Native and Nonnative Speakers' Softener Use in English

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When people talk, expressing uncertainty, doubt, or hesitation is a natural aspect in everyday communication. How to soften messages has been given more attention in the last two decades in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics. Softeners not only express epistemic modality but also function as phatic communication, discourse-lubricants, or means for establishing solidarity with interlocutors. This study investigated softener use by native (NS) and nonnative speakers of English (NNS, Japanese EFL learners who had high to high-intermediate English proficiency). The empirical research was conducted based on analysing authentic conversation collected from four discussion sessions. The results indicate that in spite of their high language proficiency NNSs softener use was much less than that of NSs in terms of variety and frequency. Additionally, observation among NNSs revealed that their softener use was affected by not only long overseas stay experience but also frequent language-learning efforts.

人々が会話する時、自信のなさやあいまいさ、ためらいを表現することは日常のコミュニケーションにおいて、いたって自然なことである。どのように発話を和らげるか、ということは文化間・中間言語語用論の分野で過去２０年注目され、幅広く研究されてきた。Softenerは発話の強さを緩和するだけでなく、また、会話における潤滑油として、また対話者との連帯感を構築するなど、交感的言語使用としての機能も担っている。本研究は、英語母語話者と非英語母語話者（英語習熟度の比較的高い日本人EFL　learnersが英語のsoftenerをどの様に使用しているのかを調査する。この実証的研究は四組のディスカッショングループから集められた会話を元に分析を行った。実験の結果は英語習熟度の高さに関わらず、非英語母語話者は母語話者よりもより少ない種類の、また低い頻度のsoftenerを使用した。さらに、非英語母語話者間での比較ではsoftener使用は、被験者の英語圏での長期滞在経験だけでなく、英語学習の頻度によって影響されているようであった。

When people talk, expressing uncertainty, doubt, or hesitation is a natural aspect in everyday communication. People usually intend senses that are greater than what is said or more than what the word or phrases literally or semantically mean. That is one of the main pragmatic uses of language. In the area of pragmatics, mitigating what we say is a huge issue in language use.

The central aim of this study is to investigate softener use by native (NS) and Japanese nonnative speakers of English involving two research questions: 1) whether Japanese speakers of English soften their messages less than English natives; 2) whether the length of stay in English-speaking countries or frequency of English learning may affect NNSs' softener usage. The analysis was based on naturally occurring data, collected by recording actual discussions (four sessions) in English among English NSs and NNSs covering a contemporary social issue.

Background

Softeners are lexical and syntactic devices to soften messages or propositions asserted in discourses. Generally, they are called "hedges/hedging", which refers to a device to modify propositions asserted or a strategy to modify the potential force of messages in the linguistic and pragmatic field. In addition to the term "hedges/hedging", those devices are labelled in the literature with such terms as "downgraders" (House & Kasper, 1981), and "downtoners" (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). Softeners function to decrease the strength of utterances. At the same time softeners have two communicative functions in addition to the purposes of just weakening the illocutionary force of speech acts, i.e., negative politeness (Holmes, 1984b, 1995; Hyland, 1996, 1998). Holmes (1982, 1984a, 1984b) distinguishes two types of softeners to modify the force of speech acts: the modal meaning and the affective meaning. First, the modal meaning "involves the speaker's expressed degree of certainty concerning the validity or truth of the proposition asserted in the utterance" through which "the speaker can express this uncertainty or unwillingness to take responsibility for its validity" (e.g., "*I'm not at all sure* Mary's coming.") (1984b: p.348). In other studies, Coates (1983, 1987) and Holmes (1984b) term this modal meaning expressing doubt and uncertainty "epistemic modality". In other research, this is occasionally called "referential meaning" and "epistemic meaning" as well. Next, the affective meaning (also called "facilitative meaning") entails "the speaker's attitude to the hearer in the context" meaning "the speaker-hearer relationship" including solidarity or social distance (e.g., "That was *really very* kind *indeed.*") (1984b: pp.349-350). This second reason for weakening the strength of speech acts, the affective meaning, seems to function similarly to Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness, which Yule (1996) introduces as a solidarity strategy, through which a speaker emphasizes closeness between speaker and hearer. Thus, a speaker appeals to a hearer with a common goal. It sometimes includes usage of dialect or slang, and inclusive terms such as *we* and *let's*. Positive politeness conveys a signal of closeness, intimacy and rapport to the interlocutor. Holmes (1984b, 1995) indicated that generally the modal meaning and affective meaning are brought together, depending on the context.

