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## CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC TEXTS. AN ENGLISH AND CZECH CONTRASTIVE STUDY

Academic authors employ various language means in order to construct and disseminate knowledge, to sound persuasive, to undergird their arguments, but also to seek agreement within the academic community. The aim of this paper is to analyse a selected group of rhetorical strategies used by Anglophone and Czech authors of Linguistics research articles (RAs) and research theses (RTs). These strategies are assumed to vary in both academic genres since the position of their writers within the academic community differs. Even though authors of RAs have to meet reviewers' requirements in order for their article to be published, so their relative position may be lower than that of the reviewers', authors of RAs may have the same "absolute status" as the reviewers may be just as expert in that particular field. By contrast, the status of research students is lower than that of their evaluators both in relative and absolute terms. Even though students may gain some learned authority in presenting an original contribution, their assessors command both learned and institutional authority, hence are endowed with a higher status. Apart from comparing rhetorical strategies used in RAs and RTs, the paper focuses on cross-cultural differences between Anglophone and Czech academic writing traditions.

*Keywords: rhetorical strategies, Anglophone academic writing tradition, Czech academic writing tradition, strategic hedging, research article, research thesis*

### 1. Introduction

It is widely known that in recent decades English has become a dominant language of academic publishing, which means, besides other things, that also academics who are not native speakers of English must be able to write their

articles in this language since their professional careers depend on publishing in international academic journals. The result of English becoming the lingua franca of the academic world is that the majority of authors publishing their work in English are non-native speakers (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2013a: 7). The educated English native speaker has always been regarded as a prototype of appropriate language performance and the Anglophone academic writing tradition has been considered “the prevailing discourse convention” (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2013a: 7). However, as Dontcheva-Navratilova (2013a: 8) points out, “in the last decade numerous researchers and educational practitioners have problematized the role of the native speaker as a model and questioned the practice of imposing the Anglo-American tradition of academic writing on intercultural communication (e.g. Flowerdew 2008, Jenkins 2009, Mauranen 2009).”

Moreover, a common practice is that non-native academics are recommended by editors of academic journals to have their papers proofread by an English native speaker before submitting their text for publication. In this connection, Mauranen et al. (2010) raise the question of whether it is justified to insist on these practices in a situation where non-native speakers of English prevail over native speakers and that “perhaps qualities such as clarity and effectiveness in communication should be considered from their perspective rather than that of the native speaking minority” (2010: 184). They continue with the claim that all new authors entering the academic community, regardless of their native language, need to be learned basic principles of academic discourse, since “there are no native speakers of *academic English*” (2010: 184, italics in original) and not only language proficiency matters but also the ability to employ appropriate conventions.

The question also is whether it is legitimate to require linguistic standards used by a national research community if we consider the fact that scholars publish their papers in academic journals that are international. This fact has provided motivation for research into academic texts produced by non-native speakers of English with the aim to find out whether they have acquired conventions of the Anglophone academic writing tradition, how they have conformed to variation in organisation of academic texts, and what rhetorical strategies these authors utilise in order to have their papers accepted by examiners, peer-reviewers, or journal editors. To answer these questions, the present paper focuses on a pragmatic analysis of rhetorical strategies employed by Anglophone and Czech authors of Linguistics research articles and research theses and contrasts their use. Rhetorical strategies examined in the paper follow from the use of specific types of strategic hedges defined by Hyland (1996, 1998). The research article and research thesis represent two important genres of academic discourse since they are utilised by academic authors to construct and disseminate knowledge, to undergird their arguments, and at the same time to seek agreement within the academic community.

The research article (RA) takes up a leading position in reporting new findings and knowledge claims in the academic community because “ratification of claims comes only following their approval by a research network as a whole” (Koutsantoni 2006: 20). In this connection, Latour (1988) maintains that “scientific statements are made into facts by others” (Koutsantoni 2006: 20). Research article authors therefore employ persuasive language means to convince other members of the academic community to accept their new findings.

Before being published, research articles go through a lengthy and difficult peer-review process. Therefore, knowledge claims are structured in a way that disciplinary gatekeepers find convincing. These gatekeepers “act as evaluators of what is acceptable or not. These individuals control access to scholarly discourse and have the power to decide who may speak, about what, when and in what context” (Koutsantoni 2006: 20).

