

The Use of Linguistic Signals in English Researches: Myanmar University Context

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Abstract

Researchers employ key interactional devices such as hedges and boosters expressing their believability and degrees of commitment to opinions and claims and adjusting the truth-value of the knowledge. The aim of the research was to explore the contributions of hedges and boosters, category of metadiscoursal markers in rhetorical sections (Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion) of researches from the Journal of the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science Vol. XVIII, No.7. The objectives intended to analyze the significant use of hedges and boosters in the selected English researches and to investigate what category of overall occurrences of hedge and booster is dominantly employed in the researches. The quantitative research design is used to uncover the writers' attitude to the result of research articles with the contribution of two linguistic signals- hedges and boosters- in academic research. The theoretical concept of Holmes' (1988) classification,

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expression of doubt, and certainty focused on types of modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns. Findings revealed that the occurrence of hedges in rhetorical sections of researches 1, 2, 3, and 4 is significantly higher than the use of a booster. However, the occurrence of hedges used in RA 5 is the same number of boosters. The use of lexical verb and the modal verb is significantly higher than other devices of overall occurrences in the selected researches. This study makes a contribution to the use of linguistic signals in writing academic papers in the Myanmar universities context.

Keywords: English researches, Boosters, Hedges, Linguistic signals

Introduction

Studying discourse markers in academic courses gradually broadens to maintain and achieve conversational continuity and to express the relation of an utterance to the preceding utterance or to the context. Hedges and boosters are used as key interactional devices for the purpose of modifying the truth-value of the knowledge conveyed, describing commitment to views. The use of hedge and booster is able to increase or reduce the force of statements as communicative strategies carrying the writer's degree of confidence in the truth of a proposition or expressing his doubt and certainty. They also carry both epistemic and effective meaning in academic discourse. Hyland (1998, p.350- 351) states that boosters express strong conviction and hedges indicate the speaker's uncertainty or to claim something tentatively. Holmes (1988) classifies the lexical devices hedges and boosters in terms of modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns. Holmes (1984) identifies two basic strategies for expressing different degrees of commitment (certainty) and detachment (doubt). Three sources of potential difficulty were discussed; particular linguistic forms; meaning; and the interaction of different types of meaning in different contexts.

In research paper writing, the individual choices are academically controlled by the discourse convention of their disciplines. Hedges and boosters employ from the interpersonal aspects of language use within a context. A few studies examined the use of linguistic signals in researches from

different disciplines and across their rhetorical sections. By analyzing three rhetorical sections of published research articles of five English language teachers, researchers' preference of language use and attitude to the use of linguistic signals in the research could be identified. The objectives of this research are to explore the contribution of hedges and boosters in the rhetorical section of selected English researches and to analyze the significant use of hedges and booster in the selected English researches and to investigate what category of overall occurrences of hedge and booster is dominantly engaged in the selected researches.

Literature Review

Hedges and boosters in research paper writing carry not only the writer's degree of certainty but also their attitude to the audience. L2 writers may feel worries when using them. An analysis of hedges and boosters in the corpus was conducted within the framework of the hypothetical concept of Holmes (1984), "there are at least two basic reasons why a speaker might wish to modify the strength or force with which a particular speech act is expanded: firstly, to convey modal meaning... and, secondly, to express effective meaning or the speaker's attitude to the addressee". Modal meaning involves the speaker's attitude to the content of the propositions (Holmes, 1982); therefore, epistemic modality is concerned with this type of meaning. The writers' degree of conviction or confidence or the degree of illocutionary force affects the meaning of the proposition. The illocutionary force of utterance and the authors' stance become soft and unconfident by the use of hedges. Lexical items such as *perhaps*, *probably*, *doubtfully* and *unlikely* may serve to soften the force of directive speech acts or positive utterances. Some examples like; *believe me*, *surely*, *certainly*, *definitely*, *really*, *without doubt*, and *no way*, convey the speaker's certainty that a proposition is true to boost the illocutionary force of speech acts as well as modal and affective meaning. The functions of boosters express the speaker's intentions with confidence and reinforcement. There has been some research on hedges and boosters in academic writing for both L1, as well as L2 (Holmes, 1988; Hyland, 1994, 1996, 2000; Hyland & Milton, 1997). Farrokhi and Emami (2008) conducted "Hedges and Boosters in