Methodology and participants

The method of the research was established to investigate the NSs' and NNSs' use of softeners, focusing on how frequently they softened their messages (quantity) and categorising the types of softening markers (amount of variety) in what was designated as the actual discussion.

Participants comprised four NSs (three Australians and one American) and eight Japanese EFL learners. Participants were all female in order to avoid possible cases of gender differences in softener use between male and female. Japanese participants were chosen from among under/postgraduate international studies majors who had low-advanced to high-advanced English proficiency. Specifically, all of them had TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores higher than 720. In addition to high proficiency of English, the Japanese participants were chosen according to several other criteria, including how long they had experienced staying abroad for any particular purpose,

and how often they spent time regularly for English language learning. A summary of their backgrounds is presented in Table 1 below. In regard to stay experience (factor A), two of them had lived in the United States for five years in their childhood: MOMO and NAZUNA at the ages of 8 to 13 and 5 to 10, respectively. DAISY had spent five and half months in Hawaii several years prior to the study, and FREESIA spent just about one year at an American high school. KAEDE spent time in Canada and Australia, for two weeks and one week respectively. SAKURA spent two weeks each in the United Kingdom and Korea. She reported that her daily language use in Korea was in English. SATSUKI spent approximately three weeks in Canada in 2003; SUMIRE had not experienced direct contact with any English speaking countries.

Regarding frequency of language learning (factor B), NNS participants who responded that they studied English daily in varieties of ways were coded as "1"; participants who responded that they occasionally used English or who did not study outside class were coded as "0".

Taking the A and B factors into consideration, the NNS participants were divided into two groups: more exposed and less exposed, based on the amount of exposure they

Table 1. Japanese participants' backgrounds

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4	
NNSs' pseudonyms[1]	MOMO	NAZUNA	DAISY	FREESIA	KAEDE	SAKURA	SATSUKI	SUMIRE
TOEIC score	**965**	**855**	**885**	**875**	**750**	**785**	**720**	**745**
A) Stay Experience (in weeks)	260.5 (5 years)	260.5 (5 years)	22 (5.5 month)	52.1 (1 year)	3	4	3	0
*B) Frequency of Language Learning	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
(A+B = SE factor) **Super Exposure	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**

Bold font means two main factors.

*0= not frequent, 1= frequent.
**0= less exposed, 1= more exposed.

had to circumstances of English language learning. The super exposure (SE) factor was extracted considering how long the participants had stayed in English speaking countries and whether they were currently putting effort into English language learning regularly. As shown in Table 1, if participants had either of the factors A or B, they were put into the more exposed group and coded as "1" in the super exposure column. If participants had neither of these factors, they were grouped in the less exposed group.

Participants were divided into four discussion groups, each composed of one NS and two NNSs. They were asked to discuss and reach a consensus by the end of their discussion on the prepared topic for approximately 30 minutes. The topic of the debate was "Who gets the heart?", which was based on a topic from an ESL discussion practice book (Rooks 1988: pp. 7-11). The participants were fictive members of a citizens' committee to advise the heart transplant surgery team at a university hospital, and they had to decide which of the five patients was to receive the heart that had become available for transplantation. The participants had a number of pieces of information about five patients who were all classified as critically ill.

The entire conversations were video- and voice-recorded digitally, and transcribed afterwards. Softening markers were carefully identified by this researcher and they were double checked by a native English speaker specialised in linguistics.[2] Additionally, possible mitigation devices were re-checked several times carefully by considering the meanings in each context, because contextual meanings of mitigators are crucially important for the analysis of linguistic devices in discourse.

Data analysis

The data collected from the transcribed discussion was analysed quantitatively first to examine whether NNSs mitigate their utterances less than NSs. The comparison of NS and NNS data was made in terms of three variables which were represented by the mean number of total words they spoke, the mean frequency of softeners per 100 words, and the mean varieties of softeners used.