According to Hyland (2013: 168), the system of publication is regarded as an institutionalised system creating knowledge and distributing rewards. “A paper is judged as a contribution to a particular field by an audience of colleagues who are potentially in a position to make use of it” (2013: 168). If reviewers, journal editors, and readers consider it to be of a sufficient quality and give their consent to its publication, or cite it in their papers, the author obtains recognition, e.g. in the form of professional reputation among their academic colleagues, offer of promotion, access to research grants, etc. Thus, academic success is seen as “largely measured by recognition and, in turn, the process of acquiring recognition as dependent on the capacity to produce papers valued by one’s colleague” (Hyland 2013: 169). Scholars not only gain social power within their disciplinary fields but are also influential in “setting standards, directing strategies and determining what is considered good or important in their disciplines” (Hyland 2013: 169).

Focusing now on the research thesis, it is “the most sustained and complex piece of writing ... [students] will undertake” (Swales 2004: 99). Furthermore, research theses (RTs) are regarded as “major intellectual enterprises” (Fox 1985: 7) providing their authors with “valued professional credentials and membership in academic discourse communities” (Koutsantoni 2006: 20). In order for new claims made in RTs to be accepted, research students have to persuade their examiners and assessors of the soundness of their arguments. Therefore, research students find themselves in a similar situation as RA authors: they have to convince the academic community, even though not that large, of the validity and strength of their arguments. These must be presented in a way that match examiners’ expectations since examiners have the authority to set the standards of acceptance of RTs.

Even though these two genres of academic discourse share some features, the position of RA authors and RT authors in academic communities differs, as

follows from what has been said above. Different is also the power imbalance between the two groups of authors on the one hand and disciplinary gatekeepers on the other. When submitting their papers for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, RA authors have a lower relative status compared to peer reviewers, who decide which article will be accepted and which article will be rejected. They are in a more powerful position because they may enforce their standards. RA authors must match these expectations in order for their articles to be published. As Hyland points out,

social interactions present in academic prose not only negotiate community knowledge and credibility, but help to produce and sustain relationships, exercise exclusivity and reproduce interests which lead to an unequal distribution of influence and resources. This is the power to engage with one's peers and to have one's opinion heard, considered and accepted (Hyland 2013: 168).

Despite having a lower relative position compared to these disciplinary gatekeepers, RA authors may have the same level of expertise in that particular discipline. Peer-reviewers use the so-called "institutional authority" to decide on the acceptance or rejection of papers; however, this authority is temporary and expires after a specific period of time, contrary to the expertise, which is constant (Watt 1982). Watt also speaks about the "learned authority" which "requires personal excellence and is constant" (Koutsantoni 2006: 21).

The position of research students differs from that of research authors because both relative and absolute status of student researchers is lower than the status of their examiners. "Even though they may make original contributions to knowledge and have some learned authority, their examiners are still of a higher status and possess both learned and institutional authority, which prevents students from claiming expertise and authority of knowledge" (Koutsantoni 2006: 21). Nevertheless, as Diamond (1996) points out, even research students or novices in academia, who are usually thought to have a lower position, can challenge their status because their authority and power are acknowledged by members of a particular academic community. Furthermore, not only is the status of the author of the text important when gaining credibility, but also the author's ability to face criticism is indispensable.

In order to sound persuasive and credible and in this way to make their relative status higher, academic authors and research students should know expectations of disciplinary gatekeepers and examiners. This knowledge of expectations, understanding the purpose of particular genres, awareness of social contexts of these genres, and adoption of suitable textual practices and conventions have been termed "advanced academic literacy" (Belcher 1995, Paltridge 2002).

The paper will now continue with a brief comparison of Anglophone and Czech academic writing traditions (Section 2), since one of the aims of this paper is to explore cross-cultural differences. In Section 3 material under investigation and methodology will be described. Section 4 presents the results of a quantitative analysis and Section 5 offers a qualitative analysis of the quantitative results. Conclusions are drawn in Section 6.

