

Hedges and Boosters in Indonesian Thesis and Dissertation Abstracts

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Abstract. The effective expression of arguments in academic writing is largely shaped by rhetorical strategies, particularly hedges and boosters, which aid in managing certainty and engagement. This study employs a qualitative design with a corpus-based approach, utilizing 144 abstracts from bachelor's theses, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations in Indonesian language education. The abstracts were extracted, converted to text format, and organized into three corpora based on academic level. Using AntConc 4.1.4, softening and strengthening words were identified based on Hyland's (2005) grammatical classification and Hyland's (1998) pragmatic framework. The analysis included the identification of lexical words, calculation of their frequency, and interpretation of their use at various academic levels. To ensure validity, selected examples were analyzed qualitatively to reveal patterns of metadiscursive strategy use by students when presenting scientific claims. The findings indicate undergraduate and master's students primarily use hedges, particularly modal verbs like "can", "could", and "may" to express cautious claims, while doctoral students more frequently use boosters, especially lexical verbs such as "prove", "show", and "assert", reflecting greater assertiveness and confidence. Pragmatic analysis reveals that both hedges and boosters serve mainly accuracy- and writer-oriented functions, with limited reader-oriented use. These results suggest a rhetorical shift from cautious to assertive claims in line with academic maturity. The study highlights fostering students' awareness of rhetorical strategies for effective scientific communication.

Keywords: Abstracts; academic writing; boosters; hedges; metadiscourse

Introduction

Academic writing is a representation of students' critical thinking skills in conveying scientific ideas in the world of higher education. In academic texts, abstracts have an important role that not only functions as a summary of the research content, but also as a rhetorical tool to attract readers' attention and direct understanding of the research focus (Hyland, 2000). In this context, the success of abstract writing is greatly influenced by the linguistic strategies used by the author, including metawacana. In particular, two important elements of metawacana are hedges and boosters. The presence of hedges and boosters in academic texts serves to emphasize the author's point of view and guide the reader in understanding the information in accordance with the author's intention. According to Hyland (2005) hedges are used to express uncertainty and or avoid claims that are too absolute. Meanwhile, boosters function to affirm findings and claims, strengthen the truth value of statements, and emphasize certain parts of the discourse.

In reality, many students still face difficulties in using effective writing strategies in their scientific papers, especially in the most important part of the research, the abstract. Taymaz (2021) noted that most students have limited awareness of rhetorical strategies such as hedging and boosting. As a result, the messages conveyed through abstracts often do not reflect a level of caution or confidence that is in line with academic standards. Research on the use of hedges and boosters in academic writing has been conducted extensively, particularly in scientific articles. Some of these studies were conducted by Takimoto (2015), Seyyedi (2024), Ardhiyanti et

al. (2023), Triyoko et al. (2021), Herminingsih & Isro'iyah (2023), Al-Mudhaffari et al. (2020), Ekoç (2023), and Hryniuk (2018). In addition, studies comparing the use of hedges and boosters between scientific articles have also been examined by several researchers, such as Hu & Cao (2011), Al-Ghoweri & Kayed (2019), Donadio (2022), Ranjbar et al. (2023), Akman & Karahan (2023) and Sepehri et al. (2019). Other studies have explored the comparison of the use of hedges and boosters in other forms of scientific work. Taymaz (2021) for example, examined the differences in their use in the academic work of master's and doctoral students in Turkey, with the result that doctoral students tend to use boosters more, while master's students use hedges more often. Similar research was also conducted by Dontcheva-Navrátilová (2024), who compared master's theses and scientific articles, as well as research by Jabeen et al. (2023), Abdullah, (2022), Wang & Zeng (2021) and Uba et al. (2021) discussed comparisons between dissertations and theses. Specifically, Al-Zarieni & Alkhreshheh (2024) examined the use of hedges and boosters in abstracts of English-language linguistic theses.