Academic Writing: Native vs. Non-Native Research Articles in Applied Linguistics and Engineering” and it was found the overall occurrences of hedges and boosters in Electrical Engineering articles was a lesser amount of in Applied Linguistics articles. Takimoto (2015) discussed the use of hedges and boosters and their functions in academic research papers. It indicated that a style that requires more hedges and boosters for subjectivity, more interpretative and less abstract in the humanities and social sciences, whereas more fact-oriented and more impersonal in natural sciences.

Research Objectives

The aim of the research was to explore the contributions of hedges and boosters, category of metadiscourse markers in rhetorical sections of researches from the Journal of the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science Vol. XVIII, No.7.

Methodology

In this research, the quantitative research design is used to uncover the writers’ attitude to the result of research articles with the contribution of hedges and boosters in academic writing. This study focused on the use of linguistic signals, hedges, and boosters, in the Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion sections of selected research articles of English language teachers from different universities, Myanmar. Holmes' (1988) theoretical concept of the lexical devices hedges and boosters is employed.

1. Instrument(s)

The resources are purposefully selected to provide the data for this research. The reasons for selecting these researches are that the professions of all the researchers are teaching English language and literature to EFL learners at different universities in Myanmar and to study their typical writing style in research. Once the research articles were selected, two linguistic signals known as hedges and boosters in the rhetorical sections of Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion were explored based on the concept of Holmes (1988). Collective data were categorized into five lexical devices such as lexical verb, modal verb, adverb, adjective, and noun. The fast and easy

freeware program (Laurence,2013) AntConc is used to determine the frequencies of the hedges and boosters in all the selected researches. The significant expression of doubt and certainty in the selected research articles is analyzed. Then the dominant type of lexical category of hedges and boosters in the selected researches was investigated.

2. Data collection procedures

The selected published research articles extracted from the Journal of the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science Vol. XVIII; No.7 are used as samples of research. The researcher downloaded published English researches by using the purposive sampling method. Based on a corpus of researches, the numbers of hedges and boosters employed in three rhetorical sections: finding, discussion, and conclusion sections of each research article were scanned. Data collection was based on the framework of Homles (1988).

Table 1

The Contribution of Hedges and Boosters in the Rhetorical Sections of Researches

Source	Hedges	Booster
RA-1	about, frequent, often, appeared, claims, can, claim, proved, noticeable, think, appeared, should, noted, will, considered, assumed, seems, rarely, asserted, could, concluded, might, argues, attempt,	shows, found, in fact, clearly, has to, truly, inevitable
RA-2	can, usually, small, appear, quiet, mainly, common, may, typical, should, often, indicates, general, almost, belief, believed, suggestions	clearly, really, found, obviously, can't, will ensure,

Table 1 (Continued)

Source	Hedges	Booster
RA-3	appeared, frequently, nearly, can, seen, concluded, may, should, evaluate, seemed, alternative, suggested, assumed,	have to, showed, found, certain, indicated
RA-4	according to, can, supposed, feel, will, alternative, suggested, should, idea, may, apparent, evaluate, opinion, claimed	found, complete, clear, do, real, the fact, show
RA-5	widely, frequently, common, can, suggest, indicate, can, will, (is) hoped, can	found, find, shows, could not, must, do,

Note. A corpus-based analysis of hedges and boosters in three sections of selected researches is classified in accord with the concept of Holmes (1988).

