at thesis defences because they are an academic genre that offers an insight into how hedging is used in academic spoken interaction, especially when giving criticism. Thesis defences are also representative examples of academic discourse practices as all the participants have been members of the academic community for a considerable time already. Therefore they are certainly familiar with the conventions of the academic world. This is true especially for the opponents, as they tend to be fairly senior staff members.

4 POLITENESS

In this chapter, I first present some background on politeness theory in general. Secondly, I move on to discussing Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, initially presenting an overview of the theory and then examining its most relevant parts for this study in more detail.

4.1 Background to Politeness Theory

Politeness in language has been a popular research topic for linguists ever since the seminal work of Goffman in 1960s and Brown and Levinson in 1970s and 1980s. These pioneers of politeness theory inspired researchers from as varied fields as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, applied linguistics, social psychology, conversation analysis, and anthropology (Brown and Levinson 1987: 2) to study the complex relationship of politeness and language. Despite this impressive body of research, politeness as a theoretical concept is often misunderstood, mostly because the same word also refers to everyday notions of politeness. Politeness in the theoretical sense, however, has little to do with good manners, as Goffman points out: “in this [theoretical] perspective, politeness, deference and tact have a sociological significance altogether beyond the level of table manners and etiquette books” (1971: 90).

The ambiguity of the word 'politeness' has lead to some later researchers abandoning the term altogether. For instance Spencer-Oatey (2000) has opted for the term 'rapport management' to refer to similar ideas. In this thesis, I use the term politeness despite the confusion it might arise. Politeness is the original term and still widely in use. It is also the term used by Brown and Levinson, whose theory is the most central politeness theory discussed in this dissertation.

Leaving terminological disputes aside, what both 'rapport management' and 'politeness' in the theoretical sense refer to is a fundamental feature of human interaction, namely maintaining and/or promoting interpersonal relationships (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 3). With

this definition of politeness in mind, it becomes clear that the term captures a phenomenon of different dimensions than, for example, table manners mentioned by Goffman. This is also why politeness is seen as something universal. What is considered polite does naturally vary from group to group or situation to situation (Gumperz 1987: xiii) but the basic need for the maintenance of interpersonal relationships is present in any human community. Brown and Levinson further argue that quite unrelated languages show strikingly similar patterns in conveying politeness: "even if one doesn't know the language, on seeing one person approach another - - and speak to him with hesitations, *umms* and *ahhs* and the like, we have a strong clue that he is making a request or doing something that he considers (or considers that the other will consider) imposing" (1987: 57).

Politeness theory offers an interesting point of departure for the present study. Analysing two different groups of English-speakers using lexical hedges offers an insight into how the universal need for politeness and on the other hand group-dependent features are reflected in the use of hedges.

In the following an overview of Brown and Levinson's theory is given. Concepts central to this study are discussed in more detail.

4.2 Brown and Levinson: Theory of Politeness

Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is a classic in the field of politeness theory. Despite the fact that it was originally introduced already in 1970s, it remains the most influential model for describing politeness in human interaction. The theory has been criticized for example for emphasizing individualistic Western values (see e.g. Matsumoto 1988; Mao 1994) and for not properly accounting for the fact that people do not always aim at maintaining *harmonious* relationships but might deliberately want to attack rather than support their interlocutor (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 3). The latter concern has brought research focusing on impoliteness to the fore lately (see e.g. Bousfield and Locher 2008). In spite of the criticisms, Brown and Levinson's theory as a whole has not been challenged, and therefore it is also used in this study.

4.2.1 Overview

Brown and Levinson's theory is based on the existence of speakers (S) and addressees (H) (1987: 59). Both speakers and addressees are rational agents who have something that Brown and Levinson call 'face'. The term 'face' could be translated as a public self-image. The concept of face derives from earlier work by Goffman (1967) and from the English folk term used for example in the idiom of 'losing face' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61).

Brown and Levinson further divide the notion of face into positive and negative face. Positive face refers to a positive self-image and a desire that this self-image is approved of by others (ibid). Negative face, on the other hand, refers to freedom of action and to rights to non-distraction (ibid). These faces can also be treated in terms of wants. As Brown and Levinson point out, both speakers and addressees share the same basic face wants and are aware of this (1987: 62). Therefore it is normally in the interest of speakers and addressees to cooperate in maintaining each other's face in interaction (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61).

This cooperation is especially needed in situations which could potentially make either the speaker or the addressee feel uncomfortable. These situations contain speech acts that "by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65). These acts are called 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs for short) (Brown and Levinson 1987: 60). FTAs are speech acts such as complaints, criticisms, disagreements and insults but perhaps surprisingly also apologies, invitations, advice and compliments. The first group means threats to *positive face*, as they do not enhance a positive self-image nor express approval. The second group is potentially threatening to *negative face*, as they limit freedom of action in some way. An illustrative example is an invitation, which puts some pressure on the addressee to do a particular act in the future, to attend a party for example, thus limiting the addressee's freedom of action in the future. For a very comprehensive list of FTAs to positive and negative face, see Brown and Levinson 1987: 65 – 68.

A further division of FTAs can be drawn by looking at whether the FTA is primarily threatening to the speaker or to the addressee (Brown and Levinson 1987: 67 – 68). An example of a speech act primarily threatening to the speaker is apologizing, because it requires the speaker to humble himself or herself. It poses a threat to the speaker's positive face as it compromises his or her positive self-image. An example of an FTA that primarily threatens the face of the addressee would be criticism, because it expresses disapproval of some sort and is therefore threatening to the positive self-image of the addressee.

As it is normally in the interest of speakers and addressees to cooperate in maintaining each other's face, interlocutors resort to a number of strategies to minimize the effect of FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68). Brown and Levinson have divided these strategies according to how much they minimize the threat (see 1987: 69 for an illustrative figure). The strategies range from doing the FTA directly without minimizing the threat at all to not doing the FTA in the first place because it is considered too threatening.

The strategies that Brown and Levinson discuss in more detail are the ones placed somewhere between these two extremes. These strategies generally aim at counteracting the threat of the FTA by partially satisfying the face wants of the one to whom the FTA is directed (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68). For example in the case of criticism, the speaker can satisfy the addressee's positive face wants by emphasizing that despite the criticism the addressee still is appreciated as a friend or colleague, for instance. This is what Brown and Levinson call positive politeness. Continuing on the same example, when giving criticism the speaker could also satisfy some of the addressee's negative face wants, for instance by softening the content of the utterance so that the addressee is at least theoretically given a possibility to ignore it and thus retain his or her freedom of action. The speaker should in this case show deference and for instance even apologize for intervening. In Brown and Levinson's model this is called negative politeness.

4.2.2 Hedging as a negative politeness strategy

The primary focus of this study is on hedging, which can also be used as a strategy for minimizing the threat an FTA poses. Hedging falls under the category of negative politeness, as it distances the speaker from the content of the utterance by making the connection fuzzier. For example in the case of criticisms, hedging softens the impact of the criticism thus making it easier for the addressee to take in.

Hedging from a purely linguistic point of view is discussed in section 3. Politeness theory on hedges relies heavily on linguistic analysis, but the emphasis is on the fact that hedges are used to "disarm routine interactional threats" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 146). The motivation behind the use of hedges can be stated as the following: "Don't assume H is able/willing to do A" (ibid); 'A' being the content of the criticism, for instance. In other words, the speaker cannot assume the addressee to agree with the content of the critical comment. When the assumption is that the criticism is a face threat to the addressee and also that the addressee is not willing to accept the content of the criticism, it is easy to see why hedging to some extent is needed for the communication to flow successfully. An example clarifies the difference:

> Your research questions are vague.
> *I feel* your research questions are *slightly* vague.

To what degree hedges are used depends on the speaker, the addressee and the communicative situation. In more general terms it is possible to talk about the choice of strategy, as some strategies counteract a face threat more than others. These factors influencing the choice of strategy are discussed below.

4.2.3 Choice of strategy: Social distance, Power, Rank

The choice of strategy is largely dependent on the situation and naturally on the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. In their theory, Brown and Levinson (1987: 74 – 84) present a model for calculating how sociological variables affect the choice of strategy. The three variables in this model are 1) social distance of S and H, 2) the relative power of S and H, and 3) the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture. The basic argument that Brown and Levinson present is that the speaker will satisfy more of the addressee's face wants – in other words use more polite strategies – if there is:

1) a great the social distance between the speaker and the addressee
2) the hearer has more relative power than the speaker
3) the FTA the speaker is performing is ranked as a highly threatening act in the particular culture the speaker and hearer find themselves in.

Brown and Levinson stress that these sociological variables are not meant to be taken as professionally evaluated and tested ratings, but merely as the speaker's and addressee's personal evaluations of them (1987: 74, 76). Furthermore, Brown and Levinson point out that all these variables are context-dependent, meaning that no individual can be assigned certain values at any one point and assumed that the values will carry over to other situations as well (1987: 78 – 80). All the variables are subject to change as the context changes.

These sociological variables present an interesting starting point for the analysis of the material in the present study. Starting from the first variable, social distance, it has to be said that as the material for this study consists of thesis defences, the social distance between the opponent and respondent cannot be very small. In order to secure the objectivity of the defence, opponents are usually academics who have had little contact with the respondent. Furthermore, opponents tend to be respected members of senior staff and distinguished academics whereas the respondents are usually younger and only

commencing their possible academic careers.

The material used for this study includes two social groups, as it were, ELF-speakers and native speakers of English. It is possible that there are differences between the two groups in the first variable – social distance. It could be speculated that in one of the two, the group's social distance is smaller. It could either be that the ELF-speakers exhibit a behaviour related to a smaller social distance because the participants are all using a foreign language and therefore might feel some kind of solidarity towards one another. It could also be the case that it is the native speakers who feel solidarity towards each other just because they share a first language and probably also a similar cultural background. These differences can have an effect on the amount of hedging. The aspect of social distance is considered when analysing the number of hedges used, even though these kinds of sociological questions cannot be thoroughly answered only based on the linguistic data that comprises the material for this thesis.

Moving on to the second sociological variable in Brown and Levinson's model, it is clear that the opponents and respondents have different power relations. The opponents have more power bestowed upon them both because of their status as senior staff members as well as because of their context-dependent role as opponents. This creates an asymmetrical power relation in which the opponent has the upper hand. What this means is that the opponent can choose to use strategies that do not soften the FTAs to a great extent. For example in this study, it would mean that the opponents do not choose to hedge a great deal since they have the power and authority to be critical and not having to worry about the face wants of the respondent.

