When All is Hedged and Done: Toward a Literature-based Integrative Language Curriculum, Using Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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1. Introduction

This paper advances the argument that a pedagogically viable English language curriculum can be devised by integrating literature into the lesson plan. Ideally, a literature-based integrative curriculum will further activate the linguistic knowledge and skills taught, while at the same time leading students to explore literature and its distinct use of language. The twining together of literature and language education may raise some eyebrows. Indeed, more sceptical readers may ask whether university courses should not introduce a more practical language curriculum to the students in order to prepare them for the life beyond the classroom walls. In fact, this is precisely the point I am putting forward. Given the practical, administrative demands on university curricula, there is a limit to what can be taught and learned in the length of one course. Therefore, realistically speaking, university language curricula should be designed in such a way so as to make the students autonomous learners of English. Once they have acquired sufficient competence in English with the aid of the courses, they can go onto explore a more advanced or specialised use of language on their own. Looking at university language education from this perspective will necessarily mean that the focus of the curriculum will be as much on the actualisation of the language skills as on their inculcation. In the following space, I will argue that a literature-based curriculum can indeed be practical by expediting the learning process and by priming the students for a continuing education in English.

The history of using literature to teach English is as long as

it is contentious, but the idea has occurred to many in the profession of language teaching. Not surprisingly, literary-minded educators and writers are particularly amenable to this suggestion and agree that incorporating literature into the curriculum will make the learning experience more variegated and enjoyable (Retallack and Spahr, 2006). At the outset, the claim sounds reasonable and well-merited. But one may well probe further: 'enjoyable' yes, but for whom? It should not be forgotten that while the instructor has the authority to dictate the syllabus, the success of the curriculum will be measured by how much it benefits the students. As Ronald Carter and Michael N. Long (1991) caution, there is a profound difference between 'studying literature and using literature as a resource' (p. 10). Admittedly, the idea of bringing literature into the classroom itself does not require much critical thought. It is the more taxing issue of *how* to put literature to productive use that seems to be the terrain on which the debate is waged today.

According to Geoff Hall (2005), many literature-based language curricula past and present suffer from a lack of instructional coordination and conceptual rigour (p. 47). A curriculum may be short on language instruction and long on teaching literature, or vice versa. Not only does such a half-measured approach undermine the pedagogical goal of literature-based language teaching, but could also colour the students' perception of literature, and turn them further away from its joy. In order to fully integrate literature into the curriculum, specific language skills that will focus its pedagogical synergy must first be sought. As one such skill, I propose 'hedging'. Hedging helps the speaker use the right English at the right time, and therefore is indispensable to communication.

In technical parlance, this concept of right English usage is called 'register', and is glossed by OED as '[a] variety of a language or a level of usage'. What register governs is variation in language according to *usage* in the widest sense of the term. Geoffrey Leech (1969) gives three main categories of register under which most variations can be subsumed. These are (1) medium (e.g. variation according to whether the language is used in writing or speech, in public or private documents, in official or unofficial channels, etc.), (2) social relations (e.g. variation according to whether the language used between the com-

municants is formal or informal, familiar or polite, personal or impersonal, etc.), and (3) role (e.g. variation according to whether the language is being professionally used by a lawyer, university professor, newscaster, comedian, etc.). As Leech's schematisation makes clear, register is a tricky affair because it is modified by social relations. For this reason, while infelicitous use of grammar in speech will be passed over without much fuss, a similar *faux pas* with register 'will bring about a reaction of disorientation and surprise' (Leech, 1969, p.12). Crucially, being more than just an erratic linguistic appendage or rhetorical flourish, hedges play a pivotal role in inter-relational discourse as illocutionary modifiers that determine how appropriate an utterance sounds to others. Thus, learning how to hedge properly will lead to a more accurate use of language, and will enhance the overall communicative competence of the students.

