Gender Difference of Hedging in Interpreting for Chinese Government Press Conferences: A Corpus-based Study

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine gender differences in hedging in Chinese-English conference interpreting based on a transcribed parallel corpus. The point of departure was to test Holmes's (1986, 1988a) claims that women do not necessarily employ more hedges than men but that women's use of hedges tends to focus more on interpersonal relationships while men's is more on propositional precision. Hyland's (1996a, 1996b) model in which hedges were categorized into accuracy-oriented, speaker-oriented and audience-oriented, has been adapted for this end. Our finding shows that male interpreters actually employ more hedges than their female counterparts on the whole. In particular, their accuracy-oriented and speaker-oriented hedges exceed those of female interpreters, but not for audience-oriented ones. To find out whether these differences were caused by the source texts per se or by interpreters' manipulation, we named four types of interpreting approach towards hedge items: direct

transfer, indirect transfer, shift and addition. The former two types were identified as source text interference while the latter two as interpreters' manipulation. The results indicate that male interpreters exceed female interpreters in terms of shift and addition cases in all three types of hedges. The findings of the present study have implications for interpreter training and give instructions for interpreting practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of hedging has long attracted scholars with an interest in research on written and oral discourse. "In recent years, attention seems to have shifted away from the role of hedging in oral discourse, a topic prevailing in much of the literature on hedging in the eighties, to hedging in academic discourse" (Meyer 1997:21). Indeed, the shift has been continuing from the focus of hedging in oral discourse in the 1980s (Hübler 1983; Hosman1989), to the focus on academic discourse in the 1990s (Salager-Meyer 1994; Hyland 1996a, 1996b; Meyer 1997), and most recently to hedging in translation studies (Auwera 2005; Kranich 2009, 2011; Peterlin 2010; Hu and Cao 2011) and interpreting studies (Monacelli 2006; Liu 2010; Sun 2014). Gender has been considered as a potential factor in this process which may influence a speaker's use of hedges or choice of hedging strategies (see Holmes 1986, 1988a, 1990; Newman *et al.* 2008). However, most previous studies either explore the role of gender on hedging in monolingual discourses or explore hedging in bilingual discourses without focusing on gender. In fact, hedging is also extensively resorted to by interpreters for bilingual manipulation in an interpreting context to indicate uncertainty or save face.

This paper aims to explore the role of gender in interpreters' use of hedges in Chinese government press conference interpreting. To arrive at a statistically significant conclusion, we adopt a corpus-based approach to examine in detail the use of hedges in our targeted interpreting discourse. Though various other means can be used for hedging, all the potential hedges in this research are confined to lexical items only; this is for the convenience of automatic retrieval by computer, and more importantly, for the fact that "lexical choices represent the most frequently used means of expressing doubt, tentativeness, and affect in native speaker usage" (Hyland 1994:245).

This study aims to address the following two questions: 1) Is there any significant difference between male and female interpreters in the use of hedges in their interpreting discourses? 2) If so, is the difference the result of source discourse interference or the result of gender?

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1The Concept of "Hedges"

The concept of hedge was initially introduced into linguistics by George Lakoff as "words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness- words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (1973:471). This concept was subsequently developed and expanded by later scholars. Yu (2009:32) summarized the historical development of hedges into three stages: "The first stage, in Lakoff's original conception, is mainly linguistic, working on a local level modifying words or phrases within a proposition, with its focus on content. The second stage is mainly linguistic and pragmatic, modifying the truth-value of the whole proposition and the speaker's (or writer's) commitment or attitude to the propositional content, with its focus on the speaker-content relationship. The third stage is mainly pragmatic and social, modifying relationships between interlocutors or social relationships in a wider context, with its focus on interpersonal and social relationships". Researchers have now generally agreed on the "multi-functionality and heterogeneity" (Namsaraev 1997:68) of hedges though no shared definition of hedge has ever been reached (cf. Markkanen and Schröder 1997). As a result, researchers in the third stage adopted the function-based definitions and classifications of hedges (e.g. Salager-Meyer 1994; Namsaraev 1997), which are believed to be "more reliable than a 'blind' (i.e., non-functional, purely formal) identification which would undoubtedly lead to the distortion of the data both in their quantity and their distribution" (Salager-Meyer 1994:6-7). Among them, Hyland's model of hedges, which "combines sociological, linguistic and discourse analytic perspective" (1996a:434), is a representative one and serves as the basis of many later functional analyses on hedges (e.g. Varttala 2001; Yu 2009).Hedges are defined by him as "any linguistic means used to indicate either a)a lack of complete commitment to the truth of a proposition, or b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically" (Hyland 1996b:251), and can be mainly divided into accuracy-oriented, writer-oriented and reader-oriented functions.

