Introduction

It is unfair to state that the English language has a standard whether in usage or in its capacity to expand. Lacking in an academy, which would provide means of default usages, it would be more appropriate to say that there is more room for growth, rather than error. Although deemed the *lingua franca* of the world, English possesses the potential to shift freely to better fit the needs of the speakers engaging, ultimately translating distinctively to differing regions and customs. Analysis of usage variation in grammar and semantics, logged in the International Corpus of English, can show relation to social variables in a specified region, in both differences and commonalities (Xiao; Tao 2007). Specifically in the regions of Singapore, India, and the Philippines, deviations of the occurrences of three linguistic elements were found: amplifiers, qualifiers, and hedging devices. Earlier studies have been conducted on these elements’ frequencies in spoken language, but not in these particular areas or the “extralinguistic parameters” in which they operate.

Amplifiers or emphatics, such as “totally”, “very”, and “so” are commonly found throughout English conversations, usually to intensify the degree of the pragmatic utterance. Qualifiers, on the opposing end, decrease the certainty of a claim through insertion of lexemes such as “I think” or “usually sometimes” (Elvan-Geransson; Krause; Fox 1993), causing the relationship of the claim and level of acceptability to decrease. The third linguistic element of hedging holds some similarities to qualifiers, in that they lessen the reliability of what is being said, however they are different in that hedging has the potential to serve the social purpose of lessening the bluntness or assertiveness of
speech as a gesture of being polite, and in turn having the probability of explaining more than one of the area’s linguistic and cultural relevancies.

**Methodology**

To compare lexical assertiveness in English in India, Philippines, and Singapore, we analyzed spoken International Corpus of English or ICE (2013) files using Biber tagged data and Antconc, a corpus analyzing software. We looking at the Biber tagged data and noticing that there was a difference in hedging devices across regions, we investigated qualifiers and private verbs in egocentric sequences, which would show hesitancy or indirectness, and amplifiers, which would show directness or assertiveness by intensifying the meaning of the oration, in spoken ICE (2013) files for India, Philippines, and Singapore. We used the Biber tagged data to compare hedging, qualifiers, and amplifiers, but Antconc was necessary for analyzing private verbs because we needed to determine how many of the private verbs that occurred were in egocentric sequences. The reason for this is that non-egocentric private verbs, such as “she thinks,” do not show the same kind of indirectness that we were looking for as “I think” because it is personally lessoning the validity of the statement. For example, if I say, “This ice cream is low in fat,” it is much more assertive and credible than, “I think that this ice cream is low in fat.” Because of this we used Antconc to find the frequency of occurrences of the common egocentric private verb sequences, “I think,” “I believe,” and “I feel.”
Results:

The Philippines English showed the most qualifiers and the least amplifiers, but Singapore showed the most adverbials. The numbers below are out of 1,000 words.

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<th>India</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifiers</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amplifiers</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
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Some examples of phrases with hedging adverbials in the corpora extracted using Antconc are:

"Maybe he is in loss of pay," and "My work is almost getting over," from India,

"It was an offprint from ... I think a foreign magazine

-No

-Or a journal

-Maybe uh it it is" from the Philippines, and

"Ya probably you'll see sunset but yours only on the third floor. Maybe you can't see a lot." from Singapore (ICE)
Singapore showed the most egocentric private verb sequences. The India corpus had 1,052,249 words, the Philippines 924,732, and Singapore 716,433, so for the sake of proportional comparison, the occurrences below are all per 1,000 words.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I think&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I believe&quot;</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I feel&quot;</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.04</td>
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**Analysis**

Two approaches to the analysis are possible for this conducted study: linguistic and cultural. Especially with usage of hedging devices included, both components go hand-in-hand because of the social ties it carries. After investigating frequencies with the aid of both Antconc and ICE (2013), we found that the English that is used in the Philippines proved to show significantly more use of egocentric private verb sequences than both Singapore or the India, with 1,956 occurrences in the corpus which consisted of 716,433 words. Some researchers would attest that this could apply to certain pragmatic, universal principles without considering other culturally relevant theories specific to the regions, because each region has different goals when it comes to communication. For example, the primary aspect of Brown and Levinson's (1978) "politeness theory is the notion of face, the public image each individual wants to display. Speakers choose
linguistic strategies to satisfy face wants and achieve communicative ends." This finding within the study could argue that the people of India have a different definition of what it means to be polite than those of Singapore and the Phillippines, going as far as adding extra participles in words to emphasize negativity or positivity of a statement. The latter areas, however, tend to have more of a hearer-based method of communication, and "members of these hearer-based cultures value indecision and ambiguity…in which the speaker leaves the responsibility and decision-making up to the hearer" (Valentine 1994).

The remaining elements that we paid attention to were the amplifiers and qualifiers used whenever English was being spoken in these countries. To shortly recap, amplifiers are also known as intensifiers, increasing the validity and emphasis of a statement while qualifiers perform the exact opposite, lessening credibility but on a more linguistic level than social, as seen with hedging. Studies show that intensifiers are more frequently used in second language acquisition of learners, because they view it as enrichment and influence of their speech (Perez-Paradais; Diez-Bedmar 2012), which are desired traits when learning a foreign language to impress the foreign culture, especially with adult learners. Qualifiers, however, are learned and used more often the further the learner advances in their proficiency of English, because they have to ability to communicate in more specific avenues and they are able to better identify with the language. The high numbers reported of the corpora support this study, bringing the desired result of attributing more concreteness to the theories previously presented.
Conclusion

From this study, it is evident that different cultures use different hedging devices and different levels of lexical assertiveness, even within the same language. The Philippines uses fewer amplifiers in English than India and Singapore and Indian uses fewer hedging adverbials than the Philippines and Singapore. Singapore uses a lot of egocentric private verb sequences in comparison to the other two. It is important to consider the appropriate levels and forms of hesitations in cross-cultural interactions. Coming across as too forceful or too uncertain can hinder the message that the speaker wants to portray. Corpus based studies of these features can help determine what level of hedging or assertiveness is regionally normal.
References


