CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Background of The Study

English is an international language for global communication that is used by large amount of people from all over the world. It does not only function in a mere daily communication, but also becomes a tool for people from different countries with variety of background and cultures to share each others' ideas to achieve "certain communicative purposes in numerous fields, including international trade, banking, manufacturing, diplomacy, science and technology, entertainment, and education" (Crystal: 1997). It is even claimed that this status will still "continue to occupy into near and foreseeable future" (Bawker: 2013) which means that English as a lingua franca will keep connecting people in most human life.

Since English is a vehicle for many kinds of people to unite in communication, the use of English is necessarily appropriate and acceptable for all users. To achieve this goal, people need to be competent in two aspects in English, linguistic competence, in which the ability to use English in structured form and grammatically correct way, and pragmatic competence, the ability to use of English appropriately in socio-cultural context.

Unfortunately, some researches showed that English as a second/foreign language users failed in dealing with these two aspects in English. One failure that happened is on the linguistic competence that occur "when inappropriate language forms are used to

perform actions, while the other is on pragmatic competence that caused by misunderstandings which arise from the different perceptions that affect linguistic choices during cross-cultural exchanges" (Thomas: 1983), or simply called as pragmatic failure, which can be perceived as "more disruptive for communication than grammatical errors" (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei: 1998). Another evidence on pragmatic failure explored by Kelly (2008) showed that Japanese students were perceived as being rude by native speakers on the realization of requests made by 70 Japanese EFL students through a discourse completion task. Students are considered as committing pragmatic failure when they do not have the ability to use language appropriately in certain communicative purposes, like showing disagreement, criticism, giving personal judgement or opinion, and some other functions in communication, which results in potential communication conflict both to speaker or hearer, especially on academic context where students are mostly in. However, a person might sound rude or disrespectful when he or she commits a pragmatic error, which "could lead to breakdowns in communication" (Thomas: 1983).

That is why having a pragmatic competence is necessary especially for language learner since it is essential for successful communication and "is a fundamental part of general communicative competence, which is the goal towards which much language learning and teaching strives" (Neary : 2013). One aspect of pragmatic competence is the ability to use vague language. Vague language has several possible pragmatic functions; it can be used "to mark politeness, to indicate solidarity with one's interlocutor, or to soften a request" (Yates, 2010). This vague language is what called Hedging.

Hedging as a part of pragmatic competence has several functions in communication. The appropriate use of hedging might avoid a potential conflict in expressing a communicative goal, like refusal, disagreement or criticism that "leads to maintain harmony in interaction, which is, generally, considered as highly desirable" (Wilamova: 2005). It can also be used "to mark politeness, to indicate solidarity with one's interlocutor, or to soften a request" (Yates, 2010), and "to reduce the force of a face threatening act" suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) and other different functions to achive communication purposes in certain fields.

However, hedging with its functions is still not much known by language learners since they focus more on the linguistic competence like grammar and stuff. The ability to use grammatically correct sentence is still considered as the most important part in language learning, and therefore make pragmatic aspect like hedging is sometimes neglected. It results in learners, even those at high proficiency levels, "may know how to make their language more precise but not when or how to make it strategically vague"(Yates: 2010). In the end, this lack of familiarity with vagueness make L2 speakers "whose speech is grammatically correct but who nevertheless do not succeed in accomplishing their communicative goals" (Fraser: 2010).

One of fields where hedging plays important role in its communicative purposes is science and education. The spread of science makes people involved have the needs to communicate and share the knowledge not only in a small scale but also in a larger one, which sometimes, involves people from different background and cultures to sit together. However, students in their learning are involved in this matter. Eventhough

they are not yet an expert who need to speak in front of scientists or education practicioners, students do sharing and spreading the knowledge in the similar way, like writing academic paper and presenting certain topics with their peers. Therefore, students need to be accustomed to use the appropriate way of sharing the knowledge and communicating in academic world.