This research adopts Hyland's model to account for the functions of hedges as it offers "a useful amalgamation of earlier approaches to hedging" and succeeds in "providing a useful

taxonomy of the various functions that a given hedge may have" (Varttala 2001:89-90).

2.2 Gender and Hedging

The relationship between gender and hedging was noted by Robin Lakoff (1975) when she argued that there are marked differences between men's and women's language. Women's language, compared to men's, is characterized by unassertiveness and indirectness, including the frequent use of modifiers or hedges. This viewpoint was supported by several subsequent studies which revealed that women applied more hedges to express imprecision or tentativeness than men (Crosby and Nyquist 1977; Preisler 1986). However, some other studies reported no significant difference or even contradictory results between men and women in their use of hedges (Miettinen and Watson 2013). Based on the investigation of some New Zealand speech corpuses, Holmes (1990) found that men use *I think* and *you know* more often than women to convey their uncertainty. Yaguchi *et al* (2004) found out that in academic settings male groups used more hedging devices than their female counterparts while the opposite was true in a press conference setting. However, O'Barr and Atkins (1980) presented a different picture: hedges were used more often by people with low social status, regardless of sex, and were thus better marked as a feature of "powerless language". Such results may indicate that participants' status and the context of use may influence a speaker's use of hedges.

Against this backdrop, Holmes (1986) argued that many previous studies suffered from the serious methodological weakness of relying simply on indiscriminate frequency counts of hedges "without taking account of their function in context" (Holmes 1990:186). After detailed functional analyses of several hedges in context, Holmes (1986, 1988a, 1995) claimed that women more frequently used hedges to express interpersonal warmth and maintain solidarity while men more frequently used hedges to express propositional imprecision and tentativeness. As such, men and women merely prefer different aspects of hedges, with men focusing more on epistemic meaning to indicate uncertainty while women placing more emphasis on affective meaning. She then suggested that, for any results to be useful, the description of the distribution of hedges "clearly requires a prior functional analysis" (Holmes 1986:1) and that researchers need to establish "a coherent framework for identifying the linguistic devices" instead of

examining "a random list of features assumed to characterize women's language" (Holmes 1990:202). This viewpoint on analyzing the functions of hedges has been applied in the present study.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 A Functional Model of Hedges

As Hyland's model of hedges (1996a, 1996b) mainly focuses on the study of written discourse, we feel it necessary to slightly adapt his model to accommodate our spoken discourse. Hedges can thus be categorized into accuracy-oriented, speaker-oriented and audience-oriented types. Accuracy-oriented hedges involve the speaker's desire to express something with greater accuracy and aims at reducing the risk of falsification on objective grounds. According to the cooperative principle proposed by Grice (1975), most discourse keeps a balance between fact and evaluation, and speakers would like to present their statements as accurately, fully and objectively as possible. "The main function of accuracy-oriented hedges is to imply that the proposition is based on plausible reasoning in the absence of certain knowledge, they ask that a proposition be understood as true as far as can be determined" (Hyland 1996a:440). While accuracy-oriented hedges focus on the truth value of proposition, speaker-oriented hedges focus on the relationship between speaker and the propositional content and do not change the truth value of the latter. Speaker-oriented hedges only reflect the speaker's judgment concerning the actual state of the proposition and indicate that the speaker is not fully committed to the truth of the proposition. Rather than increasing the precision of propositions, they serve to distance the speaker from a proposition when the speaker is not prepared to guarantee the truth of it.

While both accuracy-oriented and speaker-oriented hedges aim to fulfill "adequacy conditions", audience-oriented hedges are used to realize "acceptability conditions" (Hyland 1996a:436). Hence, unlike the former two types of hedge which put emphasis on objective dimensions, the audience-oriented type involves a sense of interpersonal consideration on subjective grounds, focusing on the relationship between interlocutors and indicating the

attention the speaker gives to his listeners. They serve to mitigate the illocutionary force of a speech act either to show deference, politeness or humility towards the listeners and reflect the speaker's desire to be understood and accepted by the audience. Both accuracy-oriented and speaker-oriented hedges are "content-motivated" as they are both concerned with the speaker's assumptions about the nature of external reality; by contrast, audience-oriented hedges are "audience-motivated" as they indicate the speaker's assessment of the acceptability to their audience.