As a move toward devising a literature-based integrative curriculum for teaching hedges, first I will give a theoretical overview of hedges as they appear in conventional usages. In Section 2, the relationship between hedges and polite language will be discussed using concepts derived from the linguistic field of pragmatics. In Section 3, hedges used in academic discourse will be examined. The objective here is to shed light on the illocutionary aspect of academic discourse, and describe the specific uses to which hedges are put to facilitate inter-peer communication by academics. In Section 4, which forms the locus of this paper, I will incorporate the preceding theoretical discussions on hedges and consider the pedagogical implications of teaching them using Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. In particular, the novel will be characterised as a type of 'hedging literature' that makes creative use of hedges, and thereby enabling the students to appreciate their literary potential and leading them to an exploration of literature. In the final section, drawing on this insight, I will present some language-based activities using Ishiguro's novel, and discuss how literature might be integrated in the language curriculum.

2. Hedges in Polite Conversation

Given the myriad uses to which English is put, what type of English should be taught to the students is a legitimate question

that the instructor of a university language course should ponder carefully. It might then dawn on the instructor that if preparing the students for real life is one of the roles expected of university education, English that is most conducive to communication should be taught. One essential element that fosters verbal exchange is politeness. Indeed, many would intuitively grasp why politeness is integral to conversation, but the question of how it is expressed through language may not be as clear. The relation between language and politeness can be best explained by using theoretical concepts elaborated in pragmatics. A central concept in expressing politeness through language is 'face'. Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1994) define 'face' as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself' (p. 61). In pragmatics, where language use is considered in terms of social relations, politeness is understood as an act that seeks to pre-empt or restore the loss of this 'face'. As a precondition for performing these 'face saving acts', as they are called, it is necessary that the speakers first understand what kind of social desires, or 'face wants' of the listeners are at stake.

Depending on the nature of these 'face wants', faces can be classified as positive or negative. It is important to note that here the positive/negative distinction does not suggest any moral judgment or hierarchy. Positive face represents the desire to be accepted, recognised, and valued as a member of a given community. On the other hand, negative face represents that of being independent and free of any interference (ibid., p.62). Accordingly, there are two different politeness strategies corresponding to the two face wants. Positive politeness is that which ratifies the interlocutor's positive face wants, often manifesting as expressions that appeal to a common good, camaraderie, and even friendship (ibid., p. 144). Conversely, negative politeness is directed to his/her negative face wants, often characterised by self-effacement, formality, and restraint (ibid., p. 70). Given the difficulty of appraising the intention of others and therefore their face wants, it is safer to perform face-saving acts via negative politeness strategies. Therefore, as George Yule (1996) remarks, polite expressions most commonly found in English are those that employ negative politeness strategies (p. 64).

Significantly, there are diverse linguistic and non-linguistic ways to perform negative politeness strategies, and this is where

hedges come into the picture. According to Brown and Levinson (1994), hedges modify the illocutionary force of the speaker's utterance, and thereby indicate that one is heedful of the other's negative face wants (p. 141). To put the point differently, hedges are linguistic markers that communicate the speaker's will for 'non-imposition'. By putting into words their reluctance or unwillingness to encroach upon the listener's comfort zone, the speaker is attempting to solicit the other's cooperation in establishing a dialogue.

This is particularly so when the speaker needs to announce unpleasant news about him/herself; such as making a request to borrow money. Although the speaker is the one in trouble, announcing such news to someone could potentially put the other in an uncomfortable position by placing the person under obligation, the failure to meet which may cause the person to lose face (the addressee might feel embarrassed or guilty when he cannot oblige). To avoid imposing on the other's face, the expression 'Can you lend me 1,000 yen?' could be hedged with expressions like the following: 'Oh, by the way, might it be possible . . .', 'I was wondering if . . .', 'Say, I have a bit of a problem'. The hedging expressions all warn that the information the speaker is about to impart by making such a request could be potentially face-threatening to the listener, and thus allow the other to prepare for the act of imposition. By introducing hedges in connection with the teaching of polite English, the students will come to better understand the wider communicative issues that language use entails.