What has to be borne in mind, however, is the fact that as Brown and Levinson pointed out, these sociological variables get their significance from the personal evaluations of the speaker and the addressee. Therefore, if an opponent would not consider himself or herself to be very socially distant or powerful, he or she might use politeness strategies that do satisfy the respondent's face wants more. However, what is important to note, is that in such a case the opponent would choose to behave in a certain way, but should he or she choose to exhibit his or her relative power more, it would also be acceptable, as

the model of Brown and Levinson shows. Also other politeness theorists confirm this, for example Berger: “status increases perceived competence, which then allows these so perceived to become more dominant” (1994: 487).

Lastly, the third sociological variable concerns the way in which different FTAs are ranked in a specific culture. As this thesis is focusing on academic spoken discourse and thesis defences, the culture in question is the academic interaction culture in general. Naturally there are differences from country to country or even from university to university, but the basic assumption behind the analysis in this study is that as the opponents and respondents are taking part in an academic event, they are aware of how it is conducted and what the content is approximately like. Therefore they are fully expecting the event to include or even evolve around criticism, which makes this particular FTA rather acceptable in this academic setting. However, criticisms are always FTAs and therefore it would be highly unlikely that the speakers would not soften them at all.

5 ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

In this section, I first discuss the role of English in today's world. Secondly, I focus on the question of whether or not ELF can be regarded as a legitimate variety of English. Thirdly, I present some of the most prominent lexico-grammatical features of ELF. Finally, I discuss ELF-speakers and hedging, presenting some results from previous studies.

5.1 English in the world

In today's world, the English language has gained a status practically no other language has ever had before in human history. English is spoken on all continents as a first or second language and even more importantly, English has become the most widely taught foreign language in the world (Crystal 2003: 5). It is estimated that already over a quarter of the world's population are competent in English (Crystal 2003: 6). The spread of English has inevitably lead to the development of different varieties as English has become the means of communication in different speech communities around the world (Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 1).

These different kinds of English can be placed in a three-circle model. This model categorizes the varieties according to the functions they perform in the speech community. This three-circle model of English world-wide was developed by Kachru in 1985 and it remains one of the most influential models for grouping the varieties of English in the world (Mollin 2006: 41). The three circles in Kachru's model are the Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle (1985: 12).

The Inner Circle includes native speaker varieties, such as British English or American English. The Outer Circle, on the other hand, includes communities in which English is not spoken as a native language but where it has an important role and often official status in intranational communication. Varieties in the Outer Circle are for example Indian English or South African English. The Expanding Circle finally includes

communities in which English is learned as a foreign language mostly to enable communication with the English-speaking world in Inner and Outer Circles. According to Kachru's model for example Finland as well as many other European countries belong to the Expanding Circle. Kachru's idea of dividing non-native use of English into Outer and Expanding Circles resembles the traditional division between English as a second language versus English as a foreign language, which is often referred to in language teaching contexts.

Despite the clarity this three-circle model brings into categorizing English world-wide, it still fails to account for a growing use of English, namely the use of English as a contact language – lingua franca – between speakers who do not share a first language (Mollin 2006: 41-42). The use of English has become overwhelmingly widespread in international settings. English is the language of choice in, for example, international organizations and companies, and the like (Katzner 2002: 39), as well as in the academic world. It is also the dominant language of the Internet, international mass media as well as entertainment (Phillipson 1992). In addition to this, the increased mobility of people has made personal relationships across language borders very common.

Because of all this, knowing English has become a necessity in today's world. Unlike Kachru claims in his model presented above, English is not learned in the Expanding Circle only, or even mostly, to enable communication with the Inner and Outer Circles. English is learned because it enables communication with the whole world – even with other non-native speakers in the Expanding Circle. Therefore learning English can no longer be seen as learning a foreign language in the traditional sense. As Graddol (2006) argues, knowing English has become a basic skill in the global world.

5.2 ELF -A variety of English?

The widespread use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) brings into question the ownership of English. Traditionally, any language has been seen as the 'property' of its native speakers. Native speakers have had the authority to decide what is correct and

what incorrect usage of their language. Native speaker varieties have also presented the model language learners should aspire to. This is natural in situations in which a foreign language is learned in order to be able to communicate with native speakers. As has been pointed out, however, English is no longer learned solely for this purpose. It is learned because of its status as a global lingua franca. Therefore it is questionable whether English is the property of only its native speakers any more. As Crystal points out: “Language is an immensely democratising institution. To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it” (2003: 172). As a result of this, some linguists see ELF as a variety in its own right with little or no need to aspire to native speaker models for correct language usage (e.g. Widdowson 1994a: 385; Howatt with Widdowson 2004: 361).

ELF-speakers are thus not seen as language learners nor is their English analysed as learner language (Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 1). If ELF was analysed as learner language, it would imply that ELF-speakers make mistakes when they use forms that deviate from native speaker varieties. This, however, is not the idea behind ELF-research. ELF-research sees ELF-speakers as real language users who use English to communicate with others. As an example one could think of an international group of businessmen conducting a meeting in English. These businessmen would be using English in order to communicate with one another, not in order to improve their skills in this particular language. Moreover, their focus would surely be on the content of the language, not the actual language forms they use.

ELF is thus seen as a form of English with its own characteristics. ELF-researchers tend to see the deviations ELF-speakers show from native speaker varieties as linguistic innovations born out of language contact rather than as deficits (Jenkins 2007: 17). Widdowson concludes: “the modified forms of the language which are actually in use should be recognized as a legitimate development of English as an international means of communication” (Howatt with Widdowson 2004: 361). The assumption behind this thinking is that linguistic innovations in ELF are not arbitrary or chaotic but that they rather reflect the usual constraints of human languages (Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 2). Linguistic changes occurring in ELF serve to make it a more efficient means

of communication for its speakers. Developing in its own direction is only natural, as Jenkins (2007: 17) points out. Holding on to native speaker models would thus be unnatural, as the socio-cultural features of these groups differ significantly.

ELF-research is slowly establishing itself as a field of English studies (Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 3) and attracting increasing scholarly interest. Whether ELF is a legitimate variety of English or simply a deficient form of it continues to be a highly debated issue (see e.g. Seidlhofer 2003: 7 – 75; Jenkins 2007: 1 – 30). There are linguists who see ELF and other varieties deviating from standard native English as undesireable (see e.g. Quirk 1990, Görlach 2002, Trudgill 2005). Quirk for instance argues for the need of standard English which is “both understood and respected in every corner of the globe” (1990: 6). As Jenkins points out, this respect and admiration for a standard native speaker model is shared by many English teachers and general public alike (2007: 9 – 13). ELF and other varieties deviating from a standard native speaker model have even been labeled diseases that pollute and corrupt proper English (Görlach 2002: 12 - 13), whatever this 'proper' is taken to stand for. As Jenkins notes: “it is notoriously difficult to pin down standard English even within a single country” (2007: 9). No matter which position one chooses, the fact is that language change is a natural and never-ending process in language contact situations (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 61). In case of English today, changes are happening at an accelerated rate due to continuous contact with other languages.

As was noted above, ELF-research is still a new field of English studies and as a result, ELF has not yet been thoroughly investigated. More research on ELF would be needed in order to map out its linguistic features. Once the features of ELF can be characterized and codified, it will be easier to answer the debated question of whether or not ELF should be regarded as a legitimate variety of English. This study attempts to provide some answers to how hedging might differ in ELF as compared to a native speaker variety of English and thus make a modest contribution to finding possible characteristics of ELF.

Despite the shortfall of existing ELF-research, some characteristics of ELF have already

been identified. They are presented below.

5.3 Lexico-grammatical features of ELF

ELF-speakers come from a variety of language backgrounds as far as first languages are concerned. In the case of English, they have normally received some formal instruction, although the amount of course varies (Mauranen 2003: 514). Mauranen argues that as a result, ELF displays features that are due to variable learning and interference from speakers' first languages (2003: 514). Mauranen concludes that ELF can thus be assumed to exhibit structural simplification and a preference for unmarked features, among other things (2003: 514). She explains that this is because unmarked features are generally the easiest to learn and they are also the expressions that are most likely to be understood by all interlocutors (2003: 514). The latter is an important concern in ELF-interaction, as ELF users represent varying levels of proficiency (Mauranen 2008).

The following features have been identified as being characteristic of the lexico-grammar of ELF:

- articles missing or superfluous
- prepositions used freely (e.g. We have to study *about;* We discussed *about*)
- frequent use of verbs with high semantic generality (e.g. *have, make, take, go, do*)
- increased explicitness (e.g. How long *time* instead of how long?)
- lack of idiomaticy as compared to native speaker varieties (e.g. How to put *the* end *on* it? As compared to: How to put *an* end *to* it?)
- simultaneous overuse and underuse of the most common expressions in native speaker varieties

  (Mauranen 2008; Cogo and Dewey 2006: 75)

These lexico-grammatical characteristics of ELF are intertwined with pragmatic motives (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 87). Pragmatic concerns, such as for instance the avoidance of misunderstandings, is a major factor in shaping ELF lexico-grammar. An example of this is the tendency to increase explicitness in ELF interaction, which aims precisely at both parties understanding what is being said. Cogo and Dewey list the

following as pragmatic motives that result in lexico-grammatical changes: efficiency of communication, added prominence, reinforcement of proposition, increased explicitness and exploiting redundancy (2006: 87). Mauranen adds enhanced cooperativeness to the list (2008). This is visible for example in how interlocutors indicate comprehension by clear back-channelling and also spontaneously adopt each other's expressions as a means of convergent accommodation (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 70).

As this study is concerned with hedges, it will be interesting to see how the interrelatedness of pragmatics and lexico-grammar found in ELF is displayed in the use of hedges. Hedging has strong pragmatic motives, such as politeness as was argued above. In the following existing research on hedging in ELF is presented.

5.4 ELF-speakers and hedging

Earlier studies on hedging in spoken interaction have been primarily interested in native speaker usage of hedges. As a result, hedging in non-native interaction has not been very thoroughly investigated. The most recent studies that have looked at non-native use of hedges are those by Nikula (1997), De Cock et al. (1998), Cheng and Warren (2001) and Metsä-Ketelä (2006). In most of these studies the terminology used differs to some extent from this paper. For example De Cock et al. use the term 'vagueness expressions', Cheng and Warren 'vague language' and Metsä-Ketelä 'lexical vagueness' to refer to a linguistic phenomenon that comes very close to the idea of hedging in this study. In addition to differences in terminology, all these studies with the exception of Metsä-Ketelä (2006) have viewed non-native speakers as language learners and therefore any language use deviating from that of native speakers as problematic.

All these studies except for Cheng and Warren (2001) confirm the result that non-native use of hedges differs from that of native speakers. Differences are both quantitative and qualitative. Nikula (1997) studied conversations of Finnish non-native speakers of English and compared their use of hedges to that of a native speaker control group. She concluded that the Finnish non-native speakers of English used both a smaller number and a smaller variety of hedges than the native speaker control group. De Cock et al.

compared a group of French non-native speakers of English to a native speaker group. According to their findings, the non-native speaker group used nearly four times less hedges than the native speaker group. They also found significant qualitative differences. For example the expression *and so on* was used almost ten times more by non-native speakers than by native speakers. Lastly Metsä-Ketelä (2006) studied the use of the vague expression *more or less* in non-native speaker data (from the ELFA-corpus) and compared the findings to native speaker use. She found out that *more or less* was used significantly more in the non-native speaker data, also in functions absent from the native speaker data.

