

A Comparative Study of Boosters between Genders in the Introduction Section

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Abstract

Although there are several studies conducted by linguistics researchers on the differences between the linguistic styles of female and male writers, there are not many studies conducted on the use of boosters in academic writing. Boosters are used to convince and emphasize statements made. This study analyzes the regularity of boosters used in the Introduction section of Ten Research Articles (RAs). The influence of gender differences in the use of specific boosters will also be looked at. A document analysis method was chosen as the 10 RAs were analyzed as the corpus in this study. The findings showed that male writers used more boosters than female writers. Even though the number of words for the female writers was more than the male writers, it did not affect the number of boosters used in the Introduction section of those articles. In conclusion, it can be deduced from the analysis that both the female and male writers used boosters to highlight their claims or their beliefs regardless of their gender, while the use of boosters was more evident among the male RAs as the male writers seemed to be more direct in illustrating and mentioning their claims.

Keywords: belief, boosters, gender, solidarity

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Introduction

There are several studies by linguistics researchers on the differences between the linguistic styles of female and male writers (Mahamod, 2019; Ali & Krish, 2016; Keong, Gill & Noorezam, 2012; Hamid, Yasin, Bakar, Keong & Jalaluddin, 2008; Amir, Abidin, Darus & Ismail, 2012). A simple comparison on the use of some elements of academic discourse could also elucidate this issue. Hewings, Lillis & Vladimirou (2010) stated that,

“research on aspects of the interpersonal nature of academic writing has focused on features such as hedges, boosters, pronoun choices, and citation variously categorized under labels such as evaluation, stance, and metadiscourse. These textual features are a manifestation of scholarly practices which help to constitute and maintain academic communities.” (p. 102)

However, compared with the other features, there are not many studies conducted on boosters in academic writing. According to Hyland (1998), boosters are words that are used to support a writer's statement or argument. There are two ways to do this:

“Firstly, it served to emphasize the strength of the writer's commitment to a proposition and thereby sought to convince the reader by their belief in the logical force of the argument. The second way that writers employed boosters was to comment impersonally on the validity of their propositions. Boosters were either used to stress the strength of warrants, suggesting the efficacy of the relationship between data and claims” (Hyland 1998, pp. 21-22).

Boosters are generally used to convince other people about the claim that a writer is making and also to give emphasis on the statement made.

Lorés-Sanz, Mur-Deñas, and Lafuente-Millán (2010) mentioned that boosters are generally seen in applied linguistics rather than business reports. The use of ‘stance markers’ is frequently found in reports rather than Research Articles (RAs). There is still a gap in this area of research as little research has been conducted on boosters. Therefore, in this study, the analysis examines the regularity of boosters used in the Introduction section of ten RAs. The influence of gender differences in the use of specific boosters was also examined.

Hence, this study was conducted to analyze the regularity of boosters used in the Introduction section of ten RAs; to examine the influence of gender differences on the use of specific boosters of ten RAs; and, to determine how boosters influence the way of writing in the ten RAs. The significance of this study is it could shed light on the differences in academic writing styles, particularly on the use of boosters in the academic writing of both male and female writers.

Literature Review

Boosters and hedges are often seen being discussed together by most researchers (e.g., Bacang, Rillo & Alieto, 2019; Akbas & Hardman, 2018; Zafar, 2018; Batool, Majeed & Zahra, 2019). Hyland (2009) stated that hedges are often employed by writers to create “a credible representation of themselves and their work by claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their

material and acknowledging alternative views in some appropriate ways” (p. 74) while Hyon (2008) identified both hedges and boosters as linguistic strategies deployed by writers who wish to convey their stands (as cited in Hyland, 2004). They are used to ‘strengthen claims’ by elucidating the writers’ stance of certainty and stressing the statement that they are making with three primary functions which are “Function 1: strengthening the evaluation of the faculty member; Function 2: entertaining readers; and Function 3: expressing solidarity” (p. 183). Yeung (2007) mentioned that boosters are used in business reports specifically to make them sound logical. They are also generally used to add emphasis on adverbs or adjectives to strengthen any claim made.