3. Hedges in Academic Discourse

Significantly, teaching polite hedges in the classroom has a further pedagogical benefit as it prepares the ground for a more 'advanced' use of hedges. While making the students better communicators in English would be the aim of language courses in general, at the university level, it would be desirable to give the goal an academic focus and orientation. This can be done by teaching the students 'academic hedges', or hedges used in academic discourse. Academic discourse is represented by research articles, monographs, lecture notes, and other writings produced by professional and aspiring academics. As such, the language of

academic discourse is generally regarded as a very formal or specialised use of English quite removed from that of everyday use. This is rather untrue as far as hedges are concerned. Hedges are a common feature of academic discourse, and they serve a practical function for academics.

Academic hedges are similar to polite hedges in their performative act of non-imposition. However, whilst polite hedges are employed to foster communication by avoiding imposition in the area of social relations, academic hedges aim for the same effect by not imposing on the research territory established by other academics; in Ken Hyland's (1998) words, using academic hedges shows that one is heedful of others' academic claim by 'qualify[ing] . . . confidence in the truth of a proposition' (p.1). In this sense, the ability to hedge in an academically appropriate way becomes a badge of membership in the community. At the same time, however, one might wonder whether being too 'polite' to other academics by qualifying one's assertion would hamper the integrity of one's own claim. This is a reasonable concern. After all, have we not been taught that the goal of academic writing is to be as clear and precise as possible about what we intend to say? Academic hedges in fact do not deviate from this principle. On the contrary, they are the very embodiment of scholarly fastidiousness. By using hedges, academic writers can be very clear and precise about what they know as well as *what they do not know*. A characteristic hedge in a science article might run as follows:

> Although a causal relationship between the latter processes remains to be verified, the correlation may not reflect mere coincidence.[1]

Admittedly, the statement is couched in most ambiguous terms. The implication of the statement is that, even if the remaining 'processes' are somehow finally 'verified', the 'correlation' may turn out to be the product of 'mere coincidence'. If a layman read this kind of assertion, the person may wonder whether conducting an experiment that can only yield such inconclusive results is worth the trouble. Yet, being able to precisely demarcate research areas and topics that need further investigation is extremely valuable for the scholarly enterprise as a whole. Even if individ-

ual research does not lead to a breakthrough, by reporting preliminary findings based on the ground covered, it will aid and encourage others in their pursuit to take the project beyond the present limits. Therefore, academics need to be as precise and honest as possible about their state of knowledge, and hedges are the linguistic tool used to express this epistemic condition.

Commonly, academic hedges take the forms of auxiliary verbs (*could, would, may, etc*.), epistemic adjectives and adverbs (*possibly, apparently, likely, etc.*), lexical verbs (*appear, seem, believe, etc.*), and other items which mitigate the strength of an assertion. Note how markedly the impression of a statement changes when even one of these hedges (italicised words) are added as in the following illustration:

1. The environmental damage to the river is *possibly* caused by industrial discharge.
   As opposed to: The environmental damage to the river is caused by industrial discharge.

2. *I believe* the nuclear arms race can be curtailed by multilateral treaties.
   As opposed to: The nuclear arms race can be curtailed by multilateral treaties.

3. James Joyce *seems* to be representing the history of mankind in *Finnegans Wake*.
   As opposed to: James Joyce is representing the history of mankind in *Finnegans Wake*.

