

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HEDGING AND BOOSTING DEVICES IN WRITTEN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

Hedging and boosting strategies are very essential part of written academic discourse to express writer's politeness, uncertainty or persuasion. The research argues that hedging and boosting devices are employed frequently for different purposes like expressing caution, epistemic uncertainty or presenting arguments with greater certainty and authority. This study investigates the use of hedging and boosting devices in academic discourse in order to identify their linguistic features, pragmatic functions, and frequency of usage.

**Key words:** boosters, hedges, written discourse, academic discourse, academic writing,

### Introduction

Academic discourse is not merely a transmission of information; it is a complex interaction between writers and readers. Writers are required to present their arguments convincingly while maintaining a balance between certainty and caution. In this case, there are two essential linguistic strategies called hedging and boosting that facilitates this balance. Hedging is a linguistic device that is used to express uncertainty, tentativeness, or politeness (e.g., *may, might, possible*), whereas boosting involves expressions that convey certainty and emphasis (e.g., *clearly, definitely, undoubtedly*) [3: 471]. These devices help writers position themselves in relation to their claims and their audience. As noted in previous research, academic writers must carefully manage their stance to gain acceptance within their discourse community [2: 52].

This study aims to explore how hedging and boosting devices are used in written academic discourse. It focuses on their functions, distribution, and differences, providing insights into how writers construct meaning and negotiate knowledge claims.

### Literature review

Hedging has long been recognized as a defining feature of academic writing. According to foundational work in the field, hedges allow writers to present claims with appropriate caution and avoid overgeneralization [3: 458]. Later studies expanded this perspective by emphasizing the interpersonal and pragmatic functions of hedging in maintaining politeness and mitigating claims [4: 150]. Hyland argues that hedging is central to academic argumentation because it enables writers to present propositions

as opinions rather than facts, thereby opening space for negotiation with readers [1: 178].

Boosting, although less extensively studied, is equally significant. It serves to reinforce claims and express the writer's confidence in the validity of their arguments. Boosters such as *clearly* and *demonstrate* help establish authority and persuade readers [2: 63]. Previous studies also indicate that the use of hedging and boosting varies across disciplines and linguistic backgrounds. Non-native writers, particularly in EFL contexts, may either overuse boosters or underuse hedges, leading to imbalance in academic tone [4: 155].

Despite extensive research on hedging, fewer studies have systematically compared hedging and boosting within the same analytical framework. This study addresses this gap.

## **Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative discourse analysis.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

A corpus of 20 research articles was selected from peer-reviewed international journals in linguistics, education, and social sciences.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The analysis involved:

- Identifying hedging and boosting devices
- Classifying them into categories (modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives, lexical verbs)
- Calculating their frequency
- Interpreting their contextual functions

The analytical framework is based on established models of metadiscourse and stance [2: 49].

## **Results**

### **4.1 Frequency of Hedging and Boosting**

**The analysis shows that hedging devices account for approximately 65% of stance markers, while boosting devices represent 35%. This confirms the dominant role of hedging in academic discourse [1: 182].**

Hedging devices

<b>Sub-type</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Function in Academic Writing</b>
Modal Verbs	may, might, could	Express possibility and reduce certainty

Adverbs	possibly, likely	Indicate probability and soften claims
Lexical Verbs	suggest, appear	Present claims as interpretation rather than fact
Phrasal Expressions	it seems that, it is possible that	Maintain impersonal tone and cautious stance

#### Boosting devices

Adverbs	clearly, obviously	Emphasize certainty and guide reader interpretation
Lexical Verbs	demonstrate, prove	Strengthen validity of arguments
Adjectives	certain, evident	Convey confidence and authorial authority

#### Discussion

The findings highlight the complementary roles of hedging and boosting in academic writing. Hedging allows writers to mitigate claims and maintain academic politeness, while boosting helps emphasize key points and assert authority.

The predominance of hedging reflects the cautious nature of scholarly communication, where claims must be presented tentatively to invite acceptance rather than confrontation [3: 472].

At the same time, boosting is strategically employed to reinforce arguments, particularly when presenting results or conclusions. Effective academic writing requires a careful balance between these two strategies [1: 185]. An imbalance—either excessive hedging or overuse of boosting—can negatively affect the credibility and persuasiveness of academic texts.

#### Conclusion

This study examined the use of hedging and boosting devices in written academic discourse. The results confirm that both strategies are integral to effective academic communication. Hedging is more frequently used due to its role in expressing caution and politeness, while boosting is applied selectively to emphasize strong claims. Together, they enable writers to construct balanced and persuasive arguments. Future research could explore cross-cultural variations in the use of these devices or extend the analysis to spoken academic discourse.

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