## **2. Cross-cultural differences in Anglophone and Czech academic writing traditions**

Since the present study focuses on cross-cultural differences regarding rhetorical strategies of hedging in two academic cultures, Anglophone and Czech, this section will briefly focus on their comparison. Variation stemming from different practices adopted by different academic cultures in academic discourse has been explored and confirmed by various studies (cf. Clyne 1987, Čmejrková and Daneš 1997, Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2013a, 2013b, Duszak 1997, Galtung 1981, Mauranen 1993, Siepmann 2006).

In their study examining Czech academic writing and cultural identity, Čmejrková and Daneš (1997: 41) point out that many times Czech society has had to conform to the norms that “appeared to be the bearers of culture, or to confront them”. Czech academics, due to their geographical proximity to other academic cultures in Central Europe, have been constantly developing their rhetorical style to be part of Central European academic discourse communities. Galtung (1981) proposed a taxonomy of intellectual styles suggesting that the Central European academic writing tradition was influenced by the Teutonic style concentrating on theory formation, deductive thinking, and paradigm analysis. This style is more monologue-oriented and less democratic than the Anglophone academic tradition. It is best represented by Germans with whose reasoning Czech scholars came in direct contact. Therefore, the Czech academic discourse resembles the German academic style, for example, in syntax, in the use of similar terminology, and in some aspects concerning the purpose of academic communication. Nevertheless, the Czech academic style also shares some features with the Anglophone tradition, as Čmejrková and Daneš point out (1997: 42).

The Anglophone rhetorical style of academic discourse differs from the Central European tradition predominantly in its orientation on essay writing. British students of language and literature have to write 3000-word essays every week, which are then read out aloud and discussed with other students and their lecturer in tutorials (Hermanns 1985). This explains a key feature of the Anglophone academic style, which is reader orientation. In this tradition,

“a paragraph should normally open with a topic sentence, which all other sentences in the paragraph must support. A concluding sentence helps to end one paragraph and to provide a smooth transition to the next” (Siepmann 2006: 134). The writer must pay full attention to the topic and should not deviate from it since digression is considered a drawback. All these aspects form the principal constituents of the reader-oriented Saxonian intellectual style as described by Galtung. Therefore, compared to the Teutonic rhetorical style, Saxonian academic writing is more dialogic, explicit, and the authorial presence is more apparent.

Another key difference between the Anglophone and Central European academic traditions concerns the writer-reader relationship. In the Czech academic style, the author remains more in the background and dialogic linguistic means (e.g. personal and impersonal markers of attitude) do not occur as frequently as in Anglophone academic writing. These markers expressing author’s attitude modify the illocutionary force of propositions and thus appeal “to the reader in seeking agreement with the viewpoint advanced by the author” (Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2013b: 12). This backgrounded authorial presence is strongly visible in the sub-corpus of research theses written by Czech students, which are rather impersonal, monologic, and much less interactive compared to English research theses, which share the features of Saxonian intellectual style in being more dialogic and reader-oriented.

Research into authorial presence in Anglophone and Czech academic discourse carried out by Dontcheva-Navrátilová (2013b) confirms that even though Czech linguists are aware of writing conventions of Anglophone academic discourse, their authorial presence

is marked by a lower level of interactiveness and authoritativeness and backgrounded authorial presence. The choices of Czech linguists bear signs of interference from the Czech academic literacy and reflect a lower level of self-confidence resulting from their non-native speaker status and a subjective perception of a lesser degree of expertise stemming from the small size of the Czech linguistics community [...] (Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2013b: 28).

Nevertheless, when producing an English-medium publication or a paper for an international academic journal, Czech scholars attempt to conform to the style common in the Anglophone academic tradition. The transfer of Czech academic writing norms and attempts to conform to Anglophone traditions results in “hybridizing forms” (Gotti 2012) reflecting “tension derived from intercultural clashes” (Dontcheva-Navrátilová (2016: 165).

Having described general characteristics of the Anglophone and Czech academic writing traditions, important for understanding basic differences between these two styles and for research carried out in this paper, we will now move on to the description of data and methodology.