The effect of the insertion of hedges is obvious: they make the statements sound more thoughtful and cautious, that is scholarly. Where the statements lose in assertiveness, they gain immensely in credibility. Yet, the illustration also intimates that more is at stake than factual accuracy or fastidiousness. Crucially, the aim of academic hedges is not just to make the language sound objective and factually accurate like the telephone directory or a cooking recipe. For the lack of a better word, perhaps this essential quality can be termed 'academic honesty'. Note how the inclusion of academic hedges renders the statements easier to relate to. As Hyland (1998) points out, the

'human' element in academic hedges is crucial. There is an equally subjective and speculative element in the above statements, and what one individual considers to be doubtful or unverifiable could be judged otherwise by another. By honestly acknowledging one's human limits and ceding room for criticism and argument, academic hedges 'help[] gain communal acceptance for knowledge' (ibid., p. 38).

Given this insight, while there is no need to be able to hedge professionally, it would be a good idea for the students to learn the rudimentary skills of academic hedging in order to express themselves in a way that is academically communicative to their peers and course instructors. However, even with a good measure of goading and guiding, learning academic hedges is no easy task for foreign students. In an article devoted to this topic, Hyland (1996) notes that 'foreign students find the expression of commitment and detachment to propositions highly problematic and a failure to hedge statements adequately is a common feature of even formally proficient L2 writers' (p. 481). Hyland argues that cultural, linguistic, and above all institutional factors are behind the poor performance of L2 learners with hedging. On the last, institutional factor, Hyland writes that 'ESP writing textbooks tend to ignore or under-represent the significance of hedging and most explanations of epistemic devices are generally ill-informed and inadequate' (ibid., p.482). To be sure, some standard writing manuals for students introduce hedges under the rubric of 'qualifiers', and gloss their function rather generally as linguistic devices that allow writers to be cautious and critical about the presentation of data or argument, but greater coverage is needed in this area.[2]

In order to address this issue, Hyland (1996) argues that educators should (1) make expert writers' hedging strategies salient to students, and (2) develop the appropriate use of hedges in the students' written work (p. 482). To meet these two criteria, Hyland proposes a lesson plan based on concordanced journal articles (mainly scientific) that contain hedges. This way, Hyland argues, students will be introduced to 'authentic' hedges based on which appropriate language activities can be devised. The activities proposed by Hyland (1996) include 'Identification', 'Gap-fill', 'Translation', and 'Rewriting' (p. 483). Further, to actuate their full pedagogical potential, Hyland (1996) notes that lan-

guage materials with sufficient context that provide '[e]xplicit links between reading and writing' are needed (p. 484). Addressing this issue raised by Hyland will form part of the argumentative fulcrum of the following discussions: namely, that an integrative language curriculum for teaching hedges can devised by incorporating literature. Such a curriculum will draw out the full pedagogical potential of literature as a viable linguistic interface which can facilitate the actualisation of knowledge and acquisition of skill compared to curricula based on more conventional methods and material.

4. Hedges in Literature-based Language Curriculum

In proposing literature as pedagogical material, I am not taking an instrumental view that regards literature as a depository of 'authentic' language specimens for teaching English. Rather, the point I am trying to make here is quite to the contrary. That is, integrating literature in the language curriculum can be pedagogically enabling because reading and writing about literary language also leads to the exploration of language outside its strictly pragmatic use. Understandably, this argument might seem to defeat the original purpose of teaching English to enhance the students' communicative competence. However, introducing students to literature and its language does not necessarily conflict with such an aim. As in most other cases, one cannot fully understand the operation of a rule until it is (consciously) transgressed. In terms of second language acquisition, the development of some meta-linguistic knowledge and awareness in the learner is desirable in order to reach a state of autonomous language use. In so far as poetic or literary language is said to be a 'creative deviation' from a normative use of language (Leech, 1969, p.5), teaching literature in university classrooms will have a practical as well as intellectual reward.

However, one should be ever careful about introducing literature into the classroom. To recall Carter and Long's (1991) resounding dictum: teach English before teaching literature. The principle behind this admonishment should also guide the selection of literature used for material in a language-based curriculum. Aside from the level of the students' English and the demands of the curriculum, the instructor needs to decide

whether the language skill to be taught justifies the use of literature. Or to see the question from the other end, literature should not be brought into the classroom unless it aids the acquisition or understanding of the language skill intended for instruction.