As mentioned by Kuteeva (2011), based on the analysis of some corpora, not many boosters were found, as she was only able to identify ‘of course’ and ‘obvious’ as the frequently used boosters. According to Vassileva (2001), Salager-Meyer's (1994) classification of boosters is not that clear to her either, so she has used

“Chafe's (1985) treatment of the means of knowledge representation and include classes of boosters termed as ‘solidarity’ (the case when the author claims shared knowledge with the audience) and ‘belief’ (when the author states unequivocally that he/she is convinced of what he/she is saying)” (p. 4).

It allows writers to express their beliefs and solidarity with the audience. Undoubtedly boosters are less commonly used by academic writers. Although it is not a very common sight, it indicates the writers’ confidence and certainty in generating and compiling their ideas and claims that they made.

An example given by Lewin (2005) to differentiate hedges and boosters on both certainty and uncertainty, for examples, ‘I am sure the earth is round’ as well as ‘I am not sure the earth is round,’ where Lewin concurred with Halliday (1985) and Skelton (1997) who believed that those are examples of hedges. However, Hyland (1998) regards it as a way to express confidence or certainty as boosters rather than hedges. The different views are more of subjective interpretation by researchers whose actual intention of using either hedges or boosters, are only known by the writers of the articles themselves.

Boosters may occur at different parts of the sentences which could also set the tone of an article that the writers would like to highlight. Recski (2005) had used tone ranks introduced by Halliday (1970) in his study to identify boosters which are:

- i) at clause rank: through mood and modality
- ii) at group rank:
 - a) in the verbal group: through a person
 - b) in the nominal group: through attitude
 - c) in the adverbial group: through a comment
- iii) at word rank: through lexical register (p. 12)

Recski added that comparatives and boosters are used to stress certainties that the writers would want to convey by using boosters like ‘greater, better, more, desirable, really and extremely.’

Hyland (2008) did a study on Swales' writing where the latter was found to use boosters to modify his way of conveying what he was writing as what Martin (2000) referred to as 'turning up the volume' to stress the strength of his certainty (as cited in Hyland, 2008). In a study on graduates' writing styles, Tardy (2005) noticed a qualitative change in most of the students' writing. The students used more hedges in their early years of studies as they were unsure how to write appropriately rather than to conceal any weaknesses that they had. They used more boosters later as they became more confident in their writing, indicating their certainty in the statements made.

Examples of boosters are 'obvious and of course' (Kuteva, 2011); 'greater, better, more, desirable, really and extremely' (Recski, 2005); and 'will, the fact that, show (that), it is clear/clearly, actually, indeed, always, obvious(ly)' and 'of course' (Hyland, 1998). Therefore, for this particular study, the examples of the 21 boosters that were gathered through various RAs, like Kuteva (2011), Recski (2005), Hyland (1998), and other books are 'greater, better, more, desirable, really, extremely, certainly, obviously, clearly/clear, show (that), the fact that, prove/proven, undoubtedly, definite, confirm, always, will, actually, of course, indeed' and 'demonstrate'. These examples are categorized under two (2) categories which are 'solidarity' and 'belief' categories (Chafe, 1985, as cited in Vassileva, 2001), as shown in the Results section later. Thus, it would also be interesting to see the regularity of boosters used in the Introduction section of ten RAs and whether there is an influence of gender differences in the use of specific boosters. As mentioned by Lorés-Sanz, et.al (2010), boosters are generally seen in applied linguistics rather than business reports. The use of 'stance markers' is also frequently found in reports rather than in Research Articles (RAs) and thus, boosters in this area are less and it would be significant that the gap is addressed in this research.

Methods

A total of ten RAs were used as the corpus in this study. The corpora were taken from several journal websites (refer to Appendix A). Five (5) of the journals were written by female writers and the other five (5) were written by male writers. Only the Introduction section in all journals was selected to be analyzed. An in-depth analysis of the function and regularity of boosters was carried out to verify the distinction between female and male writers in writing RAs. The influence of gender differences in the functions and the use of specific boosters were also highlighted. All findings will be discussed in the Discussion section of this study and the results are highlighted in tabulated forms (please refer to Tables 1 and 2 in the Result section of this study) for ease of understanding. Table 1 consists of boosters that are found in the selected ten RAs where the list and categories of boosters are gathered from Kuteva (2011), Recski (2005), Hyland (1998), Chafe (1985) cited in Vassileva (2001), and other researchers as well, based on their research that has been carried out before. Table 2 consists of the number of words in the Introduction section of all the ten RAs, the Mean, and the number of boosters' occurrences according to gender.