However, in the researchers' observations, studies that explicitly compare the three types of scientific works, namely theses, dissertations, and dissertations simultaneously, have not yet been found. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by comparing the use of hedges and boosters in theses, dissertations, and dissertations in the context of the Indonesian language. This study aims not only to contribute to the development of metadiscourse studies, but also to improve understanding of academic writing in accordance with academic standards, as well as to improve the ability to convey arguments effectively.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative design with a corpus-based approach. The research corpus is constructed from a collection of abstract texts from undergraduate theses, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations. The data consists of words or phrases taken from Indonesian-language abstract texts. This corpus allows researchers to examine the use of hedges and boosters in academic discourse at three different levels of education. The data sources were taken from 144 thesis abstracts, 144 dissertation abstracts, and 144 dissertation abstracts in the field of Indonesian language education published through the Indonesia University of Education Repository database. Data collection was carried out using documentation techniques. The documentation technique was carried out by accessing the Indonesia University of Education repository page. The next stage was to identify theses, dissertations, and dissertations in the field of Indonesian language education. Following the identification of relevant theses and dissertations, the researchers downloaded the abstract sections from each document. The next step was to extract the abstract section from each thesis, dissertation, and dissertation. Next, all thesis, dissertation, and dissertation abstracts were converted to text format (.txt), and researchers created three separate corpora. Finally, the abstract texts are entered into the corpus analysis software AntConc 4.1.4. Elements such as words or phrases that indicate reinforcement and fencing devices are identified and annotated. To facilitate searching in AntConc, the researcher used the advanced search mode and entered these search terms in the "Cluster/N-Grams" menu.

The analysis of hedges and boosters is based on Hyland (2005), which categorizes them into five grammatical classes: modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns. Additionally, their pragmatic functions were analyzed using Hyland (1998) three-dimensional theory: accuracy-oriented, writer-oriented, and reader-oriented. The analysis was conducted in four stages: (1) the corpus was processed and separated by educational level; (2) the interactional metadiscourse lexicon was identified with the help of concordance and cluster features in AntConc; (3) the frequency of occurrence was calculated based on grammatical category and pragmatic function; and (4) the results were interpreted comparatively across academic levels. To support the validity of the interpretations, the data were analyzed qualitatively by tracing example sentences containing hedges and boosters. This method aims to provide a comprehensive picture of trends and patterns in the use of metadiscursive strategies that reflect how students frame scientific claims in their papers.

Result and Discussion

The types of hedges also apply to the types of boosters, namely modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns.

Categories and Distribution of Hedges

The analysis shows that hedges are used in total 800 occurrences in the abstract. The most dominant type is modal verbs, such as *can*, *could*, and *may*, which function to convey uncertainty or potential in claims. The highest frequency of use was found in thesis abstracts (298 occurrences), followed by theses (282), and dissertations (220). The prevalence of modal verbs in theses and master degree's theses abstracts suggests that students at this level tend to make cautious claims. Examples of their use demonstrate the mitigating attitude characteristic of early academic writing. Meanwhile, doctoral students seem more confident in their claims, as evidenced by the lower frequency of hedging. Other types, such as lexical verbs (e.g., *assume*, *attempt*, *suggest*), adverbs (e.g., *enough*, *some*, *little*), adjectives (e.g., *similar*, *like*), and nouns (e.g., *potential*, *likely*), are also used, albeit less frequently. These findings demonstrate that students employ various linguistic strategies to express uncertainty, though modal forms are more prevalent.

Modal Verbs

The following are examples of modal verbs used in abstracts:

Example 1 : *"Peneliti tertarik untuk mengkaji novel Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk karya Ahmad Tobar untuk nantinya hasil kajian tersebut bisa dimanfaatkan sebagai rancangan bahan ajar."*

The word *"bisa"* implies possibility or potential, not certainty. This means that the results of the study are not guaranteed to be used as such. The author does not say *"the results of the study will be used,"* only *"can be used."* This characteristic of the fencing device shows a cautious or open attitude toward various possible outcomes and avoids making absolute statements that cannot be confirmed.

Example 2 : *"...dengan adanya fakta tersebut boleh disebutkan bahwa cacian, makian dan sumpah serapah sebagai sebuah tuturan yang sangat tidak santun..."*

In this context, the word *"boleh"* weakens the strength of the claim by suggesting possibility. Using *"may"* implies that the claim is debatable. It gives the impression that the writer is being cautious and not imposing a view.