The mean numbers of total words spoken are shown in Table 2, and Figure 1. The count of total words spoken by NSs was twice more than those of NNSs.

Table 2. Total words

	Means (SDs)
Native (N=4)	1681.0 (490.99)
Nonnative (N=8)	635.0 (281.59)

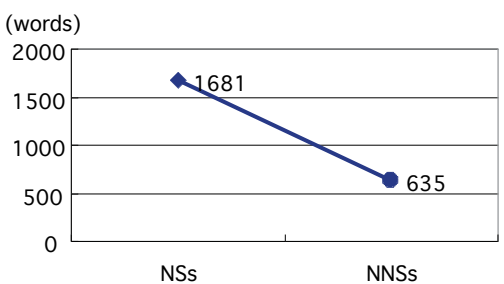

Figure 1. Mean number of total words

Similarly, the mean frequencies of mitigating words per 100 words are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2. The analysis outcome indicates that NSs used mitigating words more than twice as often as NNSs.

Moreover, in terms of the mean varieties of mitigation devices, NSs had almost four times as many kinds as NNSs as indicated by Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 3. Frequency of softeners used (words/100)

	Means (SDs)
Native (N=4)	12.95 (3.45)
Nonnative (N=8)	5.98 (3.27)

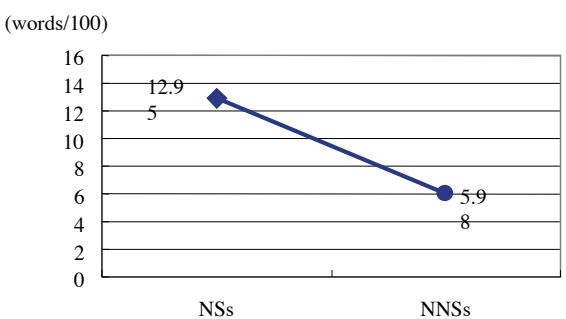

Figure 2. Mean frequency of mitigating words

Table 4. Variety of softeners used (number of kinds)

	Means (SDs)
Native (N=4)	35.5 (5.97)
Nonnative (N=8)	9.13 (4.19)

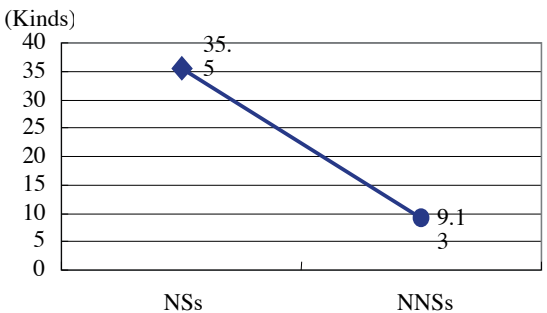

Figure 3. Mean varieties of mitigation devices

All the data were entered into a two-way multivariate analysis of variance test: 2 (NSs vs. NNSs) by 3 (total words, mitigation frequency, and mitigation variety). As shown in Table 5, the two groups differed significantly at the $p < .01$ level in the total number of words, the number of frequency, and variety.

Table 5. Test of Effects (Univariate f tests) (NSs vs. NNSs)

	SS	DF	MS	F	p
Total words	291.764	1	291.764	22.825	0.001
Frequency	129.396	1	129.3896	11.727	0.006
Variety	1872.667	1	1872.667	76.670	0.000

Secondly, other quantitative examinations were performed among NNSs to ascertain whether differing degrees of exposure (SE factor) to English language use may have affected NNSs' performance.

Tables 6 to 8 show the results of comparison of the two groups of NNSs in terms of the same three variables: total words, frequency, and varieties. The result of the count of total words shows a slight difference: the exposed group talked slightly more than the other group (see Table 6).

Table 6: Total words

Factor (NNSs)	Means (SDs)
More exposed (N=5)	701.60 (309.40)
Less exposed (N=3)	524.0 (237.70)

The frequency factor resulted in showing that the more exposed group used almost twice more than the less exposed group (see Table 7).