3. Data analysis

The use of Hedges and Boosters in the selected research articles are classified into five categories such as lexical verb, modal verb, adverb, adjective and noun. The frequencies of using hedges and boosters are associated with the researchers' typical writing style as well as his attitude, commitment and certainty to the context. The distribution of hedges and boosters in the rhetorical section of each research is analysed.

Table 2.

Distribution of Hedges and Booster in Rhetorical Sections of RAs

		RA 1	RA 2	RA 3	RA 4	RA 5
	Word Count	2305	1486	931	2846	530
1	Lexical verbs	39	8	20	12	13
2	Modal verbs	17	13	12	15	10
3	Adverbs	15	17	2	1	2
4	Adjectives	6	8	3	18	2
5	Noun	1	2	1	5	1
	TOTAL = H+B	53+25	34+14	28+10	26+25	14+14
	PERCENTAGE %	2.3+1.1	2.3+1	3.1+1	1+1	2.6+2.6

According to data analysis, lexical verbs and modal verbs were dominantly used in the research articles to express the degrees of certainty and degree of conviction of the researchers. RA1 covered the use of 53 hedges and 25 boosters and the sharing of hedges and boosters consists of 39 Lexical verbs, 17 Modal verbs, 15 Adverbs, six Adjectives, and only one Noun. It is indicated that the percentage of hedges in the three sections constitutes 2.3% and the percentage of boosters shares 1.1%. Overall conveyance of hedges and boosters found in three sections of RA2 include eight Lexical verbs, 13 Modal verbs, 17 Adverbs, eight Adjectives, and two Nouns. The total frequencies are converted into a percentage. The frequency of hedges shares 34 (2.3%) and boosters 14(1%). The total occurrence of hedges and boosters in three sections of RA3 include 20 Lexical verbs, 12 Modal verbs, two Adverbs, three Adjectives, and one Noun. The frequency of hedges 28 and boosters 10 is converted into percentage and it has 3.1% and boosters only 1%. The rhetorical section of RA4 consists of 2,846 words. Total numbers of 26 hedges and 25 boosters are categorized into 12 Lexical verbs, 15 Modal verbs, one Adverb, 18 Adjectives, and five Nouns. The frequency of hedges and boosters is converted into percentages. The use of hedges constitutes 1% and boosters only 0.9%. In RA 5, the frequency of hedges was equivalent to boosters. Overall distributions of hedges and boosters are classified into its word class, consisting of 13 Lexical verbs, 10 Modal verbs, two Adverbs, two Adjectives, and 1 Noun. The frequency of hedges was

converted into percentage and it shared 2.6%, so did the boosters. Since the size of three rhetorical sections of each research article varied, the frequency of hedges and boosters was calculated per 100 words. Data analysis exhibited that hedges and boosters expressed degrees of certainty and degree of conviction; category in lexical verbs and modal verbs were dominantly used in all research articles. The use of hedges in the form of Modal verbs in research 1 and 4 is higher than in other research articles. Modal meaning involves the speaker's attitude to the content of the propositions (Holmes, 1982). Research 1 includes more modal hedges as a way of reducing the risk of opposition, reporting precise results, being polite and boosters were also found in large numbers to get the approval of the readers.

Results

This research discovered two types of linguistic signals, hedges, and boosters, in rhetorical sections of academic research conducted by English language teachers for expressing commitment/detachment in presenting knowledge claims in accord with the theoretical framework of Holmes' (1988) taxonomy. To observe the authors' doubt and certainty, the use of two linguistic signals in the research is categorized into five devices; modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns. Findings revealed that the frequency of each section of hedges and boosters varies according to the author's attitude and the contribution of hedges in each research was more than boosters. However, the frequency of boosters in RA 1 is the same as in RA 4 though the total word count of the rhetorical section fluctuates. The contribution of hedge and booster in RA 5 constitutes 2.6%. More hedges and boosters are found in the Findings and Discussion sections than in the Conclusion section. In the Conclusion sections, the authors commonly summarize the results and put forward claims about future events. Data analysis uncovered that hedge exceeded boosters by nearly 2 to 1, and the percentage of hedges and boosters in RA 5 slightly differs from others. The balanced use of hedges and boosters in RA5 indicated that the researcher's degrees of certainty and degree of conviction in his writing.