3.2 Research Materials

3.2.1 The setting

In this research, all the materials are drawn from a corpus entitled "Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Press Conference Interpreting" (hereafter referred to as CEPCPCI) which is part of a larger project, the "Chinese-English Conference Interpreting Corpus" constructed by the Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies, Shanghai Jiao Tong University. The aim of the project is to study "the linguistic features of interpreted texts, interpreting norms and the cognitive process of interpreting" (Hu and Tao 2013:627). For the purpose of ecological validity, all the materials collected in the CEPCPCI are transcriptions of authentic speeches at Chinese government press conferences held during the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference between 1990 and 2014 (also known as the "Two Sessions"). As all the press conferences were broadcasted live by China Central Television (CCTV), most materials are publicly available and can be lawfully used for research purposes. At all the press conferences recorded, the speakers, either premiers of the State Council or foreign ministers of China, are uniformly male. The speakers' gender, therefore, does not affect the interpreters' performances. At these press conferences, both domestic and international correspondents were allocated time by moderators and had the chance to raise questions either in Chinese or English. Consecutive interpreting was then provided by professional interpreters from the China Foreign Ministry. For the purpose of the project as a whole, questions raised in English, together with their Chinese interpreted texts, were

eliminated from the corpus. Some materials jointly interpreted by both male and female interpreters were also removed from the corpus. As a result, the interpreting discourses at press conferences employed in our research included consecutive interpreting services provided by 6 male and 9 female interpreters. In this way, gender is controlled as the only independent variable in analyzing the use of hedges.

3.2.2 The corpus profile

All the recorded source discourses and their interpreted counterparts were first transcribed into texts based on certain conventions and then aligned at sentence level using the software ParaConc (see Hu and Tao 2013). The specifics of the corpus thus compiled can be seen in Table 1: the interpreting texts for male and female interpreters are 72,887 and 113,486 English words respectively, with their Chinese counterparts being 86,954 and 148,060 characters respectively. It is clear that the sizes of the interpreting texts of the male and female interpreters are not equal; however, we decided not to arbitrarily remove some materials from the female interpreters in order to make them "equal" as we believe that larger sample texts enable more representative conclusions to be drawn, considering the great difficulty involved in collecting and transcribing interpreting materials. Rather, we decided to calculate the normalized frequencies of hedges per 10,000 words to offset the difference in total word counts.

Table 1.Basic information of the corpus

	Chinese Source Texts (characters)	English Target Texts (words)
Male Interpreters	86,954	72,887
Female Interpreters	148,060	113,486

We have also looked at the corpus in regard to the number of male and female interpreters, as well as the number of their interpreting performances. As can be seen from table 2, there are altogether 15 interpreters, with 6 being male and 9 being female. The average number of performances for each gender is exactly the same, and the result of a t-test shows that there is

no statistically significant difference between the male and female groups in the number of interpreting performances. Thus, the experience gained through high level conference interpreting for each group is not counted as a variable in our research.

Table 2. The number of performances for male and female groups in the corpus

	Male	Female
Number of Interpreters	6	9
Total performances	12	18
Mean performances	2	2
Variance	1.7	5.25
T-test (two-tail)	$p>0.05$	

3.3 Research Procedure

Our research adopted two approaches: 1) a quantitative analysis based on an examination of the interpreted discourses; 2) a qualitative analysis based on a scrutiny of the interpreting process and documentary resources. Hyland's (2005) and Holmes' (1988b) list of potential hedges was employed as the starting point for our compilation of potential hedges. The compiled list of potential hedges was then concordance by male and female interpreters' outputs respectively using the software AntConc (version 3.2.2), a free corpus analysis toolkit with functions for concordancing and text analysis (http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/ antconc/). As "any adequate treatment will have to take context into account" (Lakoff 1973:484), the retrieved cases were subsequently examined manually in context making sure that only those serving in hedging functions as we had defined above were counted as hedges. The identified hedges were simultaneously coded according to our established functional model. In this process, the overall and distributional frequencies of hedges were cross-classified according to the interpreter's gender; and the results of this will provide the answer to our first research question.

The second stage involved examining the interpreting process to find out whether the data acquired in the first stage were the result of source discourse interference or the effect of

gender. The software ParaConc, which is able to indicate bilingual co-occurrence contexts, was employed to examine the ST counterparts of the identified hedges in the first stage. In this stage, the corresponding relationships between ST and TT hedges were classified according to their source: from the ST or from the interpreting process. The resultant frequency information for each category was subsequently calculated. Any differences in terms of the frequencies of hedges arising from the interpreting process were thus concluded to be the effect of gender.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

In this section, the overall frequencies of hedges as well as their functional distributions across the outputs of the two genders are presented. By this, we are getting closer to our aim of "studying the linguistic features of interpreted texts" as a whole and of studying hedging features in the outputs of interpreters of both genders in particular.