### 3. Data and methodology

For the purpose of the present study, a corpus of linguistic research articles and research theses written in English by Anglophone and Czech scholars and research students was compiled. It contains 342,201 words altogether and consists of four sub-corpora:

| Sub-corpus                              | Number of words |
|---|-----------------|
| RAs written by Anglophone linguists (9) | 76,364          |
| RTs written by Anglophone students (8)  | 90,154          |
| RAs written by Czech linguists (9)      | 70,995          |
| RTs written by Czech students (8)       | 104,688         |
| <b>TOTAL NUMBER OF WORDS</b>            | <b>342,201</b>  |

Table 1: Sub-corpora used in the present study and number of words

Research articles were excerpted from these distinguished peer-reviewed linguistic journals: *Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of Linguistics*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *Studia Linguistica: A Journal of General Linguistics* for collecting data from Anglophone researchers, and *Linguistica Pragensia* and *Discourse and Interaction* for obtaining data from Czech scholars. The last two journals are English-medium linguistic journals published in the Czech Republic by Charles University in Prague and by Masaryk University in Brno, respectively. All research articles used for the analysis in the present study are written in English by both Anglophone and Czech linguists and were published between 2014 and 2018. Even though international linguistic journals differ from those published in the Czech Republic as for the prestige and size of the target audience, research articles drawn from them form a representative sample for the research purpose of the present study.

Regarding research theses by both Anglophone and Czech students, they are theses at the master's level written in English between 2013 and 2018. They were produced at universities in the UK (*University of Birmingham*, *University of York*, *University of Sussex*), and in the Czech Republic (*Charles University, Prague*). The selected theses were all of the 'traditional' type consisting of introduction, theoretical background, or literature review, methods, results, discussion, and conclusions. They were downloaded from the universities' websites.

The theoretical framework utilised in this study is a modified version of Hyland's taxonomy of hedges (1996, 1998) since it is particularly useful for the aim of this paper. Hedges modify the illocutionary force of utterances and are used by authors to avoid responsibility for categorical statements. Their appropriate utilisation in academic discourse is therefore vital. According to Hyland, "hedging refers to any linguistic means used to indicate either a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition, or b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically" (1998: 1). Hedges thus help academic authors convey the right amount of certainty to their statements.

Hedges in Hyland's taxonomy consist of two principal categories, namely lexical and strategic, in order to be able to differentiate between lexical means and "regularly used grammatical patterns and other means of expressing reservation in the articles" (Hyland 1998: 103). This division and the subsequent quantitative analysis of both categories of hedges show that lexical mitigation prevails over strategic hedging substantially. However, if strategic hedges were not paid attention to, this type of mitigation would pass unnoticed even though it is an important means of hedging in academic texts.

The main types of lexical hedges include: modal verbs (*could, can, may, might, would, etc.*), epistemic lexical verbs (*suggest, appear, seem, etc.*), epistemic adjectives (*possible, (un)likely*), epistemic adverbs (*apparently, probably, possibly, relatively, etc.*), and epistemic nouns (*possibility, probability*). They predominantly attenuate the illocutionary force of utterances, as described above.

Strategic hedges also provide an important means of mitigation in academic texts, even though they are not that frequent as lexical hedges, as already mentioned. From all hedges occurring in the corpus, they make up around 15%. They form linguistically a very heterogeneous group; therefore, Hyland categorises them according to their functions, namely those referring to "experimental conditions", strategic hedges questioning "the model or method employed", and those acknowledging "inadequate knowledge" (Hyland 1998: 103). My modification of this taxonomy of strategic hedges rests upon the finding that, in agreement with Koutsantoni's research (2006), there are two more functions relating to the use of these hedges not mentioned by Hyland. These are strategies confirming agreement with research of other scholars and hedges acknowledging limitations of the scope of the paper/thesis.

The methodological approach adopted in the present study was both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis aimed at determining the frequency of incidence of strategic hedges in all four sub-corpora and producing comparable data. The qualitative analysis focused on the particular occurrences of strategic hedges in context and identification of rhetorical strategies they perform. All four sub-corpora were searched for strategic hedges manually since context is decisive in determining them and their rhetorical functions. After excerpting all strategic hedges from the four sub-corpora, raw counts were



normalised to a frequency per 10,000 words in order to make a comparison of data possible.

## 4. Results

This section discusses the results of a quantitative analysis and offers a contrastive view of the distribution of strategic hedges and the use of rhetorical strategies by Anglophone and Czech scholars and students. The analysis reveals some interesting facts; however, it is important to emphasise that the corpus was not large enough in order to allow sufficient generalisation of the results.