Lexical Verbs

The following are examples of lexical verbs used in abstracts:

Example 1 : *"Penulis menganggap masih banyak siswa yang salah dalam membuat sebuah kalimat slogan, padahal dalam membuat sebuah slogan dibutuhkan kreativitas yang tinggi"*

In this sentence, the author uses the word *"menganggap"* to express his opinion rather than stating a fact directly. This is an example of hedging; the writer does not directly say that *"many students are wrong,"* which reduces the risk of sounding too judgmental.

Example 2 : *"Berdasarkan hasil penelitian di atas, penulis menyarankan kepada guru mata pelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia untuk menggunakan media VCD dalam pembelajaran menulis karangan eksposisi karena efektif dan praktis digunakan."*

The verb *"menyarankan"* conveys a recommendation or suggestion rather than a factual claim. In an academic context, its use is often categorized as a fencing device because it allows the reader to accept or reject the suggestion. It also weakens the strength of the claim compared to a direct statement, such as *"Teachers should use VCD media,"* and demonstrates that the scientific claim is based on certain results rather than absolute truth.

Adverbs

The following are examples of adverbs used in abstracts:

Example 1 : *"Penelitian ini menghasilkan perbedaan yang cukup signifikan antara kelas eksperimen dengan kelas kontrol, yakni dengan peningkatan 42,55% pada kelas eksperimen dan 28,76% pada kelas control"*

In this context, the word "*cukup*" reduces the strength of the claim about the significance of the difference, thus functioning as a hedge. The sentence does not claim that the difference is highly significant or obvious; rather, it states that the difference is "moderately significant," indicating a level of confidence that is not absolute.

Example 2 : *"Upaya pengembangan bahan ajar dengan menggunakan kurikulum merdeka harus terus dilakukan mengingat ketersediaan bahan ajar kurikulum merdeka bagi siswa masih sedikit jumlahnya"*

The word "*sedikit*" in the sentence describes an uncertain or unspecified amount, implying a shortage without stating how much. While this fencing device weakens the claim about the size of the shortage, it still conveys that a shortage exists.

Adjectives

The following are examples of adjectives used in abstracts:

Example 1 : *"Objek penelitian ini serupa dengan penelitian sebelumnya."*

Example 2 : *"Metode yang digunakan mirip dengan metode terdahulu."*

The two examples above are adjectives that demonstrate similarity between two things. The words "*serupa*" and "*mirip*" can be used as fencing devices to soften claims or acknowledge that similarities are not absolute.

Nouns

The following are examples of nouns used in abstracts:

Example 1 : *"Penggunaan citra perempuan dalam karya sastra, terutama novel, memiliki potensi untuk menjadi bahan pembelajaran yang menarik, khususnya dalam pengajaran apresiasi sastra."*

The word "*potensi*" implies that something has not yet happened or been proven, but could happen. It is used to avoid certainty and soften claims, making them more open and cautious. Therefore, "potential" falls into the category of fencing devices.

Categories and Distribution of Boosters

The utilization of boosters attained a total of 1,200 instances, with the highest frequency observed in dissertation abstracts (445), followed by theses (414), and theses (341). The findings of this study suggest a positive correlation between the level of education and the propensity of students to assert claims in their abstracts.

The most prevalent types are lexical verbs, including "show," "prove," and "assert," which are indicative of the researchers' confidence in the validity of the research results. Furthermore, adverbs such as "very," "certainly," and "clearly" are frequently employed to reinforce claims and accentuate their severity.

A content analysis of dissertation abstracts reveals that adjectives such as "important," "absolute," and "perfect" are used more frequently. This suggests that PhD students have a higher level of confidence in the quality and significance of their findings. Modal verbs such as "will" and "must" are employed to convey predictions or imperatives with a high degree of certainty.

Modal Verbs

Example 1 : *"Kemampuan membaca akan menentukan keberhasilan belajar seorang siswa."*

In this sentence, the word "*akan*" is used to express a prediction that is certain or strongly believed by the writer.

Example 2 : *"Guru sebagai fasilitator harus mempunyai teknik yang tepat agar menumbuhkan potensi yang"*

dimiliki siswa."

The term "*harus*" is employed to signify an imperative or obligation that is considered non-negotiable. There is no room for uncertainty or ambiguity; rather, there is a high degree of necessity for the action to be taken.

