Estimation of Doubt and Certainty in the Academic Writings of Management Students with a Focus on Gender Differences

Sanjay Shrivastava
Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (SVKM's NMIMS), India

Abstract

Using specific ways writers distinguish their opinions from facts and they evaluate the certainty of their assertions which ultimately becomes central to the meaning of academic texts. Still, the second language students often find it difficult and problematic to meet this academic writing capacity. The objective of the present study was to investigate the frequency at which management students use doubt (hedges) and certainty (boosters) to express in their academic writings. The aim was also to find out if there were gender related differences. Further, the objective was also to investigate how these modifiers were structurally distributed in the dissertations according to the IMRAD model. A comparative analysis of 20 randomly selected dissertations written by the students of NMIMS is used in the research. It was noted that both male and female students displayed a substantial use of hedges and boosters. Further, it was noted that in Introduction & Discussion sections, the occurrence of boosters and hedges were more often as compared to other sections of the dissertations analyzed.

Keywords: Hedges, boosters, gender, claims, researchers

บทคัดย่อ

ผู้เขียนงานเขียนเชิงวิชาการมักใช้เครื่องมือทางภาษาเพื่อสื่อให้ผู้อ่านทราบว่ากำลังอ่านข้อความที่เป็นความคิดเห็นหรือการประเมินจากมุมมองส่วนตัวของผู้เขียนซึ่งไม่ใช่ข้อเท็จจริง อย่างไรก็ตาม ผู้เขียนที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษาซึ่งไม่คุ้นเคยกับรูปแบบภาษาดังกล่าวมักประสบปัญหาในการใช้รูปภาษาเบี่ยงบัง (hedges) และรูปภาษาเพิ่มความเชื่อมั่น (boosters) ในการขียนได้อย่างถูกต้องและเหมาะสม งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาความถี่ของการปรากฏรูปภาษาเบี่ยงบังและเพิ่มความเชื่อมั่นในงานเขียนวิทยานิพนธ์ของนักศึกษาสาขาการจัดการและมุ่งเน้นศึกษาว่ามีความแตกต่างระหว่างกลุ่มผู้เขียนเพศหญิงและชายหรือไม่ ผู้วิจัยได้สุ่มเลือกวิทยานิพนธ์จำนวนทั้งสิ้น 20 เล่มซึ่งเขียนโดยนักศึกษาสาขาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัย NMIMS โดยใช้โครงสร้าง IMRAD เพื่อมาวิเคราะห์เปรียบเทียบผลการวิเคราะห์พบว่าการปรากฏของรูปภาษาเบี่ยงบังและเพิ่มความเชื่อมั่นมีความถี่สูงทั้งในกลุ่มนักศึกษาหญิงและชายและยังพบว่าปริมาณการใช้รูปแบบภาษาดังกล่าวจะพบในบทนำและอภิปรายผลมากกว่าส่วนอื่นๆ

คำสำคัญ: รูปภาษาเบี่ยงบัง รูปภาษาเพิ่มความเชื่อมั่น เพศ กล่าวอ้าง นักวิจัย

Introduction

The extreme significance of hedges and boosters lies in the expectation that readers anticipate claims to be warranted for of the assessments of reliability they carry. By using these devices, academics gain acceptance for their work by creating a balanced conviction with caution. It also helps writes to express their assertiveness with modesty (Hyland, 1996a). In fact, writers should religiously differentiate among the written input in texts and get the correct interpretation or implied meaning to construct their claims accordingly. Either academician or students must stand persuasive in their claims of writing to be widely accepted in the discourse communities they belong to. This certainly requires the selection and the inclusion of definite discourse markers such as hedges and boosters into the writings of research writers since exposure to discourse markers via explicit instruction will surely help students improve their research writing aptitude (Alward, Mooi & Bidin, 2012).

Further, in hedging, statements are opinions rather than facts, which reduce force. However, the expressions used to indicate strong persuasion are stated as boosters like clearly, obviously, and of course. Boosters let writers express confidence. They also endorse engagement and solidarity with readers (Itakura, 2013; Mirzapour & Mahand, 2012; Hyland, 1998; Myers, 1989). Mirzapour & Mahand (2012) investigated hedges and boosters in native and non−native Library, Information and Computer Science Research Articles. The findings revealed that hedges and boosters used in Library and Information articles were more than Computer Science Research Articles.

However, Hedges and boosters express both interpersonal and conceptual information (Halliday, 1994), creating a space for writers to communicate more precise degrees of accuracy in their assessments.

Of course, in expressing authorial judgments, hedges and boosters facilitate authors to convey the major content of their utterance.

Dontcheva–Navratilova (2015) observed that the rhetorical strategies adopted by academic writers are naturally affected by their social and cultural. However, as recent research by Dontcheva–Navratilova (2013a, b, 2015) informed that the academic discourse of Czech linguists, especially in their English–medium publications, are changing under the influence of globalization giving rise to "hybridizing forms" reflecting tension derived from intercultural clashes (Gotti, 2012).

It is always interesting to know that how writers adopt to the strategies of softening down language in metadiscourse. Since, management concepts developed by researchers, most of the time, invite a great host of critics to analyze it, with inclusion of their own understanding on the issue using ample metadiscourse. It was, of course, interesting to note how management students involve themselves in discussions of managerial concepts when the engage in academic writing and how do they assert and react to it using hedges and boosters. It was also interesting and useful to know whether there are any gender differences while using specific words that moderate the overall tone of the metadiscourse. The research was conducted to know the frequency of hedges and boosters that management students use at the time of academic writing. The objective of the research was also to find out if there was any point of difference between the genders in using hedges and boosters. This study may be highly useful in order to determine the frequency of usages of hedges and boosters in academic writing by the management students. The present study appears to be significant because it also works as a test on the pre established theories and concepts in the language study of metadiscourse. The carried out research will surely be informative for readers in terms of delving deep to the understanding of the practices of students'

academic writing and their way of using hedges and boosters along with the frequency at which they use it.

Further, a metadiscourse is usually assumed to be a "discourse about discourse" or "communication about communication" (Kopple, 1985, p. 83). As per recent discussions, researchers have explored that a metadiscourse is more often than just indicating out toward discourse. In fact, it involves the relative delivery among the text, the writer, and the reader. In fact, the writers prefer using meta–discourse for engaging readers in their textual expressions which most of the times is an added input beyond the text providing readers the different facets of discourse. Hyland (2005) considered metadiscourse as "an umbrella term to include an apparently heterogeneous array of cohesion and interpersonal features which help relate a text to its context" (p. 16).

