HEDGING THROUGH THE USE OF IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN INDONESIAN OP-ED ARTICLES

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Abstract

The presence of an opinion editorial (op-ed) page has allowed the public to articulate their ideas about recent salient issues at no cost. The authors of an op-ed article may need a device like hedges to protect themselves from any adverse consequences, such as rejection from readers if their argument is considered false. This descriptive qualitative study is intended to investigate the use of impersonal constructions as hedging devices in 45 Indonesian opinion editorial articles published by three leading national newspapers: *Kompas*, *Tempo*, and *Republika*. Impersonal construction refers to a grammatical construction that avoids using a human subject in the sentence. This construction includes the use of agentless passive voice and abstract rhetors. This study reveals 56 occurrences of impersonal construction with 53 belonging to the agentless passive voice category and three others belonging to the abstract rhetors category. The use of such constructions in op-ed articles can be a means to protect the authors from the consequences of being blamed if, in any case, the argument they stated is different from reality. Furthermore, this construction can also be used to avoid the subjectivity of the claim and direct the focus of the argument to the content of the text and not the authors.

Keywords: hedges, impersonal constructions, passive voice, abstract rhetors, opinion editorials

Abstrak

Kehadiran halaman opini telah memberikan ruang bagi masyarakat umum untuk menyuarakan gagasan mereka terhadap isu-isu penting terkini dengan mudah. Penulis artikel opini membutuhkan piranti tertentu seperti pembentengan untuk melindungi diri dari berbagai konsekuensi negatif seperti penolakan dari pembaca jika ternyata argumen yang disampaikan salah. Penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini dimaksudkan untuk mengkaji penggunaan konstruksi impersonal sebagai peranti pembentengan dalam 45 artikel opini berbahasa Indonesia yang diterbitkan oleh tiga media Indonesia: Kompas, Tempo, dan Republika. Konstruksi impersonal merujuk pada penggunaan konstruksi tata bahasa yang menghindari penggunaan subyek manusia pada kalimat. Konstruksi ini meliputi penggunaan konstruksi pasif tanpa agen serta retorika abstrak. Penelitian ini menemukan sebanyak 56 penggunaan konstruksi impersonal sebagai peranti pembentengan dalam artikel yang diuji dengan rincian sebanyak 53 masuk dalam kategori konstruksi pasif dan tiga lainnya termasuk retorika abstrak. Penggunaan konstruksi impersonal dapat berfungsi sebagai peranti untuk melindungi penulis dari adanya konsekuensi disalahkan jika ternyata klaim yang disampaikan berbeda dengan realita. Lebih jauh, konstruksi ini juga dapat digunakan untuk menghindari subjektivitas dari klaim yang disampaikan serta untuk mengarahkan fokus pada isi teks itu sendiri dan bukan pada penulisnya.

Kata kunci: *pembentengan, konstruksi impersonal, konstruksi pasif, retorika abstrak, artikel opini*

INTRODUCTION

A few studies have noted the use of impersonal construction as a hedging device (Hardjanto, 2016b; Luukka & Markkanen, 2010). In practice, however, this construction is not massively deployed. Referring to some previous studies, the use of grammatical constructions, particularly impersonal construction, as a hedging device is indeed not as massive as the prototypical linguistic forms that are often used to realise hedging, such as modal and epistemic verbs (Hardjanto, 2016b; Hyland, 1998; Varttala, 2001). Consequently, impersonal constructions often receive a smaller portion of discussions than prototypical ones. In English and other Indo-European languages, impersonality and its function as a hedging device might be sufficiently discussed. Unfortunately, it is still hardly found in the context of Indonesian language.

In relation to impersonal style, Hyland (1994: 240) argues that impersonal style "appears to minimise the involvement of social actors" and it also marks "the interpretative viewpoint of the writer". This argument points out the role of impersonal style in writing, which might apply to all writings regardless of language. Moreover, there are still numerous other roles of impersonal construction, especially as a hedging device in written discourses. Hence, impersonality, mainly its function as a hedging device in written discourse, deserves further discussion and attention.