In contrast to these results, Cheng and Warren (2001) did not find any remarkable differences between non-native and native speaker use of vague language. They studied conversations of native speakers of English and of non-native speakers of English whose first language is Cantonese. The findings showed that vague language was used in a similar manner to perform same communicative tasks by both groups.

The quantitative and qualitative differences encountered in the above-mentioned studies were seen as problematic. For instance Nikula points out that non-native speakers "can easily be judged overly formal, detached, or indifferent to their interlocutors because their speech lacks the interpersonal flavour that the use of hedges conveys" (1997: 203). De Cock et al. (2001) are also worried about how non-native speakers are perceived by native speakers. These concerned sentiments are understandable if the focus is on non-native speaker – native speaker interaction.

However, as has been pointed out in the case of ELF, non-native speakers mostly interact with one another. Therefore from the point of view of ELF, possible deviations in the use of hedges are no longer problematic. As Metsä-Ketelä concludes, ELF-speakers did use vague expressions differently from native speakers but it did not seem to result in any confusion or communication breakdown (2006: 141).

These studies provide a useful point of departure for my own research. I expect the ELF-speakers in my data to use hedges differently from the native speakers. However, I

do not expect this to cause any communicational problems for the ELF-speakers.

6 MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this section, I first present the materials of this study and the way they were collected. Secondly, I present discourse analysis as a method and explain how it was used for analysing the material. Lastly questions of reliability, validity, and generalisability are discussed.

6.1 Data collection

The material analysed in this study consists of recordings and transcripts of doctoral defences conducted by both ELF-speakers and native English speakers (American English). The doctoral defences were obtained from the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings -corpus (ELFA) and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) respectively. These two corpora both consist of academic discourse and can therefore be reliably compared.

The ELFA-corpus was compiled as a joint project of the University of Tampere and the University of Helsinki, Finland. It consists of about 1 million transcribed words (approximately 131 hours of recorded speech) of ELF. The corpus has speakers from 51 different first languages and all the major academic disciplines. For more information, please consult <www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa>.

The MICASE-corpus was compiled at the University of Michigan between 1997-2002. It comprises a total of 1.8 million transcribed words (over 190 hours of recorded speech). Also the MICASE-corpus includes different academic speech events from various academic fields. The whole corpus is available online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micase/>. For more information on the MICASE-corpus, please consult <http://lw.lsa.umich.edu/eli/micase/index.htm>.

Working with samples from these corpora enabled me to analyse naturally occurring speech. As the focus of this study was to analyse the use of lexical hedges, I chose to

look at doctoral defences because they by their very nature include criticism from the opponent or opponents. Criticisms in general elicit hedging, as they can be seen as face-threatening acts that need softening. In the selected doctoral defences I therefore concentrated on the opponents' utterances, as they most explicitly contained criticism. Furthermore I chose doctoral defences only from humanities and social sciences. I was concerned that including doctoral defences from many different scientific fields to the material might have added another variable to the analysis of the results. Therefore I limited the number of scientific fields to two.

This selection process of the materials can be called 'purposive sampling' (Silverman 2001: 250), as the sampling is not random. Denzin and Lincoln describe purposive sampling as follows: “many qualitative researchers employ - - purposive, and not random, sampling methods. They seek out to groups, settings and individuals where - - the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (1994: 202).

I chose to analyse roughly 60 minutes of speech from both speaker groups. Due to the different nature of thesis defences found in the MICASE corpus and ELFA corpus, the number of opponents to be analysed was not exactly the same. In the ELFA corpus, there is normally only one opponent per respondent in a thesis defence. Therefore there is plenty of material from these opponents as they naturally speak a lot during the defence. The thesis defences in the MICASE corpus, on the other hand, are such that there is a whole panel of opponents and therefore the amount of speech per person remains relatively low.

To solve this problem, I selected five thesis defences from the ELFA corpus and two from the MICASE corpus. This way I got five ELF-opponents and six native speaker opponents. From the ELF-material I selected approximately 12 minutes of speech per opponent so that the total duration would be approximately 60 minutes. These 12 minutes I selected so that it consisted of stretches that I judged to be typical to the speaker in question. The stretches were taken from the beginning, the middle, and the end of the defences so as to get a realistic picture of the whole event.

As was mentioned above, I selected to analyse two thesis defences from the MICASE corpus. Those two included nine opponents altogether, but I discarded three of them. This was because two were classified as near-native speakers of English instead of native speakers and one spoke so little that I felt including that opponent in the material would have been unnecessary. The six selected opponents from two different thesis defences gave me approximately 60 minutes of speech to be analysed.

The selected thesis defences were the following:

Native speaker data

- Music Dissertation Defense (Transcript ID: DEF420SF022); speakers S1, S3, S5
- Social Psychology Dissertation Defense (Transcript ID: DEF500SF016); speakers S1, S3, S5

ELF-speaker data

- UDEFD020: Unemployment and Employment Policy at the Local Level; speaker S3
- UDEFD050: Parallel Corpora of Literary Texts; speaker S3
- UDEFD070: Development Communication Policy and Economic Fundamentalism in Ghana; speaker S2
- UDEFD110: Shadow Dynasties. Politics of Memory and Emotions in Pakistani Women's Life-Writing; speaker S3
- UDEFD140: Decentralisation Policy in Cambodia: Exploring Community Participation in the Education Sector; speaker S2

6.2 Data analysis

In the following I first present discourse analysis as a method and then move on to present the analytical process that was carried out in this study.

6.2.1 Discourse analysis

The chosen doctoral defences were analysed with discourse analysis. Discourse analysis as a method is difficult to define, as it is used by a number of different academic disciplines for varied purposes (Schiffrin 1994: 5). Moreover, not all discourse analysis is concerned with spoken data as in this study. Written discourse and for example interviews can also be analysed with this method (Silverman 2001: 177). What these different types of discourse analysis have in common, however, is that the focus is on language as the medium for interaction (Potter 1997: 146). Discourse analysts believe that meaning is built in interaction and therefore the analysis of talk or text should include the analysis of the context as well (Silverman 2001: 180). As Brown and Yule put it: "discourse analyst threats his data as the record (text) of a dynamic process in which language was used as an instrument of communication in a context by a speaker / writer to express meaning and achieve intentions (discourse)" (1983: 26).

The emphasis on the importance of context is why discourse analysis is a useful method for analysing hedging. Hedging is an extremely context-dependent phenomenon and a method attempting to analyse hedge usage must be able to address that. Moreover, hedging is an important linguistic feature in softening criticism and thus avoiding problems in communication or even communication breakdowns. As discourse analysis is concerned with analysing interaction, it provides tools for analysing the role of hedging in interpersonal communication. The analytical process has to take into account both the co-text as well as the context of the situation, as they both are important for giving hedges their meaning.

In addition to the above, discourse analysis also allows the researcher to pick up and analyse expressions that are unique to the ELF-speakers. As there are no set categories or expressions that should be looked for, it is possible to capture the non-native use of lexical hedges in its entirety, without restricting the analysis to native speaker norms.

6.2.2 The analytical process

The analytical process started with identifying all the utterances of the selected opponents in the material. Secondly, these utterances were analysed so that all lexical hedges were identified. The only utterances that were excluded from the analysis were those that did not directly relate to the doctoral thesis being opposed. An example would be an opponent asking his or her colleague to open the window or tilt the mirror of the overhead projector, and so on. Moreover, also direct requests to the respondent were excluded. These requests (e.g. *Could you maybe comment on that a little bit?*) contained a considerable amount of lexical hedging, but as these expressions were not critical comments as such, they were excluded from analysis.

Lexical hedges were identified only after careful consideration, because as was noted above, no expression can always be said to function as a hedge. The identification process took into account both the co-text as well as the context of situation. If the utterance in question would sound more direct without the possible hedge but otherwise retain its core meaning, a potential expression was classified as a lexical hedge (see 3.3 for a more detailed discussion of identifying a lexical hedge). If, however, removing the possible lexical hedge altered the core meaning of the utterance, it was classified as a part of the sentence and thus not a hedge.

An example illustrates this difference:

1. now one the a- a- again I have a *kind of* a methodological motive for asking this because - -
2. exactly this *kind of* work would be translated in a way to which is which is then er by its very nature deviant
   (both examples from ELFA, UDEFD050, speaker 3)

In the first example, *kind of* is clearly used as a lexical hedge, as removing it would not alter the meaning of the utterance but would make it sound more direct. In the second example, removing *kind of* would actually alter the message the speaker is trying to

convey. He is talking about specific *kind of* literature as opposed to other kinds. Therefore these expressions that are identical on the surface, are not, in fact, identical at all.

After going through the whole material several times, all the lexical hedges were identified and noted down. After listing all the lexical hedges found in the material, these expressions were analysed in more detail and placed into eight different categories. These categories arose from the analysis of the lexical hedges as it seemed that the expressions could be grouped into larger sets to enable a deeper and more efficient analysis. The eight categories are: personal evaluations; expressions of approximation; expressions of limitation; modal verbs; expressions of hesitation; lexical verbs; expressions of metadiscourse; and other.

After identifying and categorising lexical hedges, I calculated the total number of lexical hedges used by both groups. I divided the total number of lexical hedges by the total number of minutes in order to see how many hedges were used in a minute by both groups on average. In addition to this I also calculated how many different lexical hedges were used per minute on average. These results are discussed in section 7.1.

After calculating the average numbers of lexical hedges per minute, I counted the occurrences of all the different lexical hedges in order to find out the most frequently used lexical hedges of both speaker groups. I compiled a list of the seven most frequent lexical hedges of both groups. After that I counted the percentual shares these expressions have out of the hundred percent which is, of course, all the lexical hedges of one speaker groups. These results are presented in 7.2.

After counting and analysing single lexical hedges, I moved on to analysing the eight categories I had established previously. I counted the percentual shares of these categories and compared the results of the ELF-speakers and the native English speakers. These results are presented in 7.3.

After these stages of analysis, I focused on finding any features that might characterize

and possibly also explain the way ELF-speakers use lexical hedges. These features are presented in section 7.4.

Lastly, I reviewed the results in the light of politeness theory and also presented some observations from the data that politeness theory allowed me to notice. These are discussed in section 7.5.

6.3 Validity

Working with samples from the two corpora enabled me to analyse naturally occurring speech. It enhanced the validity of the study as the interactional situations were as natural as possible and the presence of a researcher had a minimal effect on the way the participants spoke or interacted. Discourse analysis has, in general, a strong preference for using naturally occurring data (Silverman 2001: 178, 189).