4.1.1Overall frequencies

Identifying potential linguistic devices as hedges is no easy task because "no linguistic items are inherently hedgy but can acquire this quality depending on the communicative context or the co-text" (Markkanen and Schröder 1997:6). To filter the concordanced linguistic items as hedges, we combined grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic aspects as a whole to identify hedges in this research. Grammatically, certain lexical categories including modal auxiliaries, lexical verbs, adjectives, adverbials and nouns are more likely to contribute potential hedges than other categories (Hyland 1996b; Holmes 1990). Semantically, hedge is closely associated with epistemic modality or is more exactly part of it: the part of epistemic modality that expresses tentativeness or doubt instead of certainty or confidence (Hyland 1998:3). However, hedge is to be distinguished from epistemic modality as the former is essentially a pragmatic concept while the latter a semantic one. Pragmatically, hedges must be used intentionally by the speaker to fulfill the function(s) we have discussed above: either to show uncertainty in

claims, or to protect the speaker against possible falsification or to show humility, deference and recognition to the listeners. As such, hedges in this study are confined to those concordance words expressing doubts or reservations on the part of speakers only. Bearing these criteria in mind, the task of identification can be carried out in a consistent way.

The freeware AntConc was employed to concordance potential hedges and the results obtained could be saved into .txt files using the option "save output to text file". Figure 1.shows the "concordance" of the potential hedge *may* in the window pane of AntConc 3.2.2. In addition to this, the "File View" function (visible in figure 1.) can provide further context for each concordanced case by simply clicking on the highlighted key word.
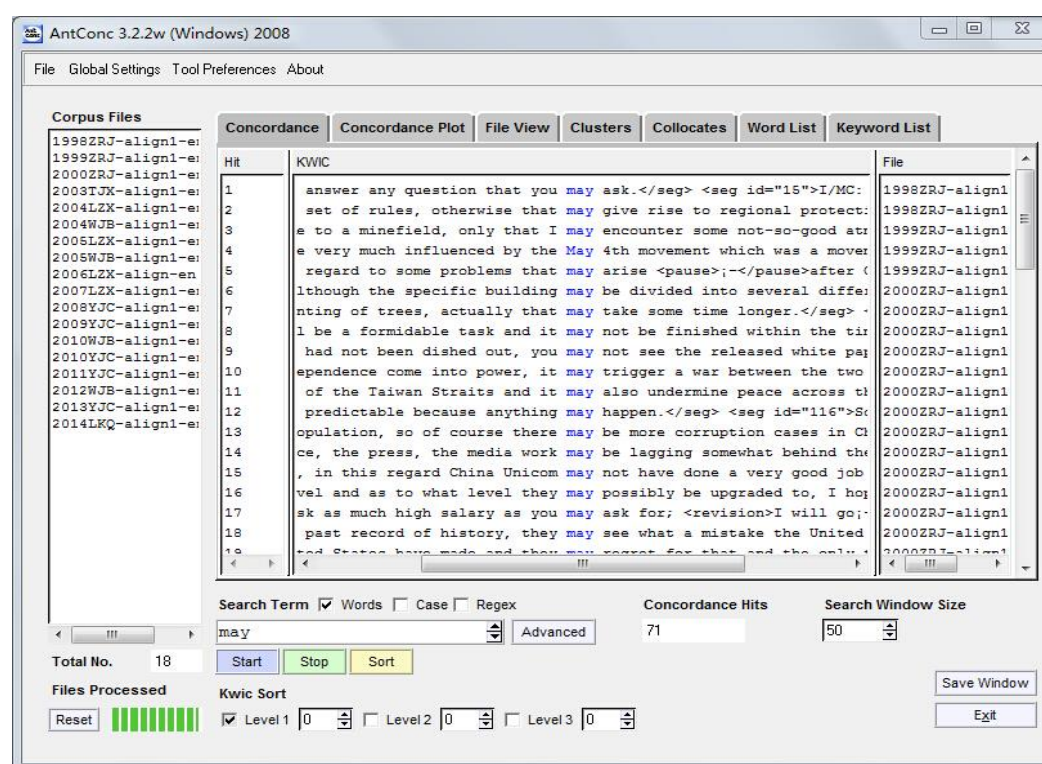

Figure 1. Concordance of "may" in AntConc 3.2.2

Table 3. shows the overall observed frequency and normalized frequency (per 10,000 words) of hedges in the outputs of interpreters of both genders. Though the observed frequency of male interpreters' use of hedges is lower than that of female interpreters (547<725), considering the larger sample text size of female interpreters, the normalized frequency per 10,000 words of male interpreters is higher than that of female interpreters (75.1>63.9). Log-

likelihood tests indicate the difference between male and female interpreters in terms of observed frequencies is statistically significant (LL=8.02, $p<0.05$). As a result, at least for the outputs of interpreters, the finding indicates that male interpreters more frequently use hedges than their female counterparts in Chinese-English conference interpreting. Thus, this discovery concerning interpreters' use of hedges is in line with the claims put forward by Lakoff (1975).