It was Lakoff (1973) who firstly introduced the term hedges, which refers to the words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. In his concept, hedges are closely related to the degree of truth of a proposition. Rooting from Rosch's (1971) concept, he asserted that the concept of truth is not merely a whole yes-or-no matter; instead, it is a matter of degree. That is, a proposition can be true to a certain extent, false to a certain extent, true in certain respects, and false in other respects (Lakoff, 1973). In its development, hedges are commonly associated with the notion of authors' lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition stated. For example, Hyland (1998) defined *hedging* as a linguistic means to indicate either the writer's lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition or a desire not to express that commitment categorically. As a communicative strategy, hedging has been widely used in various written discourses for various purposes, such as to present unproven propositions with cautions and precisions and allow the writers to downplay their statements and anticipate audience response by modifying the degree of certainty they give to their claim (Hardjanto, 2016a: 38; Hyland, 1994: 241, 1996: 433). Previous literature has explained that hedging is an essential strategy to avoid any negative response from the readers. Hyland (1996) is one among those who underlined the importance of hedging as a means of anticipation from the negative response by asserting that at the end, readers may therefore be persuaded to judge a claim acceptable or may decide to reject it, and thus hedging strategy is needed because it signals the writer's anticipation of the opposition to the proposition.

The use of hedging in both spoken and written discourses is manifested through various linguistic forms, and impersonal construction is one of them. Siewierska (2008: 3) further denotes the term impersonal as "subjectless constructions, construction featuring only a pleonastic subject, and constructions which lack a specified agent". Impersonalization, thus, could be defined as the process whereby the agent's identity becomes obscured, resulting in anonymity (Runblad, 2007). As stated by Siewierska (2008), impersonality could be recognised semantically through two characteristics: the lack of a human agent controlling the depicted situation, or the presence of the unspecified human agent. Meanwhile, syntactically, impersonal constructions

either lack a grammatical subject altogether or feature only a pleonastic subject (Siewierska, 2008).

Impersonal construction is not only restricted to those with no subject or those with an unspecified human subject but also involves using specific sentence constructions with inanimate references (Malchukov & Siewierska, 2011). Passive voice is among many devices to manifest impersonality (Halloran, 1984; Luukka & Markkanen, 2010; Runblad, 2007). Using passive voice in literature helps the writers remove their presence in the text and focus more on the proposition expressed instead of the writer. Furthermore, passive voice helps to render the writing "thing-centred" instead of "human-centred" (Ding, 2002: 143).

Another way to depersonalise a text is by using abstract rhetors. *Abstract rhetors* is a term used by Halloran (1984: 75) to refer to a sentence construction such as '…The data show that…' or '…This paper will argue that…'. Those construction suppresses human agency and implies that rhetorical acts can be accomplished without human volition. Several linguists referred to this concept differently. Banks (1996), for example, referred to this concept as 'metaphors', while van Aertselaer (2002) and Hardjanto (2016b) named it 'personification'. In addition, Runblad (2007) used the term 'metonymy' to introduce this concept. All of those terms refer to the same concept: the use of inanimate subjects with verbs that generally require a human subject (Banks, 1996).

Syntactically, there are several other ways to embody impersonal strategies, such as using dummy subjects in English and cognate constructions (Malchukov & Ogawa, 2011). However, this study merely focuses on analysing the use of passive voice and abstract rhetors as part of an impersonal strategy to realise hedging in op-ed articles in three Indonesian media. The term abstract rhetors will be consistently used in this study to refer to the use of inanimate subjects with verbs that generally require a human subject.