Table 7. Frequency of softeners used (in words/100)

Factor (NNSs)	Means (SDs)
More exposed (N=5)	7.53 (3.19)
Less exposed (N=3)	3.40 (1.00)

Among the two different groups of NNSs, the more exposed group used more than twice as many varieties as the less exposed group (Table 8 and Figure 4).

Table 8. Variety of softeners used (in number of kinds) among Japanese participants

Factor (NNSs)	Means (SDs)
More exposed (N=5)	11.40 (3.65)
Less exposed (N=3)	5.33 (0.58)

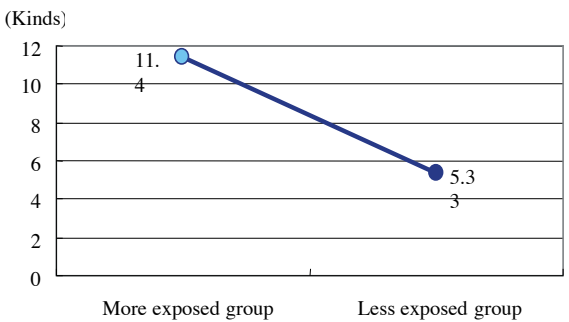

Figure 4. Varieties of mitigation devices

The results of the comparison between the two groups of NNSs were tested statistically using two independent variables (more exposed vs. less exposed) and three dependent variables (total words, mitigation frequency, and mitigation variety) in a MANOVA (Table 9).

Table 9. Test of effects (Univariate f tests) (More exposed vs. Less exposed)

	SS	DF	MS	F	p
Total words	59140.800	1	59140.800	0.716	0.430 (n.s.)
Frequency	31932146.7	1	31932146.7	4.484	0.079 (n.s.)
Variety	69.008	1	69.008	7.687	0.032

As shown in Table 9, the difference in the number of total words was not statistically significant. In addition, the difference in frequency of softeners was also not statistically significant but the p-value indicated a strong tendency of the difference between two groups. However, only eight people's data were available for the present study. Therefore, more research will be needed to verify the tendency shown in these results. Lastly, the mean numbers of variety was found to be statistically significant at the $p < .05$.

After the data analysis was performed statistically, softeners were observed descriptively in different categories. The softening devices obtained were categorized into seven groups: "Modality markers", "Subjectivizers", "Hedges", "Vague language", "Pragmatic markers", "Disclaimers", and "Evaluative markers" in terms of mainly semantic criteria. Those were identified on the basis of the available softeners from the transcribed discussion data. Only semantically meaningful devices related to softening were explored in this study. A complete list of softening devices which were identified is presented in the Appendix. Here are explanations of each category below.

"Modality markers" comprised two subcategories: (1) modal verbs (*would, could, can, may*), and (2) modal adverbials (*maybe, probably,*) and phrases (e.g., *it is possible that*). Those modality markers represent possibility or probability of speakers' propositions or speakers' uncertainty or doubt toward their utterances.

Another category of softening device is referred to as "Subjectivizers" (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), which consist of collocations formed from first person pronoun "*I* and lexical verbs" (Holmes, 1984b) or "parenthetical verbs" (Urmson, 1952 cited in Fraser, 1980), for instance, *think*, *believe*, and *suppose* which express epistemic modality.

"Hedges" (e.g., *a little bit*, *kind of*, *at least*) are adverbials which convey speakers' desire to maintain a stance that is vague about their propositions or to avoid potential aggravation from being precise about what they say (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). This meaning of "hedge" is not exactly equivalent to Lakoff's (1972) use of the term "hedge" because he introduced "hedge" related to general fuzziness and vagueness; therefore the term "hedges" in the current study involves narrower criteria than Lakoff's "hedges".

"Vague language" refers to one kind of mitigator which refers vaguely to quantities of facts and information. They often come after *and/or* plus *–thing/things* to bring vagueness to the core meaning, for instance, *or something like that*.

"Pragmatic markers" are conventionalized speech items which carry contextual or discourse meaning rather than literal meaning (e.g., *you know*, *like*). This category contains a syntactic form usually called "tag questions" or simply "tags" which follow a declarative sentence (e.g., "We agreed on that and that, *didn't we?"*), although they did not necessarily always come at the end of sentences in my data.