In the selection of the doctoral defences I looked for defences that would be as similar as possible in both corpora. I chose seminars only from closely related scientific fields, that is either from humanities or social sciences. Moreover, I checked that all the opponents were members of senior staff at their university. This is because the power relations between interlocutors tend to affect the way interaction is conducted. Thus it also can have a clear effect on hedging. Brown and Levinson suggest that people tend to hedge more when speaking to their superiors and similarly less when the interlocutor has a lower status, for example in terms of academic status. Thus differences arising from social variation in the data were minimised.

In addition to this, the linguistic backgrounds of the opponents were carefully checked. In the case of ELF, I avoided selecting several opponents with the same first language. However, I was unable to avoid this completely due to the limited number of doctoral defences in humanities and social sciences available in the ELFA corpus. Therefore there are two opponents in the ELF-data with the same first language, namely Swedish. The other ELF-opponents have either Finnish, Norwegian, German or Italian as their first language. In the MICASE corpus, the linguistic backgrounds of the opponents were

checked as well. All opponents with either near-native or non-native linguistic status were discarded from the material. Thus only native speakers were analysed.

Gender, however, was not considered a factor that should be neutralized. In the academic discourse community, the speaking styles of men and women have not been found to differ to a significant extent (Poos and Simpson 2002).

6.4 Reliability

As this study is qualitative in nature and the research method is discourse analytic, the results will be subjective to a certain extent. Another researcher might disagree with some of my findings, especially because it can be difficult to identify lexical hedges without any hesitation. However, the threat of subjectivity can be minimized by a clear framework on which the analysis is based. Also both the co-text as well as the context of situation have a significant role in making the discourse analytic method less subjective.

6.5 Generalisability

Despite the fact that the amount data in this study is relatively small, it has been carefully selected on the basis of clear criteria presented above. Therefore, the material is fairly well representative of the type of speech event and the kinds of speakers this study aims to analyse. The results can thus be generalised to similar speech events and speakers. The results can certainly also be used to test certain tendencies in different kinds of speech events and with different speakers.

7 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented and analysed. The analysis is based on the theories presented in the theoretical part of this thesis. First, results on the average numbers of lexical hedges used per minute are discussed. Second, the most frequently used lexical hedges of both speaker groups are presented. Third, the categorization of the lexical hedges is discussed, focusing on the categories in which there are clear differences in usage between the ELF-speakers and the native speakers. After this, characteristics of lexical hedging in ELF are discussed, with an emphasis on why certain preferences exist in ELF. Finally, the results are looked at from the point of view of politeness theory. The most important results are summarised in section 7.6.

7.1 The number of lexical hedges

In this section, I first present an overview of the average numbers of lexical hedges and of *different* lexical hedges used per minute. Second, the average numbers of lexical hedges are discussed in more detail. Third, the average numbers of different lexical hedges used per minute are discussed.

7.1.1 Overview

The table below shows the average numbers of lexical hedges found in the data. The numbers are given as average numbers per minute. This is because the total duration of the recordings of the two speaker groups was not exactly the same and therefore the total number of lexical hedges used by both groups could not be directly compared. An average number of lexical hedges per minute enables a more reliable comparison.

Table 1

Average numbers of lexical hedges per minute

	LEXICAL HEDGES	DIFFERENT LEXICAL HEDGES
NATIVE SPEAKERS	4.44	2.30
ELF-SPEAKERS	3.85	1.64

The left hand column of Table 1 shows the average number of all lexical hedges used by both groups per minute. These average numbers include all lexical hedges in the material without making any distinction between expressions that are used once or several times. Lexical hedges were thus counted as tokens.

The right hand column, on the other hand, presents the average numbers of different lexical hedges used by both groups per minute. These average numbers were calculated by counting any one hedging expression only once. These numbers thus reveal any possible differences between the variety of lexical hedges used by the two speaker groups.

As the information presented in the table reveals, the native speaker group used lexical hedges more than the ELF-speaker group. On average, the native speakers used 4.44 lexical hedges per minute whereas the ELF-speakers used 3.85 lexical hedges per minute. The native speakers used thus approximately 13% more lexical hedges than the ELF-speakers.

The native speakers also used lexical hedges in a more varied way. They used 2.30 different lexical hedges per minute. The corresponding number of the ELF-speakers was 1.64. The difference becomes clearer when counted as a percentage: the native speakers used different lexical hedges approximately 29% more in comparison to the ELF-speakers.

Examples 1 and 2 illustrate the differences:

(Note: Lexical hedges are highlighted in yellow.)

Example 1: Native speaker data

> **S5:** let me ask one um, question about the thesis, itself um, while i pretty much agree with your conclusions about, how these cultural differences affect cognition and affect the development of science, i think in the thesis itself there's a pretty big extrapolation, from your results to the conclusions you wanna draw about science. um so i guess, he- i'm just, curious if you thought a little bit about, a few future experiments to fill in that extrapolation and make it more, um, concrete to draw the kinds of conclusions you (made) about, you know, those effects. (Social Psychology Dissertation Defense, S5; word count 97)

Example 2: Non-native speaker data

> **S3**: i think that there is a tension in your dissertation between the theoretical framework which you , are very well read in <S2> @mhm-hm@ </S2> but at the same time you seem to refuse to apply and the , er so to say narrative literary er po- even poetical elements of the texts [themselves] <S2> [mhm-hm] mhm-hm </S2> er . and to go back to my er previous er , statement when i said that you tend to solve this problem of speaking of cross-cultural dialogue by simply locating yourself by simply making a political statement i think that also the choice of these three autobiographies <S2> mhm </S2> is a political statement in itself - -. (UDEFD110, S3; word count 102)

As becomes clear when looking at these two sample passages, the amount of hedging differs between the two opponents. In the first passage, the native speaker uses 6 lexical hedges per 97 words (roughly 6% of the words are hedges), whereas the ELF-speaker opponent employs 4 lexical hedges per 102 words, amounting in about 4% of the words being lexical hedges. In addition to hedging more, the native speaker opponent also resorts to a wider array of expressions. These passages help illustrate the differences that were found to exist between the native speakers and ELF-speakers. In the examples above, the difference in the number of lexical hedges is slightly bigger than in the whole material. Despite this, the above examples reflect the tendencies found.

These findings confirm the initial hypothesis presented in the beginning: native speakers would use more lexical hedges and also a broader variety of expressions. It was surprising, however, that the native speakers used different lexical hedges almost 30% more than the ELF-speakers.

7.1.2 Average numbers of lexical hedges per minute

In the light of these results, it does not seem unjustified to claim that there might be a slight inclination towards content-orientedness in ELF, as was suggested by Cogo and Dewey (2006: 65 – 66). What is noteworthy, however, is that the difference between the actual amounts of lexical hedges used by the two groups was only approximately 13 % in this study. In previous studies on non-native speaker hedging, for example De Cock et al. (1998) have discovered that their non-native English speaker subjects hedged nearly four times less than a native speaker control group. In another study, Nikula (1997) found out that the non-native English speakers she studied used less than half of the amount of hedges used by native speakers in casual conversations. Such radical differences were not found in the present material.

This could be explained by the fact that the ELF-speakers in this study were highly confident and competent English-speakers and that the activity that both the ELF-speakers and the native speakers were engaged in was such that called for hedging. As the speakers performed the task of an opponent in a thesis defence, they faced a communicative situation, a genre, that naturally elicits hedging. As Brown and Levinson (1987) argue, giving criticism is a face-threatening act and the need to minimize that threat to a certain extent is universal. Therefore the fact that the ELF-speakers used only 13% less lexical hedges could be taken as supporting Brown and Levinson's claim and my initial hypothesis that politeness in language is universal and present in all human languages. Therefore the language of ELF-speakers was not in the least void of lexical hedges, even if they were employed slightly less than in the native speaker material.

What is important to note is that even though ELF-speakers used lexical hedges less, this did not seem to cause any visible problems to their interaction. In other words, there

were no signs of the use of fewer lexical hedges resulting in any pragmatic failure, which for example Nikula (1997) was concerned about.

When comparing the results of the present study to the findings of some of the previous studies on non-native speaker hedging, it could be speculated that perhaps differences between native speakers and non-native or ELF-speakers come out more in less formal situations, as for example Nikula's (1997) results would suggest. It might thus be possible that the content-orientedness Cogo and Dewey argue for is a flexible feature of ELF-interaction that can be more or less prominent depending on the communicative situations and its constraints. However, this is a mere speculation and cannot be answered from the basis of the present study nor that of Nikula (1997).

Another possible reason for why ELF-speakers used lexical hedges less might be related to the sociological variables presented in Brown and Levinson's theory (1987: 74 – 84). It could be suggested that ELF-speakers feel a smaller social distance between each other as they all are operating with a foreign language. This might elicit some feelings of solidarity between the participants and this would in turn decrease the social distance. With a smaller social distance there would be less need for hedging. This is an interesting speculation but would require a sociological analysis to be adequately investigated.

7.1.3 Average numbers of different lexical hedges per minute

More profound differences between the two speaker groups came out when calculating how many different lexical hedges were used per minute. The fact that the native speakers employed different expressions nearly 30% more is an interesting result. Even if it can be argued that the result is by no means surprising since the native speakers are obviously using English as their mother tongue and thus have a better command of it than the ELF-speakers, the result might still reveal some characteristics of ELF lexico-grammar as well.

The fact that ELF-speakers did employ different lexical hedges almost 30% less than

the native speakers is an important finding. At least theoretically the fact that the ELF-speakers do not possess a native-speaker-like command of English would not have had to result in a smaller variety of lexical hedges. The ELF-speakers also could have made up their own expressions or translated expressions from their native language and thus could have arrived at the same amount of different expressions used as a native speaker group. This is especially true since the method of analysis in this study allowed the researcher to take into account all expressions used as lexical hedges irrespective of whether they are normally used as lexical hedges in English as a native language.

The fact that the ELF-speakers used nearly 30% less expressions might therefore not indicate a lack of proficiency in English but perhaps a more general tendency in ELF, namely a preference for structural simplification and for unmarked features, as Mauranen points out (2003: 514). Cogo and Dewey (2006: 87) also mention increased explicitness as a characteristic of ELF pragmatics. The tendency to stick to well-known hedges in ELF interaction might thus be explained by a preference to use expressions that the majority of interlocutors are familiar with. This is also a sign of cooperation, which Mauranen (2008) lists as a feature of ELF interaction. The results from this study would seem to support these characteristics of ELF.

7.2 The most frequent lexical hedges

After presenting and analysing the average numbers of different lexical hedges, it is interesting to see which expressions were most frequently used by both groups. Below I will first present an overview of the results and then discuss the differences between the percentual shares and the most frequent expressions of native speakers and ELF-speakers.

