

Indirectness Markers in Korean and Persian English Essays: Implications for Teaching Writing to EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated and analyzed the prevalence and presence of indirectness markers in Korean and Persian English Essays. The researchers analyzed the prevalence of the indirectness markers as a set of politeness strategies employed by the Korean and Persian university bound students in their English compositions. Furthermore, the researchers espoused the Politeness Strategies Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson as framework in the analysis of the indirectness markers in the texts. In the analysis of the English essays, it was found out that there were seven (7) categories of indirectness markers evident in the essays. The Persian English writers displayed a noticeable evidence of repetition and vagueness and ambiguity in their essays while the Korean counterparts on point-of-view distancing. The presence of these indirectness markers in their writing are attributed to socio-cultural factors, such as Persians have the tendency to be literary in their writing while the Koreans, prose-oriented resulting to lengthy descriptive accounts and indirectness. The results and findings of the study could be beneficial to English writing pedagogy in an English as Second Language (ESL) context.

Keywords: Indirectness markers, English composition, Politeness Strategies Theory, ESL

1 Introduction

The ‘Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis’ or the Whorfian Hypothesis propagates the idea that the logic evident in any written discourse is culture specific. This notion of logic is where Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) was originally taken from. Moreover, both the concepts of CR and Whorfian Hypothesis instigate the idea that peoples from different cultures organize their thoughts in writing in the same reality, yet varying in methods. Furthermore, Kaplan (1990) added that different cultural

communities have their set of writing practices that are not shared outside their respective communities. Therefore, written compositions from different communities exemplify their own sets of shared beliefs, cultural norms, and other social practices.

Park (1990) attributed Korean writing styles to be prose-oriented, thus, leading to long and descriptive accounts themed on an event or a person instead of getting directly to the point. Furthermore, Hinds (1990) claimed that Oriental writing (i.e. Thai, Chinese, Korean), follows a 'quasi-inductive' pattern, which means that the thesis statement is implied. The implied thesis statement uses indirect, inferential expressions (Hall, 1976 & Beamer, 1994). Furthermore, Kaplan (1990) reiterated that most Asian languages are 'reader-responsible' languages; hence, the reader takes on the responsibility to understand the writer's implied message within a text. In the context of the Korean writers, Sohn (1986) mentioned that this implicational or indirectness strategies in writing are based on the interlocutors' shared knowledge about the context presented in their writing.

On the other hand, Hong- Nam & Leavell (2006) claimed that Persian writers of English find it difficult to write using the international language, thus, it is important that they are given very clear instructions on how to carry on the task. Contrarily, Nimehchisalem, et. al. (2015) emphasized that Persians have adequate skills to develop content, organize ideas, and choose the right words in their essays, only with minor difficulties in the English language's syntactic structuring.

Nowruzi, Khiabani & Pourghassemian (2009) analyzed Persians' English argumentative essays and found out that their subjects wrote inductively. Alijanian (2012) justified that this indirectness style of writing among Persians is a product of artistic writing and is aimed towards achieving harmony with the readers. Also, he emphasized that the Persian readers are naturally patient in reading and are noted of their reflective thinking geared towards meaning-making.

It has been established that indirectness in writing is evident in all written discourses of different speech communities. However, indirectness appears less in the Western cultures, particularly among the Anglophone speakers. They are noted for their straightforward style in writing across genres. This attribute in Western writing is known as being writer-responsible in style, rather than reader-responsible (Hinds, 1990). In written academic discourse, direct discussion of main ideas related to the text's thesis and the writer's analyses are considered requisite (Matalene, 1985; Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994); thus, must be observed when advancing arguments and points in writing.

In the light of the use of these indirectness markers in writing, Tran (2007) claimed that these markers are used as a strategic communicative style; thus,

circling around the thesis is intentionally done. Kaplan (1966) described this circling around the thesis as gyres moving around the subject that makes the composition appear longer, and the thesis implicit. To support these claims and descriptions, Scollon (1997) added that this circling around is also a strategy that delays sensitive points in the discussion.

Felix-Brasdefer (2004) argued that indirectness is relative to politeness. while Myers (2004) defended that indirectness in writing is used to soften the argument, especially when advancing ideas to maintain politeness as a tone in writing .

Sew (1997) further claimed that any audience who is unaware of these styles in writing of the different cultural communities may have difficulties in understanding the ideas and points being advanced in the composition.