The op-ed page, named for its geography 'opposite the editorial page' when it was created for the first time, is a page created to provide a forum for writers with no institutional connection with the media office (Shipley, 2004). This page is different from the editorial page or *tajuk rencana* because an op-ed page does not represent the views of the media office and the editorial board. In contrast, an editorial page does speak for them (Shipley, 2004). In other words, an op-ed page should represent the authors' views on specific salient issues they write. The presence of an op-ed page is expected to encourage new thought and prompt new discussions on public problems (Socolow, 2010). Thus, it is not surprising that the content of op-ed articles is often persuasive and debatable. In such discourse, hedging might make high appearances as a communicative and rhetorical strategy. The use of hedges in op-ed articles has previously been studied by Mahanani (2013). In her study, hedging is frequently deployed in op-ed articles, and it was manifested through the use of various linguistic forms. However, this study mainly concerns the use of impersonal constructions to realise hedging regardless of the notion that hedging is expressed through various linguistic forms. This decision is based on some considerations, such as few studies have explored the use of hedges in op-ed articles compared to the other genre, such as research articles (Hardjanto, 2016a; Hyland, 1996, 1998; Sanjaya, 2013; Varttala, 2001). Besides, the use of impersonal constructions as a hedging device, especially in the Indonesian language, is still restricted in numbers.

Many studies have mainly discussed impersonal constructions in various languages (see Blevins, 2003; Ding, 2002; Malchukov & Ogawa, 2011; Malchukov & Siewierska, 2011; Runblad, 2007; Siewierska, 2008). However, it was Hardjanto (2016b) and Lukka & Markkanen (2010) who scrutinised impersonal constructions as a hedging device. In Hardjanto's (2016b)

study, hedging in the form of impersonal construction can be manifested through the anticipatory subject (i.e., it-clause) and abstract rhetors (i.e., personification). According to Lukka & Markkanen (2010: 168), using hedges in impersonal constructions allows the author/speaker to avoid taking full responsibility for what s/he is saying. Hardjanto (2016b) and Lukka & Markkanen (2010) were concerned with using impersonal constructions as hedging devices in academic texts. More importantly, their study focuses on impersonal constructions in English and Finnish. It supports our previous claim that the existing studies of impersonal constructions and their functions as hedging devices are still centred on English and other Indo-European languages. And therefore, more studies about impersonal constructions and their functions as hedging devices in other languages are demandable.

Based on those problems, this study investigates the linguistic constructions used to mark impersonalization as a hedging strategy and their functions in Indonesian op-ed articles. The articles were retrieved from three mainstream national news media: *Kompas*, *Republika*, and *Tempo*. Forty-five articles published in 2021 were scrutinised to answer those problems. This study is then expected to complete those previous studies and contribute to the development of the hedging theory of the Indonesian language, which, so far, is still centred on lexical hedges as the formal realisation of hedges (Sanjaya, 2013).

METHODS

This study was a descriptive qualitative study. The implementation of qualitative research allows us to explore and explain how language is used and how writers give meaning to the use of language (Berg, 2001; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). The data source in this study was 45 Indonesian op-ed articles published by three leading national newspapers: *Kompas, Republika*, and *Tempo*. The selection of these three media was based on some considerations, such as the fact that they provide spaces for op-ed articles on their online news website and regularly post new articles daily. The selection of articles from different media also allows us to embrace the use of impersonal constructions in Indonesian op-ed articles and not exclusively in one particular media office. Thus, it is expected that the result of this study would represent the general use of impersonal construction as a hedging device in Indonesian op-ed articles. However, it should be borne in mind that this study was not intended to compare the use of impersonal constructions in those three media. Hence, it allows each media to contribute different numbers of articles.

Furthermore, the articles that were examined in this study should be those which were posted in 2021 and should not be written by the reporter or any other person who possessed any job position in these three media. The elimination of articles whose authors possessed any job in these media was intended to avoid overlap with editorial articles or *tajuk rencana*. In the case of this study, the accessibility of the articles was also considered (i.e., convenience sampling) (Berg, 2001). Concerning these aspects, 21 articles were retrieved from *Kompas*, 16 articles from *Republika*, and eight from *Tempo*. Those articles primarily talked about politics, economics, and education. The retrieved articles were then compiled into a document file (docx). However, it should be noted that it was only the content of the articles that were compiled in the document file. The title of the articles that was irrelevant to the aim of this study was excluded.