The lowest number of strategic hedges occurs in research theses written by Czech students, the highest number of them occurs in research theses written by Anglophone students. Anglophone and Czech linguists employed a very similar number of strategic hedges in research articles, as apparent from Table 2. This finding may suggest that Czech linguists have attempted to conform to the norms of the Anglophone academic writing tradition and use hedging devices with a similar frequency of occurrence as their Anglophone counterparts. In addition, since they are academics employed by universities, they are used to publishing their papers in international academic journals in English. They are experts in the field and, of course, familiar with the Anglophone academic writing tradition. This awareness of Anglophone academic writing norms is also confirmed by the occurrence of particular types of strategic hedges (SH) Czech linguists use: the order of SH as for their frequency is the same in both sub-corpora (see Table 2).

The highest amount of SH occurs in the sub-corpus of Anglophone research theses. This may be connected with the fact that student researchers are not that confident about their research and findings and express themselves more tentatively, leaving their assertions open to discussion. Also, they need their theses to be accepted by supervisors and assessors and their claims to be defended if necessary. On the contrary, Czech research students hedge their statements to the least extent if compared to the other three groups of researchers. This does not mean that they are more confident about their claims than their English counterparts; rather, the reason is that they are not that familiar with Anglophone academic writing conventions and therefore they conform more to the norms of the Czech academic writing tradition. As a result, their writing does not sound convincing and authentic.

The reason why authors of research articles hedge less than students is that they are more confident, they have more experience with publishing, but at the same time they open some dialogic space for discussion with their readers. Also, they know that the results they present in their papers are not definitive and always have some limitations.

| Types of SHs                                  | ENG RAs | ENG RTs | CZ RAs | CZ RTs | Types of SHs                             | ENG RAs | ENG RTs | CZ RAs | CZ RTs |
|---|---------|---------|--------|--------|--|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| Limitations of method/theory                  | 5,50    | 6,99    | 7,04   | 3,06   | Limitations of method/theory             | 47%     | 46%     | 58%    | 50%    |
| Limitations of study                          | 3,01    | 5,55    | 2,11   | 1,34   | Limitations of study                     | 26%     | 37%     | 17%    | 22%    |
| Limited knowledge                             | 1,57    | 0,22    | 1,69   | 0,57   | Limited knowledge                        | 13%     | 2%      | 14%    | 9%     |
| Agreement with other research                 | 0,92    | 1,66    | 0,85   | 0,67   | Agreement with other research            | 8%      | 11%     | 7%     | 11%    |
| Limitations of scope of the thesis/paper      | 0,65    | 0,67    | 0,42   | 0,48   | Limitations of scope of the thesis/paper | 6%      | 4%      | 4%     | 8%     |
| TOTAL (normalised frequency per 10,000 words) | 11,65   | 15,09   | 12,11  | 6,12   | TOTAL (percentages)                      | 100%    | 100%    | 100%   | 100%   |

Table 2: Distribution of strategic hedges across corpora

The following section discusses each rhetorical strategy of hedging occurring in the corpus and illustrates it with examples from the four sub-corpora.

## 5. Discussion

This section offers a qualitative analysis of the results presented in the previous part. It is divided into several subsections according to the rhetorical strategies performed by strategic hedges.

### 5.1. Limitations of method/theory/model/analysis

As the name of this category suggests, authors admit limitations of the method adopted in research or of theory, model, or analysis, which were insufficient or not as effective as originally thought or expected, or may have weakened the accuracy of results. Even though undesirable, also such results are an integral part of scientific work.

Looking back at Table 2, we can see that around 50% of all strategic hedges occurring in the four sub-corpora are those relating to limitations of method/

theory/model/analysis. In RAs written by Czech scholars it is even more, namely 58%, which makes them the most frequent category in all four sub-corpora. Several examples from the sub-corpora to illustrate this category follow:

- (1) The move analysis was not conducted by multiple raters and so the reliability of the analysis is open to challenge. [ENG-RA1]<sup>1</sup>
- (2) The analysis started with an attempt to use existing parameter based models to understand how evaluation was working in the corpus, but this proved unsatisfactory. [ENG-RT6]
- (3) As outlined in the theoretical background, the differentiation between *look* and *listen* used as directives and as attention-getting signals is sometimes very problematic, especially in written data, ..[CZ-RT5]

As apparent from the examples above, researchers utilise these hedges as a self-protection against possible negative comments coming from journal reviewers or theses supervisors. Since they are aware of these shortcomings, the authors acknowledge them before they are highlighted by evaluators.