In this age of globalization, the ability to effectively communicate interculturally has become more demanding and important than ever before. Language and culture are said to be two inclusive entities that cannot be separated from one another; thus, in understanding language, especially when used as a tool in writing, issues like the use of indirectness markers, must be understood not just on how words appear in compositions, but more importantly, on how culture is embedded in them. In fact, Halliday & Hasan (1978) clarified that language situates culture, and not otherwise. In effect, it is important that readers must be able to decode culturally significant contexts in written discourses (Rivers, 1988). Therefore, to communicate in written form in this highly globalized world, different peoples coming from different cultural backgrounds, possessing unique patterns of writing development across genres, must be able to adjust to the demand and context of writing in an international sense.

Mogridge (1988) forwarded that culture is mediated by language., This implies that teaching language as a tool in writing means directly teaching the culture that abounds it. Teaching the culture could be consciously or unconsciously done. Woolever (2011) claimed that there is a need for a study like this present study to promote cultural understanding when it comes to language used in written form. She further added that if sufficient descriptions of these language features are assessed in studies, culture education in the context of writing could easily be carried out..

Swales (1990) argued that students must be able to learn the value systems present in a particular language when writing in that language. According to him, it is essential when addressing an international audience. This, however, is not possible since these value systems could compromise the inherent cultural

characteristics present in particular speech communities trying to write using another language. As a mitigating solution, Herrington (1985) and McCarthy (1987) suggested that students must be able to recognize and learn different discourse paradigms and the appropriate degrees of indirectness when writing in the target language. Since indirectness is an inevitable style in writing, only varying in degrees of usage, it has to be present in the context of writing using the English language in moderation to avoid vagueness, and achieve explicitness, accuracy, and precision.

The Philippines is one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world today, and one of the Asian countries that offer quality education, especially in ESL instruction. In fact, there were about 2,655 South Korean Nationals who were studying in the country according to the 2013 statistics, and most of them are enrolled in the leading universities of the country (inquirer.net, 2013). On the other hand, in the City of Manila alone, the capital city, there are about 4,000 to 4,500 Iranians and a good percentage of them are studying medical allied programs in the University belt (Rappler, 2016). These statistics clearly show that foreign students come to the Philippines to obtain their higher education degrees with the aim of also improving their English language competencies.

Most of the communication done internationally is through writing, thus, it is imperative that the universities and institutions in the Philippines and the world, which cater to foreign students, adopt pedagogical practices that would specifically address writing conventions of their learners toward successful communication in the international arena. In the light of this study, the indirectness markers that are used sparingly, which cause explicitness and inaccuracy in writing, must be addressed to achieve a written discourse in English that is usually straightforward, with clear ideas that are interrelated and are aiming at a common thesis statement.

1.1 Significance of the study

This study is inspired by the increasing number of Korean and Persian nationals flocking in the Philippines to pursue their higher education degrees with premium on improving their communicative competence using the English language, as an international language. From this inspiration, a prompt of improving English language instruction to these foreign students is highly sought. Furthermore, the results and findings of this study shall benefit the academic communities in all parts of the world who cater to Korean and Persian learners as international students.

1.2 Research Questions

Therefore, in this study three (3) research questions were developed as follows:

1. What are the prevalent indirectness markers evident in the Korean and Persian English essays?
2. What is the extent of occurrence of these indirectness markers in their English essays?
3. What are the implications of the findings of the study in English writing pedagogy for EFL learners?

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study made use of the descriptive research method because it dealt with the analysis of indirectness markers in the written discourse of the subjects under study.

Calderon (2006), defined descriptive research as a purposive process of gathering, analyzing, classifying, and tabulating data about prevailing conditions, practices, processes, trends, and cause-effect relationships and then making adequate and accurate interpretation about such data with or without or sometimes minimal aid of statistical methods. Also, this method ascertains prevailing conditions of facts in a group under study that gives either qualitative or quantitative, or both, descriptions of the general characteristics of the group as results.

