



Types and Functions of Hedges and Boosters in Graduate Students' Research Articles

Danu Angga Vebriyanto[✉], Januarius Mujiyanto, Sri Wuli Fitriati

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

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Abstract

Hedges and Boosters are important rhetorical devices for increasing or reducing the force of claims in academic writing. Compared to other aspects rhetorical patterns or devices in research articles, quite surprisingly the use of hedges and boosters in research articles has attracted little attention from researchers. This study aimed to investigate the use of hedges and boosters employed by graduate students in research articles. This study was a descriptive qualitative study of twenty research articles written by graduate students aiming at revealing the realization of types and functions of hedges and boosters as well as their relations based on the taxonomy of Hyland (1998) and Salager-Meyer (1997). The strategies were elaborated into five sub-research questions to seek for types, functions, and relation of hedges and boosters. The objects of the study were the research articles written by graduate students. The data were gathered through documentation. The findings revealed that there were seven types of hedges and eight types of boosters employed by students. Dealing with the functions of hedges and boosters, it was discovered that the graduate students employed four functions of hedges and three functions of boosters. Moreover, it was discovered that hedges and boosters tend to be clustered together to create harmonic combination. the present study suggests the EFL lecturers to pay attention to the significance of hedges and boosters to enrich the students' knowledge on the parts of discourse. It might become references for advisors to have many attentions on the students under their guidance.

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[✉] Correspondence Address:
 Kampus Universitas Negeri Semarang, Kelud, Semarang, 50233
 E-mail: danu.a.v@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Research articles are media for graduate students to openly put forward and communicate their proposition which are likely to support or negate other researchers' findings. Therefore, the employment of rhetorical devices such as cautious language as the acceptance of the graduate students' research contributions depend widely on how these are presented to the academic community. As part of rhetorical devices, hedges and boosters are essential. Hedges and boosters perform a vital role in report of academic research (Hashemi and Shirzadi, 2016, p.34) In order to secure acknowledgment of their findings and assertions, researchers present their proposition both confidently and cautiously (Hyland, 1998,2000, pp.1-2). Hedges such as *may*, *perhaps*, and *likely* refer to linguistic strategies which are used to reduce categorical commitment, express possibility rather than certainty, while boosters such as *clearly*, *obviously* and *of course*, on the other hand, refer to any linguistic devices and strategies which are employed to convey voice conviction, affirm a proposition confidently and proposing firm contention about a state of affairs (Hyland,1998,pp.2-3).

The study of hedges and boosters help to portrait an important component of academic argument since claims and argumentation are tried to be included by writers in their academic writing (Bruce, 2005, as cited in Tran, 2013). If the writers can present their claims both confidently and cautiously, they will be considered as having sufficient scientific skill and to be accepted as the member of scientific community he or she is attending. Nevertheless, hedges and boosters need to be employed proportionally across the text. Disproportionate (i.e. overuse of hedges) utilization of hedges in a text might also have unfavorable effect on the researcher's authority. The overuse of hedges can be considered as researchers' lack of scientific skills on the

addressed area. Researchers need to accentuate their proposition with some degree of certainty and persuasion (Peacock, 2006;p.62, Sanjaya, 2013).

Regarding the rhetorical functions inborn in hedges and boosters, there has been a growing interest on hedges and boosters in various research investigations. Studies aimed at investigating the use of hedges and boosters in research articles have largely examined English texts from different disciplinary fields. Other studies assess how hedges and boosters are utilized in English and in other languages.

In Indonesian context, with the exception of (Salichah, Irawati, & Basthomi, 2015; Sanjaya, 2013, 2015), studies of the use of hedges and boosters on English research articles written by Indonesian scholars are very little. Therefore, study on this area is still worth-investigating. Dealing with these facts, the presents study is going to investigate about the use of rhetorical devices (hedges and boosters) by Indonesian graduate students on their research articles. Another fact that can be traced is that Indonesian researchers likely face some problems and even rejection when they want to publish their research article on international Journals. It is possibly caused by the fact that their rhetorical pattern their rhetorical patterns do not match the common rhetorical English patterns (Adnan, 2009,pp.107-125). The present study is going to provide further investigation about the rhetorical pattern, particularly rhetorical devices (hedges and boosters), employed by Indonesian researchers. Furthermore, the objective of the present study is to investigate the types and functions of hedges and boosters as well as their relation in research articles written by graduate students.