Table 3. Frequency of hedges of interpreters of both genders

	Overall observed frequency (words)	Normalized frequency (per 10,000 words)
Male interpreters	547	75.1
Female interpreters	725	63.9

4.1.2 Functional distribution across categories

This section aims to examine the main purposes of hedges used by interpreters, that is, to discover the functional distribution of hedges across the accuracy-oriented, speaker-oriented, and audience-oriented types. The functional model discussed in section 3.1 was accordingly applied. While some items can immediately be identified as hedges as soon as they appear, the specific functions they perform in context are not always easily distinguishable. This illustrates the multi-functional nature of hedges, implying that there are no clearly-defined boundaries across the three categories but that a particular device may have an overlap of functions in a specific context. To solve this problem, we share the view of Holmes that "categorization by primary function in context is the only feasible procedure" and "it is generally possible to classify examples after carefully considering relevant aspects of the context of utterance" (1986:12). On the one hand, though "it is difficult to exclusively assign specific devices to particular functional categories" (Hyland 1996a:445), knowledge about the distinctive grammatical features of the core cases of each category can assist our work in hedge identification: accuracy-oriented hedges usually work on a local level to modify individual words or phrases for precision. These resemble the majority of the lexical items listed in

Lakoff's (1973) original statements, e.g. *somewhat, almost, fairly, around, at least, kind of*. Speaker-oriented hedges usually work at a clause or sentence level and are marked by impersonal expression, i.e. without speaker agentivity, for the protection of the speaker, e.g. it *seems/appear*s that, *reportedly*. Audience-oriented hedges are characterized by clear reference to the speaker or by being addressed to the listeners directly, implying that a claim is only a personal opinion rather than definitive, or showing appropriate concern for the listeners, e.g. I *think/believe*, *personally*, you *may*. On the other hand, in order to ensure the reliability and objectivity of the coding process, an external examiner was invited to work independently on the coding work. Whenever different conclusions were reached by the external examiner and the authors, we negotiated until agreement was achieved.

Table 4. Functional distribution of hedges in interpreters' outputs

	Accuracy-oriented		Speaker-oriented		Audience-oriented	
	Observed (normalized*) frequency	Percent	Observed (normalized) frequency	Percent	Observed (normalized) frequency	Percent
Male	267(36.6)	48.81%	43(5.9)	7.86%	237(32.5)	43.33%
Female	304(26.8)	41.93%	32(2.8)	4.41%	389(34.3)	53.66%

*Normalized frequency=observed frequency/corpus size×10,000

The distribution of functions across the accuracy-oriented, speaker-oriented and audience-oriented types in the outputs of male and female interpreters is presented in Table 4. In each type for both males and females, the observed/normalized frequency of hedges and its percentage relative to the corresponding total number is presented. It is obvious, in terms of normalized frequency, that male interpreters' use of accuracy-oriented (36.6) and speaker-oriented (5.9) hedges outnumber those of female interpreters (26.8 for accuracy-oriented and 2.8 for speaker-oriented). By contrast, female interpreters predominate in the use of audience-oriented hedges, with the normalized frequency (34.3) higher than that of male interpreters (32.5). The same is true when comparing the percentages of each category. We can thus conclude that hedges used by male interpreters are more content-motivated, while those used

by female interpreters are more audience-motivated. As a result, in line with Holmes (1986, 1988a), our findings indicate that: male users tend to employ hedges more for their "epistemic" meaning expressing propositional imprecision or doubt; while female users employ them more for their "affective" meaning focusing on interpersonal relationships.

A closer look at audience-oriented hedges used by male and female interpreters reveals some more interesting features: when expressing something as just a personal opinion, male interpreters overwhelmingly use *I think*[1], with its normalized frequency much higher than that of female interpreters (20.6 vs. 8.4). In contrast, female interpreters more frequently resort to *I believe* to indicate personal ideas, with its normalized frequency over twice that of male interpreters (17.0 vs. 7.6). Generally speaking, *believe* indicates a higher degree of conviction in expressing an opinion than *think*. This would imply that female interpreters' use of hedges is more certain and assured than that of male interpreters, adding to our previous finding that male interpreters' use of hedges tends more to express uncertainty compared to that of female interpreters. This evidence thus collectively indicates that female interpreters' use of hedges is more audience-oriented.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

As indicated above, our initial results are inconsistent with Robin Lakoff's (1975) claim that female users employ more hedges and are thus more tentative than male users. The findings we have reached so far indicate that male interpreters employ hedges to a greater extent than female interpreters and use more hedges to express uncertainty and doubt while female interpreters use more hedges to facilitate interpersonal relationships and pay attention to the listeners. However, we need to address one more problem before generalizing the results: the interpreters' outputs are based on the invited speakers' utterances, meaning that the differences in hedge uses between male and female interpreters may possibly be a transfer of the ST differences. In order to determine whether the differences are a result of the effect of gender or a transfer of ST differences, we moved one step further to examine the interpreting process.