7.2.1 Overview

Table 2 below shows how the most frequent lexical hedges used by the two groups differ to some extent both in terms of which expressions are most frequent and also how frequent the most popular expressions in fact are. Table 2 lists the seven most frequently

used lexical hedges of both groups. The reason why precisely seven most common lexical hedges were listed is that after the seven most common hedges were listed, the percentual shares of any one lexical hedge are very small. When the shares of a lexical hedge were approximately three percent or less, including them in the list of most common ones would have been questionable. However, the entire lists of all lexical hedges used by the two groups can be found in Appendix 3.

Table 2

The most frequent lexical hedges

NATIVE SPEAKERS		**ELF-SPEAKERS**	
just	**12.00%**	**I think**	**20.00%**
would	**9.50%**	**would**	**9.00%**
I think	**7.75%**	**kind of**	**7.50%**
sort of	**7.50%**	**could**	**5.00%**
it seems to me / to me	**5.50%**	**a bit**	**4.50%**
could	**4.00%**	**just**	**3.25%**
and so forth	**4.00%**	**and so on**	**3.00%**

The most common lexical hedges used by the native speakers were *just* (12%); *would* (9.5%); *I think* (7.75%); *sort of* (7.5%); *it seems to me / to* me (5.5%); *could* (4%); and *and so forth* (4%). They all got a share of over three percent of all the lexical hedges used. The most frequent lexical hedges of the ELF-speakers were *I think* (20%); *would* (9%); *kind of* (7.5%); *could* (5%); *a bit* (4.5%); *just* (3.25%); and *and so on* (3%). Also all these lexical hedges got a share of at least three percent. Below are examples from the data that show some of the most frequent lexical hedges in a context.

Native speaker data

(Note: Lexical hedges in general are highlighted in yellow and the ones under closer examination are also underlined.)

Example 1: ***just***

now why is_ why didn't you just notate this with one flat then? is this is this, do you_ is this somehow a, a, a Lydian F or a Dorian D or something it doesn't sound anything like it to

me - - i i just don't see why this isn't in on E-flat? (Music Dissertation Defense, S5)

Example 2: ***would***

well you're making theoretical arguments [S2: right] there rather than, um strengthening them with, with data that could fill in um, w- which would seem to me not (a bad thing) to do (Music Dissertation Defense, S5)

Example 3: ***I think***

i think it would be good, uh to say something about the sources of your, [S2: mhm] i i mean in an abstract for a dissertation i think it's always a good thing to include, what is this based on? is it based on listening, periodical literature, interviews? (Music Dissertation Defense, S3)

ELF-speaker data

Example 1: ***I think***

i think for instance what you write about how the nation state is being articulated a postcolonial er nation state is being articulated is theoretical rather than a methodological observation and i also think that when you write later in your dissertation on the question of er technology and articulation - - i also think that you move from er the problem away from the problem of how you actually it's on page 116 articulation theory and ICT's , er you actually move away from the problem of how do you actually go about doing the research in favour of , making a theoretical point so i would like you to reflect a bit on the relationship (between) theory and method and i think this is very important (UDEFD070, S2)

Example 2: ***would***

what i would like to question is your continuous reference to a materialist dimension whereas you do very seldom refer to a strictly economic or what i would call [materialistic] <S2> [yeah] </S2> er frame of analysis as regards er the histories you take into account (UDEFD110, S3)

Example 3: ***kind of***

> you did not control certain factors or vary them systematically like prosperity or or other factors you kind of come later to such possible influential factors between regions inside a country so i think what is important in a way and but i think it's also what what you mainly did is to to take the region as a kind of representant of the national welfare state (UDEFD020, S3)

7.2.2 Comparison of the percentual shares of the most frequent lexical hedges

As the lists of the most frequent lexical hedges reveal, the most common ones and their percentual shares differ considerably between the two groups. Below I will discuss the most important differences.

Before analysing any hedging expressions in more detail, the differences between the percentual shares of the two groups must be addressed. Just by looking at the percentages, it is possible to notice a clear difference in the hedging behaviour of the two groups. The observation is actually closely related to the analysis of the average amounts of different lexical hedges used per minute by the two groups. This analysis is presented in the section 7.1.1 and in more detail in 7.1.3. In those sections, it was stated that ELF-speakers use fewer different expressions as lexical hedges. The fact that the most frequent lexical hedge in the ELF-speaker group has a share of 20 percent while the most common lexical hedge of the native speaker group has a considerably smaller share, 12 percent, illustrates the result that ELF-speakers resort to a smaller variety of lexical hedges. (For a more detailed discussion of the differences in the variety of lexical hedges used, see section 7.1.3.)

Interestingly enough, after the striking difference in the shares of the most common lexical hedge, the percentages of the remaining lexical hedges are quite similar in the two groups. The second most frequent lexical hedges get a share of about 9 percent, the third most common lexical hedges about 7 percent, and so on. The only difference between the two groups that should be acknowledged is that the percentual shares drop slightly more quickly in the ELF-data than in the native speaker data. This can be explained by the fact that the most frequent lexical hedge in the ELF-data has clearly

replaced some of the other common lexical hedges thus leaving them with a smaller percentage.

7.2.3 Comparison of the most frequent lexical hedges

When moving on to looking at the actual lexical hegdes, the composition of the lists must be analysed. The two lists include many of the same expressions, albeit in different places. Expressions that are found on both lists are *I think; would; could;* and *just*. Expressions found only among the most common lexical hedges of the native speakers are *sort of; it seems to me / to me;* and *and so forth*. Similarly unique to the most common lexical hedges of ELF-speakers are *kind of; a bit;* and *and so on*. On a closer look at the expressions found on only one of the lists, it is easy to notice that some of the different expressions are, in fact, very similar; they only differ in wording. Such lexical hedges are *sort of* (NS) – *kind of* (ELF) as well as *and so forth* (NS) – *and so on* (ELF). The differences in wording might be partly explained by the fact that the native speakers in this study were speakers of American English, which might explain the preference for certain wordings, such as *and so forth* in stead of *and so on*.

It is quite surprising that the lists of the most frequent lexical hedges are so similar when looking at what expressions were used. The percentages certainly reveal larger differences between the two speaker groups. However, the fact that over half of the expressions – four out of seven – were exactly the same on both lists is a very interesting finding. The amount of similar expressions would be even considerably higher if the expressions *sort of – kind of* and *and so forth – and so on* were counted as the same lexical hedge, ignoring the variation in wording. If these lexical hedges were counted, six out of seven lexical hedges would be the same, amounting up to over 85 percent of the most frequently used lexical hedges being the same in both groups.

The only lexical hedges that have no equivalent in list of the other group are *it seems to me / to me* of the native speakers and *a bit* of the ELF-speakers. The absence of *it seems to me / to me* from the ELF-speaker's most frequent lexical hedges might be a result of the popularity of *I think*. Both of these expressions are used to express a personal

evaluation of some kind. It would seem plausible that ELF-speakers mostly use *I think* to convey a personal evaluation whereas the native speakers use a broader array of expressions for this purpose. What is more puzzling, perhaps, is the popularity of the lexical hedge *a bit* among ELF-speakers. It could be speculated that ELF-speakers frequently use both lexical hedges *a bit* and *just* to express some kind of limitation of the scope of the utterance. For this purpose native speakers would most often seem to use their most frequent lexical hedge, namely *just*. Interestingly this example represents a case in which the ELF-speakers actually frequently employ more expressions than the native speakers to convey a certain meaning.

As the analysis of the most frequent lexical hedges reveals, there are certain differences between the two groups in terms of what expressions are used and how frequently they are used. Looking at it from a native standard point of view, it can be said that the ELF-speakers overuse certain expressions and underuse others. The clearest case of overuse would, of course, be the lexical hedge *I think*, which was used 2.41 times more by the ELF-speakers than by the native speakers. Another example of overuse would be the modal verb *could*, which is slightly overused by the ELF-speakers when compared to native speaker usage. Instances of underuse are common as well. The lexical hedge which is most clearly underused by the ELF-speakers is *just*. It is the most frequent lexical hedge in the native speaker data and is used 3.87 times more by the native speakers in comparison to the ELF-speakers. Returning to an earlier speculation according to which ELF-speakers might use the lexical hedges *a bit* and *just* to convey similar meanings, even their usage combined remains under the use of *just* in the native speaker data.

These instances of overuse and underuse confirm some of the results from previous studies on non-native speaker hedging. For example Metsä-Ketelä (2006) studied vague expressions and discovered that the expression *more or less* was used considerably more by non-native speakers than native English speakers. Also De Cock et al. (1998) reported on several cases of both overuse and underuse in their study which compared native and non-native speaker hedging. One of their findings was that the expression *and so on* was used almost ten times more often by non-native speakers than by native

speakers. This result is not confirmed by the present study, where the lexical hegde *and so on* was slightly underused by the ELF-speakers if compared to the equivalent expression *and so forth* which the native speakers preferred. This radically different result might be due to a different speech genre being studied. The material studied by De Cock et al. (1998) consisted of informal interviews whereas the data of the present study is from a rather formal academic setting.

In order to get a fuller view of the quantitative and qualitative differences that exist between native speaker and ELF-speaker use of lexical hedges, I decided to go from looking at single lexical hedges to analysing larger groups of lexical hedges. The idea was to see if analysing larger sets would uncover more differences between the two speaker groups. For this purpose, I devised eight different categories in which to place the lexical hedges found in the data. Below I present the categorization and the results that were obtained by this approach.

7.3 Categories of lexical hedges

After identifying all the lexical hedges in the material, I devised eight different categories in which to place the lexical hedges according to functional similarity. Grouping individual expressions into larger sets enabled me to analyse the lexical hedges more effectively and also to compare differences between native English speakers and ELF-speakers. I used a bottom-up method in establishing the categories. In a sense this categorization was also a by-product of the whole analytical process. Below is the list of the categories.

1. PERSONAL EVALUATIONS
2. EXPRESSIONS OF APPROXIMATION
3. EXPRESSIONS OF LIMITATION
4. MODAL VERBS
5. EXPRESSIONS OF HESITATION
6. LEXICAL VERBS
7. EXPRESSIONS OF METADISCOURSE
8. OTHER

7.3.1 Overview of the categories

In this section, I first present the different categories and then move on to discussing and comparing the results of the native English speakers and ELF-speakers.

Personal evaluations

The first category includes lexical hedges such as *I think; it seems to me / to me; I guess; I suppose; I have the feeling*, and even more exotic hedges such as *I read you as stated that; maybe my perception is not quite right;* or *I seem to consider*, to give just a few examples. Although not all the lexical hedges in this category are synonyms of *I think*, what they have in common is that the hedge is somehow related to a speaker's personal evaluation. It is precisely the element of personal evaluation that makes these expressions lexical hedges and renders the utterance they govern less threatening. An example illustrates the difference:

(Note: Lexical hedges in general are highlighted in yellow and the ones under closer examination are also underlined.)