Interestingly, even though both academic authors and research students admit certain deficiencies in their research, analysis, methods, etc., they emphasise at the same time that these limitations did not have any negative impact on the research outcomes obtained. Therefore, authors attempt to balance these limitations somehow. In Example 4, the author admits that the corpus used for the analysis was small but despite that the results of the analysis are useful:

- (4) Although the present study was based on a relatively small corpus of 94,237 running words, the results of the analysis show useful insights into the representation of art in two kinds of published texts addressed to different audiences. [ENG-RT2]

In a similar vein, authors of the following examples admit certain limitations but at the same time they provide a convincing explanation why the results of their analysis or method are valid:

- (5) In short, even though some of the analysis results such as the length of noun phrases did not show strong evidence to support my hypothesis, they have still lead new directions to future research for any other non-finite complementation clauses or similar syntactic patterns. [ENG-RT5]
- (6) Although the analysis carried out in this paper centers on a relatively narrow field of study and thus leaves some space for further research, e.g. on the

<sup>1</sup> ENG = Anglophone author, CZ = Czech author, RA = research article + its number in the sub-corpus, RT = research thesis + its number in the sub-corpus.

lexical level, it provides sufficient material for some conclusions to be drawn. [CZ-RT1]

- (7) Although this method disregards the actual distribution of the two pragmatic markers in the corpus, it allows comparing the translation equivalents of *now* and *well* with the same collocates. [CZ-RT2]

Admitting limitations of method/theory/model/analysis in research theses might be regarded as sincere since students do not have enough experience and cannot anticipate problems they will be confronted with and will have to solve during the process of writing the thesis. Furthermore, they have to submit their theses within a certain deadline and it may happen that their effort has not produced expected results. Thus, a solution may be to “acknowledge the problems and limitations, and counterbalance the hedge by attempting to justify their choices and indicate that they did take some precautions” (Koutsantoni 2006: 28). Regarding RA authors, they are not expected to submit papers which are problematic and in which insufficient methods were adopted. However, it may happen that research does not come off as originally expected. In such a case, researchers admit this problem so that they show their awareness of these limitations.

## 5.2. Limitations of study (reference to testability)

This rhetorical strategy refers to “experimental conditions”, as Hyland puts it (1998: 103). It is the second most frequent in all four sub-corpora, even though its occurrence differs across them. The most striking difference as for the incidence of this strategy may be noticed between Anglophone research theses and research theses written by Czech students. This fact indicates a cross-cultural difference. Czech student researchers express themselves with more confidence than their Anglophone counterparts, who are more careful when formulating the research findings and their general validity.

Hedges referring to this category are associated with the testability of the study and acknowledge the necessity of further research in order to prove the findings of the study. Employing these hedges is an indirect way to point out that the results are not conclusive (Koutsantoni 2006: 30). Several illustrative examples follow:

- (8) However, this is only speculative and would need to be tested in future research where the pre-planned nature of the utterances was known. [ENG-RT1]
- (9) While I have been able to implement it in this thesis, I believe future lines of research should continue to test this method on different data sets. [ENG-RT1]

- (10) However, only further analysis, comprising more data from other non-English speaking discourse communities, can confirm my conclusions. [CZ-RA8]

A higher occurrence of this type of hedges in Anglophone RTs may be explained with respect to the author's position within the particular academic community. Student researchers do not usually feel confident about their claims since they are not as experienced in writing as authors of research articles, who have gained a certain status within the academic community and "can claim a higher level of expertise and authoritativeness" (Koutsantoni 2006: 30). This fact may be further supported with previously accepted knowledge claims in already published RAs.

### 5.3. Reference to limited knowledge

This rhetorical strategy is the third most frequent type in Anglophone and Czech RA sub-corpora. The occurrence of hedges performing this strategy is very similar in both sub-corpora, with a bit higher incidence in RAs written by Czech scholars than by Anglophone ones.