By means of the software ParaConc, each identified hedge in the target texts was examined in terms of its relationship to the source text. A scrutiny of the parallel texts revealed

four kinds of corresponding relationship between the identified hedges and their source texts: direct transfer, indirect transfer, shift and addition. These are summarized in Table 5 respectively.

Table 5. Types of correspondence between identified hedges and their source texts

Types	Description	Examples
Direct Transfer	An identified hedge transfers the form and function directly from the ST item	ST:*也许就不需要再发这种建设性的国债了.* TT: Or **perhaps** there is no need at all to issue any treasury bonds to undertake those construction projects.
Indirect Transfer	An identified hedge transfers the hedging function of the ST item or structure but differs in form	ST:*可是这一次这个增加 14.7%是好像是这四五年来是最高的.* TT: But the most recent military expenditure increase was fourteen point seven percent, **almost** the highest in four to five years.
Shift	An identified hedge has a corresponding ST item(mostly intensifiers) with no hedging function	ST:*基本养老的参与人数也超过 8 亿人.* TT: Now the basic old-age insurance schemes cover **about** 800 million people.
Addition	An identified hedge is added by the interpreter with no corresponding ST item.	ST: *如您所知，中国最高法院呢已经收回了死刑的核准权.* TT: As you **may** know, the Supreme People's Court of China has taken back the power to approve death penalty.

As can be seen from the table, either in *Direct Transfer* or *Indirect Transfer*, the identified TT hedges derive from their ST equivalents directly, meaning that no extra hedge has been added to the target texts by interpreters. However, in cases marked as *Shift* or *Addition*, interpreters either shift an intensifier (or similar item) into a hedge in the target text or add an additional hedge in the TT without a corresponding item in the ST. As a result of this kind of manipulation, the number of hedges in the TT will increase. To be more specific, the identified TT hedges in the former two types come from the source texts produced by the speakers, while the TT hedges in the latter two types come from the process of interpreting by interpreters, indicating interpreters' active choices. Obviously, it is the latter two types that have been of interest to us in our investigation of the effect of gender on hedge usage.

Hence, we marked *Direct Transfer* and *Indirect Transfer* as "equivalent" cases, with *Shift* and *Addition* as "non-equivalent" cases, and statistically counted both kinds of cases as they appeared in the parallel texts. We assume that if there is a significant difference in terms of "non-equivalent" cases between male and female interpreters' outputs, the difference in hedge usage identified in section 4.1 can be regarded as the effect of gender. The results can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequencies of "equivalent" and "non-equivalent" cases

	Accuracy-oriented		Speaker-oriented		Audience-oriented		Total	
	Equivalent	Non-equivalent	Equivalent	Non-equivalent	Equivalent	Non-equivalent	Equivalent	Non-equivalent
Male	177(24.3*)	90(12.4)	34(4.7)	9(1.2)	115(15.8)	122(16.7)	326(44.7)	221(30.3)
Female	190(16.7)	114(10.0)	25(2.2)	7(0.6)	248(21.9)	141(12.4)	463(40.8)	262(23.1)

*Note: in each column, observed frequency is followed by its normalized frequency in brackets in terms of per 10,000 words.

Table 6. shows the observed and normalized frequencies of "equivalent" and "non-equivalent" cases in each category. In terms of normalized frequencies, the "non-equivalent" cases of male interpreters in all three types of hedge (12.4, 1.2, and 16.7 respectively) outnumber their female interpreter counterparts (10.0, 0.6, and 12.4 respectively). In terms of observed frequencies, log-likelihood tests indicate that only the difference in audience-oriented "non-equivalences" is significant between male and female interpreters (LL=5.75, $p<0.05$). The difference is more obvious if we look at the total normalized numbers, where the "non-equivalent" cases by male interpreters is 30.3 words, compared with 23.1 words by female interpreters. The log-likelihood test indicates that the difference between male and female interpreters is significant in terms of total observed frequencies (LL=8.81, $p<0.05$). Consequently, the data indicated three major findings: 1) non-equivalence, in which interpreters add extra hedges or transform a non-hedge ST item into a TT hedge, is a prominent feature of Chinese-English government press conferences. This is proved by the fact that more than one third of hedges in either male or female interpreters' outputs arise from the interpreting process. 2) In terms of functional distribution, the data partially substantiate our earlier results on the functions of hedges as used by interpreters: male interpreters are more content-motivated and audience-motivated than

female interpreters. However, the difference is only significant in audience-oriented cases. 3) On the whole, male interpreters add significantly more optional hedges or are more likely to render a non-hedge ST item into the TT with hedge in conference interpreting, indicating that male interpreters are generally more tentative or indirect than their female colleagues. The combination of the last two findings has thus answered our second research question: the significant difference in the use of hedge between the outputs of males and females is partly the result of ST interference and partly the effect of gender.