> i'm wondering if it would make more sense just to quote the original, of, the original of the piece or conceivably even this and the original (Music Dissertation Defense, S5, native speaker data)
>
> cf. it makes more sense to quote the original - -

By looking at the example above, it is easy to see how removing the personal evaluation *I'm wondering* from the beginning of the utterance would make it sound more direct and thus more threatening to the hearer. Of course the other two lexical hedges, *would* and *just*, soften the utterance as well, but the fact that the whole utterance starts by the speaker marking the following speech as his or her personal evaluation of some sort is certainly important for softening this critical comment.

Expressions of approximation

The second category includes all the lexical hedges that are used to show that an utterance or a specific word should not be understood in its literal meaning in the sense that it is only an approximation of some sort. In the data, these expressions were regularly used to soften critical comments. It was clear that these words were not only used to make a specific semantic relationship fuzzier but that they were also regularly put to use as a means to make the relationship between the speaker and the content of the utterance fuzzier. However, no differentiation is made between these two usages in this study. As was pointed out in the theoretical part above, both usages can be seen as aiming at softening the critical comment and thus making it more acceptable to the addressee.

Approximative expressions include lexical hedges such as *sort of; kind of; in a way; somewhat; somehow*, to name the most common ones. I also included the expressions *and so on* and *and so forth* in this category because although their usage differs from expressions such as *kind of* or *sort of*, they still bring a similar sense of 'fuzziness' to the content of the utterance they govern. Below are some examples of approximative lexical hedges in a context:

> i know one of the the issues that was uh, uh sort of floating around in my mind at the time was was the question of, sort of historical context chronology, and and so forth and, of course you've chosen to do a, uh, a a nonchronological approach - - but um, you know there there seem to be so many changes in his career, uh, of position and interest and so forth, so that when, for instance i came to this uh this portion, i believe you were talking about a concert that took place in_ this is the Kyoto concert of nineteen, seventy-six or [S2: yeah] whenever, uh and and you say um, you quote him about making the piano sing you're
>
> talking about his vocalizations and and so forth i want the notes to flo- fly naturally float in the air and so forth, that's the only thing that interests me. (Music Dissertation Defense, S3, native speaker data)

> you have three charts but then they vanish somehow i didn't i didn't find them again i was looking for them - - it seems a bit to be the kind of ad hoc characteristic or do you is there a

tradition of characterising such employment policies with these terms (EDEFD020, S3, ELF-data)

Expressions of limitation

The third category includes all lexical hedges that express a limitation of some sort. What this means in practice is that all the hedges in this category somehow limit the scope of the utterance and thus soften the content of a critical comment. Such lexical hedges as *a little; a bit; just; quite; fairly; slightly; in one respect* belong to this category. The function of these hedges is best illustrated with examples from the data:

> it seems to be at least with respect to some things that Chinese are more, overconfident, than Americans. so how would you put those? (Social Psychology Dissertation Defense, S1, native speaker data)

> you have a rather conventional concept of governance you no- you don't refer you didn't find it worthwhile to to use foucault's analysis where you almost everything is governance (UDEFD140, S2, ELF-data)

Modal verbs

The fourth category consists of all the modal verbs that were encountered in the material. Those were the following: *would, could, might, may* and *should*. Examples from the data:

> you may wanna use that term of im- implicit contradiction and say okay now i'm gonna get really explicit, in fact as you go from one to two to three, you are making the explicitness of the contradiction [S2: right] e- ever greater [S2: right so] and that would be a nice organizing theme (Social Psychology Dissertation Defense, S1, native speaker data)

> there is m- one erm problem which i would like to ask you to in one respect there could might appear kind of tautolo- tautology namely in the dependent variable one factor is one indicator the the ability to promote local co-operation and then on the other hand also the explanatory variables there is the ability to mo- promote local co-operation erm by forming social networks and so on what could you perhaps explain a bit more what is the dependent

part and what is the explanatory part in relation to this (UDEFD020, S3, ELF-data)

Expressions of hesitation

In the fifth category, I included all lexical hedges that explicitly mark hesitation. It is important to bear in mind that hesitation can, of course, be expressed in numerous ways, not just with single lexical hedges. However, certain hedges have a clear hesitative meaning and therefore I felt it justified to place them in their own category. For instance the following expressions were listed in this category: *perhaps; maybe; probably*, to list some of the most common ones. Examples from the data include the following:

> maybe, maybe it is unconscious borrowing, but it seems to me you'd have to, do an analysis of other improvisers which have entirely different, [S2: right] temporal structures in order to make the case for borrowing here. (Music Dissertation Defense, S1, native speaker data)

> the role that er some feminist writing plays is perhaps er more important than what is actually showed er and what is actually spoken out so to say [in the text] (UDEFD110, S2, ELF-data)

Lexical verbs

The sixth category consists of lexical verbs, which are used as lexical hedges. This group is one of the smallest of the eight categories, but it includes an extremely important lexical hedge, namely the verb *seem*. Other examples are not numerous, but include the following: *assume; tend to; try to;* and *claim*. Below are some examples of how the verb *seem* was put to use:

> and this seems to be especially problematic since you're cutting across languages (Social Psychology Dissertation Defense, S3, native speaker data)

> do you have more than er a priori opinion to support this high assessment this high re-regard in which you seem to hold these literary texts and their importance for for for what you’re doing (UDEFD050, S3, ELF-data)

Expressions of metadiscourse

The seventh category is also a small one but it includes some of the most interesting lexical hedges found in the material. It consist of lexical hedges in which the speaker explicitly comments on his or her own criticising. These are expressions that also Brown and Levinson take up in their discussion of negative politeness and hedging. Brown and Levinson call these expressions 'hedges addressed to politeness strategies' as they directly notify the hearer of a face threat that follows. Brown and Levinson list as such expressions for instance *to be honest* or *I hate to have to say this* (1987: 171 – 172). Examples from my material are the following:

> the the thing that brought me up short a little bit and, i'm not trying to catch you on anything but i wonder if you'd just comment on it was th- th- the date of the quote was sixty-nine, which is quite a bit before, that particular concert and, i just wonder the extent to which, with somebody who's been so, uh, publicly available and who has made so many pronouncements some of them contradicting each other, how do you know, when, something that he says at a particular time, it can be applied to, things uh, later in his career? (Music Dissertation Defense, S3, native speaker data)
>
> this is not criticism but in my view this er table from lauglo it fits much more high economy high income societies i think it's very difficult to place some country like mozambique or very poor countries in this table (UDEFD140, S2, ELF-data)
> now i'm going to be nasty <S1> @@ </S1> it sort of reminds me of er two er of two er not necessarily theoretically compatible ways of looking at this , one is a way that you actually referred to yourself namely alt- althusserian ideology criticism , and the other one which you actually w- when you said that you can use it to and you made reference to gramsci to actually criticise the ideology of the market (UDEFD070, S2, ELF-data)

Other

The final, eighth category simply consists of the expressions I was unable to or too hesitant to place elsewhere. This category will not be analysed in more detail.

Finally, what has to be said, of course, is that the above categories do overlap in some

ways. Lexical hedges themselves can be very vague and also greatly affected by the context in which they appear. Because of this a categorization with no overlapping would be virtually impossible to achieve. It is possible to argue that certain expressions should be placed in a different category. However, I have done the categorization after a careful analysis and by applying similar criteria to both speaker groups. Therefore I do think that these categories provide an applicable tool for analysing the hedging behaviour of the native speakers and ELF-speakers. Complete lists of the expressions and how they were categorized can be found in Appendix 4.

7.3.2 Comparison of the categories

After presenting the categories, I will move on to discuss what kinds of differences this categorization revealed between the native English speakers and ELF-speakers. First I will present the percentual results and then proceed with a closer analysis.

The table below gives an overview of the different categories and of how popular they were in both speaker groups. The biggest categories are presented first, then moving on to the smaller ones. The percentages have been rounded up so that no decimal values were taken into account.

Table 3

Categories for lexical hedges 1/2

	PERSONAL EVALUATIONS	EXPRESSIONS OF APPROXIMATION	EXPRESSIONS OF LIMITATION	MODAL VERBS
NATIVE SPEAKERS	24%	23%	24%	18%
ELF-SPEAKERS	31%	21%	14%	19%

Categories for lexical hedges 2/2

	EXPRESSIONS OF HESITATION	LEXICAL VERBS	EXPRESSIONS OF METADISCOURSE	OTHER
NATIVE SPEAKERS	5%	4%	1%	1%
ELF-SPEAKERS	4%	4%	3%	4%

As can be seen in Table 3, there are some differences between the two speaker groups in terms of the percentual shares of the categories. The biggest differences seem to come out in 'personal evaluations', 'expressions of limitation', 'expressions of metadiscourse', and 'other'. The remaining categories get even surprisingly similar percentual shares. Below I discuss the categories in which the biggest differences between the native English speakers and ELF-speakers came out. The only exception is the category 'other', which I leave outside the analysis. This is because it is a more or less 'rag-bag' category and therefore analysing it in more detail would make little sense.

7.3.2.1 Personal evaluations

Starting from the biggest category, 'personal evaluations', it is clear that the ELF-speakers use lexical hedges in this category more than the native speakers. Out of all the lexical hedges in the ELF-speaker data, 31 percent were expressions of personal evaluation. The corresponding figure of the native speakers was 24 percent. It is interesting to notice that the tendency anticipated already in the lists of most frequent lexical hedges (see section 7.2) carried over to these categories as well. The most frequently used lexical hedge of the ELF-speakers was *I think*. This was not the case with the native speakers.

Not only are personal evaluations generally used more by ELF-speakers but they also resort to a broader array of expressions when conveying personal evaluations than the native speakers. This is fascinating because when looking at the whole data, ELF-

speakers on the whole use a clearly smaller array of expressions as lexical hedges (see 7.1.3 for a more detailed discussion). Table 4 below shows the differences:

Table 4

Expressions of personal evaluation

NATIVE SPEAKERS		ELF-SPEAKERS	
I think 17 / I would think 1	18	I think 46 / I do think 2	48
it seems to me 7 / to me 5 / it would seem to me 1	13	to my mind	4
I'm not sure 5 / I'm not quite sure 1	6	it seems to me 2 / to me 1	3
I guess	5	I guess	3
I wondered 1 / I just wonder 1 / I'm wondering 1	3	I wonder 2 / was wondering 1	3
as far as I can tell	2	I have the feeling	2
I suppose	1	I would say	2
I believe	1	I find	1
I felt	1	as far as I can see	1
it occurs to me	1	in my view	1
at least in my experience	1	I take to mean	1
I don't know what exactly	1	I read you as stated that	1
but maybe I don't know maybe maybe I'm, I'm wrong	1	I'm not so certain	1
maybe my perception is I mean, is not quite right	1	I seem to consider	1
		if I understood this correctly	1
		but I think it's also what you mainly did	1
		my personal position would be	1
TOTAL 55 occurrences; approximately 1.0/min		**TOTAL 75 occurrences; approximately 1.2/min**	

The popularity of lexical hedges with a personally evaluative content among the ELF-speakers is a feature of ELF that needs to be looked at more carefully. As was pointed out in the theoretical part, ELF-researchers see the deviations that ELF-speakers have from native speaker language use as linguistic innovations that serve to make ELF a more efficient means of communication for its speakers (Jenkins 2007: 17). With this in mind, it would be possible to claim that ELF-speakers prefer using expressions of personal evaluation because they serve a certain communicative need that the speakers have.