However, in academic world, communication is not only occurred in dialogic way such as direct interaction or discussion, but also in monologic one, like academic paper or oral presentation, which highly considered as the important tools in the science spreading. This monologic way of communication cannot be seen as an easy matter just because the communication is indirect, rather it requires the high competence to be able to make it. Brown (2003) even suggested that academic paper is categorized to extensive writing, as well as oral presentation that categorized to extensive speaking, which are the highest task level in both skills since they require writer/speaker "to achieve purposes, develop ideas logically, use details to support or illustrate ideas, demonstrate syntactic and lexical variety, and use more deliberative and formal language style" (Ibid: 2003)

In addition, students, especially in higher education, are asked to do such tasks a lot. Students are frequently asked to write academic paper, not to mention to present their works in front of the class, in which they are still not aware of the appropriate way of sharing and communication in these matters. Students, for the sake of fulfilling their tasks, mostly neglect these by simply providing the other's statement in their works without referring it appropriately, claiming some values or extent they are not sure of

with certain number or proposition, or making their personal judgment as a fact and vice versa.

However, even though there is no clear 'written rule' on what students should do or should not do in performing the academic tasks, there are some generic thoughts on how the academic performance supposed to be according to several researchers of academic discourse in which more or less are similar in most of the academic communities views. Some features, like what the group national experts in academic language development mapped out according to Hakuta (2011), as cited by O'Hara et. Al (2012), are "reasoning abstractly and quantitatively; constructing viable arguments and critiquing reasoning of others; constructing explanations and designing solutions; engaging in argument from evidence; and asking questions and defining problems". These contents should also be supported by the way of delivering them which should be acceptable among academic communities as well as fulfilling what the larger society expect to exist when someone demonstrate the academic tasks.

In academic discourse where the academic world is that of "uncertainties, indirectness, and non-finality" (Mauranen: 1997), hedging is a necessary tool to make a smooth and 'safe' monologic communication because responsibility in every information delivered is required. Academic discourse demands an appropriateness of an author or speaker stating arguments, to name but few, considering the politeness, being cautious and tentative, differentiating personal opinions and facts, etc. Therefore, hedging can support these demands for the use of hedging might imply that the utterance in some content is "not to be taken as something universally true or definite,

but rather as a personal opinion, judgement or belief, which is open to further negotiation" (Wilamova: 2005). Hedging might also avoid the troubles that the information delivered was proven not to be true later since science itself is dynamic. It can also indicate suggestions and thus "contribute to the degree of politeness in that they make the utterance more tentative and soften the imposition carried out" (Ibid: 2005).

Hedging in academic writing had been much explored by previous researchers while there are still few researches on hedging in oral presentation. It is possibly due to practical reasons in exploring spoken discourse like time consuming, complexity in transcribing, etc. That is why "research on spoken academic discourse still lags behind its written counterparts" (Camiciottoli: 2004). However, exploring hedging in oral presentation is also necessary since nowadays science is much shared this way like in academic conference, seminar, and other similar events for academic conferences are "essential part in scientific discourse community" (Weber: 2005), or even in a smaller scale task like students' oral presentation of their work or paper in class.

In addition, in oral presentation, students are required to deliver ideas systematically, deal with the variety of audience or listeners, and respond the questions or interruptions appropriately. More than that, to be a good speaker, students need to have the pragmatic competence, "the ability to communicate the intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of interlocutor as it was intended" (Fraser: 2010), in which hedging plays an important part here "as the pragmatic markers that attenuate (or weaken) the strength of an utterance" (Wilamova: 2005).

This study focuses on exploring hedging devices in students' oral presentation, specifically English major students's way of delivering ideas academically on particular knowledge content. As a part of science community, English major students are much involved in some academic tasks, not to mention to present their work to their peers or larger audience. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the hedging devices they use as well as to explore how they use them in their oral presentation performances.

1.2. Focus and Sub focuses of the Study

This study focuses on the use of hedging devices in English major students' oral presentations with the following sub focuses:

1. The hedging devices in the lexical form used by students in their oral presentations

2 The classification of hedging devices used in accordance to Meyer classifications

3. The way students use the hedging devices in their oral presentations

1.3. Research Questions

The study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the hedging devices used by English major students in their oral presentations?

2. How do they use the hedging devices in their oral presentations?

1.4.   Significance of The Study

The researcher hopes the result of this study will lead to the deeper understanding in hedging as a part of pragmatic competence especially for students so that they will be able to use it in academic discourse, and also give more insight as well as contribution to the development of research in related area.