Results

Based on several scholars and other previous studies, for examples like Kuteva (2011), Recski (2005), Hyland (1998), and Vassileva (2001); which Vassileva's categories of boosters were cited from Chafe (1985) that have been mentioned earlier; boosters can be categorized into two (2) categories which are:

- i) 'solidarity' (the case when the author claims shared knowledge with the audience) – for examples: greater, better, more, desirable, really, extremely, always, will, and actually.
- ii) 'belief' (when the author states unequivocally that he/she is absolutely convinced of what he/she is saying) – for examples: undoubtedly, definite, confirms, prove/proven, demonstrate, certainly, obviously, clearly, show (that), the fact that, of course, and indeed.

The percentage of boosters as listed above that are used in the Introduction section of the ten RAs are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 *Frequency of boosters found in the Introduction section of the ten RAs between female and male writers*

Categories	Female							Male						
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	Total	%	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	Total	%
Solidarity														
*greater	-	-	-	1	-	1	2.4%	-	-	-	2	-	2	5.0%
better	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
*more	-	-	1	2	1	4	9.8%	1	-	-	5	-	6	14.7%
desirable	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
really	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
*extremely	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	2.4%
*always	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	3	-	-	-	1	4	9.8%
*will	1	-	1	1	-	3	7.3%	-	8	-	-	-	8	19.5%
actually	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
Total	1	0	2	4	1	8	19.5%	4	9	0	7	1	21	51.4%
Belief														
undoubtedly	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
*definite	-	-	-	-	1	1	2.4%	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
confirm	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
prove	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
*demonstrate	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2.4%
*certainly	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2.4%
obviously	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
*clearly	1	-	1	-	-	2	5.0%	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
*show(that)	-	1	-	-	-	1	2.4%	-	1	-	-	-	1	2.4%
*the fact that	1	-	1	-	1	3	7.3%	1	-	-	-	-	1	2.4%
*of course	-	-	-	1	-	1	2.4%	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
indeed	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-
Total	2	1	2	1	2	8	19.5%	1	1	1	1	0	4	9.6%
Grand Total	3	1	4	5	3	16	39.0%	5	10	1	8	1	25	61.0%

Note 1. The boosters that were identified in the ten selected RAs

In Table 1, it can be seen that boosters were used forty-one times in total by both female and male writers based on the ten RAs that were analyzed. The boosters identified were greater, more, extremely, always, will, definite, demonstrate, certainly, clearly, show (that), the fact that, and of course. Out of the twenty-one boosters listed in the table, however, only twelve of the boosters found in the ten RAs were analyzed. The boosters that were used frequently were ‘will’ which occurred eleven times (26.8%), followed by ‘more’ about ten times (24.5%), ‘always’ and ‘the fact that’ with four occurrences (9.8% each), ‘greater’ which occurred about three times

(7.4%), ‘clearly’ and ‘show(that)’ occurred two times (5% each), and ‘extremely, definite, demonstrate, certainly and of course’ which only occurred only once each (2.4%).

In the analysis of the selected ten RAs that are listed in the Appendix section of this study, it can also be seen that the male writers used more boosters with twenty-five occurrences (61.0%) whereas female writers used sixteen occurrences of boosters (39.0%). There are differences between female and male writers with the choice of boosters’ category where females tended to use more of the ‘belief’ category which occurred eight times (19.5%) than male writers with only four occurrences (9.6%). For the ‘solidarity’ category, the male writers used more boosters in this category with twenty-one occurrences (51.4%) than females with only seen about eight times of usage (19.5%).