The data in this study was any word, phrase, clause, or sentence which indicates an impersonal construction functioning as hedges. A thorough observation of the texts and the context was later conducted to collect the data. From the observation, it was found that there were numerous uses of impersonal constructions in Indonesian op-ed articles. However, not all

impersonal constructions could function as hedges. An operational definition is needed to identify which impersonal constructions could be counted as hedges. Crompton's (1997) definition of hedging was deployed as the operational definition.

> "Can the proposition be restated in such a way that it is not changed but that the author's commitment to it is greater than at present? If "yes", then the proposition is hedged" (p. 6).

Concerning this, if a proposition could be restated through specific word/phrase removal or paraphrasing without changing the proposition, but the author's commitment to that proposition changes, then the proposition is hedged. The impersonal construction, which contributes to the change of the author's confidence in and commitment to the proposition, could be categorised as a hedging device. In this case, we followed Runblad's (2007) definition of impersonalization to identify impersonal construction. According to him, impersonalization could be defined as the process whereby the agent's identity becomes obscured, resulting in anonymity.

All of the impersonal constructions (i.e., agentless passive and abstract rhetors) that were counted as a hedging device subsequently were tagged, and those which cannot function as a hedging device were eliminated. Data tagging was intended to enable us to identify and count the data of this study. Concerning this, some abbreviations were made to the data tagging as follows:

<HDG>	: Hedges
<IC>	: Impersonal Construction
<AP>	: Agentless Passive
<AR>	: Abstract Rhetors

After data tagging was accomplished, the format file of the compilation of the articles was converted from the document into plain text. This conversion made the file readable to a computer corpus program AntConc. Data counting was later done with the assistance of this corpus program. The use of corpus assistance in this study allowed us to see the frequency of the data as well as the distribution of the data easily (Poos & Simpson, 2002). All previously tagged data would appear if we typed the keyword <HDG><IC> in this corpus program, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Data display in AntConc corpus program
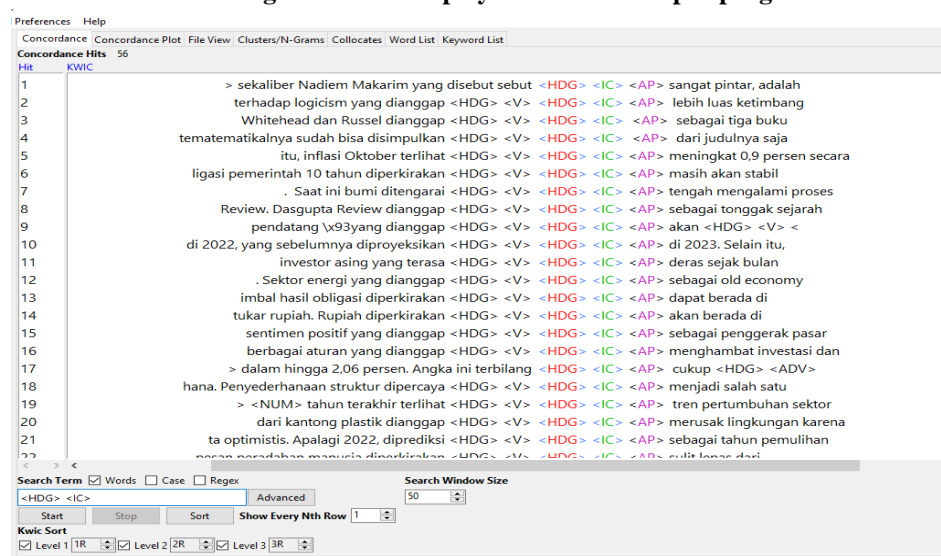
After all the mentioned stages were done, data analysis was the closing stage in conducting this study. In this case, the writers played an essential role as the primary interpreter of the results of the study. Hedging is, first and foremost, the product of a mental attitude; thus, decisions about the function of a language span are bound to be subjective (Salager-Meyer, 1997: 131). Finally, the data of this study were presented in the discussion. Data coding was conducted to enable the observation of data distribution. As stated previously, 45 articles taken from three news media were examined in this study. Those articles were given numbers from 1 to 45 in a row. The data of this study are presented by assigning some codes as follows.