Given these pedagogical considerations, the next step is to find a work of literature that builds a substantial part of its literary texture around hedges. This would be Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. Much has been discussed about the Booker Prize-winning work, but a brief description of the work may be in order. *The Remains of the Day* is Kazuo Ishiguro's third novel and is set in England during the post-war period. While this choice of setting would be something of a given for a native-born writer, bringing it off credibly was a great challenge for the Japan-born Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro left Japan at the age of five and has since lived and worked in the UK. By the time he took up writing as a professional career, English was already his natural medium. Yet the memory of his native country was never far from his imagination, and became the stuff from which his first two novels, *A Pale View of the Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, were created. For better or worse, the 'Japanese' setting of these two works cemented Ishiguro's reputation as a cosmopolitan British writer who writes from (and about) a different cultural perspective and background. Given this burden of bias, 'going native' in the setting was perhaps a conscious choice on the part of the author. Yet, not to have this point unduly emphasised, we see Ishiguro at pains to play down the cultural specificity of the setting for *The Remains of the Day* in various interviews. According to the author (Ishiguro, 2008), setting the story in historical England was merely a justification for fictionally recreating his real object of interest: 'the language of self-deception' (p. 23).

Whether or not the setting has a marginal role in Ishiguro's fiction is beyond the scope of the present study. What is of import here is how this 'language of self-deception' figures in the language of the narrator-protagonist Stevens as a type of hedging language. As a veteran butler who has worked for a distinguished gentleman in the past, Stevens has perfected the art of non-imposition even in the manner of his speech. Take the opening passage of the book as an example:

> It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr Farraday's Ford; an expedition which, as I foresee it, will take me through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country, and may keep me away from Darlington Hall for as much as five or six days (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 3).

Presented in laboriously long sentences punctured with commas, Stevens's language visually strikes one as meandering and circuitous. The textual length is a testament to the care Stevens expends on his wording so as not to impose on his extra-narrative guest: the readers. As a result, Stevens sounds extremely polite and courteous throughout the book. Significantly, taking a closer analysis of Stevens's hedges reveals an interesting fact. In this short passage, all the three main categories of 'academic hedges' outlined by Hyland (1998) are present. These include auxiliary verbs ('I <u>should</u> say' / '<u>may</u> keep me away'), epistemic adjectives and adverbs ('<u>increasingly</u> likely that' / 'I <u>really</u> will'), lexical verbs ('It <u>seems</u>' / 'as I <u>foresee</u> it'), as well as qualifiers that function as hedges ('now <u>for some days</u>' / '<u>as much as</u> five or six days'). The huge incidence of 'academic' hedges in Stevens's narrative is noteworthy. If we consider that, like an academic, a butler also needs to be accurate and modest about the state of knowledge he possesses (at one point in the novel, Stevens becomes a laughing-stock of his employer's fellow gentlemen friends due to this modesty), professional overlap in the area of language is somewhat to be expected.

The novel is replete with such passages, showcasing an extensive armoury of hedging. This fact has ramifications for using the book as pedagogical material. While the novel is fairly conventional in terms of its setting and plot, the narrative language is made highly complex by the idiosyncratic use of hedges. Even for a native speaker, following the story-line with the narrative shifts and turns occasioned by the hedges will require some effort until s/he has become accustomed to Stevens's butler-speak. Given this issue of technicality, consider how much of a challenge the book will pose to university students as foreign readers. However, a literature-based curriculum

can turn this technical hindrance into a valuable resource. Teaching hedges in advance will find its extra reward here as the knowledge and insight will allow the students to bypass the narrative technicality and appreciate the *effect* of the literary language with considerably less difficulty. The language-first approach to literature will likewise greatly facilitate the task of the course instructor. Rather than having to teach the technical aspects of conventional hedges and lecture on their literary effect simultaneously, the instructor can focus on one issue at a time, and return to either for further elaboration if the situation demands.