Homes (1984, 1990) observed that the significant feature of such academic discourses is the way that writers adopt to modify their assertions and besides, they tone down the affirmation of uncertain and risky claims. The writers assimilate their opinion to make the certain idea more acceptable and suitably conveyed.

Academic writing, which is objectively reported to the scientific community but with adequate conviction, is normally based on empirical researches. As far as academic writers are concerned, this does imply a promotional role. Multifaceted linguistic maneuvering is a dire need of the hour in order to meet the challenging demands of objectivity and persuasion in academic writing that draws on ideational as well as interpersonal resources. The interpersonal involve–ment in this strategy calls for the emergence of the writer as a persona that is his own representation in the text to situate the latest scientific work into the prevailing body of research and to generate a consensus between new research and confronting ideas. This can be

arrived at, for example, by using first person pronouns modality and attribution (Myers, 1990).

Other authors, such as Mauranen (1993), Hyland (1998, 2005), 63−71, Dafouz (2003, 2007), have widely argued the persuasive power of meta discourse and some more studies have been carried out to examine how persuasion is attained by meta discourse markers and how such persuasion is articulated meta discursively (Dfouz, 2008).

Persuasion, in various fields in general and genres of academic writing in particular, can be construed and attained by hedging and boosting as they are significant tools of communication. Both of them are two sides of the same coin since they both bring in persuasive academic communication. How so ever less the phenomenon of boosting is researched as compared to hedging, it, still, remains to be a key aspect of metaphorical persuasion, as far as academic writing is concerned.

Hyland states that "effective academic writing actually depends on interactional elements which supplement propositional information in the text and alert readers to the writer's opinion" (1994, p. 240), which means that what improves the quality of an article and make it a "good" article is the ability of the author to deliver the reader a faltering analysis of the collection of data, thereby, leaving a room for alternative interpretations. The indication of a speaker's confidence or lack of it in supplying prepositional information is referred to as epistemic modality in the world of linguistics (Coates, 1987, p. 112).

Hedges and boosters are also used as a significant way to express the degree of confidence of an author in academic writing (Hyland, 1994, 2000). While boosters like 'obviously' and 'clearly' are expressions of uncertainty, hedges such as, suggest, 'seem' and 'indicate' express doubt in relation to the propositional information

provided by an author (2000, p. 179). It is only by differentiating propositional information such as data and facts from interactional elements viz. hedges we realize that academic writing must contain both the elements to be meaningful. Skelton explains and emphasizes this necessity. 'It is by means of the hedging system of a language that a user distinguishes between what s/he says and what s/he thinks about what s/he says. Without hedging, the world is purely propositional, a rigid (and rather dull) place where things either are the case or are not. With a hedging system, language is rendered more flexible and the world more subtle.' (Skelton, 1988, p. 38)

Dissimilar to spoken dissertation where hedges, when used frequently, may be viewed as indications of a toothless language (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999), in academic writing, according to Hyland, hedges convey a guarded approach to the material or research outcomes being presented, which, in turn, helps "academics gain acceptance for their work" (Hyland, 2000, p. 179).

Thus, for all academic writers as well as second language learners of English, the ability to exercise hedges appropriately seems to be of great importance. Yet, it is concluded in a study of hedging tools utilized in scientific research papers by Hyland (1996) that the learners of English as a foreign language find it "extremely troublesome" to make use of hedges appropriately resulting in possible hindrances while participating in a research world of English domination (1996, p. 278)

Aim and Objective of the Study

It was found interesting to study how the students of management make use of the hedges and boosters in academic writing. Additionally, conflicting views appear, depending upon a person's

gender, on the usages of epistemic modality which is a sub−classifi−cation of a speaker's degree of confidence or lack of it in, or belief of, the knowledge based on which the proposition is evaluated/adjudged differently.

The principal aim of this study is, therefore to examine the overall frequency with which students of management studies use epistemic modality to articulate doubt (hedges) and conviction (boosters) in their academic writing; and if there appear gender−related differences. In addition to the overall occurrence, the secondary aim is to investigate if the frequency of boosters and hedges appear in varying degrees in the different parts of their dissertations (*Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and Conclusions*).

Literature Review

In recent past, a huge amount of research has been carried out on exercising boosters and hedges applying different approaches. Some of these researchers have focused upon gender differences as regards varying politeness strategies in both written as well as spoken discourse (Coates, 1987, Holmes, 1990). Other approaches include investigation of the effects of powerful versus powerless language styles on listeners (Hol & tgrave Lasky, 1999; Hosman, Huebner & Siltanen, 2002; Hosman & Siltanen, 2006). On the contrary to the present study, it is found to be a common view, in these two areas, that hedges hardly contribute to a beneficial result for the speaker as they lack assertiveness. Lastly, there have been studies carried out in relation with hedges and boosters used in academic writing for both professional researchers, as well as students of English as a second language (Holmes, 1988; Hyland, 1994, 1996, 2000; Hyland & Milton, 1997).

The study of the proficiency with which second language learners of English learn and articulate hedges and boosters in their studies is an interesting area of research. As cited above, it has been suggested that, since they struggle to use hedges appropriately, foreign learners of English may face difficulties participating in English dominated research world (Hyland, 1996, p. 278).

A study conducted by Holmes (1988) on four ESL books suggests that the quantum as well as the quality of hedges and boosters presented to learners differ among different books (1988, p. 38). In some books, excessive focus appears to be adhered to on modal verbs amounting to a disregard for substitute ways of communicating certainty and doubt. She emphasizes upon the significance of equipping the second language learners of English with the legitimacy of lexical and syntactic tools that are actually used by native English speakers "selected from those occurring more frequently in relevant spoken and written texts" (Holmes, 1988, p. 40). An additional study, more recently, conducted on 22 text books designed for students of English as a second language concluded similarly that the course work meant for students of English as a second language ostensibly ignores the inclusion of academic hedging on the basis of an analysis of legitimate usage (Hyland, 1994, p. 253). Considering these research results are equally applicable to the course work meant for Swedish learners, it may advocate that the academic articles used in contemporary study will restrain restricted use of numerous boosters and hedges identified in the English language.

Besides, a few studies have also focused upon learners of English from various countries to figure out how they understand and exercise boosters and hedges in their respective academic writing.