"Disclaimers" (Fraser, 1980) constitute one kind of modification that conveys the speakers' intention to reduce unwelcome effects on hearers such as "And *I shouldn't be judgemental but* just looking at her life -".

"Evaluative markers" present speakers' personal emotions or feelings towards the propositions asserted and express subjective evaluation toward what they say. For example, "*It's really sad but* the congenital problem can't be changed easily", and *"it's nice to think about* their families and stuff *but* they've all got families -" were put in this group.

Discussion

Overall, the quantitative research answers the first research question and shows that NNSs used softeners less frequently than NSs. In terms of varieties of softeners, additionally, NSs employed many more than NNSs. The results appeared to be similar to past findings that indicate English native speakers (NSs) use a much greater number and variety of mitigators compared to NNSs (House& Kasper, 1981, LoCastro, 1993, Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993, Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, and Iwai & Rinnert, 2001). Japanese EFL learners mitigated their utterances with less variety and lower frequency than NSs in spite of NNSs' high proficiency, including near-bilingual NNSs, in this study.

Surprisingly one NNS (SATSUKI) who had the lowest TOEIC score among NNS participants applied softeners most frequently. This result suggests that no matter the high level of linguistic proficiency, NNSs are lacking, quantitatively, in terms of softening their messages, just as the other past studies have indicated. In addition, when looking at the use of softeners in each of the seven categories, comparing NS and NNS usage, the results represented the same tendency in most categories except evaluative markers (probably because of its being such a minor strategy, as shown in the Appendix). From these findings we could again indicate that NNSs' general grammatical levels did not have a positive relation with pragmatic competence (Tanaka, 2003, Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) if we consider NNSs' fewer softener uses as lower pragmatic ability.

The second research question was whether the length of stay in English-speaking countries and frequency of English learning affected NNSs' mitigation usage. The difference in the total words the two NNS groups spoke did not show any statistical significance. It appears that the amount of speech did not differ because of any factors considered in this study. It may be that all participants were able to speak up and express what they wanted to say. In terms of frequency of their softener use, the result showed that participants in the more exposed group tended to use softeners twice as frequently, even though this was not statistically significant. Only 1 factor, i.e., variety of softeners use, was found to be significant under the second research question. The more exposed group used more than twice as many varieties of softeners compared to the less exposed group. It seems possible that the more exposed group had acquired more various kinds of softeners than the other group. On the other hand, when the softeners were observed separately in each of seven categories, the differences did not seem to be accountable solely on the basis of differences between the more exposed group and less exposed group. To be more

precise, with respect to modal verbs of modality markers, the differences were found to relate to the length of stay experience, especially the 5-year-long stay versus the other group (one-year-stay at longest to non-stay). In terms of modal adverbials of modality markers and subjectivizers, the differences seemed to be based on the SE factor: combination of length of stay experience and frequent learning. Conversely, the other softener use (hedges, vague language, and pragmatic markers) seemed not to be affected by any of the factors among NNSs considered in this study. Use of disclaimers and evaluative markers indicated individual differences for both NSs and NNSs.

It seems that most softeners are grammatically simple devices, probably with the exception of modal verbs, for Japanese EFL learners. Therefore, all participants could use more hedges, vague language, or pragmatic markers to soften messages, which could overcome inefficient use of other softening markers. Alternatively, they could apply more disclaimers or evaluative markers to make up for the deficit in the use of other softeners, as one NNS (SATSUKI) did.

To sum up, the results show that more exposed participants (longer stay experiences and more frequent language learning) used softeners in more varieties and more frequently than less exposed participants when the data involving softeners are taken all together.