METHODS

The present study employed qualitative method to collect and analyze data. The object of the study are types and boosters employed

graduate students in their research articles. There were 20 research articles analyzed in the present study. Each research articles were labeled as A1(research article 1) until A20. The first part of data analysis involves a careful investigation into the hedges and boosters markers used in the aforementioned data inspired from Salager-Meyer (1997), Hyland (1996) Crompton (1997) ,Vartalla (2001) and Hyland (2004). The next step is quantification of the qualitative data into counts and percentage of each of lexical and syntactic markers based on the occurrence of words regarded as hedges and boosters. The next is analyzing the basic pragmatic functions of lexical and syntactic hedges and boosters as used contextually in the data are interpreted by some theoretical concept of hedges and boosters. This builds a logical chain of evidence, noting causality and making inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, there are five main findings to answer the research questions, i.e. types of hedges, types of boosters, function of hedges, functions of boosters, and relation of hedges and boosters.

Types of Hedges

The present study found that all graduate students hedged their claims or propositions in their research articles. It means that graduate students soften or weaken the force of claims proposed on their research articles in order to avoid any possible negative feedback from readers. This result is in line with the result of studies conducted by Hyland (1996), Salager-Meyer (1994), and Vartalla (2001). They confirmed that hedges are having critical role and abundant in academic writing. In the present study, the discussion of hedges covered two aspects, namely types and functions. The types of hedges are elaborated in this part. The types of hedges as proposed by Salager -Meyer (1997), cover seven categorizations, namely; modal auxiliary verb, modal lexical verb, adjectival, adverbial and nominal phrases,

approximator of degree, quantity, frequency, and time, introductory phrases, if clauses and compound hedges. It was discovered that the seven types of hedges were employed by graduate students in their research articles.

The first type of hedges which was highly used by the graduate students is modal auxiliary verbs (68%). It comprised more than half of total hedging device. This result is different from the result study conducted by Hyland (1998) that found the highest type of hedges employed in the research articles was lexical verb. This difference could be affected by the fact that Hyland studied research articles written by native speaker while the present study investigated the research articles written by non-native speakers, in this case the present study investigated Indonesian graduate students' research articles. In the other hand, the similar result was spotted on the study by Kazemi (2016) and Salichah (2015), they discovered that the modal auxiliary verbs were highly used by non-native speakers, in this case, he investigated research articles written by Iranian and Indonesian students. The high proportion of the use of modal auxiliary verb can explain that it is the most familiar type of hedges typically taught to and digested by EFL learners. Furthermore, modal auxiliary verbs tend to be used to avoid over generalization and reduce the directness of proposition. This fact can be observed in the following example.

The use of gambits in the debate might contribute to each part of students' debate structure. (A1)

The example above was taken from the excerpt of A1. The use of modal auxiliary verb "might" above is associated with probability and possibility. By the use of "might", the writer tried to soften his or her categorical proposition so that the overstatement can be avoided. It confirms the study of Salager-Meyer (1997) and Kazemi (2016) which proposed that medal auxiliary verb was employed by writers to mitigate their commitment to certain proposition or claim. In the excerpt above, the writer proposed that the use of gambit had possible

contribution for each part of students' debate structure.