The total word count for the Introduction section of the ten selected RAs, the Mean, and the occurrence of boosters according to gender are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. *Word counts, Mean and number of boosters’ occurrences according to gender*

RA	Word counts for Introduction section	Total no. of words (by gender)	Mean of boosters (by gender)	Occurrence of boosters (by gender)
Female 1 (F1)	458	3277	Mean = 3.2 (based on 5 female writers)	1 booster for every 204.81 words
Female 2 (F2)	696			
Female 3 (F3)	1073			
Female 4 (F4)	631			
Female 5 (F5)	419			
Male 1 (M1)	434	2976	Mean = 5.0 (based on 5 male writers)	1 booster for every 119.04 words
Male 2 (M2)	935			
Male 3 (M3)	283			
Male 4 (M4)	1109			
Male 5 (M5)	215			

Although F3 and M4 showed a high number of word count for their Introduction sections, the number of word counts did not actually affect the number of boosters used since both F4 and M2 had the highest number of boosters used in their gender group respectively although their word counts were not that high.

A comparison between female and male writers in this small-scale study shows that the total number of words for all the female writers was 3277 words with a Mean score of 3.2 occurrences of boosters, whereas for male writers, the total number of words was 2976 words. The Mean score for male writers was 5.0. It is interesting to see that although the female group yielded a higher number of word count in their articles, the male writers’ Mean analysis for boosters yielded higher than that of the female writers’.

For the female writers, a booster occurred every 204.81 words and for the male writers, the occurrence of boosters was at every 119.04 words per boosters. Although the male writers had fewer words in their articles, they used more than half of the total boosters identified from the ten RAs than the female writers.

However, this result should not be generalized into a universal assumption or conclusion that all other articles will have the same result as this study only analyzed ten RAs. This is just a preliminary study and a platform for other large-scale corpora to be analyzed for future research.

Discussion

The Regularity of Boosters Used in the Introduction Section of ten RAs

From the analysis of the ten RAs of both female and male writers, there are only twelve most frequently used boosters out of the twenty-one identified by other researchers with a total of forty-one occurrences of boosters. This particular study which only used a small number of corpus shows that the number of words and their length does not affect the actual number of boosters used. Moreover, in comparison to hedges, boosters are relatively few found in RA as stated by Kuteeva (2011). The examples of boosters that were used in the analyzed ten Ras are as follows:

‘Solidarity’ category:

5) My informants quickly came to the belief that university study made greater demands of reading, writing and listening than it did of speaking. (F4)

ii) I begin by considering how patterns of attitude correspond to different kinds of arguments and then attend more closely to how attitudinal meanings radiate out from any explicit expression of attitude. (F5)

iii) The investigation of both of these can be extremely useful in ESP curriculum design. (M2)

iv) Vocabulary items are not always single items or simply “content words”. (M5)

‘Belief’ category:

5) The last two decades of research on academic writing have demonstrated that written academic genres are not purely objective, impersonal, and informational as had once been believed. (M3)

ii) As such, the functions of lectures include, but are certainly not limited to, introducing key theories, concepts, and research. (M4)

iii) This shortcoming is lexicalized in the previous sentence and serves as a cohesive device; at the same time, it clearly expresses the attitude of the writer towards the Guidelines. (F1)

iv) Supported by this methodology, other studies also show that North American university classes display linguistic features of both face-to-face conversation and written academic prose. (F2)

v) The fact that the concepts of genre, discourse analysis, textography, community, and consciousness-raising have now established themselves, and in many cases supplanted these earlier ideas, is testament to Johns' defining influence on the field. (M1)

The functions of boosters are to elucidate claims, state findings, and also to show the writers' level of confidence and clarity on certain issues including statements that they have made. Hyon (2008) also stated that boosters are generally used to strengthen claims and stress the statement that they are making concerning three main functions (strengthening the evaluation of the faculty member; entertaining readers; expressing solidarity). However, in the study of the ten RAs, only Functions 1 and 3 are applicable. There are only twelve boosters found to have been in use (29.3%) which shows the belief that the writers have in strengthening their evaluation. On

the other hand, the highest number of boosters comes from expressing solidarity with 29 occurrences (70.7%) altogether.

The Influence of Gender Differences in the Use of Specific Boosters of ten RAs

From Table 1, the male writers used more boosters with twenty-five occurrences (61.0%) whereas female writers used sixteen boosters (39.0%) of both categories. In this analysis, female and male writers had different choices of booster categories where females tended to use more 'belief' categories of boosters which occurred eight times (19.5%) than male writers with only four occurrences (9.6%). On the other hand, the male writers used more boosters in the 'solidarity' category with twenty-one occurrences (51.4%) than females with only about eight occurrences (19.5%). Since this is a small-scale study where only ten RAs were analyzed, some data may contain extreme values that could affect the total percentage of booster occurrences.