4.3 Discussion

First of all, the prominence of "non-equivalent" choices made by interpreters at Chinese government press conferences is understandable. As institutional insiders from the Department of Translation and Interpretation (hereafter referred as DTI) of the Foreign Ministry, interpreters are more than just invisible ghosts transferring the literal meaning of the source utterances. In fact, many of the "non-equivalent" cases can be alternatively described as "explicitation", which involves "making explicit in the target language what remains implicit in the source language because it is apparent from either the context or the situation" (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995:342). Obviously, interpreters will, from time to time, make judgments over what is certain and what is only inferential in the speaker's original utterances. As indicated by Enlai Zhou, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, "a qualified interpreter should be able to correct the expressions (of a speaker) where they are logically, lexically or syntactically inappropriate"; "an interpreter is not just a mechanical sound conduit … but should demonstrate his/her personal awareness and initiative in interpreting" (Shi 2009:10, translated by the authors). This instruction has been strictly followed by the interpreters and translators working for the Chinese Foreign Ministry (Shi 2009:10). It is therefore natural that interpreters will utilize additional hedging to qualify speakers' utterances even though there have been no equivalent ST terms.

Secondly, the reason why male interpreters use significantly more audience-oriented hedging than female interpreters may be related to their preference for different types of 'face'. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, males tend to be more focused on each

other's negative 'face' while females are more attentive to positive 'face'. Assuming this rule also applies to interpreters, male interpreters would normally employ more hedging than their female colleagues for two reasons: firstly, though hedging can sometimes serve as a positive politeness strategy (e.g. reducing disagreement), it is mainly a strategy for negative politeness according to Brown and Levinson (1987:146); secondly, hedges are found to be frequently used to protect not only the principal participants' (i.e. the speakers and correspondents) face but also the interpreters' own face in interpreting, a finding which was also confirmed by Liu (2010) in the same press conferences. Consequently, the more frequent use of audience-oriented hedging by male interpreters may be due to their greater eagerness to save negative face on their own part and that of their principals (i.e. their government superiors).

Thirdly, the gender difference in hedging may be linked to the neurobiological differences between males and females. It is well accepted that interpreting is a cognitively demanding task with high requirements on working memory. And there are numerous studies in neuroscience indicating that gender differences exist in the functional organization of the brain for working memory (Speck et al 2000). Particularly, studies have shown that language processing is more bi-lateralized in women as opposed to left-lateralized in men (see Andreano and Cahill, 2009), affording women advantages in linguistic functionality. Consequently, women are typically found to perform more accurately in verbal working memory tasks and therefore are believed to possess a superior verbal memory compared to men. If this is true for interpreters, female interpreters should reproduce more accurately the speaker's utterances in interpreting tasks because they have a better memory of the source contents. To confirm this, we made a simple calculation of the figures presented in table 6. It shows that the proportion of all equivalent cases to the total cases by female interpreters (63.9%) outnumbers that by male interpreters (59.6%), suggesting female interpreters have made more accurate interpretations in terms of hedging. In contrast, male interpreters may have resorted to more "shift" and "addition" type hedging to compensate for their less accurate verbal memories.

In addition, the difference in hedging between male and female interpreters may also relate to the different degrees of redundancy produced in their outputs. The ratio of English output (72,887 words) to Chinese source texts (86,954 characters) for male interpreters is 0.838, which means technically each Chinese character has been translated into 0.838 English words.

By comparison, this ratio for female interpreters is 0.766. These figures imply that male interpreters have generated a higher percentage of redundancy in their outputs, with additional hedging being a part of this. Redundancy in linguistics means offering more information than is strictly necessary to decode the message (Crystal 2002:146), and functions in the process of interpreting by providing interpreters with more processing time in switching between languages. It can be a beneficial strategy in smoothing out the interpreting flow, however, it is found that qualifiers (or hedges as we refer to them here) are often used indiscriminately in Chinglish, negatively impacting on the utterances. Pinkham who worked as a translation polisher for years at governmental agencies in Beijing, points out that overuse or redundancy of qualifiers (e.g. *quite, rather, relatively, possibly, perhaps, somewhat,* etc.) is quite common in the rendered versions of official reports and speeches by Chinese translators. She also found that many qualifiers in Chinglish translations were used with no logical reason to the extent of even producing a contradictory effect (Pinkam 2000:42-47). Accordingly, it follows likely that Chinese interpreters are also prone to overuse of hedges (or qualifiers) and that male interpreters are even more prone to overuse. The above result on the total output/input ratio coincides with our findings that male interpreters have more "non-equivalent" cases in all three categories of hedging compared to their female colleagues.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on data drawn from the corpus, this paper has compared the use of hedging by male and female interpreters in interpreting at Chinese government press conferences, and aims to investigate the existence of any gender difference in the use of hedging. Analysis of the interpreters' outputs show that male interpreters generally employ more hedging based on normalized frequency than their female counterparts. This initial result contradicts Robin Lakoff's (1975) claim that female users tend to employ more hedging and are more tentative than male users. A detailed functional analysis indicates that male interpreters employ more accuracy-oriented and speaker-oriented hedging than female interpreters while the latter employ more audience-oriented hedging. This result corroborates Holmes' (1986, 1988a)

findings that male speakers tend to focus more on the epistemic aspect of hedging to express uncertainty while female speakers tend to put more emphasis on the affective aspect of hedging to facilitate interpersonal relationships.