The second type of hedges that was used the most by all graduate students is modal lexical verb. The use of modal lexical verbs show that the writers just delivered their personal opinion or idea on their propositions. It confirms study by Salager-Meyer (1997) which proposed that modal lexical hedges can express the writers' personal opinion towards or on the contrary, it expresses their strong belief. In the present study, this type of hedges was realized linguistically by the use of words such as seem, appear, assume, imply and suggest. It was discovered that the word "seem" had the highest proportion. This result is different from the result study conducted by Hyland (1998) which found that the most commonly occurring lexical verb employed in the research articles was "suggest". It can be seen that the writer employed the modal lexical verb "seem" to helm him or her to propose his or her proposition about the possible main concern of speech. By the use of "seem" in the sentence, the force of writer's proposition was softened. The use of word "appeared" in the sentences tends to have the same role as the use of modal lexical verb "seem". In this case, it was employed by the writer to show his own view about new information in his or her claim so that the overstatement could be avoided.

The third type of hedges which was utilized by graduate students is approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time. This type of hedges is used to indicate that the exact figures cannot be mentioned in the writers' proposition precisely. It confirms the study conducted by Salager-Meyer (1997) and Vartalla (2001) which proposed that approximators of degree, quantity, frequency, and time are commonly used for indicating that "the exact figures are irrelevant or unavailable or when the state of knowledge does not allow the scientists to be more precise". In the present study, this type of hedges was realized linguistically by the use of words such as often, usually, and generally. It was discovered that the word "often" had the highest proportion. It was

shown that the writers did not mention the exact degree of frequency of how often the teacher repeated their questions and also the display of low motivation to read of poor readers.

Functions of Hedges

The next discussion is about the functions of hedges realized in graduate students' research articles. The theory of functions of hedges are based on the study conducted by Hyland (1998) that proposed the theory of poly-pragmatic functions of hedges. It has been discovered in the research findings that all graduate students employed certain functions of hedges in their research articles. It was revealed that writer-oriented hedge function had the highest percentage of function of hedge compared to the others. There are 636 sentences written by graduate students on their research articles contained the realization of writer-oriented hedge function. The percentage is 54%. The second highest frequency of function of hedges is reliability hedges with the frequency 399 times (34%). It is followed by reader-oriented hedge on the third place and attribute hedge on the last place. As the lowest place, attribute hedge can be found in 43 sentences produced in research articles with the proportion 3.7%. This result is different from the study conducted by Musa (2014) which proposed that the reliability hedge function had the highest proportion followed by accuracy hedge function on the second place. This difference is possibly caused by the fact that the present study investigated research articles written by non-native speakers while the study conducted by Musa (2014) investigated research articles written by native speakers.

The first function of hedges that was analyzed in this discussion is writer-oriented hedge. In this function, writers mitigate their claims by reducing their responsibility on performing act on their proposition in order to avoid any possible negative feedback from readers. Agentless passive, impersonal subject and attribution to the source are served to realized linguistically this kind of function. The highest language device used on the present study is agentless passive. It confirms the study

conducted by Hyland (1998). The realization of writer-oriented can be seen in the following example.

- (1) Further, it is explained that the careful use of two or more observers can lead to a more valid and reliable data. (A3)
- (2) Even so, the transcription in this research was adjusted into a quiet different form (A13)
- (3) The result analysis of the research is still a dialogue form. It means that dialogue can be used to teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). (A17)

It can be seen from the examples above that the use of passive voice could minimize the involvement of the writers on performing act which was in turn it can help them to mitigate their claim. Another language device that was used by graduate students to fulfil writer-oriented function is impersonal subject. It can be observed on example 13 and 14 that graduate students employed impersonal subjects and also epistemic lexical verb to show the tentativeness of their claims as well as to decrease the force of their proposition. These examples also indicate that the writers were not prepared to personally guarantee the proposition. It seems that they avoid to be seen fully and personally committed to truth of their proposed claim.