As idiosyncratic as Stevens's hedges are, what specific literary effect do they aim at? While the verisimilitude of butler-speak incorporates elements of both polite and academic hedges, it differs from each in one crucial aspect. This would be the communicative dysfunctionality that serves to foreground Stevens's characterisation as an 'unreliable narrator'. However, Stevens is not 'unreliable' in the sense that he deceives the readers by withholding or altering some crucial piece of information. As the above passage amply indicates, Stevens is often more than informative and forthright about even the most trivial of details in the story. What makes him 'unreliable' is the fact that he is never entirely honest with himself. Indeed, Stevens constantly hedges the truth from himself through butler-speak, and thereby loses as much as he wins the readers' sympathy through his cowardice. Consider the following passage:

> It could well be argued that in making my decision to end those evening meetings once and for all, I was perhaps not entirely aware of the full implications of what I was doing. Indeed, it might even be said that this small decision of mine constituted something of a turning point; that the decision set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened. But then, I suppose, when with the benefit of hindsight one begins to search one's past for such 'turning points', one is apt to start seeing them everywhere (ibid., pp. 184–85).

The passage is an apology on a grandiloquent scale. It would have become painfully obvious to the readers by this point that

his decision to end the evening meetings with the housekeeper Miss Kenton was indeed a turning point in his life. The incident effectively terminated Miss Kenton's career at Darlington Hall, and with it a rare chance for romance which could have made all the difference for Stevens.

Further, while hedges are unsparingly used by Stevens, his politeness is affectively vacuous as the gesture is largely self-directed. By talking volumes but saying little about himself, Stevens desperately tries to save his own face by avoiding uncomfortable encounters and reminders about his personal life. Therefore, Stevens's hedging is essentially an avoidance strategy employed to disengage from rather than engage in social relations. By magnifying their non-impositional effect to an extreme, Stevens's hedges build an invisible barrier between him and others. The effect of his convoluted use of hedges on his social relations is nothing short of tragedy. At the end of the day, Stevens feels utterly alone and confused. When Stevens does finally own up to the consequences of his life-long hedging, words fail him as he is choked by an outpouring of grief. Not a small part of the success of *The Remains of the Day* has to do with Ishiguro's skillful representation of a complex psychological process through Stevens's hedges.

As idiosyncratic as Stevens's use of hedges is, the novel demonstrates literature's remarkable ability to foreground ordinarily less salient aspects of language. Defining the nature of literature and its language is a formidable task, but according to one influential literary critic, Terry Eagleton (1983), literature is ordinary language made strange (p. 4). Eagleton's remark is revealing. While one might suppose complexity, or calculated abstruseness, is the distinguishing feature of literary language, he maintains that it is quite the contrary: in fact, literary language is quite 'ordinary'. By this statement, Eagleton does not mean to discredit the worth of literature and its language. Rather, his remark points to the inherent complexity and richness of *all* languages. On this point, Eagleton writes: '[a]ny actual language consists of a highly complex range of discourse, differentiated according to class, region, gender, statues and so on' (ibid., p. 5). In the end, it is this capacity for 'mimetic inclusiveness' that allows literature to incorporate a diverse range of languages, each of which in turn is already dialogically complex,

and processes them to serve an aesthetic purpose that is extraordinary. The end product is no less striking. In the process of estranging 'ordinary languages', certain aspects of language are intensified and presented to us in a refreshing way.

The pleasure principle of literature outlined above also applies to Stevens's hedges. Unlike those of scientific journals, 'intensified' uses of hedges in the novel can be at times extraordinary funny. Indeed, once we get used to Stevens and his butler-speak, the entire book turns into a linguistic guessing game of sorts: it is always fun to probe what Stevens might really mean when he hedges at crucial moments in the novel. Crucially, the hilariousness has a deeper psychological source. Stevens's hedges are funny because they represent a form of transgression. What Stevens is transgressing by over-hedging is obviously the bounds of register, and as we have seen, the act can be communicatively disastrous. Yet readers are able to laugh without much nervousness at his linguistic-*cum*-social blunders because they are at a safe diegetic distance from the story. Having discussed the merits of using literature as a pedagogical resource, the next step would be to present some specific activities that aid in the teaching of hedges using the novel.