When employing hedges with this function, RAs authors admit "inability to always offer explanations for phenomena and limitations of the scope of definitions and suggested models, versions, etc." The main reason may be authors' self-protection. These hedges also "make a reference to the uncertainty scientists face" (Koutsantoni 2006: 28). Here are several examples from the corpus:

- (11) At present I cannot account for the behaviour of this suffix. [ENG-RA5]  
 (12) Whether or not this is an essential feature of expressives as such is difficult to say without a comprehensive survey. [ENG-RA9]  
 (13) Exactly why it should be so is difficult to say — it could be due, perhaps, to awkward pronunciation, euphonic reasons, or to the fact that the affixation obscures the adjective and makes the formation less transparent and recognizable (cf. \**enfreen*, \**entruen*). [CZ-RA1]

Sometimes questions are used to emphasise knowledge limitations since they are means of hedging the truth of "a proposition by making it relative to a writer's state of knowledge" (Hyland 1998: 143):

- (14) ... but even if some languages do have circumfixes that satisfy this strict requirement, may there not be other languages for which it does not apply in full? [CZ-RA1]

- (15) But can covert quotation, even granting that it may be reasonably assumed whenever needed, actually explain the kinds of examples of non-speaker oriented expressives that we have seen in Section 2? [ENG-RA9]

Acknowledging knowledge limitations is not that frequent in Anglophone and Czech RTs sub-corpora compared to RAs, and what is more, the occurrence in Anglophone RTs sub-corpus is almost negligible. The reason for such a difference between RAs and RTs sub-corpora may be seen in different status of RA authors and research students. Even though expert authors acknowledge limitations of knowledge more frequently and more openly than students, this use of strategic hedges does not weaken their claims; on the contrary, it still indicates authority. Research students are not in this position and do not take the risk of admitting the lack of knowledge as often as RA authors. The reason is that by doing this, their argumentation could be weakened or their thesis could seem less convincing. Also, they could be accused by their supervisors of not being familiar with research of other scholars or with relevant literature in the field. Here again are several illustrative examples from the sub-corpora of RTs:

- (16) Is it possible to identify established discourses through the representations found? [ENG-RT2]
- (17) The body of knowledge regarding the distribution of the pDit, to which the present investigation has aimed to add, is — as was said in the introduction — limited and fragmentary. [ENG-RT7]
- (18) It remains unclear, however, whether the Czech translation equivalent *no* refers to *now*, or to *then*. [CZ-RT2]

#### 5.4. Agreement with other research

Strategic hedges referring to agreement with other research are not included in Hyland's taxonomy; however, they do belong there in my view. Agreement with research of other scholars allows authors to "express tentativeness regarding their findings by seeking support from external sources, suggesting that they are not alone in their suggestions" (Koutsantoni 2006: 29). Furthermore, their research results are more "anchored" and supported by similar discoveries and results of other researchers. In this connection, Hunston (2000) points out that when assertions are attributed to some other source, not just plainly stated, then the responsibility for them is shifted. Apart from this responsibility shift and support found in other sources, authors also prove that they are acquainted with research carried out in their field by other scholars and in this way they "rhetorically strengthen their claims" (Hyland 2002: 538).

Regarding the incidence of this rhetorical strategy, it may be found in research theses more frequently than in research articles with a slightly higher occurrence in the latter. Research students are not that confident when writing their theses compared to scholars, who are more experienced, therefore we may find this type of hedges in RTs more frequently. Moreover, students need to find support for their statements in reliable sources, which is also a reason for employing this type of hedges in RTs. Several examples to illustrate:

- (19) In this I am building on proposals in Chomsky 2000, 2001, where it is argued that *v* can be optionally endowed with an EPP-property that permits movement to its edge. [ENG-RA8]
- (20) In line with Mueller's (2010) research, corpora were used to explore the relative novelty of metaphors and metonymies. [ENG-RT1]
- (21) This is fully in compliance with what Plag (2003, 117) says on the topic, ... [CZ-RA3]
- (22) In this respect, in agreement with Flowerdew (2005: 321, 329), I believe that the contextualized use of LBs coupled with genre-specific information and a situational analysis [CZ-RA4]

### 5.5. Limitations of scope of the thesis/paper

Hedges referring to limitations of scope of the thesis or paper are again not part of Hyland's taxonomy. Employing hedges with this function means that the author admits constraints connected with the scope of their paper or thesis and explains what exactly they decided to leave out and which topics they aim to explore. Limitations of scope in RAs are usually explained with respect to limited space or number of words. A specific word limit is a common requirement of editors of academic journals. Concerning limitations of scope in theses, they are usually motivated by "failed experiments and circumstances outside of the students' control" (Koutsantoni 2006: 28), i.e. by something students could not have anticipated since they may not have had enough experience. The decision what to include and discuss in the thesis is not taken in advance but much later, depending on how the thesis and research develop.