Lexical Verbs

Example 1 : "*Hasil penelitian **membuktikan** bahwa model PSA efektif meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa. Adapun temuan penelitian ini sebagai berikut.*"

The term "*membuktikan*" denotes a substantial assertion, suggesting that the data or research findings substantiate the veracity of the proposed statement. This suggests that the author considers the findings to be substantiated facts.

Example 2 : "*Data hasil penelitian **menunjukkan** bahwa keterampilan menulis karangan eksposisi siswa melalui media VCD mengalami peningkatan.*"

The term "*menunjukkan*" signifies that the research data offers substantial support for the claim, thereby providing a solid foundation for enhancing students' abilities. The employment of this term engenders the perception that the assertion is not merely a subjective opinion, but rather a finding that is substantiated by empirical evidence and merits credence within an academic milieu.

Adverbs

Example 1 : "*Model pembelajaran menulis ini **sangat** efektif dalam mengajarkan, menganalisis alih kode dan campur kode yang diberikan kepada siswa Sekolah Menengah Atas (SMA).*"

The word "*sangat*" functions as an intensifier, thereby reinforcing the primary proposition that the learning model is indeed effective. The employment of the booster "very" serves to underscore the author's conviction in the veracity of their assertion. This assertion serves as a testament to the author's profound confidence in the claim's veracity.

Example 2 : "*Keberadaan bahan ajar tersebut **tentu** mendukung tercapainya tujuan perkuliahan sintaksis yang diharapkan.*"

The term "*tentu*" serves to reinforce the assertion that the teaching materials in question effectively facilitate the realization of the objectives established during the lecture. This reinforcing device conveys a high level of certainty from the writer.

Adjectives

Example 1 : "*Penelitian ini **penting** dilakukan mengingat Twitter merupakan media yang efektif dalam menyampaikan pesan secara tepat dan cepat.*"

The term "*penting*" functions as an intensifier, emphasizing the urgency and significance of the proposed action or activity, which is to conduct research on the use of Twitter.

Example 2 : "*Penggunaan afiksasi yang benar dalam Bahasa Indonesia **mutlak** diperlukan.*"

The term "*mutlak*" is an adjective denoting a degree of certainty and necessity. The employment of the amplifying device is indisputably indicative of its indispensability, irrelevance, and inflexibility.

Functions of Hedges and Boosters

In terms of pragmatic function, both hedges and boosters are most frequently employed in accuracy-oriented and writer-oriented contexts. This finding suggests that students frequently employ linguistic strategies to ensure the accuracy of information and to circumvent direct personal involvement in claims. The utilization of reader-oriented functions is comparatively infrequent, indicating that direct interaction with readers has not yet become a prevalent strategy in academic abstracts.

Discussion

The findings indicate that hedges and boosters in abstracts of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral student work can be classified into five grammatical categories: modal verbs, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns. The findings also demonstrate that claims made by undergraduate student writers are characterized by the predominance of hedges in the form of modal verbs, while the use of boosters is characterized by a combination of verbs and modal verbs.

This finding aligns with the observations reported by (Sukhanindr, 2009) and Getkham 2016), who identified modal verbs as one of the three most prevalent grammatical categories employed in academic writing genres to express hedging. Modal verbs are generally used to express doubt (hedging) more frequently than modal verbs that express certainty (boosting) (Chen, 2012; Hyland & Milton, 1997). Furthermore, modal verbs of hedges are used more frequently than modal verbs of boosters.

The present study identified discrepancies in the frequency and types of hedges and boosters employed by writers in thesis, thesis, and dissertation abstracts. Firstly, hedges are most frequently employed by writers at the undergraduate level. The utilization of hedges in the author's statement signifies the presence of uncertainty and imprecision, thereby allowing for the possibility of divergent interpretations from the reader. Additionally, hedges are characterized by their orientation towards context, as well as towards the writer and reader. This orientation reflects the application of hedges in abstract contexts.

The occurrence of hedges is dominated in the form of modal verbs. Getkham (2016) discovered that hedges are most frequently implemented with modal verbs. The employment of hedges, for instance, can serve as a rhetorical device to introduce ambiguity. (Getkham, 2016) conceptualizes hedging as a linguistic device that serves to introduce ambiguity, particularly in the context of intercultural communication across diverse cultural discourses. In summary, hedges serve as linguistic devices that convey caution or uncertainty regarding a claim, potentially indicating a lack of confidence on the part of the writer.