5. Hedges in Classroom Activities

In this section, I shall propose some in-class activities designed for a literature-based integrative language curriculum. To such an end, I adapt conventional language-based activities including Gap-fill and Identification in order to take full advantage of the pedagogical potential of *The Remains of the Day*. Following the order of technical difficulty, the activities develop in stages from those focusing on the instruction of polite hedges to their academic counterparts, but the scheme is not rigid and the instructional components (politeness, making an accurate claim) can be interchanged without much difficulty. As I mentioned earlier, allowing room for manoeuvre would be desirable in the case of this curriculum, as one of its main purposes is to further activate the students' linguistic knowledge and skills so they can branch out to diverse mediums and uses of English.

In getting a feel for hedges and their illocutionary force, Gap-fill would be an ideal hands-on exercise to introduce in the

classroom at the earlier stages. After giving a short preliminary talk on the technical aspects of conventional hedges (standard teaching materials can be used at this point), the instructor can introduce an activity like the following. Selecting passages from Stevens's narrative like the one above, the instructor can blank out the parts that correspond to hedges, and ask the students to fill in the gap with their choice of words to make the phrases more polite. If the students are at a more rudimentary level, the instructor can provide a glossary of hedging phrases with the passages to aid them in the task. If the classroom environment allows, the instructor can put the students into pairs or groups, and have them discuss their choices with others. After this is done, the instructor can present the phrases in the original text and have them compare them with their own. The collaborative learning format is important, as it allows the students to see that there is no objective criterion for politeness intrinsic to language, and that the appropriateness of English use depends on specific communicative settings that surround it. At this point, the instructor could insert a talk on register and explain how and why hedges are used to modify the illocutionary force of a statement in face-to-face communication.

As a follow-up to this, I propose a writing activity like the following. To check and reinforce their understanding of hedges, the instructor can give a compositional task incorporating role-play. Assuming that they are professional butlers like Stevens, and are entrusted with the difficult task of writing a letter of refusal to an invitation from individuals of different social standing (close friend, relative, ordinary acquaintance, distinguished foreign host) on behalf of their employer. The students should be forewarned that the wording of the letter must be as appropriate as possible so as not to offend the addressee. Again, the activity would be best carried out as a group work. Putting students in groups of four, the instructor should assign each student the role of writing a letter of refusal to one of the above individuals. Their task is to be polite as possible in their refusals by using language appropriate to the social standing of each addressee. This will naturally entail the use of hedging phrases, and will be more challenging as the sender must adjust the level of politeness so as not to over/underdo it. Once the letters are written and have exchanged hands within the group, a different student should

check the level of politeness of each letter and tone up and down the phrases accordingly. After the editing session is done, the instructor should have the group compare the letters and discuss the implications of the different impressions of politeness they give.