2.2 Corpus

The corpus used in this study were the essays composed by entering Korean and Persian university students at the Centro Escolar University (CEU) in Manila, Philippines. The essays were part of their initial requirements for entry to the university. The University has been screening foreign applicants in terms of their writing using the English language as a medium since 2012. Thus, the researchers decided to choose randomly from the essays composed by the Korean and Persian entrants from 2012 to 2016. There were 30 randomly selected essays, which were subjected for analysis of the use of prevalent indirectness markers. Also, the 30 essays were chosen based on the number of minimum paragraphs that should comprise an essay, which is three (3). The three paragraphs should represent the components of an essay, which are— *introduction*, *body*, and *conclusion*. Moreover, the English essays revolve around the topics— ‘Describe yourself as a student’; ‘Tell something about yourself’; ‘One thing I like about the Philippines’; ‘The advantages and disadvantages of computer technology’; and ‘How I see

myself ten (10) years from now'. There were 15 randomly selected essays from the Korean group. Eight (8) were written by females and seven (7) were written by males. The numbers of words in the essays were ranging from 119 to 257 with a mean of 185.33 words. The ages of the writers were ranging from 16 to 30. The mean age of the group was 19.07. On the other hand, there were also 15 randomly selected essays from the Persian group. Seven (7) were written by females, and eight (8) were written by males. The numbers of words in the essays were ranging from 70 to 256 with a mean of 109.47 words. The ages of the writers in this group were ranging from 18 to 29 while the mean age was 22.80.

2.3 Framework for Analysis

The framework that the researcher espoused in this study is the Politeness Strategies Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) (B & L). B & L provided a comprehensive definition of indirectness markers as a set of politeness strategies used by the speaker to reduce imposition towards the hearer. Furthermore, the speaker employs politeness strategies to achieve solidarity and sound relationship with his hearer. B&L proposed three major categories of indirectness markers namely: (1) *rhetorical strategies/markers*; (2) *lexical and referential markers*; and (3) *syntactic markers and structures*. These major categories are further identified into subcategories. First, rhetorical strategies/markers include *rhetorical questions, tag questions, disclaimers and denials, vagueness and ambiguity markers, repetition and irony*. Second, lexical and referential markers include *hedges and hedging devices, point of view distancing, downtoners, diminutives, point-of-view distancing, demonstratives, indefinite pronouns and determiners, and other understatement markers*. Finally, syntactic markers and structures include the *use of passive voice, nominalization, and conditional tenses in the sentence structures*.

Hinkel (1997) claimed that the use of these indirectness markers are used in the written discourse of different languages. However, the gravity of the use of these markers vary from one culture to another. Alijainan (2012) mentioned that despite the presence of the use of indirectness markers in interpersonal communication, particularly in writing, they still appear less in Western composition.

In this study, the analysis of the presence of indirectness markers in non-Western writing has been anchored, particularly the Koreans and the Persians through identifying the categories presented by B & L in their essays.

2.4 Procedure

A letter requesting for the acquisition of the essays of the Korean and Persian entrants was sent via email to the head of the CEU- Languages Department, Dr. Arlene S. Opina. After her approval, the essays were sorted out and only the ones

written by the Koreans and the Persians were chosen. Attached in each essay is a profile sheet that includes the entrant's full name, age, date of exam, gender, and nationality. Furthermore, a separate sheet that contains the entrant's reading comprehension test and interview results were also attached. Due to confidentiality issues, the entrant's age, gender, and nationality were recorded on a separate sheet since this information is not written on the essay's heading and is not a part of the 'confidential' results of their other tests. The essays that contain at least three (3) paragraphs regardless of the length were selected. Eventually, 15 essays for each group with a mixture of both genders were carefully selected.

The essays were analyzed of the presence of indirectness markers through hand-tagging. They were organized for analysis by labelling each with a code; hence, **K** for Korean, and **P** for Persian. Each letter code is accompanied by a corresponding number (e.g. **K1** for Korean essay number one, **K2** for the second, and so on). A separate sheet of one-eighth (1/8) in size was stapled with the essay. Written on the one-eighth sheets are the evident indirectness markers; their corresponding occurrences; and the percentage computation. The categories of indirectness markers were also coded for a more convenient analysis both on the actual essays and the stapled sheets of paper.

2.7 Statistical Treatment

Since this study is descriptive in nature, a descriptive statistics method was employed for getting the frequency, mean, and percentage of occurrences of indirectness markers in the essays of the two groups. Moreover, a specialized accounting of occurrences of each indirectness marker in the essays was employed. To ascertain whether the Korean and Persian essays similarly used the indirectness markers, the percentages of these occurrences were derived and compared.