A recent study of how 14 Cantonese students of English in an academic text, responded to hedges and boosters conducted at the

University of Hong Kong indicated that boosters tended to be more evident to these students as compared to hedges (Hyland, 2000). Hayland further advocates that students of English as a second language may not realize the efforts made by academic texts' authors to deteriorate their pledge towards the propositional information supplied (2000, p. 192), thereby rooting them to draw inadequate inferences (2000, p. 184). Hayland then explores the possibility that the aforesaid findings apply only to Cantonese students but concludes that here is, however, the possibility of likelihood that such consequences are due proficiency instead of first language, an opinion that is supported by a number of studies suggesting that complete know−how in this field is next to impossible to achieve in a foreign language (e.g. Clyne, 1987). Letdown to alleviate statements adequately has been observed as a failure of non−English speaking students' work in English with a suggestion that the conclusions of this study are substantially germane to students beyond Hong Kong (Hyland, 2000, p. 192).

Consequently, if not investigated thoroughly, it may not be possible to differentiate between an individual's level of proficiency and the effects of his/her first language on academic English writing, so derived. Nevertheless, there appears to be significant differences between native and non−native speakers of English language, regardless of their nationalities not being specified.

Besides, Allison studied some writing samples of various students of the same university and noticed gratituitous use of linguistic tools, particularly boosters, as the required substantiation to do so was amiss (1995, p. 10).

In addition, a comparative study of write ups written by non−native (Hong Kong) and native (British) speakers of English showed that the "Hong Kong learners employed syntactically simpler constructions, relied on a more limited range of devices, offered

stronger commitments to statements and exhibited greater problems in conveying a precise degree of certainty" (Hyland & Milton, 1997, p. 201).

Hedges and Gender

Holmes (1995), during the reanalysis of women's language, argued that women's using of hedges expresses interpersonal warmth out of feminine attitude and not, as many researchers have argued, linguistic tentativeness. She suggested that it is typically men, who use hedges to convey imprecision and incertitude.

What is worth noting down here is Robin Lakoff's book, Language and Woman's Place which strongly influenced contemporary researches on gender and hedging. Lakoff (1975), was an American linguistic researchers. He argued that "women's speech lacks authority because, in order to become "feminine," women must learn to adopt an unassertive style of communication. That is, they must learn to denude their statements of declarative force. Lakoff coined the phrase "women's language" to refer to a group of linguistic devices that serve this function, including hesitations, intensive adverbs, empty adjectives, tag questions, and compound requests."

There have been contradictions regarding whether or not gender is a deciding factor while individuals choose to express themselves both orally as well as in writing. Recently, 14000 text samples, written by both men and women, were analyzed extensively to explore the possibilities of linguistic differences based on gender, keeping hedging tools as research variables (Newman, Groom, Handelman & Pennebaker, 2008). The study conducted suggested that the tendency of using with hedges viz. guess and reckon frequently

is more in women than in men, but same was not the case with other hedging tools such as maybe, perhaps (2008, p. 232).

Past few years the issue of gender differences has attracted the attention of more active researchers. Some of them found it evidentially supporting the absolute existence of gender differences in hedging does not lead to a firm conclusion. Lakoff founded her arguments chiefly on personal observations and hypothetical examples. Later researches, using real speech as data, the conclusive statistics have often failed to support her surmises. Besides, a few researches supported that female speakers employ more hedging devices than male speakers (e.g., Carli, 1990; Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; McMillan, Clifton, McGrath, & Gale, 1977). Priesler (1986), in his research, found that British women participating in group discussions used more signals of tentativeness and uncertainty than men, and in the result he interpreted such habit as indicative of their feeling of social insecurity. However, a lot many inconsistent or even contradictory findings have also emerged out of many prominent researches in the area (e.g., Baumann, 1976; Brouwer, Gerritson, & de Haan, 1979; Dubois & Crouch, 1976; O'Barr & Atkins, 1980; Schultz, Briere, & Sandier, 1984). Wholly, it may be accepted that if gender differences exist in hedging language, they are subtle and subject to variation in terms of speakers and allied contexts.

Since the combination I guess is dubious to be found in academic writing, the aforesaid research results are irrelevant here. However these research results did point out that there is no considerable difference on the basis of gender, between expressions of doubt in academic writing, which may recommend that the use of hedging tools in this study will be unaffected by gender bias either. The methodology used by Newman et al. to define which specific words must be counted as hedges is significant. Ignoring every prescribed model, the

researchers opted to let twelve graduate students to decide "whether each of 43 candidate phrases was commonly used as a hedge, intended to qualify a statement and reduce its force" (2008, p. 222). There will have to be discrepancies in different models used for the said purpose since hedges are not specified here.

There was one more study that investigated gender bias in spoken English relating to the rate of occurrence and contextual use of the hedging tools sort of, you know and I think (known as pragmatic particles) argues the misguiding inferences drawn in many studies, in the said area of research, focusing only on the rate of occurrence of certain hedges "in a social and textual vacuum" (Holmes, 1990, p. 186).

When, simultaneously, taking into account various appropriate factors such as background or context, Holmes observed that women frequently use pragmatic particles "to assert their views with confidence or as positive politeness devices signaling solidarity with the addressee, rather than as devices for expressing uncertainty" (1990, p. 202).

These findings are contradictory to much of earlier research that she points to and more specifically to the findings of Robin Lakoff, a pioneer within gender−bias research in linguistics (Holmes, 1990, p. 202).

Holmes, further, pointed out that since words can carry out different functions in different contexts, there will have to be some problems when taking into account only the frequency of encounter of certain words while completely disregarding the context (Holmes, 1990). It is, therefore, important to consider the contiguous text in this study of students' essays and not merely go on counting isolated words.

Methodology

The objective of this study is to examine, on the whole, the frequency of use of epistemic modality to express doubt and certainty by management students in their academic writing and whether there are gender−bias differences.

Besides the frequency by and large, the derived aim is to study if the frequency of occurrence varies in degrees in different parts of their dissertations− IMRAD (Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion and Conclusions).

This study uses the linguistic model borrowed from above cited Hyland's study which comprised of the most popular boosters and hedges "found in a 500,000 word corpus of academic research articles from eight disciplines" (Hyland, 2000:182−183).