D01/01/KPS

Remarks:

    D01   : Data impersonal construction number 1

    01   : The data was taken from article no. 1

    KPS   : The data was taken from an article published in *Kompas*

    REP   : The data was taken from an article published in *Republika*

    TMP   : The data was taken from an article published in *Tempo*

Thus, if a datum is coded with the code D01/01/KPS in the discussion, the datum presented is data number 1 from article number 1 published by *Kompas* media.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study found numerous uses of passive voice and abstract rhetors, which imply impersonality in Indonesian op-ed articles. However, as previously discussed, not all impersonal constructions could function as hedging devices. Of the 45 articles that were examined, only 56 impersonal constructions were categorized as a hedging device. Most of them are dominated by passive voice with a total of 53 occurrences, while the other three occurrences belong to abstract rhetors. Table 1 depicts the frequency and distribution of impersonal construction as a hedging device in Indonesian op-ed articles.

Table 1. Frequency and distribution of impersonal construction

No.	Category	Frequency
1	Passive Voice	53
2	Abstract Rhetors	3
	Total	**56**

The passive voice used as a hedging device in this study is represented by the agentless passive (Luukka & Markkanen, 2010). In other words, the sentence does not need any explicit agent for the action. In a passive construction, the subject of the sentence is the patient, while the object is the agent of the action. In Indonesian grammar, the omission of an object is permissible as a sentence must consist of at least a subject and a predicate (Alwi et al., 1993). The presence of the other constituent, such as an object in the sentence, highly depends on the predicate. In this case, the absence of the agent allows the authors to avoid explicit personal references in their claim (Luukka & Markkanen, 2010). Both the passive voice and abstract rhetors used as the hedging device in the examined articles primarily used certain verbs that mark non-factivity. In

this sense, the verb used in impersonal construction as a hedging device marks that the proposition's truth value is still tentative. The following subsections discuss the use of each impersonal construction type.

Passive Voice

As mentioned earlier, the use of passive voice as the hedging device is marked by agentless passive construction. Siewierska (2008) claimed that agentless passive are referentially unrestricted. Thus, the agent of the sentence could not be identified, allowing the author to blur personal references in his claim. The passive voice as the hedging device in this study is frequently used with the passivized cognitive verbs such as *dianggap, diperkirakan, dinilai, dipandang, dipercaya*, and nonfactive verbs such as *dituduh, diprediksi, digadang-gadang, ditengarai*, and *dikabarkan*. In this case, the passivised word *dianggap* dominates the frequency of occurrence by a total of 16 occurrences out of 53, followed by the passivised word *diperkirakan* with four occurrences. All of those verbs mark the tentativeness of the truth value of the proposition expressed.

(1) *Obrador yang populis ini **dianggap** menurunkan kualitas demokrasi dengan mengembalikan Meksiko ke era pemerintahan satu partai*. [D23/42/REP]

'The populist Obrador was considered to have degraded the quality of the democracy by bringing Mexico back to the one-party rule era.'

(2) *Sebab, aturan ini melakukan revisi terhadap berbagai aturan yang **dianggap** menghambat investasi dan penciptaan lapangan kerja di Indonesia*. [D20/06/KPS]

'It is because this policy revised various regulations which were considered inhibiting the investment and job creation in Indonesia.'

(3) *Faktor-faktor tersebut sangat menarik bagi investor, terutama investor asing, sehingga imbal hasil obligasi **diperkirakan** dapat berada di kisaran 5,8 persen sampai dengan 6,3 persen hingga akhir tahun*. [D09/05/KPS]

'These factors are desirable to investors, especially foreign investors, so bond yields are estimated to be 5.8 percent to 6.3 percent by the end of the year.'