Hedges acknowledging this type of limitations are the least frequent type of strategic hedges in all sub-corpora, with the exception of Anglophone RTs, where limited knowledge is the rhetorical strategy with the lowest incidence. To illustrate this category, several examples follow:

- (23) A corpus study on the lexical variation exhibited by syncope, based on relative usage frequency, also goes beyond the scope of this paper. [ENG-RA5]

- (24) Given the needs of this investigation, developing a new framework for metonymy identification would be far beyond the scope of this paper. [ENG-RT1]
- (25) ...the tokens conveying other meanings than epistemic or root possibility have been excluded, being beyond the scope of the analysis. [CZ-RA7]

## 6. Conclusions

Both research article and research thesis authors aim at acceptance of their work by either journal referees or theses supervisors; therefore, their assertions must be formulated in ways which are acceptable for these disciplinary gatekeepers and must sound persuasive. However, it is not always possible to make definitive statements. Authors have to protect themselves from negative criticism and open a dialogic space for discussion with other researchers. Therefore, they employ a wide variety of language means with this rhetorical function, one of them being hedging expressions. These may be either lexical or strategic hedges. The focus of analysis in this paper was on the latter, even though they are less frequent than lexical hedges.

Authors of RAs and RTs utilise strategic hedges for various reasons, some of these reasons are shared by both groups of these researchers, some are different. In general, by employing them both groups of authors acknowledge a type of limitation of their work, be it limitations of method, analysis, theory, limitations of scope of their paper, or limited knowledge. Limitations of scope of the thesis or paper and agreement with other research are two special categories not considered by Hyland, on whose classification of hedges this paper is based. However, I decided to include them in my taxonomy since they are rhetorical strategies widely employed by both research authors and students to acknowledge limitations of their research.

Focusing now on cross-cultural variation we can say that Czech RA authors are very well aware of Anglophone writing conventions and attempt to conform to this academic writing tradition. On the contrary, Czech research students employ strategic hedges only to a limited extent compared to Anglophone students and Czech and Anglophone scholars. The reason is that they are not familiar with Anglophone academic writing conventions or they do not want to sound too hesitant. They may also think that by acknowledging some limitations, their research could be considered insufficient, incomplete, or could be rejected by evaluators.

The quantitative analysis revealed that Anglophone research students utilise strategic hedges more frequently than RA authors. Their experience with writing academic texts is not so wide compared to RA authors. They strive for



acceptance of their work by their supervisors so the claims they formulate are rather tentative, non-conflicting, and open to discussion and interpretation. From this it follows that students are conscious of the

power asymmetries between themselves and examiners, of their status in the community and of their status in the particular situation, which motivates their choice of rhetorical strategies. This in itself constitutes indication of their advanced academic literacy and awareness of the social forces that define genre conventions in academic discourse communities (Koutsantoni 2006: 33).

The findings of this study prove that future research in this area should focus on the use of strategic hedges and from this use emerging rhetorical strategies applied in other academic disciplines, or, for instance, in hard and soft sciences. On the basis of this research, teaching materials should be devised in order to acquaint future researchers with rhetorical strategies acceptable by their disciplinary community since the academic discourse community is heterogeneous and each academic discipline follows different conventions and practices.

To conclude, in agreement with Hyland we can say that

the expansion of international publishing is a positive development, both for academics and for developing nations seeking to become part of the “knowledge economy.” Globalization not only expands opportunities for increased scholarly dialogue by broadening the corpus of academic literature, but the involvement of EAL researchers enriches knowledge, raises previously unexplored issues in the mainstream and changes rhetorical practices (Hyland 2016: 58).

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