One explanation could be the fact that lexical hedges that express personal evaluation are often relatively easy to recognize as all of them are multi-word constructions and often, though not always, found in the beginning of the utterance they govern. This might be one reason why they are attractive to ELF-speakers who have a tendency or perhaps even a need to increase explicitness in interaction. As the expressions of personal evaluation are easy to notice, the ELF-speaker can assume that his or her interlocutor understands the hedge in question. All of this probably happens unconsciously; I do not mean to claim that ELF-speakers ponder these kinds of issues every time before opening their mouth. Anyhow, if this is the explanation or a partial explanation, it would explain why native speakers use expressions of personal evaluation less. They can supposedly assume that their interlocutors understand their hedging even from less obvious clues. Maybe this is why the most frequent lexical hedge of the native speakers was, in fact, *just* instead of *I think.*

The preference that ELF-speakers exhibit for personal evaluations might also be a sign of enhanced cooperativeness that Mauranen (2008) lists as a characteristic of ELF-interaction. Softening critical comments by referring to one's own persona might indeed be a sign of cooperation. The interlocutor is given more freedom, as it were, to ignore a specific claim since it was 'only' an evaluation of another person. Of course all hegdes aim at giving the interlocutor more freedom of action as Brown and Levinson state (1987), but when looking at it from the point of view of cooperation, it is perhaps the expressions of personal evaluation that most clearly do so.

Another possible explanation for the fact that ELF-speakers prefer lexical hedges that express personal evaluation is, perhaps, a slightly more negative one. It could be speculated that since the ELF-speakers are using a foreign language when performing a rather demanding communicative task – namely being opponents in a thesis defence – they are more self-conscious than their native speaker counterparts. This supposed self-consciousness would then lead to very explicit hedging and also to an increased use of personal evaluations. However, this is a mere speculation and cannot be answered satisfactorily on the basis of this study.

7.3.2.2 Expressions of limitation

Another category that was differently used by the two speaker groups was 'expressions of limitation'. The lexical hedges belonging to this category were clearly preferred by the native speakers who used them nearly twice as much as the ELF-speakers. This tendency was already visible from the lists of most frequent lexical hedges. There one of the hedges expressing limitation – *just* – was the most popular among the native speakers and clearly underused by the ELF-speakers. However, *just* was not the only lexical hedge expressing limitation that the ELF-speakers underused. On a closer examination of all the expressions of limitation, it is possible to notice at least a slight underuse of nearly all these expressions. There are also several expressions that are absent from the list of ELF-speakers altogether. (The expression ‘underuse’ is employed here simply to refer to differences in the numbers of hedges used. It is not meant to be a value statement pointing out shortcomings in the ELF-speakers’ language use.)

The table below illustrates the phenomenon:

Table 5

Expressions of limitation

NATIVE SPEAKERS		ELF-SPEAKERS	
just	28	a bit	11
quite	5	just	8
almost	5	mainly	4
a little	5	quite	2
a little bit	2	rather	2
a bit	2	pretty	2
fairly	2	fairly	1
pretty	1	in one respect	1
slightly	1	at some point	1
a few	1	some	1
in that sense	1		
on the face of it	1		
just little, little nitpicky fuzzy stuff	1		
at least with respect to some things	1		
sometimes	1		
TOTAL 57 occurrences; approximately 1.0/min		**TOTAL 33 occurrences; approximately 0.5/min**	

It is interesting to notice how the use of these expressions of limitation differs between the two speaker groups. After going through the whole material, I would claim that the frequent use of these little, hegdy words is a phenomenon of English as a native language in the sense that these expressions seem to be used very casually, almost just thrown in to give the speech some flavour perhaps. This kind of usage is not as common among the ELF-speakers, who seem hedge in a clearer way, as was partly stated in the preceding section on personal evaluations. This difference comes out especially saliently when looking at the use of the expression *just*. This expression was used as a lexical hedge 3.87 times more by the native speakers than by the ELF-speakers. This count does not even include all the occurrences of the expression *just,* which was frequently used in other than hedging functions as well and most often by native speakers.

When looking at these findings, it is easy to see what for instance Nikula meant when arguing that non-native speakers risk sounding too formal or even arrogant if they use hedges scarcely (1997: 203). Based on the findings of this study, it seems that ELF-

speakers hedge slightly less and also prefer clear, explicit lexical hedges, such as expressions of personal evaluation. This differs somewhat from native speaker behaviour, as has been explained in the above sections. Returning to the concern of Nikula (1997), it has to be stated that the fact that ELF-speakers hedge differently is only a problem if they in fact take part in native – non-native interaction. However, as was stated in chapter 5, the assumption behind ELF-research is the fact that non-native speakers mostly interact with one another. In those kinds of situations Nikula's concerns would be redundant.

7.3.2.3 Expressions of metadiscourse

The last category to be taken up for closer examination is that of 'expressions of metadiscourse'. Although this category is a small one, it still brings out differences between the two speaker groups. Lexical hedges that express functions of metadiscourse are clearly used more by the ELF-speakers than by the native English speakers. The lists below show the differences:

Table 6

Expressions of metadiscourse

NATIVE SPEAKERS		ELF-SPEAKERS	
I'm not trying to catch you on anything	1	now I'm (not) going to be nasty	2
I'd be willing to let you	1	this is not criticism but	2
		I'm putting this again in a bit simplified terms	1
		I'm just critical	1
		I don't know if you agree on this	1
TOTAL 2 occurrences; approximately 0.03/min		**TOTAL 7 occurrences; approximately 0.1/min**	

There seems to be a strong link between these expressions and the expressions of personal evaluation which were also more frequently used by the ELF-speakers. Although the lexical hedges expressing metadiscoursive functions and those expressing

personal evaluations are different to some extent, they also have similarities. Precisely those similarities might explain why both categories are favoured by the ELF-speakers. Firstly, both kinds of lexical hedges are very salient both to the speaker and to the hearer. As was pointed out in conjunction with the discussion on personal evaluations, this might be a reason why these expressions are attractive to ELF-speakers. These expressions are easy to notice and therefore can be assumed to be understood by all interlocutors.

Secondly, it might be that the ELF-speakers want to enhance cooperation (Mauranen 2008), which was also discussed above. The lexical hedges conveying function of metadiscourse are an excellent tool for doing that. This is because they prepare the hearer for a following face threat, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 171 – 172) point out. This is clearly cooperation-enhancing, as there is less risk of a conflict or communication breakdown.

Finally, it could also be that the ELF-speakers feel they have a need to explain themselves more. This might be due to the fact that they are using a foreign language or just wish to avoid misunderstandings, which is also a characteristic of ELF-communication (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 87). Lexical hedges expressing metadiscoursive functions are an excellent way to do that as they explicitly explain what is coming and also enable the speaker to protect his or her own face as well as the face of the interlocutor before making a critical comment.

7.4 Characteristics of lexical hedging in ELF

The second research question of this thesis was concerned with finding any possible characteristics of how lexical hedges are used as a politeness strategy in ELF. This section aims to provide answers to that question. Although the point of view of ELF has been incorporated to some extent already in the analysis of the results presented above, this section reviews those findings and aims to broaden the analysis of ELF characteristics.

As has become apparent from the results presented above, the way ELF-speakers use lexical hedges differs from that of native English speakers. It differs in terms of the amounts of lexical hedges used, the variety of expressions used, as well as in terms of what expressions or more generally what kinds of expressions are most frequently used.

To briefly itulate the main findings, it can be said that ELF-speakers hedged about 13 percent less than the native speakers on the whole. In addition to this, they used different lexical hedges nearly 30 percent less than the native speakers. The most frequently used lexical hedge of the ELF-speakers was *I think*, which was clearly overused if compared to the native speaker usage. Finally, ELF-speakers in general used lexical hedges which express personal evaluation or perform some kind of metadiscourse functions more than the native speakers. Lexical hedges expressing limitation, on the other hand, were underused.

Based on these findings, it is possible to state that the ELF-speaker usage of lexical hedges does indeed differ from that of the native speakers. This is in agreement with most of the recent studies that have been done on non-native speaker hedging (see section 5.4). However, what is different in the present study is that the differences between ELF-speaker language usage and native speaker language usage are not seen as problematic. ELF is thus viewed as a legitimate form of English, not as deficient learner language.

It could be stated that all the deviations that ELF-speakers had from native speaker use seemed to be directed to making the communication clearer and more explicit. The ELF-speakers seemed to stress and prefer certain things, such as lexical hedges expressing personal evaluation, and then again give less weight to other features that were perhaps more prominent in native speaker language use. Interestingly, this shift in preferences did not disturb the ELF-communication in the least but seemed to serve to make it more effective instead.

Therefore it could be concluded that the results of this study support the idea of ELF being a functional, legitimate variety of English. The thesis defences that were

conducted by ELF-speakers were successful speech events in the sense that there did not seem to be any major communicational problems not to mention breakdowns. The quantitative and qualitative differences that were discovered between ELF-speaker and native speaker usage of lexical hedges clearly did not make the ELF-communication less successful. Quite the contrary, in fact, as has been pointed out throughout the analysis of the results. The differences that ELF-speakers have in comparison to the native speakers simply seem to make ELF a more functional and effective means of communication for its speakers. This idea that was already presented in the theoretical part seems to be supported by the results of this study.

In the light of these results, it would be very questionable not to see ELF as a variety in its own right and for instance to continue to uphold native speaker varieties as sole models for language learning. As Jenkins (2007: 17) pointed out, the socio-cultural characteristics of native speakers and ELF-speakers are so profoundly different that it would be quite unnatural if this was not reflected in how language is used.

7.5 Results in the light of politeness theory

A key element in both the research questions as well as in the theoretical framework of this thesis is politeness theory and how lexical hedges are used as a politeness strategy. Therefore, this section reviews the results in the light of politeness theory and focuses on analysing them more on the basis of politeness theory than purely linguistic analysis, which has been dominant in the preceding sections.