2.8 Method of Analysis

Brown and Levinson (1987) Politeness Strategies Theory linked to the use of indirectness markers in written discourse was employed to analyze the essays. Additionally, the works of Hinkel (1997) and Alijanian (2012), which are similar studies, were also utilized to provide directions in analyzing the essays.

To address the first research question on the evidence of indirectness markers in the English essays of Korean and Persian entering university students, the essays were read and analyzed for the evident occurrences of these indirectness markers three (3) times. The essays were read thrice to establish the credibility of the analysis. There were seven (7) sub-categories of the three (3) categories of indirectness markers that were found evident in the essays of the two (2) groups. Under the first category, rhetorical strategies/markers, there were two (2) evident indirectness markers: (a) repetition, coded as RR; and (b) vagueness

and ambiguity, coded as RV. The second category, lexical and referential markers were (a) hedges and hedging devices, coded as LH; (b) diminutives, coded as LD; (c) point-of-view distancing, coded as LP; and (d) indefinite pronouns and determiners, coded as LI. Finally, the third category, syntactic markers and structures, where only one was found evident—the use of conditional tenses, coded as SC.

To address the question on the extent of occurrence of the evident indirectness markers in the English essays of the two (2) groups, the frequencies of occurrence of the seven (7) identified markers were tabulated in individual essays. The specialized accounting of the indirectness marker occurrences in the individual essays was statistically treated by counting the occurrence of a particular marker divided by the number of words of the essay multiplied by 100. For example; there is only one (1) occurrence of rhetorical repetition (RR) in an essay of 166 words (i.e. $1/166 \times 100 = 0.06\%$). This treatment in the data was carried out to obtain the percentage rate of each indirectness marker in each essay of the subjects. The mean percentage of the occurrences of the different evident indirectness markers was also obtained to compare the extent of the occurrences of the identified indirectness markers between the Korean and the Persian English essays.

Lastly, in citing the possible implications of the result of the study in the teaching of English writing to the two (2) groups, the researchers wrote possible pedagogical implications on how these indirectness markers could be neutralized in terms of usage in the context of writing an English essay.

3 Results and Discussion

The analyses of the 30 English essays of the Korean and Persian entering university students were found to be evident of seven (7) indirectness markers proposed by B & L (1987).

The first indirectness marker evident in the English essays of the subjects is repetition (RR). Repetition is a politeness strategy employed by a speaker of any culture to maintain an agreement (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, Tarone & Yule, (1987) claimed that repetition is not tolerable in English writing because it is synonymous to redundancy. Examples of repetition from the essays are—

K1: ‘...I came here (Philippines) to study. When I came here (Philippines), I was so nervous because I am afraid to study’.

*P14: ‘The Philippines has very **big buildings**. The **buildings are huge** they have malls inside.’*

In the exemplars given, repetition was used by the two (2) groups as a means to delineate the theme from the rheme by re-establishing the same theme and adding another rheme. Mc Carthy (1991) instigated the idea that the tolerance of repetition in writing is largely dependent on culture. In fact, he also found out in his study that both the Japanese and the Chinese cultures use repetition as a means to avoid theme-rheme relationship of ideas in the text. Moreover, repetition in the analyzed essays also signifies persuasion; thus, convincing the reader of what is emphasized. In the exemplar above, K1 tries to convince the reader that coming to the Philippines to study is difficult for him; while P14 establishes the idea that the buildings are huge that even malls (referring to stalls) could be found inside them. Mc Carthy and Carter (1994) claimed that repetition as an indirectness marker is employed by the writer as a persuasion strategy that could enable the reader to help the writer construct the argument.

The second evident indirectness marker is vagueness and ambiguity (RV). B & L (1987) defined vagueness and ambiguity as an indirectness strategy which communicative intention of the speaker (in the case of the study— the writer) is to lessen the threat on the ‘face’ of his hearer (reader). There are words and expressions that signal vagueness and ambiguity in any utterance which come in both numerical and non-numerical quantifiers; scalar qualifiers; and classifiers. Examples of these words and expressions are *a lot, lot(s) of, around, always, between, aspects of, kinds of, good, bad, high, low, and so on, etcetera*. To illustrate vagueness and ambiguity used by the groups in this study, the following exemplars were lifted—

K9: *‘I depend on (to) You (God) everything such as my dream, my future, my studies, and so on.’*