The reasons for the differences in boosters' occurrence could be that the female writers would prefer to be unambiguous in their statements of which they were absolutely convinced. They wanted to make it clear to the readers that they were confident with the research carried out especially when most of the Introductions included some literature reviews to support their beliefs.

In five of the RAs written by the male writers, the 'solidarity' booster category was more frequently deployed as they wanted to claim that they had shared knowledge with the audience. It could be that they wanted to make the Introduction sections 'friendly' to prevent readers from being overwhelmed with the content of the RAs. It is done by introducing something that the readers are usually familiar with, before moving on to a new idea or concept.

It is interesting to note that in this study particularly, the female writers used the same number of boosters in both the 'belief' and 'solidarity' categories, with eight occurrences. This practice could have been motivated by their wish to keep a balance of using both categories of boosters rather than sticking to only one category of boosters, like the 'solidarity' category preferred by the male writers.

It would be much better if a further study could be carried out with a larger corpus to see whether the same results are similar or not.

The Use of Boosters in Influencing the Way of Writing in the ten RAs

Although there were differences in the way female and male writers use boosters in their RAs, the gap for the usage of boosters in writing RAs was quite comprehensive as male writers tended to use 25 times of boosters, which constituted 61% of frequency in total. It is more than half of the number of booster occurrences in all the selected RAs. However, this is a small-scale study using only ten RAs as the corpus. Extreme value could also affect the total number of boosters between female and male writers.

In the analysis of the ten selected RAs, the male writers used more boosters as they wanted to show that they were specific with what they were writing than the female writers. Perhaps, this could be because female writers were more cautious in making risky claims and announcing any uncertainties which could be attributed to their politeness. In contrast, male writers seemed to be

more forceful in emphasizing their statements and beliefs. This corroborates a study by Holmes (1990) which stated that men would use intensifiers or boosters more frequently than women. Thus, that could be the reason for male writers to have used more boosters in writing the Introduction sections of their RAs.

A common reason that can be deduced from the analysis of the ten RAs is that both the female and male writers could have used boosters to highlight their claims or what they believe in regardless of their gender. As Afros and Schryer (2009) stated ...

“almost all the literary scholars (eight out of ten) buttressed their claims with intensifiers. The writers tried to persuade readers that their expectations had been met or even exceeded. This purpose was achieved by restating the central theses put forward in Introduction, often strengthened by boosters” (p. 65)

Nonetheless, in this study of the analysis of the Introduction section of ten RAs, the use of boosters was more evident in the RAs written by the male authors as they seemed to be more direct in illustrating and making their claims.

Conclusion

To conclude, in addressing the gap in the area of using boosters in research writing, this research has examined the regularity of boosters used in the Introduction section of ten RAs. The influence of gender differences in the use of specific boosters was also examined. There were differences in the choice of boosters used by female and male writers that have been discussed in the previous section of this particular small-scale study. There was also a difference in the occurrence of boosters between male and female writers. Both female and male writers did use several boosters in the Introduction sections of their RAs although the male writers seemed to be using them more frequently in the Introductions section of their RAs. The purpose for reinstating the primary idea was being reinforced by using boosters. Thus, that could be another reason why both female and male writers used boosters in the Introduction section of their RAs.

Recommendation

In the future, it is suggested that a larger number of corpora would be encouraged to ensure the significance of the result in reducing the occurrences of any extreme value. Further research could also be done to determine the differences between novice and experienced writers, as well as between native and non-native writers about the style used in writing especially in using boosters. Using linguistic features like boosters would help in achieving a ‘successful research career’ or it may help to increase our writing and speaking skills especially for the novice writer either in the ‘native or non-native English-speaking academic contexts’. Since not much research has been carried out on boosters and their different usage in different contexts, it could somehow give some ideas to other writers, either the beginner or even the experienced ones, to use boosters more effectively especially for academic writing purposes.

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