- (4) Qualitative research tends to analyse their data inductively. (A2)
- (5) This fact implies that the difference of engagement adopted by the speakers was relied on entertain and attribute in the last speech. (A4)

The second function of hedges that was analysed in the present study is reliability hedges. It has been revealed that reliability hedges served as the second highest category of function of hedges employed by the graduate students in their research articles. In the present study, reliability hedges served as tools functioned to convey the writers' assessment and confidence toward the truth of their claims or propositions in order to avoid overstatement. It was in line with the result of the study proposed by Hyland (1998) and Musa (2014). Furthermore, the language devices which are

used to realize this function in the present study are modal auxiliary verbs and adverbs of certainty. It was also revealed that modal lexical verbs are mostly used by the graduate students in their research articles. In the above examples, the writers tried to propose their claims by indicating the degree of probability which was done by the use of modal auxiliary "may" and "might" and it was used to shield them against overstatement. There was also an interesting finding showed in examples. It was revealed that in one sentence can contain two categories of functions of hedges, writer-oriented hedge and reliability hedge. the writer-oriented hedge was realized by the use of attribution to the source and the reliability hedge was realized by the use of modal auxiliary verb "may". Reliability hedges were also realized by the use of adverb of certainty.

The next category of function of hedge is reader-oriented hedges. By using reader-oriented hedges, the graduate students tried to indicate that their proposed claims were their personal opinion. The readers were given a room to be involved in the discussion. This kind of function was further realised by the use of first person-pronoun and if clause. In the present study, it was discovered that the use of first-person pronoun was higher than if-clause. The writers used the pronoun "I" and "we" on high proportion. It can be seen in the following examples that the writer employed the subject pronoun "I" in their proposition to indicate his or her own act as well as opinion. Moreover, the use of subject pronoun "we" indicated that the writer seeks to involve the readers on the discussion. The other linguistic realization of reader-oriented hedge was the use of if clause. It can be seen on example 22 that if clause was used by the writer to involve readers. The writer proposed a claim as one possibility among many alternative possibilities.

Types of Boosters

Instead of mitigating the force of their propositions, the graduate students also strengthened their propositions by using boosters. Based on the research finding

mentioned before, it was discovered that all graduate students employed certain types of boosters in their claims or propositions. The boosters were generally used by the graduate students to increase the degree of persuasion and certainty of their proposition so that the acceptance from the reader or the research articles can be achieved. The types of boosters as proposed by Hinkel (2002) and Demir (2017) covered 8 categorizations, namely verbal boosters, certainty modal and semi-modals, adverbs or emphatics, intensifier or amplifier, quantifier, adjective boosters, noun boosters, and universal pronoun. In the present study, it was discovered that almost all of the graduate students employed certain of those types of boosters.

The first type of booster which was highly used by the graduate students in their research articles was certainty modal and semi modal with the percentage up to 33%. This result is in line with study of the use of boosters by native speakers conducted by Hyland (199b) which stated that the most frequent boosters were “will”, “show”, and “the fact that”. The different result was explored by Demir (2017) which discovered that native writers and non-native writers highly used adjective boosters and adverb boosters. Dealing with the linguistic device that was highly used was “should”. It has the percentage up to 52%. The second highest modal verbs employed here was “will” (33%).

The following example shows that the writers increase the force on their propositions in order to indicate that the truth of the claims can be regarded as generally accepted knowledge in the discipline.

- (6) The word “replacement” is not appropriate in the form of word. It should be replaced into “replacing”. Then it becomes “activity of replacing”. (A20)
- (7) The data analysis revealed that students should behave positively in term of affective domain. (A12)
- (8) By understanding the generic structure of debate or debate structure, the students will be able to deliver their

speech structurally, well- manage and understandably. (A1)

The second type of boosters discussed in this chapter is verbal booster. This type of booster is regarded as the second highly used type of booster because it has the percentage up to 25%. It realized linguistically by the use of verb such as show (50%), find (32%), indicate (14%) and demonstrate (3%). The use of those verbs on research articles can be seen in the following examples. It demonstrates that the writers used the verb “show, find, and indicate” to increase their commitment towards the propositions to persuade the readers to the truth of their claims. The claims that were proposed by the writers were also built on evidence and data they have provided. The following examples revealed interesting finding since the verbal boosters and hedges can be clustered together within a sentence. The presence of hedges (attribution to the source) could supported the verbal boosters (show, found, and indicate) to perform their function to persuade the reader that their claims are based on the facts.