From the point of view of politeness theory, it can be stated that both native speakers and ELF-speakers used various politeness strategies in the thesis defences that were analysed. As this study was concerned with lexical hedges and thus negative politeness, the discussion has naturally revolved around those. However, it has to be remembered that politeness in language is achieved through numerous politeness strategies, both positive and negative. In the following, I discuss some observations I made when analysing the data. The idea is not to broaden the analysis to, for instance, strategies of positive politeness as that is completely out of the scope of this study. I will merely

remark upon some features of the use of positive politeness strategies that also had an effect upon the negative politeness or more specifically hedging.

Firstly, there were clear differences between speakers in what politeness strategies they preferred. Some speakers did not use hedges a great deal but chose to mark their speech less threatening by, for instance, the frequent use of the inclusive expression *you know*, which is used to convey a kind of mutual understanding of things. Other frequently used expressions of positive politeness were different tag questions, such as *right* and *isn't it*. These differences between speakers existed irrespective of whether they were ELF-speakers or native speakers. Some individuals simply preferred this strategy, which naturally decreased their need to use lexical hedges. An example illustrates this phenomenon:

> um, and at that point you don't really feel A-flat has been, has has taken over as the tonic *do you*? i mean this piece is still really really clearly in E-flat major *right*? (Music Dissertation Defense, S5, native speaker data)

The example shows how a speaker uses two tag questions to include the addressee in the discussion and at least theoretically ask for his opinion. No lexical hedges were used in this stretch to mitigate the FTA.

Another interesting observation from the data was the fact that both native speakers and ELF-speakers sometimes start an utterance without softening the criticism at all but quickly correct themselves and add a lexical hedge, for instance. These are 'concessive repairs' (see Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2005) and clear evidence of the need to mitigate the face threats that the opponents felt. Examples include the following underlined parts:

(Note: Lexical hedges in general are highlighted in yellow and the ones under closer examination are also underlined.)

you say this is the process that's going on and so forth but i'm i'm not looking for, (xx) anything smarmy or sentimental or whatever, but, it's like you're really on guard, - - it's a it's a vexed, it's a slightly vexed position, i think. (Music Dissertation Defense, S3, native speaker data)

you said er and er , well that er translators tend to the dictionary (xx) or at least i read you as <S1> mhm </S1> stated that (UDEFD050, S3, ELF-speaker data)

let's say concretely you have a (village or whatever) the pagoda association and then they have their ideas or very ti- er t- close ti- er tight ties in between themselves and then you come from a NGO from western perspective and you require at least implicitly you require a (xx) and it (xx) that then what happens to the culture something happens when the local culture make attempts to assimilate (UDEFD140, S2, ELF-speaker data)

Another factor which affected the number of lexical hedges used was the speaking style of the opponent. Some opponents simply used a more conversational, easy-going style of examining, whereas others were more direct and to the point with their comments. Normally the speakers who preferred a more conversational style used less hedges: clearly they had less need to as the face threats were diminished thanks to the relaxed way of carrying out the examination. Those opponents who gave more direct feedback normally also hedged more or at least used some kind of inclusive expressions such as *you know*.

The fact that the thesis defences differed from one another because of the speaking styles of the opponent or opponents could be seen as compromising the results of this study. However, different styles of opposing were found in both the native speaker data and in the ELF-data. For example in the native speaker data, the Music Dissertation Defense has a rather direct style and a great deal of hedging, whereas the Social Psychology Dissertation is conducted in a more discussion-like manner. The five ELF thesis defences all differ from one another and include both more direct and less direct styles of examining.

7.6 Summary of the most important results

In the following I summarize the main findings of this study. I start with the amounts of lexical hedges, then move on to the most frequent expressions. After that I will present findings on the different categories of lexical hedges. Finally, I will bring up the most important ELF-characteristics as well as some aspects of the results relating to politeness theory.

Starting with the amounts of lexical hedges used, the main findings were that the native English speakers used more lexical hedges per minute than the ELF-speakers. Native speakers used approximately 4.44 lexical hedges per minute whereas the ELF-speakers used 3.85 lexical hedges per minute, which is about 13 percent less. An even bigger difference was discovered between how many different lexical hedges were employed per minute. The exact amounts were 2.30 different lexical hedges per minute for the native speakers and 1.64 for the ELF-speakers. The ELF-speakers thus had nearly 30 percent less variation on their usage of lexical hedges.

Secondly, there were differences between which lexical hedges were most frequently used. The native speakers used the following expressions most: *just* (12%)*; would* (9.5%)*;* and *I think* (7.5%). The most frequently used lexical hedges of the ELF-speakers were *I think* (20%); *would* (9%); and *kind of* (7.5%). The percentages stand for the relative percentual share a particular expression had from all the lexical hedges the speaker groups used.

Moving on to the categories of lexical hedges. The single lexical hedges were grouped into larger entities in order to be able to analyse the hedging behaviour of the two groups more effectively. The groups were the following: 1) personal evaluations, 2) expressions of approximation, 3) expressions of limitation, 4) modal verbs, 5) expressions of hesitation, 6) lexical verbs, 7) expressions of metadiscourse, and 8) other. The biggest differences between native speakers and ELF-speakers came out in the categories 1) personal evaluations, 3) expressions of limitation, and 7) expressions of metadiscourse. Categories 1) and 7) were used considerably more by the ELF-speakers

than by the native speakers. Native speakers in turn used category 3) more.

These findings show how the ELF-speaker language use differs from that of native speakers in terms of lexical hedging. These deviations, however, are not seen as problematic but as a normal development of English as an international language. The differences that the ELF-speakers had in their language use did not cause any communicational problems not to mention breakdowns. Quite the contrary, these deviations from native speaker language use seemed to have pragmatic grounds and thus they served to make ELF an effective means of communication for its speakers.

Finally, as the results were analysed from the point of view of politeness theory, it can be said that lexical hedges were used throughout the data as a negative politeness strategy. However, some variation was also found as some speakers preferred to use, for example, positive politeness strategies more and thus give less weight to negative politeness strategies and lexical hedges. In addition to individual speaking styles, also the thesis defences differed from one another in terms of the way the whole event was conducted. Some opponents preferred a more discussion-like style of examining and thus had less need to use lexical hedges whereas others spoke more directly and normally also resorted to a more extensive use of lexical hedges.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to discover what kinds of differences exist between native English speakers and ELF-speakers in their use of lexical hedges when giving criticism in face-to-face interaction. The genre that I selected was academic spoken discourse and the speech events doctoral thesis defences, in which I concentrated on the opponents' language use. The research questions were the following:

1. How do ELF-speakers and native speakers of English use lexical hedges as a politeness strategy when giving criticism in doctoral thesis defences?
2. What characterizes the way ELF-speakers use lexical hedges as a politeness strategy in academic spoken interaction?

Before starting the empirical research, I compiled a theoretical background for the study. As the main theories that would underpin my own research, I selected general linguistic theory on hedges, theory on politeness in language use, and theory on ELF as a possible variety of English. After the theoretical part was completed, I moved on to selecting and analysing material for the empirical research.

The material for the study was obtained from two corpora, the MICASE-corpus for the native speakers and the ELFA-corpus for the ELF-speakers. From the corpora, I selected suitable thesis defences and opponents for the analysis. The total number of opponents was five for the ELF-speakers and six for native speakers. From both groups I had approximately 60 minutes of recorded and transcribed speech.

After selecting the material, I analysed it with a discourse analytic approach. Firstly, I identified all lexical hedges in the material. After this initial phase of identification, I counted how many lexical hedges were used per minute in both sets of data and also how many different lexical hedges were used per minute. Then I moved on to counting which expressions were most frequently used by both speaker groups. After this, I

formed eight different categories in which the lexical hedges could be placed on the basis of functional similarity. I wanted to group the expressions in to larger sets so that the hedging behaviour of the two groups could be analysed more effectively. After these phases, I analysed the results from the point of view of ELF and tried to see if any characteristics of ELF surfaced. Finally, the results were also looked at from the perspective of politeness theory, which was one of the key theories in the theoretical part of the thesis.

The results of the study supported the hypothesis I presented in the beginning of the thesis. Both groups used lexical hedges when giving criticism, although the ELF-speakers did so slightly less and also in a less varied way. However, they used some interesting novel expressions as I predicted, especially when expressing personal evaluations. The fact that ELF-speakers used lexical hedges less than the native speakers did not result in any communicational problems - nor did I expect it to. The ELF-speakers simply seem to have a slightly different way of using language as compared to the native speakers. However, why should this not be so, as the two groups are, in fact, rather different when it comes to socio-cultural characteristics?

On a more critical note, I think the main problem with this study was the difficulty of deciding which expressions are lexical hedges and which are not. I had to go through the material several times to be content with the analysis. Looking back, it would have been a good idea to consult another linguist and ask for a second opinion. However, the analysis is now completed and at its final form I can stand behind it. Anyone who has attempted similar analyses must know how difficult it can sometimes be to identify hedges or other linguistic items that behave like wet soap – just as you think you got it figured out, it slips out of your grip and you have to start all over.

Despite the difficulties, hedging was a very interesting topic to work with. This thesis answered the questions I initially set out to discover. However, as the study progressed and I started to analyse the results, new questions quickly arose. *Why did the ELF-speakers prefer these expressions? Why not those?*, and so on. I think this topic –

comparing the hedging behaviour of two speaker groups – would offer fantastic possibilities for further research. For instance, interviewing the opponents after a thesis defence and asking them how they perceived the situation could help broaden the researcher's understanding of how the participants actually perceived the speech event. Another idea would be to see if the results obtained from this study would hold in other kinds of genres, for example in casual conversation. There are results from previous research that show differences, but it would be interesting to set up a study and see if it really supports or refutes those results. One more, quite laborious, idea for further research would be to analyse for instance the material of this study so that all kinds of hedging (lexical, syntactic, prosodic) as well as strategies of positive politeness would be taken into account. This would give a fuller picture of how the speakers attend to interpersonal concerns when giving criticism. It might also reveal novel differences in the way ELF-speakers and native English speakers use language.

All in all I would think that any research focusing on ELF is welcome, as so many of its features are still unknown or at least not yet scientifically tried and tested. I originally chose this topic precisely because ELF sounded like such a fresh and even radical concept within linguistics. Being an ELF-speaker myself, it was very motivating to study this variety of English whose legitimate existence continues to be such a shock for some. However, ELF is certainly here to stay and hopefully the negative attitudes towards it will change with years to come. I think accepting ELF as a variety of English would have beneficial implications for example for foreign language teaching, as its goal would no longer have to be ”the (unattainable) goal of nativeness” as Mauranen puts it (2003: 514).

The aim of this thesis was to study the way lexical hedges are used by two speaker groups. The results showed differences, but also certain similarities. What I see as the most important result, however, is that when it comes to language use and human interaction, there is never only one way of doing things right – variation remains an inseparable part of human conduct.

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APPENDICES