The data above depict passive voice as a hedging device in Indonesian op-ed articles. The words written in bold indicate the passive voice that functions as a hedge. No agent is found in those sentences. As in examples (1) – (3), the passive voice is marked with the passivised cognitive verb *dianggap* and *diperkirakan.* In example (1), the author wrote a proposition that Obrador has degraded the quality of democracy by bringing back Mexico to the era of one-party rule. However, this proposition is hedged with the passivised verb *dianggap,* which marks that the proposition expressed is a subjective opinion. The active verb *anggap* implies a mental activity. When the writer said that Obrador had degraded the quality of democracy, the author used their subjective cognitive activity as the source of their judgment. Thus, the proposition expressed could not be considered a fact; hence, the truth value of this proposition is still tentative. And the question is, who exactly did consider that Obrador had degraded the quality of democracy by bringing back Mexico to the era of one-party rule? As the construction has an agentless passive, it might be the author himself or anyone else. If this is indeed the author's view, then the author has avoided marking his presence in his claim. The use of passive voice, in this case, could

indicate the authors' lack of commitment to their proposition (Hyland, 1998). Therefore, when someday this claim is proven false, the author will not be blamed for this because he did not explicitly state that it is his own opinion. And here, this kind of impersonal construction in op-ed articles could be motivated by the author's desire to protect his identity (Luukka & Markkanen, 2010).

The other motivation for using an impersonal passive voice is for the topicalisation of patients (Luukka& Markkanen, 2010). In the context of examples (2) and (3), the authors probably wanted their readers to pay more attention to the content of the proposition, not the person who expressed it. At the same time, the author might be more concerned about the content of the proposition rather than the owner of the proposition. In example (3), the author might want to highlight his claim that the bond yields would be in the range between 5.8 percent to 6.3 percent by the end of the year, and he wanted his reader to focus on this point. Thus, the target readers of this article, who might be investors or any other people interested in market issues, could prepare for this condition. Here, using passive voice in some discourse helps render a text thing-centred instead of human-centred (Ding, 2002).

Examples (1) – (3) have portrayed passive construction with the passivised cognitive verbs such as *dianggap* and *diperkirakan*. Besides this kind of verb, the passive voice is also frequently used with the passivized nonfactive verbs such as *dituduh, diprediksi, digadang-gadang, ditengarai*, and *dikabarkan*. In this case, the occurrence of passive voice with the passivised nonfactive verbs is lower than the passivised cognitive verbs. The passivised cognitive verbs make a total of 27 occurrences. In comparison, the passivised nonfactive verbs only make a total of 9 occurrences, with the passivised verb *diproyeksikan* appearing as the most frequently used with four appearances.

(4) *Karena bagaimanapun, pesta akbar demokrasi yang akan dihelat pada tahun 2024 nanti **diproyeksikan** menghadirkan kompleksitas yang tinggi dan melelahkan khususnya bagi KPU*. [D32/38/KP]

'After all, the grand party of democracy held in 2024 is projected to have high and tiring complexity, especially for the General Election Commission.'

(5) *Mungkin saja pertemuan Megawati-Puan-Prabowo adalah relasi biasa namun dimaknai high context karena baik Prabowo maupun Puan sama-sama santer **dikabarkan** bakal maju dalam kontestasi Pilpres 2024.* D29/36/KPS

'Probably, the meeting of Megawati-Puan-Prabowo is a common interaction, but it is interpreted as a high context because both Prabowo and Puan are widely rumoured to be running in the 2024 presidential election contestation.'

(6) *Saat ini bumi **ditengarai** tengah mengalami proses kepunahan missal keenam.* D08/02/TMP
'Currently, the earth is believed to be in the middle of the sixth mass extinction process.'