Once the instructor has judged that the students have reached an appropriate level of understanding with polite hedges, s/he can introduce them to academic hedges. Before doing so, the instructor should explain the different uses and purposes that hedges are put to in academic discourse. As a first move, the instructor can introduce the different grammatical categories of academic hedging as outlined by Hyland (1998) and make them identify each in research articles from different disciplines (preferably, the subject area should be adapted to those of the students). Once they have become familiar with the different typologies of academic hedges, the instructor can devise an activity to check comprehension using *The Remains of the Day.* The instructor should have the students collect hedging phrases from selected passages in the novel (those with a high incidence of academic hedges should be preferred), and ask them to classify the hedges according to their grammatical category. Once a sizable glossary of academic hedges is collected, the class can embark on the activity. At this point, the instructor should provide a list of statements with differing grade of certitude or accountability (e.g. 'It will rain tomorrow', 'There are other life forms in the universe', 'Einstein had a special liking for Swiss Cheese', 'Sumo has an anti-aging effect', etc). Using the stock of hedging phrases, the instructor should then ask the students to incorporate the hedging phrases into statements which they consider to have the corresponding degree and type of epistemic rigour. After this is done, the instructor should pair the students up and have them review their partner's hedging phrases, making them replace or revise any inappropriate use of hedging as necessary. After the task is completed, the instructor can sample answers from the students and provide feedback on the choice and wording of hedges in front of class. The pedagogical advantage of this task that incorporates strategies of Identification and Ordering is that it encourages students to actively participate in the hermeneutic analysis of each hedge. Identifying and evaluating the epistemic rigour of hedges involves a more rigorous

exercise of judgment, and will further attune the students' sensitivity to the register appropriate for academic discourse.

Once the students have become familiar with the difference between hedges, the instructor can move onto more creative language exercises using *The Remains of the Day*. The aim of such task is to test the effective bounds of hedging by doing a deliberate hedging overkill. Understandably, the task is pragmatically gratuitous and will be more technically challenging, but it can be fun and potentially rewarding if properly conducted at the right time. As Stevens's example demonstrates, when it comes to hedges, the principle 'more is better' is clearly not the case. By using certain passages from the novel and discussing the ramifications of hedging too much and too often like Stevens (the instructor should give a brief summary of the overall plot in advance), it should become clearer to the students that over-reliance on hedges can have an adverse effect. Experimenting with hedges in real-life settings may have grave consequences: imagine over-hedging in a job-interview or a PhD dissertation, for instance. By introducing such over-use to students in the classroom, they can safely test the limits of hedging, and thus gain more insight into their practical application.

6. Conclusion

Learning how to use hedges will be a productive activity in university language courses. As I hope the above discussions have made clear, hedges play an important role in communication, and thus putting aside some time for teaching hedges will have a practical pay-off. However, teaching the wider communicative significance of hedges beyond their purely practical usage poses a pedagogical challenge. One solution is to combine conventional teaching resources with authentic academic materials, as Hyland (1996) suggests. While this suggestion is well worth considering, there is a big gap in the level of language and orientation between the two types of materials, and this can risk their application becoming too abstract (telling the students what hedges are, but not demonstrating how they actually work). In teaching hedges, it is just as important to indicate their interrelatedness in form and function and devise a workable curriculum that incorporates a descriptive as well as prescriptive

method.

To address this pedagogical issue, I have argued that a carefully designed literature-based language curriculum can utilise the communicative potential of hedges to maximum effect. In devising such a curriculum, I have pointed out that Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* provides excellent material, with the novel being a type of 'hedging literature' that makes imaginative use of hedging to create a remarkable literary effect. As such, the text demonstrates both how hedging should and should not be used in real-life communication. While the English of the novel is inter-relational (in so far as a social relation obtains between the narrator and the readers), it can be adapted to teach hedges used for academic purposes without much difficulty. Moreover, teaching hedges through a literature-based language curriculum has the added pedagogical benefit of introducing the students to literature and its language. While appreciating literature would entail some measure of specialised training, teaching the key linguistic technique it employs in advance may allow general students to access its literary language and enjoy the reading experience. As tentative as it is, I hope that this paper provides some useful perspectives for devising a literature-based language instruction curriculum. Perhaps one merit of using literature for language is that, literature being an open-ended and self-evolving medium, it offers endless opportunities for devising creative activities for language instruction, which in turn will afford further insights into English as a communicative medium.

Notes

1. V.V. Kusnetsov et al, 1993, p. 192. Quoted in Hyland, 1998, p. 5.
2. See, for example, Swales and Feak, 2004, p. 125.

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