However, the above results cannot be confirmed without considering the impact of the source texts on the output of interpreters. A scrutiny of the parallel texts shows that male interpreters make more "non-equivalent" choices in total in the interpreting process than their female colleagues. This implies that male interpreters more frequently resort to hedging as a linguistic strategy in their interpreting, and are thus more tentative or indirect in speech generally. This gender difference in hedging, on the one hand, may be due to the fact that female interpreters have better verbal memories and thus are able to reproduce more accurately the hedges in the source utterances. On the other hand, male interpreters in our corpus are more prone to overuse of hedges in interpreting, which is consistent with their higher degree of redundancy in total as reflected by the output/input ratio. Our results from this English-Chinese interpreting corpus, however, show an opposite trend to Magnifico and Defrancq's (forthcoming 2017) study on gender and hedges in conference interpreting. This, based on the EPICG corpus, found that female interpreters made more additions than males. The inconsistency in these results might be accounted for the fundamental differences between the two research projects in interpreting mode (consecutive vs. simultaneous) and direction (working from L1 to L2 vs. L2 to L1), as well as the languages pairs involved.

Our results also show that male interpreters exceed female interpreters in their use of content-oriented and audience-oriented hedges. However, a statistically significant difference between the genders only applies to audience-oriented hedges. One possible reason may be that male and female interpreters typically value different types of 'face' and that interpreters wish to protect the face of their superiors as well as their own. Hence, for our second research question, the findings indicate that the difference in interpreters' outputs is partly influenced by gender difference in the interpreting process and is partly due to source text interference.

When we consider the above findings, we are also mindful of the limitations of this study. Firstly, the interpreting corpus we have used is not large enough to enable us to generalize and draw definite conclusions. Secondly, some researchers (e.g. Dixon and Foster 1997; Holmes 1986, 1988) have found that audience gender may also have an effect on speakers' use of

hedges; this, however, is not taken into account in the present study. Thirdly, as any "orthographic transcription of a speech event only constitute(s) a partial representation of the original speech event" (Sergio and Falbo 2012:31), a corpus-based study ignores important structural or intonational aspects of hedging, which may have an impact on the study of hedging between genders. These limitations will be carefully considered in our future studies on the application of hedging as a linguistic device.

Note:

1. On the status of *think/believe*, opinions vary with some scholars categorizing them as hedges (Myers 1989; Hyland 1996b; Varttala 2001) and others as boosters (Hyland 2005). Still, some scholars take a neutral position assuming that the words can be either hedges or boosters depending on the context and intonation patterns (e.g. Holmes 1984). In this paper, however, we share Varttala's view that *think/believe* are hedges, because together with personal subjects they indicate that "there may exist alternative explanations concerning the state of affairs described by the author and that what is said by the author 'is a personal opinion', the information offered being 'left open to the reader's judgment'" (2001:85). Therefore, all instances of *(I) think/believe* followed by a complement clause, which serve to qualify their following statements, are counted as hedges.

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Appendix. List of potential hedges identified in the data

Devices found in male interpreters' outputs

about	relative
almost	relatively
appear	roughly
around	seem
at least	sometimes
attempt	somewhat
basically	suppose
belief	(I)think
(I)believe	usually
can	view
could	would
expect	
fairly	
feel	
frequent	
frequently	
generally	
guess	
(my)idea	
impossible	
kind of	
likely	
mainly	
maintain	
may	
maybe	
might	
more or less	
nearly	
normally	
on the whole	
(my)opinion	
perhaps	
possibility	
possible	
possibly	
pretty	
probably	
quite	
rarely	

Devices found in female interpreters' outputs

about	seem
almost	should
around	sometimes
at least	somewhat
basically	suppose
(I)believe	tend
can	tendency
could	(I)think
estimate	to my knowledge
expect	to some extent
fairly	unclear
feel	usually
frequent	(my)view
frequently	would
generally	
guess	
impossible	
kind of	
likely	
mainly	
maintain	
may	
maybe	
might	
more or less	
nearly	
normally	
often	
on the whole	
partially	
possibility	
possible	
possibly	
probably	
quite	
rarely	
rather	
relatively	
reportedly	
roughly	