Examples (4) – (6) contain passive constructions with the passivised nonfactive verbs used to manifest hedging in Indonesian op-ed articles. The passivised nonfactive verbs indicate that the proposition stated in that claim is still open to any possibility, whether true or false. Thus, the author and readers could not guarantee that the statement claimed is 100% true. In example (4), the truth value of the proposition that there will be a high and tiring complexity that the KPU (General Election Commission) should face in the upcoming presidential election is still tentative.

In this case, the use of the passive voice *diproyeksikan* indicated the author's lack of confidence in the proposition expressed. When this passive voice is removed from the claim, the claim will be more definite, and at the same time, it also increases the author's confidence in the claim.

The same problem is also applicable to the case of example (6). The passive voice *ditengarai* also implied the author's lack of certainty whether our earth is now in the middle of the sixth mass extinction process or not. In contrast, removing this passivised verb will increase his confidence in his claim. At the same time, using those passive voices also encoded the authors' lack of total commitment to their claim. The authors in the given examples did not mark their presence as the source of the proposition or specify the other figure that had this opinion if in case they used the other argument as the source of the claim.

In example (5), the author did not specify the person who stated that Prabowo and Puan would run as the presidential candidate in the next election. Did the local media report that those two figures will run as the presidential candidate in the next election? Or did any political parties announce them to be the presidential candidate? Or, on the other hand, was it the author's prediction? Agentless passive is referentially unrestricted (Siewierska, 2008). Thus, it can be the authors' strategy to protect themselves or the other figures whose arguments became the source of their claim if, in any case, this rumour is not valid. The readers could not identify whose idea it was.

Abstract Rhetors

The use of abstract rhetors in Indonesian op-ed articles is low. It can be seen from the fact that this study only finds three occurrences of abstract rhetors as the hedging device in all examined articles. The use of abstract rhetors in this genre might not be preferred. This strategy might be preferred in research articles rather than op-ed articles, especially in the discussion section (Hardjanto, 2016b). Let us compare the result of using abstract rhetors in this study with Hardjanto's (2016b) study. In Hardjanto's (2016b) study, which primarily examined the use of hedging in research articles, abstract rhetors were found to be used for 35.9 frequencies per 10,000 words. This frequency is incredibly higher than the abstract rhetors in this study which only appeared for three raw frequencies or approximately 0.85 frequencies per 10,000 words. Therefore, we could argue that using abstract rhetors in op-ed articles is still not prevalent. Similar to passive voice, the main verbs used in abstract rhetors are either cognitive or nonfactive verbs, marking that the proposition's truth value is still tentative.

(7) ***Kajian Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional (Bappenas)*** *2020* ***memprediksi*** *kenaikan tariff cukai tembakau sebesar 20 persen dan penyederhanaan struktur tariff cukai hasil tembakau menjadi 3-5 layer mampu menurunkan prevalensi merokok anak 8,3 persen hingga 8,6 persen pada akhir tahun 2024.* [D01/08/KPS]

'A 2020 study by the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) predicted that tobacco excise rates will increase by 20 percent, and a simplification of the excise tariff structure on tobacco products to 3-5 layers could reduce the prevalence of child smoking from 8.3 percent to 8.6 percent by the end of 2024.'

(8) ***Skenario*** *ini* ***mengasumsikan*** *bahwa perjalanan dalam gelembung subregional akan mencapai tingkat pra-pandemi.* [D02/09/KPS]

'This scenario assumes that the regional travel bubble will reach pre-pandemic level.'

(9) ***Model*** *ini* ***memandang*** *setiap kebijakan public harus diuji terlebih dahulu melalui konsultasi public atau lewat diskursus public dengan keberadaan ruang publik (public sphere).* [D03/37/KPS]

'This model views that every public policy must be tested first through public consultation or public dialogue in a public sphere.'