Table 1 List of the specific hedges & boosters used in the study

Hedges	Boosters
suggest	show that
may	always
seem	demonstrate
appear could	substantially
might	fact that
assume	obviously show
likely	clear/clearly
possible/possibly	definite/definitely
speculate	certain/certainly
believe/ indicate	
probable/probably	

Material

The academic writings of the students must follow analogous style and form of writing if it is required to study the differences in the distribution of boosters and hedges structurally in their writing patterns.

Therefore, only PG Dissertations that pursue the *IMRAD* model were taken into account in the study. The *IMRAD* model, used in scientific writing, generally contains below mentioned sections: *Introduction, Method, Results* and *Discussion.* Although, it is acceptable to deviate to some extent from this layout, the scientific articles that follow the *IMRAD* model will have a factor in common that some kind of theoretical outline has been established that, in turn, is followed by some sort of scientific study. The material consisted of a total of 20 dissertations.

Table 2 Details of the content analyzed

20 Dissertations (10 by male Students + 10 by Female Students)
Total Pages Approximately per dissertation= 70
Total No of pages 20X 70 = 1400 pages
Total words per page Approx = 350
Total Number of Pages Male Students 10x 70 = 700
Total Number of Pages Female Students = 700
Total Words per Dissertation – Approx = 24500
Total Words analyzed = 490000

Method

Each dissertation was individually analyzed on the basis of the established model. First, the frequency of occurrences of each booster and hedge was counted manually right through the document. Secondly, the section wise documentation of occurrence of the hedge and booster was carried out. Subsequently, each modifier was analyzed contextually by reading the neighboring text, which was a critical step; which is why the devices were counted manually.

The dissertations referred in this study are based on the *IMRAD* model which is generally comprising of the following sections: *Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results* and *Discussion,* as well as *Conclusions* depending on the writer's preferences. Since both the *Abstract* and the *Conclusions* are referred to summarize the whole essay, these two sections were not considered separately.

Results and Discussion

This section presented the data obtained from the study in separate subsections, opening with the total frequency of both boosters and hedges found in the selected dissertations.

Henceforth, focus is located on how the frequency of occurrence in the IMRAD sections of the essays varied.

Further, the findings are argued in regards to gender. Lastly, the results are concluded.

Hedges and Boosters

The following two graphs demonstrate the total number of the encounters of boosters and hedges appeared in the research material. Figure 1 and 2 shows the frequency of occurrences in all of the dissertations; Figure 3 shows the estimated frequency of occurrences per 1,000 words on the basis of an average total of 8,500 words per essay.

Table 3 Frequency of hedges in male & female students

Frequency of Hedges in Male Students	Frequency of Hedges in Female Students
1547	1411

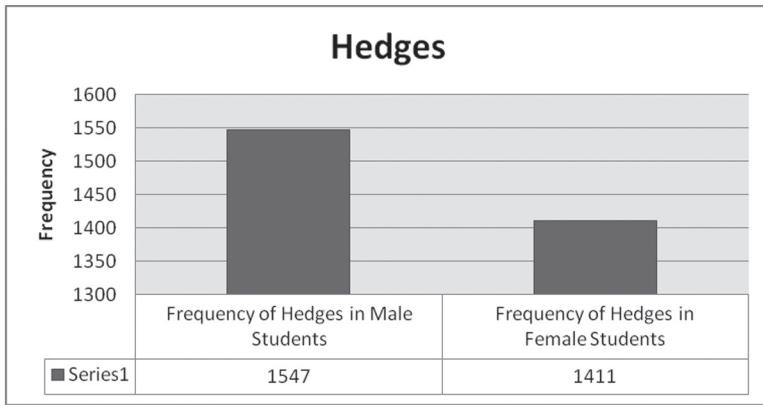

Figure 1 Frequency of Hedges in Male & Female Students

Table 4 Frequency of boosters in male & female students

Frequency of Boosters in Male Students	Frequency of Boosters in Female Students
284	476

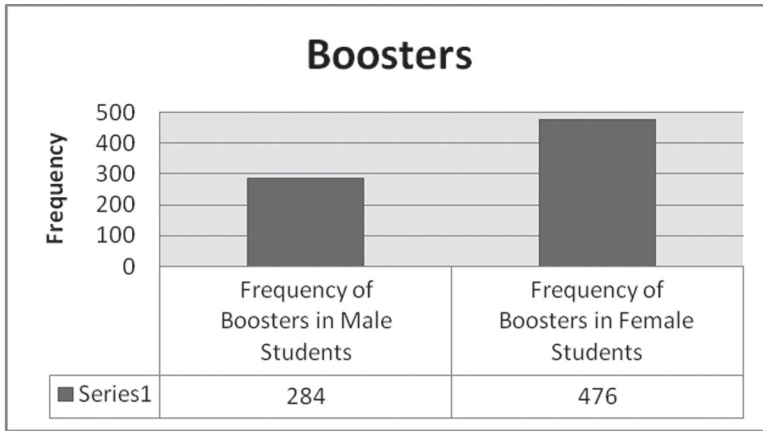

Figure 2 Frequencies of Boosters in Male & Female Students

In order to increase the understandability the occurrences of Hedges & Boosters was calculated per 1000 words.

Table 5 Frequency of hedges in male & female students @ 1000 words

Frequency of Hedges in Male Students	Frequency of Hedges in Female Students
6.31	5.75

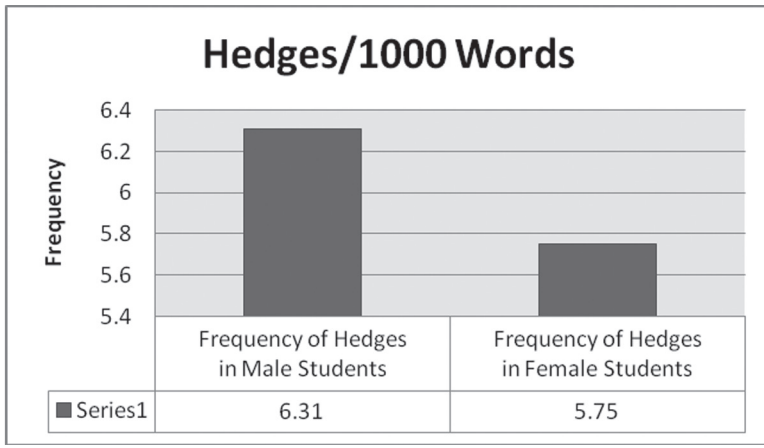

Figure 3 Frequency of Hedges in Male & Female Students @ 1000 words

Table 6 Frequency of boosters in male & female students @ 1000 words

Frequency of Hedges in Male Students	Frequency of Hedges in Female Students
1.15	1.94