P4: *‘I had a lot of experience(s) here in the Philippines.’*

Both the exemplars are vague and ambiguous statements because they failed to make their examples concrete and precise for the readers to understand the main point of the proposition. Both statements clearly depend on how the reader would define the idea(s) presented or supply specific examples. Since the K9 writer in the above exemplar wishes to think that there are other domains in his life that largely depend on God, he ended his statement by writing- *and so on*. Also, the same interpretation can be drawn from the statement of P4 when he stated that he had *a lot* of experiences, which may be good or bad; memorable, or not. Channel (1994) defined vagueness in writing as a result of using vague words. Furthermore, in her study, she was able to find out that vague claims in writing are products of the writer’s desire to accomplish two simultaneous

goals—to eradicate the writer’s responsibility on the proposition; and to reduce the imposition that the writer has towards his reader.

The third evident indirectness marker is hedges and hedging devices (LH). Hedges and hedging devices can be numerous and complex (Hinkel, 1997). However, in this study, the outline of hedges and hedging devices proposed by B & L was used as basis for the analysis of the presence of hedges and hedging devices.

There are five (5) evidential markers for locating hedges in a written discourse namely: lexical, possibility, quality, performative, and hedged performative verbs. Examples of words and expressions that signal hedging are *(at/for) about, in a way, maybe, more or less, by any chance, possibly, in case, as is, people say, they say, apparently, basically, perhaps, seemingly, want to/would want to + discuss/tell/ explain/note mention*. To illustrate how hedges and hedging devices was evident in the essays of the two groups, the following exemplars were lifted—

K5: *‘I just want to tell someone to correct his or her mistake.’*

P11: *‘Maybe computer technology has some disadvantages for us.’*

From the exemplars, both statements express uncertainty of the possibility of the occurrence of a particular action (Biber, 1988). However, in the case of K5, hedging is used as a confirmatory possibility since it seeks approval from the reader whether the action could be done or not. B & L defined hedging as a way to delimit or define the extent of a particular claim, the truth in a proposition or the completeness of it. On the other hand, P11 simply shows complete uncertainty that agrees with Biber (1988) who described hedging as a plain expression of uncertainty or possibility.

The fourth indirectness marker that was found evident in the two (2) of the essays from the two (2) groups is diminutives (LD). According to B & L, diminutives are a general class of hedging. It has a goal of delimiting the speaker’s/writer’s responsibility over a claim that leads to its imposition on the hearer/ reader. Expressions that are evident of diminutives are *a little, a little bit, little by little, a few*. The statements that follow are the only examples from both groups that contain diminutives as an indirectness marker. Quirk, et.al. (1985) & Hubler (1983) claimed that diminutives often appear in speaking, but rare in writing.

K6: *‘I studied little by little’*

P12: *‘I will be a little older’*

K6's statement is evident of a diminutive that coincides with the claim of B & L because the goal of the writer delimited his responsibility over a past action, and implications of such. Alternatively, P12's diminutive use expresses a 'smaller risk of negotiability' (Hubler, 1983) by implicitly writing that he may not be totally old when the day comes that he must be old.

The fifth indirectness marker is point-of-view distancing (LP). B & L described point-of view distancing as an indirectness construction that distances the speaker from a claim or proposition. Ergo, the removal of the claim distances him in time and space. Expressions such as *I/we feel, hope, wonder, worry, think, believe, understand* mark this indirectness. Both groups manifested point-of-view distancing as an indirectness marker. Another set of exemplars illustrate this indirectness marker—

K4: 'I hope to be a dentist because I want to help my father.'

P1: 'I believe that I came here from my country to study before anything else'

K4 expresses a particular desire, but does not totally agree to the fulfilment of the desire. Likewise, P1 isolates himself from the claim by not being totally responsible for it. This point of view distancing used in the context of both statements save the face from direct fault through decentralization (B & L).

The sixth indirectness marker is indefinite pronouns/determiners (LI). B & L maintained that choosing a point of reference (pronoun) that is higher or lower than the actual state of affairs is significant of indirectness. Pronouns/references such as *nobody, none, no one, nothing, some, somebody, someone, something* are prompts of this indirectness. The exemplars that follow illustrate this indirectness marker—

K10: 'Nowadays, most machine(s) make everything.'