- (9) The finding showed that there was no student who had an accurate translation. (A3)
- (10) Based on the analysis, I have found that the diphthongs that were influenced by Serawai Melayunese dialect. (A8)
- (11) Meanwhile, the finding of this research indicates that students agreed with RP technique being implemented in the class discussion. (A12)

The third type of boosters explored in this chapter is universal pronoun. In the present study, universal pronoun was realized linguistically by the use of “all, every, and no”. it was discovered that the pronoun “all” has the highest proportion of all universal pronoun employed by the graduate students. It supports the study conducted by Salichah (2015). The use of “all” dominated more than half percent (55%). It was followed by “every” in the second place and “no” in the third place. It was discovered that the use of universal pronoun by

the writers is for boosting its persuasive qualities as well as showing certainty.

Functions of Boosters

This chapter provides the discussion about the functions of boosters employed by graduate students in their research articles. Based on the research finding above, it can be seen that almost all graduate students in the present study employed certain functions of boosters in their propositions. The functions of boosters employed by graduate students were showing evidential truth, showing certainty and showing accepted truth. This result is in line with the study conducted by Skelton (1997), Hyland (1998). Furthermore, it can be seen on the research finding that the percentage of the function of showing accepted truth is up to 43% compared to another functions (showing certainty (32%), showing evidential truth (25%)). This new finding can be regarded as the novelty of the present study since there hasn't been any study which explore about it.

The first function of boosters discovered in the present study is for showing evidential or implicit truth. In the present study, it was discovered that this particular function was realized by the use of verbal boosters. The realization of showing evidential or implicit truth in research articles can be seen in the following examples.

(12) The result of the analysis on the students' Indonesian-English translation shows that there are 21 translation errors of 26 error categories based on the ATA's Standard of Translation Error. (A20)

(13) Based on the analysis, I have found that the diphthongs that were influenced by Serawai Melayunese dialect. (A8)

The examples above shows that the writers employed verbal boosters such as "shows" and "found" to indicate that their propositions are based on the facts or the evidence. This can lead to the increase of the truth value of their proposition so that the

purpose of persuading the readers can be fulfilled.

The second function of boosters discovered in the present study is for showing certainty. This function is realized by the use of intensifier, quantifier and universal pronoun. In the present study, it was discovered that this function was highly realized by the use of universal pronouns (51%). As in the following examples, the writers employed universal pronoun "every" and "all" in their propositions to increase its persuasive qualities as well as showing certainty.

(14) English as international language need to be understood in every particular area where knowledge is distributed, not only in literature area. (A2)

(15) In the way to practice English, students need to express all the words meaningfully (A15)

The last function of boosters discussed in the present study is showing accepted truth. This function was highly used by the graduate students. It can be seen on the research finding that the percentage of the function of showing accepted truth is up to 43% compared to another functions (showing certainty (32%), showing evidential truth (25%)). This new finding can be regarded as the novelty of the present study since there hasn't been any study which explore about it. The function of showing the truth which already generally accepted in the discipline was realized by the utilization of modals and semi-modals, adverbial boosters, adjectival boosters, and noun boosters. It has been discovered that certainty modal and semi-modals were occurred frequently to realize this function. The percentage is up to 84%. The realization of the function of showing the truth which already generally accepted in the discipline is depicted in the following examples. The following example shows that the writers increase the force on their propositions by the use of certainty modal "should" in order to indicate that the truth of the claims can be regarded as generally accepted knowledge in the discipline.