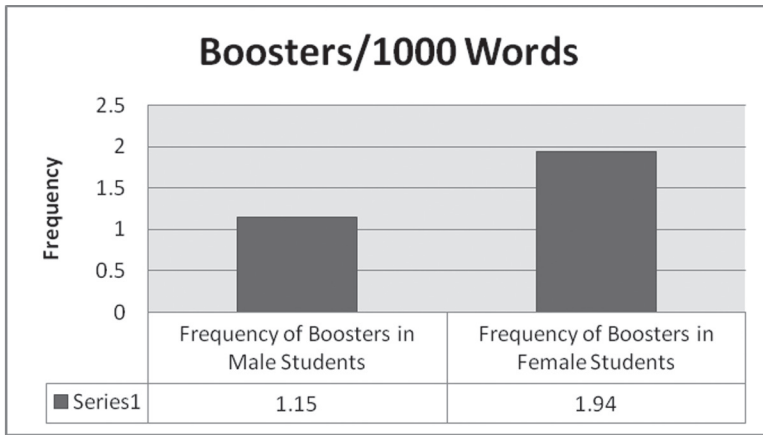

Figure 4 Frequency of boosters in male & female students @ 1000 words

Hedges

It is significant that hedges are used to serve a number of functions with multiple purposes. They assure the writer's commitment to or towards a proposition (Vande Kopple, 1985), they mark arguments as provisional statements, tentativeness, uncertainty or reluctance to ongoing propositional information categorically, display uncertainty towards the truth of an assertion (Crismore et al., 1993), in addition, they withhold commitment to propositions and open dialogue (Hyland, 2005) along with mitigating the illocutionary force of an utterance for politeness (Holmes, 1990). Brown and Levinson (1987) found hedges as the features of negative politeness, considering them as devices to "soften face–threatening acts of suggesting and criticizing by blurring the speaker's intent" (p. 117).

Regardless of the gender, the data suggest that management students more frequently use hedges than boosters. It is significant to inform that the investigation of the fact that whether or not these hedges are used appropriately has not been the aim of the study, it is rather appealing to study *how* they are employed along with their possible contribution to the text.

In various examples, the hedges function as resources of conveying a precautious advances to the statements being made, which might be a tactic used by the students to "gain acceptance for their work" (Hyland, 2000, p. 179), as these tools provide the author with the prospect of retreating at a later time. It also proposes that the author is flexible enough for further discussion or even prepared for being revaluated. Since scientifically one cannot be hundred percent sure of something, it minimizes the individual's responsibility associated with making a statement.

Maintaining too much of certainty about the statement might make a reader suspicious about a possible inefficient objectivity underlying the statement, or that the very basis of making the statement was predetermined ideas or bogus grounds.

Additionally, it is evident by the outcome of the study that some particular hedges are used more frequently than that of the others. The following bar graphs exemplify this distribution where the values show total frequencies occurred in the research material for individual hedge, respectively:

Table 7 Frequency of specific hedges in male students

Hedges in Male Students	Frequency
suggest	70
may	214
seem	245
appear	39
could	179
might	266
assume	77
likely	112
possible/possibly	112
speculate	1
believe	21
indicate	116
probable/probably	95

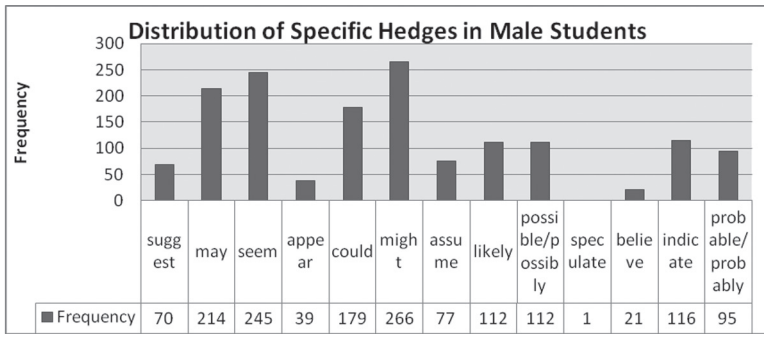

Figure 5 Frequency of specific hedges in Male Students

Table 8 Frequency of specific hedges in female students

Hedges in Female Students	Frequency
suggest	198
may	100
seem	254
appear	25
could	160
might	300
assume	21
likely	71
possible/possibly	93
speculate	0
believe	32
indicate	39
probable/probably	118

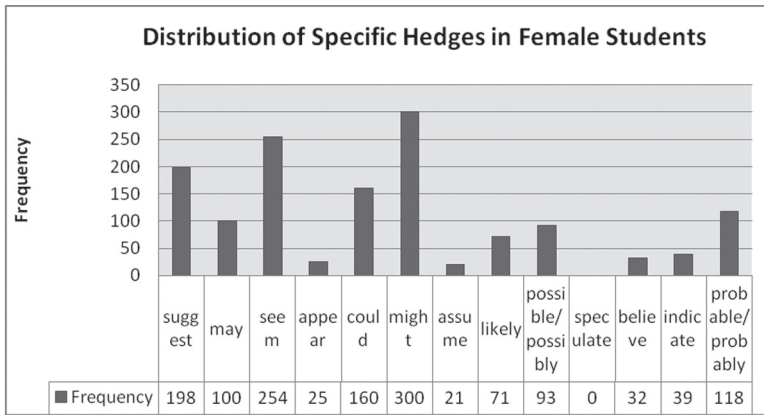

Figure 6 Frequency of specific hedges in demale atudents

In fact, certain hedges were used more frequently than that of others. In addition to the lexical verbs, such as seem and suggest, the modal verbs, such as may, might and could emerged to be the hedges that are used most frequently by both the gender groups.

Boosters

Too much unwarranted certainty exercised by foreign students of English by way of using boosters in their academic writing contradicts the observations discussed in the studies that claim that hedges were used in such a higher degree than boosters (Allison, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Milton, 1997). This study did not seem to focus the use of boosters excessively, since they merely occurred once or twice per one thousand words.

At various places, the boosters seem to be used for the sake of expressing a high degree of confidence in the observations made

during the study. In other cases, the boosters seem to function as symbolic tools used to convey the author's original version or as a generally accepted initiative or fact.