P8: 'I went to Malaysia (to study), but because (through) some problem(s), I came (went) back to Iran.'

K10 used the indefinite pronouns as indirectness markers twice in his statement. Essentially, he failed to specify 'which' machines and 'which' everything he actually means. Likewise, P8 also failed to specify 'which' particular problem(s) he means in his statement. The two sample statements are both overstated and exaggerated. Cherry (1988) found out that in certain contexts, overstating adds power to the stand of the rhetoric. Additionally, Channel (1994)

cited that exaggerations allow the speaker/writer to create a point without being precise.

Finally, the seventh indirectness marker that was found occurring in the essays is conditional tenses (SC). The use of conditional tenses is an ambiguous indirectness strategy that can prevent a threat to the writer's or the reader's face (Myers, 1989). Additionally, Myers proposed that conditional tenses are used by the writer to solicit the reader's agreement of the proposition or claim. The use of the words *If* plus a conditional tense or *Unless* plus a conditional tense signifies this indirectness marker. In this study, the essays of both groups were evident of the use of this indirectness marker. The following exemplars are evident of this indirectness:

K8: 'If I could (can) have the chance to study in America, I would (will)!'

P1: 'If I have more free (extra) time, I would (usually try to go) go to the library.'

The conditional tenses in these statements both express 'willingness' to do the actions, but have certain 'boundaries' or may have 'restrictions' to do so. Myers (1989) characterized the use of conditionals as an indirectness marker to achieve an indirect solidarity between the writer and the reader, wherein the latter may or may not agree.

The table below contains the English essays of the Korean subjects' indirectness markers; their frequency of occurrences; and mean percentages.

Table 1

Occurrence of indirectness markers in Korean English Essays

| Indirectness marker | f | mean % |
|--|----------|---------------|
| I. Rhetorical strategies/markers | | |
| <i>1. Repetition (RR)</i> | 16 | 0.60 |
| <i>2. Vagueness and ambiguity (RV)</i> | 24 | 0.88 |
| II. Lexical and referential markers | | |
| <i>1. Hedges and hedging devices (LH)</i> | 14 | 0.49 |
| <i>2. Diminutives (LD)</i> | 1 | 0.03 |
| <i>3. Point-of-view distancing (LP)</i> | 20 | 0.73 |
| <i>4. Indefinite pronouns and determiners (LI)</i> | 12 | 0.42 |
| III. Syntactic markers and structures | | |
| <i>Conditional tenses (SC)</i> | 5 | 0.20 |

In Table 1, it could be seen that the indirectness marker with the highest number of frequency and mean percentage of occurrence is the evidence of vagueness and ambiguity in the Korean English essays with 24 occurrences and a mean percentage of 0.88%. Carlson (1988) and Bickner & Peyasantiwong (1988) found out in their studies that non-native speakers' (NNSs) English essays were dominated by vague and ambiguous statements, phrases, and words. Furthermore, Hinkel (1997) also found out that vagueness and ambiguity is the dominant indirectness marker that characterized the English essays of his Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and Korean subjects.

Contrarily, the use of lexical diminutives was only evident in one Korean English essay, and only appeared once, thus, obtaining a mean percentage of 0.03%. This result of the occurrence of diminutives in the English essays of the Korean subjects agree with the claim of Quirk, et.al. (1985) & Hubler (1983) that diminutives often appear in speaking, but rare in writing among NNSs.

The following Table illustrates the occurrence of indirectness markers in the Persian English essays:

Table 2

Occurrence of indirectness markers in Persian English Essays

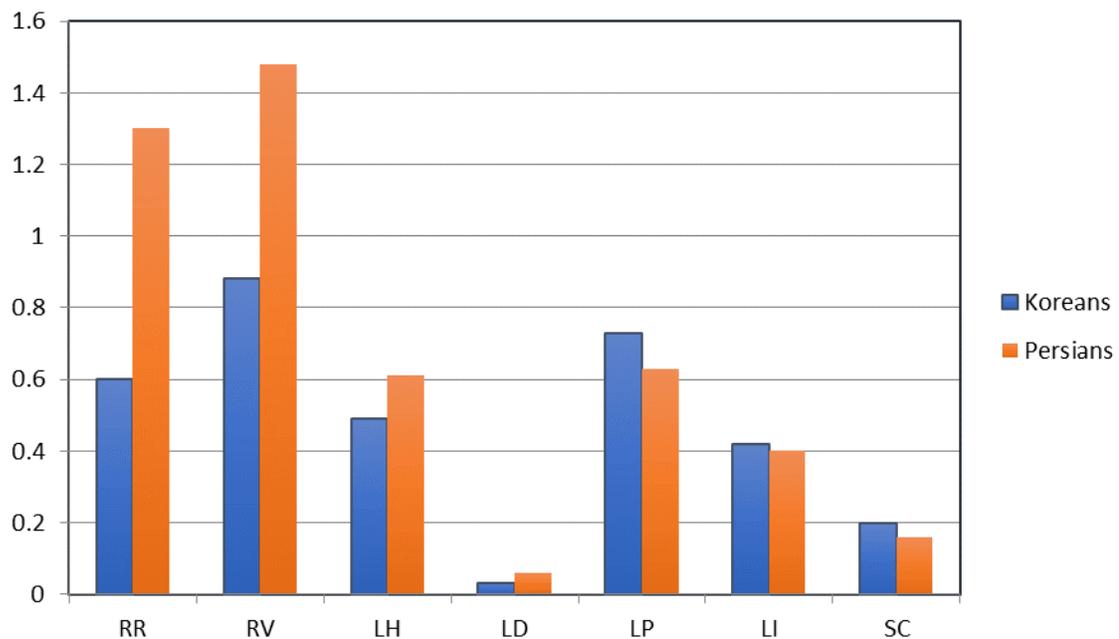
| Indirectness marker | f | mean % |
|--|----------|---------------|
| I. Rhetorical strategies/markers | | |
| <i>1. Repetition (RR)</i> | 23 | 1.30 |
| <i>2. Vagueness and ambiguity (RV)</i> | 23 | 1.48 |
| II. Lexical and referential markers | | |
| <i>1. Hedges and hedging devices (LH)</i> | 10 | 0.61 |
| <i>2. Diminutives (LD)</i> | 1 | 0.06 |
| <i>3. Point-of-view distancing (LP)</i> | 10 | 0.63 |
| <i>4. Indefinite pronouns and determiners (LI)</i> | 7 | 0.40 |
| III. Syntactic markers and structures | | |
| <i>Conditional tenses (SC)</i> | 2 | 0.16 |

Table 2 shows that both repetitive and vague and ambiguous statements were prevalent in the Persian English essays. Both rhetorical strategies/markers receive a frequency of 23 occurrences. However, the mean percentage of vague and ambiguous statements is slightly higher than the repetitive ones with 1.30% and 1.48% respectively. Alijainan (2012) justified that the indirectness in Persian English writing is a product of their goals to achieve artistry and harmony in

human communication and their belief that stating the points clearly is relative to disrespecting the readers. Thus, repetition of statements, phrases, and words, are associated with their artistic characteristics while their vagueness and ambiguity in writing with their show of respect towards the readers.

Least in terms of indirectness marker occurrence in the Persian English essays is similar to the result of the Korean English essays is the use of diminutives with one (1) occurrence at 0.06%. Diminutives are believed to occur most of the time in oral communication and are very rare in written communication.

The figure below shows the extent of occurrence of the indirectness markers in both the Korean and Persian English essays.



Legend: RR repetition; RV vagueness and ambiguity; LH hedges and hedging devices; LD diminutives; LP point-of-view distancing; LI indefinite pronouns/referencing; SC conditional tenses

Figure 1

The extent of occurrence in mean percentages (mean %) of the indirectness markers in both the Korean and the Persian English essays

In Figure 1, it could be gleaned that both the Korean and the Persian English essays have the same extent of occurrence in the use of the seven (7) indirectness markers respective of their groups. However, what is significantly evident in the figure is the difference in terms of their use of repetition and vague and ambiguous statements in their essays. The Persian English essays were shorter compared to their Korean counterparts in terms of their mean average in the number of words of essays; however, the Persian English essays have more repetitions and vague and ambiguous use of words, phrases, statements in their essays. Kachru (1992) proposed that discourse in different languages and cultural communities are often contextualized and these conventions are not necessarily shared paradigms outside a particular culture.

The difference of the rest of the indirectness markers in both groups is not significant, but still do occur in their English essays. Myers (2004) claimed that indirectness in writing is vital in the sense that it is a strategy for the writer to maintain politeness in written academic discourse especially when the writer has to advance his ideas.