As can be seen in examples (7) – (9), the subject of those sentences are *kajian*, *skenario*, and *model.* All subjects are inanimate, while the predicate in the sentence embodied through the verbs *memprediksi*, *mengasumsikan*, and *memandang* typically require a human subject because only humans can perform those activities. A study, for example, could not make any prediction because, by nature, an inanimate object does not have any power to do what an animate, particularly a human, can do. In example (7), for instance, people from Bappenas can predict that tobacco excise rates will increase by 20 percent. However, in that case, the author removed human presence from that claim. To get valid results, a study must pass several processes, such as data observation, analysis, and validation. The removal of human presence might decrease the degree of subjectivity of the claim and make this claim sound more objective because the claim 'is from a study' which has passed several processes of observation and validation. Since the truth of the proposition expressed in the claim is still tentative, the use of abstract rhetors also allows the authors to reduce their responsibility for the proposition and hand the responsibility for the truth of the proposition over to an inanimate entity (Hardjanto, 2016b; Hyland, 1996). Thus, when the prediction that tobacco excise rates will increase by 20 percent by the end of 2024 is eventually wrong, Bappenas would not directly be blamed because the prediction was wrong, and not Bappenas personally. This construction then could be the authors' strategy to protect themselves or other people whose argument is being cited in their article from any adverse consequences if finally what they wrote is not 100% correct.

This study finally suggests that impersonal constructions as a hedging device in Indonesian, especially in op-ed articles, could be realised through agentless passive and abstract rhetors. In line with both Hyland (1998) and Hardjanto (2016b), this study also finds that the use of impersonal constructions, either the agentless passive or abstract rhetors, as a hedging device could help the authors to distance them from the proposition expressed and avoid negative consequences such as critics from readers. Simply put, impersonal constructions such as hedging devices in Indonesian and English tend to share similar functions in the text. Even though the occurrences of impersonal constructions as hedging devices in op-ed articles are still minor, this study confirms some previous studies, such as Hyland (1998), Hardjanto (2016b), and Varttala (2001), that hedging is not restricted only to the form of lexical categories but also grammatical category such as impersonal constructions.

CONCLUSION

Impersonal construction as a hedging device in op-ed articles is relatively low. It can be seen that of the 45 articles that were examined, this study only found 56 uses of impersonal constructions as a hedging device in Indonesian op-ed articles. It indicates that using impersonal constructions

as a hedging device in such discourse is less prevalent. Nevertheless, this study confirms that hedging is not only a lexical phenomenon but can also be achieved through grammatical constructions (Hardjanto, 2016b; Hyland, 1998). In this study, the use of impersonal construction as hedging is dominated by a passive voice, which makes 53 appearances.

In contrast, abstract rhetors only make a meagre appearance of only three occurrences. The use of abstract rhetors as a hedging device might not be preferred in this genre, but it might be preferred in other genres, such as research articles (see Hardjanto, 2016b). The passive constructions used as a hedging device in this study are mainly agentless passive. In this study, impersonal constructions as the hedging device are marked with the passivised cognitive and nonfactive verbs or active cognitive and nonfactive verbs.

As a hedging device, using impersonality, primarily passive voice, could be motivated by the author's want to protect his face (Luukka & Markkanen, 2010). In addition, the use of passive voice could also indicate the authors' lack of commitment and confidence in the truth of the proposition. It is in line with Hyland (1998), who previously stated that passive voice could indicate the authors' lack of commitment and confidence in the proposition's truth. Passive construction also allows the authors to remove their presence in the text and thus helps render the text thing-centred instead of human-centred (Ding, 2002). At the same time, using abstract rhetors allows the authors to reduce their responsibility for the proposition and hand the responsibility for the truth value of the proposition over to an inanimate entity (Hyland, 1996). Hence, impersonal construction could help the authors protect themselves from any adverse consequences, such as readers' criticism if their writing is not 100% correct.

Finally, more studies about formal realisations of hedging in the Indonesian language are demandable in the future for the development of linguistic studies, especially hedging theory in Indonesia. This study only encompasses two forms of impersonal construction in Indonesia, and there might be other forms that are not covered in this study. Thus, further research is needed to unveil that potential.

NOTE

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