Given below is the distribution to illustrate, using a bar graph, where the values show the frequency appeared in the research material for each booster, respectively.

Table 9 Frequency of specific boosters in male students

Boosters in Male Students	Frequency
show that	48
always	13
demonstrate	7
substantially	4
fact that	84
obviously show	0
clear/clearly	103
definite/definitely	16
certain/certainly	9

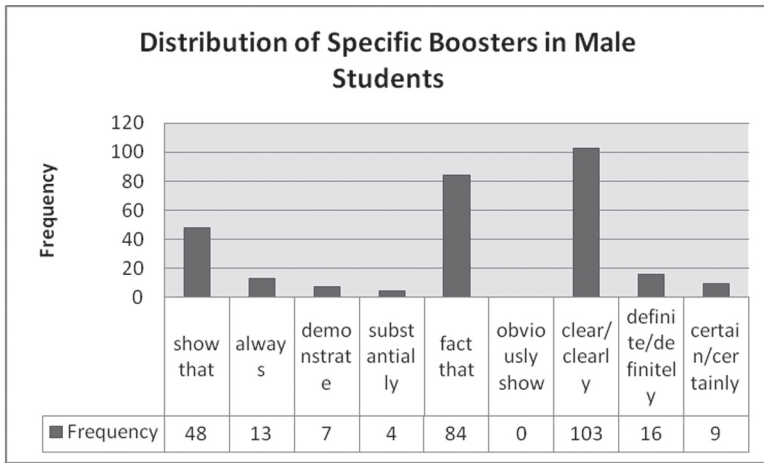

Figure 7 Frequency of specific boosters in male students

Table 10 Frequency of specific boosters in female students

Boosters in Female Students	Frequency
show that	63
always	45
demonstrate	7
substantially	4
fact that	203
obviously show	0
clear/clearly	115
definite/definitely	21
certain/certainly	18

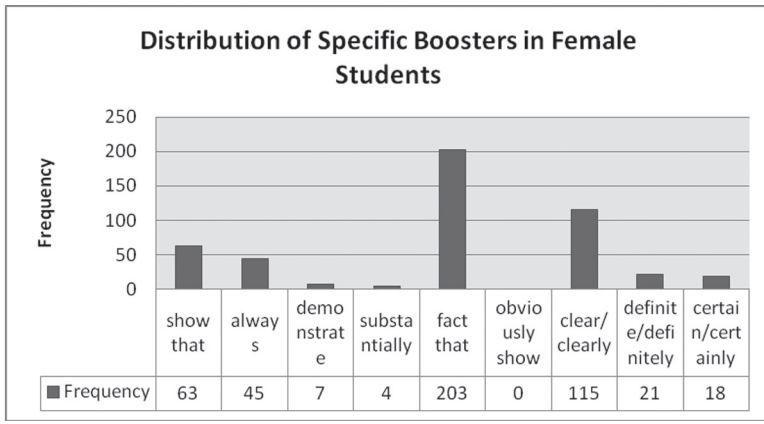

Figure 8 Frequency of specific boosters in female students

These results suggest that boosters such as demonstrate and *substantially* were rather infrequently used by students. Although they are fairly similar *show that* appeared 63 times in the research material, but *obviously show* was never used,. This, perhaps, indicates that the students were more open to boost their statements to a great extent, but not to use a confidence marker as bold as *obviously*.

IMRAD Sections

The following graphs illustrate the frequency in terms of percentage in which hedges and boosters occurred in the different sections of the dissertations based on the *IMRAD* model (i.e. *Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion + Abstract/Conclusions*). This distribution came up to be fairly similar for both gender groups.

Table 11 Distribution of hedges with IMRAD model

Section	Male Students (Total −1547)	Female Students (Total− 1411)
Introduction	449	381
Method	170	184
Result	139	155
Discussion	588	522
Abstract/Conclusion	201	169

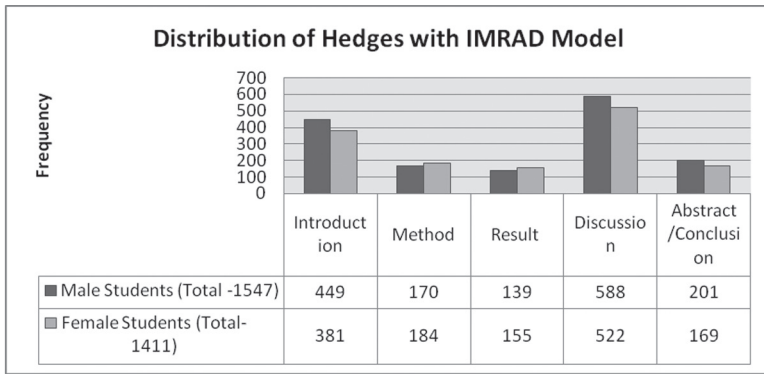

Figure 9 Distributions of Hedges with IMRAD Model

Distribution of boosters with IMRAD Model

Table 12 Distribution of boosters with IMRAD model

Section	Male Students (Total −284)	Female Students (Total− 476)
Introduction	54	81
Method	23	43
Result	40	71
Discussion	133	214
Abstract/Conclusion	34	67

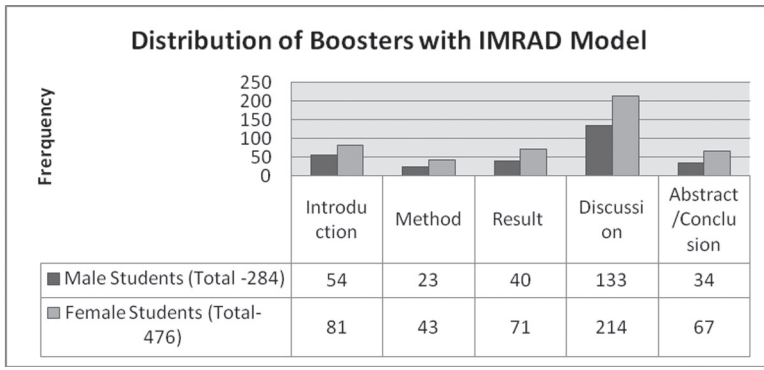

Figure 10 Distributions of boosters with IMRAD Model

These results exhibit that both boosters and hedges were more commonly used in the *Introduction* covering the background to the issue at hand, endeavor and scope, and the previous research; as well as in the *Discussion* where the findings are then reconnected to the previously discussed literature and research. Also, the *Discussion* is where the implication of the author's research results are construed and perhaps argued about, which may offer an indication as to why the proportion of boosters was slightly higher in this section. On the

contrary, the remaining sections (*Abstract/Conclusions, Method,* and *Results)* contain significantly fewer hedges and boosters, and the proportion among these only differed to a inconsequential degree. Since the Method section is supposed to present an eloquent procedure which could be replicated by a reader it is this fact that the boosters and hedges were used infrequently in the Methodology and Result sections of dissertations. Moreover, the Result must provide objective information or the data considered in the study.