4 Pedagogical implications of the findings of the study in teaching writing to Korean and Persian EFL learners

This study has explained thoroughly that writing conventions vary from one language and culture to another. Purves (1988) emphasized that the understanding of these rhetorical deviations among languages could bridge the gap between cultural encoding and decoding. Simply put, this statement of Purves explains that university professors/instructors of writing to foreign students should be aware that differences in rhetorical patterns are not relative to the differences in terms of the cognitive ability of their learners. In the case of the Persians, which English essays were shorter and more evident of their use of repetition and vague and ambiguous statements do not necessarily mean that the Korean counterparts are better writers. For example; Nimehchisalem, et. al. (2015) found out among that his Persian students learning English writing have adequate skills to develop content, organize ideas, and choose the right words despite their weakness on English syntactic structures.

Therefore, it is essential that both Korean and Persian students, most especially the latter, to have more writing exercises that avoid repetition (RR) and vagueness and ambiguities (RV). In doing so, writing professors/instructors should be more aware of this occurrence in the writing of the students, and must return 'corrected' written outputs to students emphasizing that statements, phrases, or words are repeated; thus, must be avoided or statements are vague and ambiguous because they lack clarity, unity, and coherence. On the other hand, for the point-view-distancing (LP), both the Korean and the Persian students, most

especially the former, must be instructed to be factual in what they write, so that they can take responsibility of their written statements.

However, Kaplan (1988) instigated that writing for a particular audience does not come instantly especially when an individual is coming from a completely different context. He also added that the teaching of writing would not be effective if students are asked to imitate the style in writing of a particular target audience just to fit in. In the case of the Korean and Persian university students, having their respective languages and cultures, and as evident in their writing, the presence of indirectness markers that cause problematic results to writing professors/instructors, it is important to understand that total eradication of these rhetorical conventions is impossible. Hence, what is more important is not the total eradication of these conventions in writing, but an ideological process through which one could arrive at the form. This underpins the idea that organization and presentation of the sequences of information in writing are most crucial in the writing classroom. It is therefore advisable that writing instruction should begin with modelling on how to write a specific written genre. In short, for EFL students to be effective writers in English, it is vital that writing professors/instructors should anchor their teaching of writing on the process and the product. Conversely, it is crucial that foreign students' written compositions are well-checked and corrected, and must be instructed to rewrite their outputs for gradual practice of effective writing. Through this, the presence of these prevalent indirectness markers could be minimized. After all, students need to recognize and learn different discourse paradigms and the appropriate degrees of indirectness in writing (Herington, 1985 and McCarthy, 1987).

In summary, there is no concrete set of pedagogical strategies and approaches that could be utilized in teaching writing to foreign students (Li, 2017), but through the writing professor's/instructor's deeper understanding of the students' complex cultures and rhetoric that the teaching of writing to the foreign students could be realized.

5 Insights

5.1 Conclusion

The rhetorical conventions on the use of indirectness markers were found evident in both the Korean and Persian English essays. The occurrences of these indirectness markers in the English essays vary in terms of their extents especially in the case of repetition of ideas and words and vagueness and ambiguity of words, phrases and statements that favor the Korean English writers. However, because of the inherent culture in language, the writing professor/instructor must consider the fact that total eradication of these indirectness markers when writing in English is impossible, but could be minimized and appropriated. Scollon

(1997) mentioned that it is through schooling and education that the learners are made familiar to the social norms and discourse traditions of different languages with different cultural backgrounds.

The English essays of the Koreans and the Persians are reader-responsible texts. The essays allowed the reader to interpret the meaning behind the essays due to the use of indirectness markers.

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the conclusions made, the researchers recommend that instead of asking foreign students to imitate a particular model when writing in English, it is more important to teach the form and process of writing a particular essay. What is more crucial is that students understand how to organize their thoughts and ideas properly. Linguistic accuracy is secondary to form and process. Moreover, designing classroom activities and instructional materials that would immerse foreign students in the context of the target audience would also be effective. These activities and materials could not only help them understand their target audience, but most importantly could make them realize that excessive use of indirectness markers could impede the understanding of their writing among their readers. After all, peoples today do not live on separate worlds anymore. The idea of a 'global village' has immersed that is multilingual and multicultural.

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