The findings of NNSs' inefficient usage of softeners might perhaps be caused by the fact that mitigating messages is one of the last aspects of pragmatic language use taught. As an example, EFL textbooks seem to represent little availability of softener uses. Fukazawa (2003) insists that textbooks play an essential role in developing learners' awareness regarding pragmatic aspects of language learning. His investigation of English textbooks for oral communication that are used in Japanese senior high schools reached the conclusion that dialogs in texts involve mainly speech acts such as requests, and suggestions, but less use of supportive moves to mitigate the force of requests for instance, want statement (e.g., "I need somebody to help me with my Japanese.") or grounder (e.g., "My host sister has a club meeting."). Moreover, there are no uses of syntactic (e.g. "*If* anybody had a book –", "*could I -?*") and lexical downgraders including hedges (e.g. "*just"*), downtoners (e.g. "could you *possibly* –"), or subjectivizers (e.g. "*I was wondering* if -?"). Even though there are improvements to some extent from textbooks of the past, there are more aspects that should be developed for enhancing pragmatic aspects (Fukazawa 2003).

Similarly, although in SL not FL contexts, Holmes (1988) has studied lexical items occurring in ESL textbooks (spoken and written), comparing them with those items that appear frequently in corpora. In order to evaluate descriptions of lexical items that express doubt and certainty in ESL textbooks, she investigated particular lexical items that are marked by high frequency in English corpora. She identified cases of insufficient explanation of epistemic devices (expressions of doubt and certainty) in ESL textbooks by providing some data on the frequency of such devices (modal verbs: *would, might*; lexical verbs: *think, seem*; adverbials: *actually, maybe*; nouns: *possibility, evidence*; and adjectives: *sure, likely*) from corpus-based studies. She concluded that these scanty explanations of softeners in ESL textbooks, compared to authentic use of softeners in corpora, is one of the factors causing NNSs' meagre use of softeners.

Accordingly, it is likely that the way to mitigate utterances is not generally paid attention to in language teaching. However, even if Japanese EFL learners' softener use reflects the fact that learners have few opportunities to improve softener use, there might be other possible reasons underlying this. For example, it might be because of the fact that more exposed group members are more attentive to the need to mitigate their illocutionary force.

Conclusion

This study investigated softener use among NSs and NNSs. Similar to several past studies, this investigation, on the whole, showed that NNSs who have high language proficiency conveyed fewer varieties of softeners less frequently than NSs. Among NNSs, their softener use differed in terms of a combined "SE factor" based on length of stay experience and frequent learning. The more exposed group applied softeners more than the less exposed group with respect to numbers of varieties, and appeared to use softeners more frequently. Examining many kinds of softeners in each of seven categories, more investigations should be conducted from several perspectives such as pragmatic transfer, length of stay experience, frequent learning, and strategies for communication. The factors underlying NNS softener use in each category seemed to differ; however, due to space limitations those observations could not be presented here.

Softeners weaken the force of illocutionary acts expressing speakers' uncertainly or doubt towards propositions asserted (epistemic modality meaning) and simultaneously function to establish solidarity between speakers and hearers. Therefore, learning softening devices in the target language would be beneficial for language learners to facilitate communication, to show more deference or attempt to create better relationships rather than just understand or tell the information we have. Learning how to mitigate messages can develop intercultural pragmatic competence in a variety of contexts, from everyday conversation to academic writing, during our lifetime language learning.

Because of the fact that the number of the applicants was very limited, the results that were found in this study could not be generalized beyond the sample. Thus, we have to be cautious in generalizing differences between NSs and NNSs in terms of their English language and softener use.

It seems that few researchers have devoted themselves to the investigation of NNSs' intentions toward their utterances, especially with respect to their softener usage. For instance, it is not known whether they intentionally or unintentionally use only a few softeners. Similarly, it remains to be determined why they show little use of softeners. Is it because they do not know how to soften their messages, or just because they forgot the softeners they wanted to use but could not remember and say them spontaneously, or because they regard that softening their utterances is not necessary? Investigating NNSs awareness of using softeners could bring interesting perspectives toward NNSs' L2 language use.

Notes

1. To preserve the anonymity of all NS and NNS participants, they will be referred to in this paper with pseudonyms.

2. Even though softeners were not identified entirely independently, I and the linguist discussed each case several times in order to detect softeners as accurately as possible. For example, in my data, *quite* and *just* are two of the ambiguous devices that are difficult to interpret. Ultimately, all occurrences of *quite* were identified as softeners according to the contexts. Conversely, *just* was excluded from observation because the use of *just* was too ambiguous to identify as a softener.