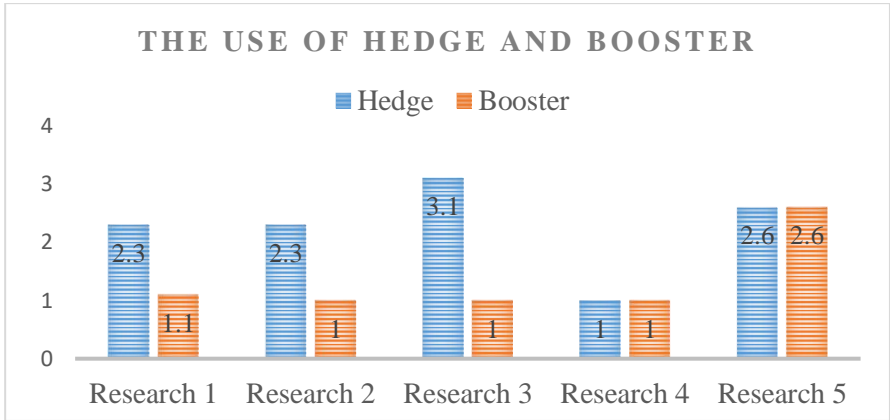


Figure 1. A comparison of hedge and booster in the research articles.

The sharing of hedges and boosters in the rhetorical sections of each research is comparatively described. The percentage of hedges in research articles was higher than boosters. Findings indicate that the more heavily frequency rate of hedges shares in the Discussion sections than in the Conclusion sections. The main rhetorical function of the Discussion is to make assertions about what has been found, to recap the results, state conclusions and suggestions with an appropriate degree of doubt and certainty. The results reveal that conducting smart research papers linguistically-and rhetorically-appropriate academic discourse with respect to the target community is of great importance in conveying the appropriate attitude of the researchers.

Discussion

Exploring the contribution of hedges and boosters in research papers Findings and Discussion sections generally contained more hedges and boosters than the Conclusion section. Frequencies of hedges are more than boosters in the selected academic articles of English. The contribution of hedging devices serves as a way of reducing the tentativeness of propositions advanced by authors. The choices of expression with hedges and boosters are dictated by discourse markers, by the authors' pretension to universality and generalization. In academic paper writing, the use of hedges

and boosters serves a variety of functions and it is central to claim the negotiation and argumentation. However, no research can be reported with the same confidence of shared beliefs across disciplines. There may be some room for uncertainty. Therefore, research has to be expressed with more hedges than boosters. The quantitative findings show the level of commitment/detachment across the texts of the researchers. With respect to signaling commitment or detachment, the writers constructed divergent academic English research articles by employing fewer boosters and signaling a commitment to the propositions. Exploring linguistic signals in research articles with numerical data may seem that the researchers consider that using hedges and boosters distorts the fact from the evidence. As the rhetorical sections of research and their purposes vary, the same epistemic meaning can be signaled in many different ways.

Recommendations

1. Implications

The comparative study of the use of hedges and boosters in academic research, theses, and dissertation can provide EFL learners developing of linguistics skills and style of academic writing. The implication of this study helped teachers and postgraduate students to conduct smart academic articles and researches with the use of discourse markers. It is needed to reflect that the effect of using hedge and booster brings the commitment or unbiasedness of the authors to the context. It is also recommended that the practice of academic writing with the appropriate use of a large form of linguistic signals should be trained for EFL learners to get a high writing proficiency.

2. Further Studies

Future studies can probably be carried out by covering a larger number of researches from various institutions since this study concentrates on the selected English research articles published in 2020. Studying how hedges and boosters are dealt with not only in academic writing but also in literary text and the functions of discourse markers that related to the context should be further studied.

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