Secondly, the utilization of boosters is predominantly observed among doctoral-level writers. The manifestation of these boosters is predominantly characterized by lexical verbs. The credibility of the proposition is significantly bolstered by the incorporation of boosters. According to Holmes (1990), the utilization of boosters in scientific articles serves to convey a variety of nuanced meanings, including expressions of solidarity, evidentiary claims, and implied or accepted truths.

In his research, Hunston (1995) further reinforces this assertion, pointing out that verbs denoting reinforcement, which are characteristic of the use of boosters, serve to indicate a high degree of certainty grounded in empirical data. Of particular significance is the fact that this certainty is firmly anchored in the empirical findings themselves, rather than being contingent upon the persuasive abilities of the author. Consequently, the employment of intensifiers in academic discourse is inextricably linked to the evidential basis of claims, thereby enhancing the credibility and substantiation of assertions made within this context.

In the domain of linguistic analysis in academic discourse, it is imperative to differentiate between hedges and boosters, as their functions are distinct. The decision to employ hedges and boosters is not arbitrary; it is heavily influenced by different writing structures and characterizes different discourse communities. The selection of hedges and boosters in academic writing is not arbitrary; rather, it is strongly influenced by the distinct writing structures and rhetorical styles characteristic of each discourse community.

According to Fraser (2010) the strategic employment of hedges and boosters functions as a linguistic instrument, signifying the degree to which writers are dedicated to their assertions, both substantively and rhetorically. Consequently, the employment of these two devices mirrors the rhetorical strategies employed by writers to maintain a balance between demonstrating confidence and acknowledging the potential for ambiguity or uncertainty in their writing. These linguistic phenomena should not be regarded as mere textual embellishments; rather, they constitute a critical component of language that facilitates effective social interaction.

Through the strategic use of rhetorical devices such as hedges and boosters, writers can judiciously convey the extent of their confidence or skepticism regarding their claims, while adapting their linguistic style to the specific context. Therefore, hedges and boosters are significant tools in academic writing, as they demonstrate the writer's capacity to manage the dynamics of scientific discourse and adapt their communication to suit the demands of the communicative context.

Conclusion

A study of the use of hedges and boosters in the abstracts of theses, theses, and dissertations of Indonesian Language Education students was conducted. The results of the study indicate that each level of education shows a distinctive rhetorical pattern in conveying scientific claims. Hedges appear to be more frequently employed in thesis and dissertation abstracts. Students at these two levels tend to articulate their arguments with a certain degree of restraint, employing modal forms such as "can," "could," or "may" to express their assertions. This linguistic tendency is indicative of a mitigative or cautious attitude, characterized by a reluctance to make definitive claims or commitments.

This choice indicates that at the bachelor's and master's levels, writers are receptive to alternative interpretations of their findings and endeavor to avoid an overly authoritative stance. Conversely, doctoral students exhibited a divergent tendency. A higher frequency of the use of boosters is observed in dissertation abstracts, particularly in the form of lexical verbs such as "show," "prove," and "assert." This finding suggests that writers at this level exhibit heightened confidence in their claims and are motivated to persuade readers of the veracity and validity of their findings. Consequently, there is a transition in academic writing style concomitant with the level of education, from one that is characterized by caution and openness, towards a style that is marked by assertiveness and affirmation. This study goes beyond an analysis of the types of words used; it also examines the pragmatic functions of hedges and boosters. The findings indicate that the majority of their utilization is characterized by accuracy-oriented and writer-oriented functions. These functions serve to substantiate the accuracy of the data and to safeguard the writer's position from claims that are overly absolute. Conversely, the reader-oriented function, which prioritizes interpersonal interaction with the reader, manifests at a lower frequency.

The findings of the present study indicate that the comprehension and utilization of linguistic devices, such as hedges and boosters, evolve in accordance with students' academic maturity. Thesis writers tend to exercise greater caution when making claims, while dissertation writers often employ more robust and persuasive rhetorical strategies. The findings of this study carry significant implications for the pedagogy of academic writing, particularly in the context of cultivating students' rhetorical awareness to meet the demands of scientific communication. The study of hedges and boosters can facilitate students' development of arguments that are more precise and strategic, both in the articulation of uncertainty and in the reinforcement of confidence in their findings.

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