(16) The word "replacement" is not appropriate in the form of word. It

should be replaced into “replacing”. Then it becomes “activity of replacing”. (A20)

- (17) The data analysis revealed that students should behave positively in term of affective domain. (A12)

Relation of Hedges and Boosters in Graduate Students' Research Articles

The interesting aspect that was explored in the present study is the fact that hedges and boosters can be found clustered together in a single sentence. Hedges and boosters have different communicative functions within a text. Hedges are employed by writers to decrease the force of their claims or propositions, while boosters are used by writers to strengthen the force of their claim. Although it seems that they have contradictory function, based on the research finding of the present study, hedges and boosters can be found clustered together within a sentence to create mutually inclusive combination.

In the present study, it was found that impersonal subject which represents the function of hedges and verbal boosters are the most frequently found in combination. The occurrence of those combined device is 17 times. The combination of impersonal subject and verbal booster can be seen in the following examples. In the example 38 and 39, it can be observed that the writers employed the impersonal subjects “the result of the study” and “the findings” to avoid personal responsibility for the propositional truth while at the same time, they used verbal boosters “show” to show that their claims or propositions were true or evidential, not just judgement claim.

- (18) "The results of the study showed that in each class session, 62% to 73% of the class time was devoted to teacher talk and almost 20% to 25% was allocated to student talk with the rest of the class time devoted to other tasks such as the groups works to related questions or issues raised by the teacher to the whole class." (A6)

- (19) "The findings show that that most of the texts have elaborating relationship with the images because they give detail information about text." (A11)

CONCLUSION

There are 5 conclusions that can be drawn in the present study. The first conclusion is dealing with the types of hedges employed by graduate students in their research articles. it was discovered that the graduate students employed all 7 types of hedges in their research articles. Those seven types of hedges are modal lexical verb hedges, modal auxiliary verb hedges, adjectival adverbial nominal modal phrase hedges, adverbial modal phrase hedges, nominal modal phrase hedges, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, introductory phrase hedges, if-clause, and compound hedges. The first type of hedges which was highly used by the graduate students is modal auxiliary verbs (68%). It comprised more than half of total hedging device.

The second conclusion is dealing with the functions of hedges employed by graduate students in their research articles. it was discovered that all graduate students employed certain functions of hedges in their research articles. those functions of hedges are reader-oriented hedges, writer-oriented hedges, attribute and reliability hedges. Reader-oriented hedge category deals with the function of hedges for allowing a space for readers to involve in discussion about certain topic discussed by writer and also indicating claims or propositions as provisional not permanent and final. Writer-oriented hedges were used by the writers for avoiding any possible falsification of the proposition. Writer-oriented hedges was realized by writers' attempt to lessen their involvement in the proposition and maintain a distance from it.

The third conclusion is dealing with types of boosters employed by graduate students in their research articles. in the present study, it was discovered that all of the graduate students employed certain types of boosters in their claims or propositions. The types of boosters as

proposed by Hinkel (2002) and Demir (2017) covered 8 categorizations, namely verbal boosters, certainty modal and semi-modals, adverbs or emphatics, intensifier or amplifier, quantifier, adjective boosters, noun boosters, and universal pronoun. In the present study, it was discovered that almost all of the graduate students employed certain of those types of boosters. The type of booster which was highly used by the graduate students in their research articles was certainty modal and semi modal with the percentage up to 33%.

The fourth conclusion is about the function of boosters employed by graduate students in their research articles. . Based on the research finding above, it can be seen that almost all graduate students in the present study employed certain functions of boosters in their propositions. The functions of boosters employed by graduate students were showing evidential truth, showing certainty and showing accepted truth.

The last conclusion is about the relation of hedges and boosters in the graduate students' research articles. The interesting aspect that was explored in the present study is the fact that hedges and boosters can be found clustered together in single sentence. Hedges and boosters have different communicative functions within a text. Hedges are employed by writers to decrease the force of their claims or propositions, while boosters are used by writers to strengthen the force of their claim. Although it seems that they have contradictory function, based on the research finding of the present study, hedges and boosters can be found clustered together within a sentence to create mutually inclusive combination. In the present study, it was found that impersonal subject which represents the function of hedges and verbal boosters are the most frequently found in combination. The occurrence of those combined device is 17 times.

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