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Appendix. Complete list of softeners identified.

Softeners	NNSs								NSs			
	MOMO	NAZUNA	DAISY	FREESIA	KAEDE	SAKURA	SATSUKI	SUMIRE	CHAMOMILE	JASMINE	LAVENDER	CALLA
Modality markers	would[8]								would/'d[10]	would [9]	would/'d[12]	would/'d[20]
(modal verbs)		could		could		could		could [3]	could [2]	could[2]	could [3]	could[3]
	can				can		can[13]		can[2]	can[6]	can[2]	can
	might[7]								might [2]	might	might[8]	
	may	may[2]								may[2]	may [3]	
										wouldn't[2]	wouldn't	wouldn't[3]
	couldn't[2]	couldn't[2]								couldn't		
	might[7]								might [2]	might	might[8]	
(modal adverbials	can't	can't[2]					can't		can't			
and idioms)	maybe[4]	maybe[2]	maybe	maybe[2]	maybe [2]	maybe [2]	maybe [16]		maybe [8]	maybe	maybe [10]	maybe[5]
	probably[2]		probably						probably [2]	probably[6]	probably	probably[3]
		actually	actually[2]						actually	actually		actually
			possibly				possibly			allegedly	it is possible that	
										basically	there is a possibility that	
											isn't it possible	
Subjectivizers	I think[3]	I think [5]	I think[3]	I think[2]	I think[3]		I think	I think [2]	I think[7]	I think[4]	I think[6]	I think[5]
	I thought	I thought[5]	I thought[2]	I thought[5]	I thought[6]	I thought[4]			I thought[2]		I thought[4]	
	I guess[2]								I guess [6]	I guess[6]	I'm sure	I guess[23]
	I imagine								I suppose	supposing that	I'm not sure	I suppose
										I wonder[3]		I wonder[4]
										I'm tempted to		I'm assuming[3]
												I assume
							I don't think		I don't think	I don't think		I don't think[4]
		I don't know (but)[3]					I don't know (but)[2]		I didn't know[2]	I don't know		I don't know [7]
(Want statements)									I'd like to	I'd like to		I'd like to think that
Hedges						negative+ so much		little bit	negative+much	a bit	negative+ a lot	a bit [2]
						negative+ much		a little	negative+a lot	any of	slight	
						a little			a bit [2]	slightly	a little	
											a little bit [5]	
			kind of/kinda[4]	kind of/, nda[6]			kind of [2]		kind of	kind of [6]	kind of[2]	kind of/kinda[7]
		negative+ really[2]							negative+really[4]	negative+really[5]	at least	negative+really
							nagative+easily	negative+completely	negative+quite	pretty[2]	pretty	pretty[2]
									quite	quite	more	in that respect
									a sort of	even		in some respects
(Verbal hedges)	try to								tend to [3]			
Vague languages	like[4]		like[5]						like [6]	like[19]	like [26]	like[39]
									that things like	something like this	some other things	things like that[2]
									anything like that			something like
		or something [2]		or somewhere			or something		something like that			or something
		and everything								and stuff[3]		kind of the thing
												that kind of thing[3]
Pragmatic markers				you know			you know [2]		you know [10]	you know[10]	you know [14]	you know[11]
											do you know what I mean? [4]	do you know what I mean?[2]
												you know what I mean?
											if you are	if you know what I mean?
												I mean[2]
	right?								isn't it?			isn't it?
									isn't that?			didn't we?[4]
									shall we?			didn't you?
												wasn't she?
												don't you?
(Politeness marker)					please							I shouldn't be judgmental but
Disclaimers							it was really hard to		It was very hard	it was difficult to decide		
							it is/was (really) hard but[4]		we don't know for sure but	I'm not very familiar with		I don't know necessarily think that
							it is hard for me to			I was under the impression		
							I can't explain			as far as I knew from what		
							I can't say not important but			information I had here		we don't know it for sure
Evaluative markers		I'm sorry for saying this but					it's really sad but			it's nice to think about but unfortunately[2]		

* numbers in parenthesis[#] indicates frequency of occurrences (no numbers indicate 1 occurrence).