It may be surprising to notice the low occurrence of boosters and hedges appearing in the summarizing sections of the dissertations, as the *Abstract* exhibits an opportunity to raise interest and encourage readers. Whereas, the *Conclusions* part usually contains a summary of the most important findings of the study, where, the author's view points are relevant. It may be guessed that the low percentages shown in the above cited graphs could be owing to the fact that both of these parts of dissertations tend to be small and concise, and might, thus, contain a few encounters of hedges and boosters. However, the occurrences may be regarded as many when compared to the total number of words in the individual sections, which was not investigated during this particular study due to its time limitations.

Table 13 Distribution of hedges with IMRAD model

Section	Male Students (Total −1547)	Female Students (Total− 1411)	Male Students (Total −284)	Female Students (Total− 476)
Introduction	449	381	54	81
Method	170	184	23	43
Result	139	155	40	71
Discussion	588	522	133	214
Abstract/ Conclusion	201	169	34	67

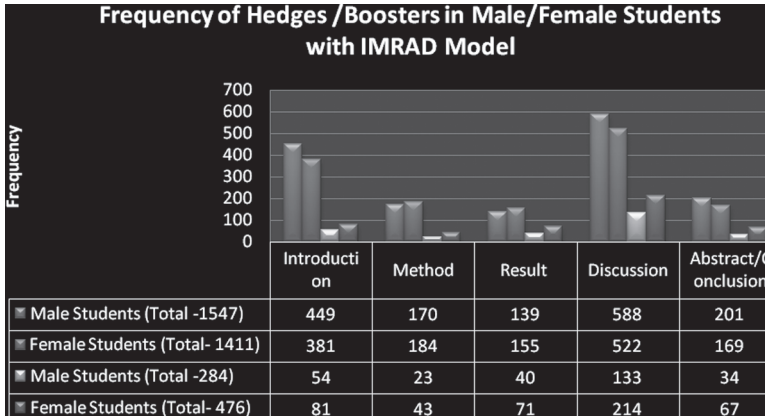

Figure 11 Frequency of hedges/booster in male/female students with IMRAD Model

Table 14 Percentage distribution of hedges/boosters with IMRAD Model

Section	% of Hedges in Male Students	% of Hedges in Female Students	% of Boosters in Male Students	% of Boosters in Female Students
Introduction	29	27	19	17
Method	11	13	8	9
Result	9	11	14	15
Discussion	38	37	47	45
Abstract/ Conclusion	13	12	12	14

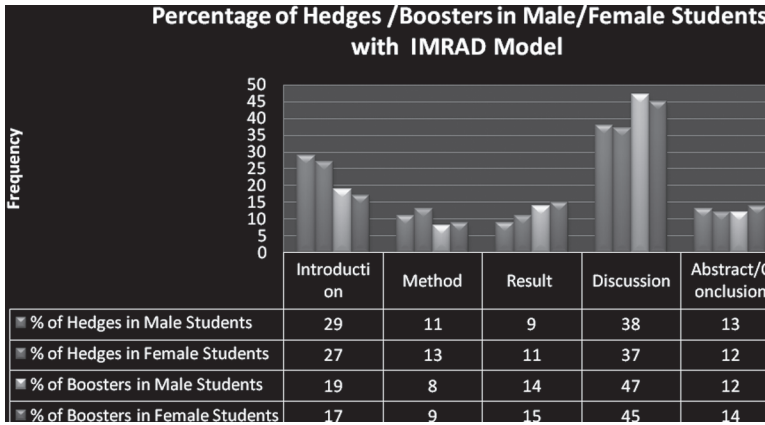

Figure 12 Percentage of hedges/booster in male/female students with IMRAD model

Gender differences and similarities

This present research has confirmed that hedging is a kind of flexible resource that academic writers use in a varied, contextually sensitive manner. The results hint that the female students were more likely to use boosters and less likely to use hedges than their counterparts. Some of the researchers found that out of the habit of feminine politeness female groups use more number of hedges, but the present study reached to an entirely different viewpoint focusing that female writers use more number of hedges as compared to boosters because the quantum of confidence is more in female writers as compared to male writers which contradicts the earlier carried studies. There was a difference of total number of hedges and total number of boosters for female students was 935 more hedges (approximately 5.16 per 1,000 words) whereas the same difference for their male counterparts was found to be 1,263 (approximately 5.16 per 1,000 words).

This was the only indicative area of the study that exposed any actual gender difference, besides the observation that the female group used the hedge *suggest* correspondingly to the frequency in which their counterparts used *may*.

Other than this, there were no significant differences between the two groups, as far as the usage of boosters and hedges by them are concerned, that could be associated with gender. Rather, it is apparent through the data that students rather use the same boosters and hedges as their peers irrespective of gender. Also, the way in which the boosters and hedges are distributed by them within the structure of their dissertations emerges to be similar, which subsequently directs me to conclude that gender cannot be a basis when it comes to emphasizing or softening a statement in dissertations or any other academic writing.

Summary of findings

To sum it all, the numbers suggested that the female group used boosters more frequently than the male group, while the male group used hedges more frequently than the female group, which may propose that in supplying propositional information females offer stronger commitments than their counterparts.

Yet, substantially higher use of hedges than boosters is displayed by both the groups. Furthermore, the modal verbs *might, could,* and *may* as well as the lexical verbs seem and suggest were the most commonly used specific hedges, irrespective of gender. Extracts from the dissertations under consideration suggest that the hedges perform as means of assigning a cautious approach while making statements.

It was found while analyzing certain selected extracts that boosters, in some cases, were used to express a high level of assurance signifying specific results. In some other cases these were used as symbolical tools to communicate the interpretation of the author as self–evident or as a universally accepted idea or fact. They were also used to convey a personal opinion distinctively; or finally, in order to give contrastive ideas to some previously mentioned opinions or beliefs. The *Introduction* and *Discussion* sections of the dissertations following the *IMRAD* model were the parts where both hedges and boosters were used most frequently. Finally, no other additional gender biases were found.

Conclusions

This study has intended to probe the overall frequency with which the students of NMIMS use epistemic modality to express certainty (boosters) and doubt (hedges) in their academic writing; and

if there seem to be gender bias by way of a comparative analysis. Additionally, the derivative aim has been to study if the occurrence of boosters and hedges varies in degrees in the different sections of the dissertations that follow the *IMRAD* model (*Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion,* and *Abstract + Conclusions*).

There have been contradictory results shown by previous research with regard to spoken discourse of native speakers and gender biases in this linguistic area (Coates, 1987; Holmes, 1990; Newman et al., 2008). Besides this, previous researches on written discourse by students coming from different nationalities has advocated that the students bank upon gratuitous amounts of certainty (boosters); while a cautious use of hedging tools appears to be troublesome (Allison, 1995; Hyland, 1994, 2000; Hyland & Milton, 1997).

The findings of the study suggested that the male group used hedges more frequently than their female counterparts (using boosters more frequently) and vice versa. Yet, the display of higher use of hedges than that of boosters by both the groups clearly suggested that management students prefer the use of cautious approach in their academic writing. Yet, substantially higher use of hedges than boosters is displayed by both the groups. Furthermore, the modal verbs *might, could,* and *may* besides verbs like *suggest* and *seem* were commonly used specific hedges, irrespective of gender. Extracts from the dissertations under consideration suggest that the hedges perform as means of assigning a cautious approach while making statements.

It was found while analyzing certain selected extracts that boosters, in some cases, were used to express a high level of assurance signifying specific results. In some other cases these were used as symbolical tools to communicate the interpretation of the author as self–evident or as a universally accepted idea or fact. They were also

used to convey a personal opinion distinctively; or finally, in order to give contrastive ideas to some previously mentioned opinions or beliefs. The *Introduction* and *Discussion* sections of the dissertations following the *IMRAD* model were the parts where both hedges and boosters were used most frequently. Finally, no other additional gender biases were found.

References

Allison, D. (1995). Assertions and Alternatives: Helping ESL Undergraduates Extend Their Choices in Academic Writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 4*(1), 1−15.

Alward, A., Mooi, C., & Bidin, S. (2012). Hedges and Boosters in the Yemeni EFL Undergraduates' Persuasive Essay: An Empirical Study. *The Internet Journal of Language, Culture and Society, 34,* 1−12.

Baumann, M. (1976). Two features of women's speech? In B. L. Dubois & I. Crouch (Eds.), *The sociology of the languages of American women* (pp. 32−40). San Antonio, TX: Trinity University.

Brouwer, D., Gerritson, M., & de Haan, D. (1979). Speech differences between women and men: On the wrong track? *Language in Society, 8,* 33−50.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage.* Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

Carli, L. L. (1990). Gender, language and influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59,* 941−951.

Clyne, M. (1987). Constraints on code switching: How universal are they? *Linguistics, 25,* 739–764.

Coates, J. (1987). Epistemic Modality and Spoken Discourse. *Transactions of the Philological Society. 85*(1). 110–131.

Crismore, A., Markkanen, R., & Steffensen, M. (1993). Metadiscourse in persuasive writing: A study of texts written by American and Finnish university students. *Written Communication, 10*(1), 39–71. Retrieved from http://10.1177/0741088393010001002

Crosby, F., & Nyquist, L. (1977). The female register: An empirical study of Lakoff's hypotheses. *Language in Society, 6,* 313–322.

Dafouz, E. (2003). Metadiscourse revisited: a contrastive study of persuasive writing in professional discourse. *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense, 11,* 29–57.

Dafouz–Milne, E. (2008): The pragmatic role of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the construction and attainment of persuasion: A cross–linguistic sytdy of newspaper discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics. 40,* 95–113.

Dontcheva–Navratilova, O. (2009) Building up discourse coherence: creating identities in political speeches. In O, Dontcheva–Navratilova, & R. Polovná, (Eds), *Coherence and cohesion in spoken and written discourse.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Dubois, B. L., & Crouch, I. (1976). The question of tag questions in women's speech: They don't really use more of them do they? *Language in Society, 4,* 289–294.

Gotti, Maurizio (2012). Reformulation and re–contextualization in popularization discourse, ISSN: 1139–7241 *Ibérica 27* (2014), 15–34

Halliday, M. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed). London: Edward Arnold.

Holmes, J. (1984). Modifying illocutionary force. *Journal of Pragmatics, 8,* 345–365.

Holmes. J. (1990). Hedges and boosters in women's and men's speech. *Language and Communication. 10*(3), 185–205.

Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, men and politeness.* London: Longman.

Holmes, Janet. (1988). Doubt and Certainty in ESL Textbooks. *Applied Linguistics, 9*(1), 21–44.

Holmes, J. (1990). Hedges and boosters in women's and men's speech. *Language & Communication, 10*(3), 185–205.

Holtgraves, T., & Lasky, Benjamin. (1999). Linguistic Power and Persuasion. Journal of *Language and Social Psychology, 18*(2), 196–205.

Hosman, L. A., & Siltanen, S. A. (2006). Powerful and Powerless Language Forms: Their Consequences for Impression Formation, Attributions of Control of Self and Control of Others, Cognitive Responses, and Message Memory. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 25*(1), 33–46.

Hosman, L. A., Huebner, T. M., & Siltanen, S. A. (2002). The Impact of Power–of–Speech Style, Argument Strength, and Need for Cognition on Impression Formation, Cognitive Responses, and Persuasion. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 21*(4), 361–379.

Hyland, K. (1998a). Boosting, hedging and the negotiation of academic knowledge. *Text, 18,* 349–382.

Hyland, K. (1998b). Exploring corporate rhetoric: Metadiscourse in the CEO's setter. *The Journalof Business Communication 35,* 224–245.

Hyland, K. (1998c). *Hedging in Scientific Research Articles.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hyland, K. (1998d). Persuasion and context: The pragmatics of academic metadiscourse. *Journalof Pragmatics 30,* 437–455.

Hyland, K. (1996a). Talking to the academy: Forms of hedging in science research articles. *Written Communication, 13*(2), 251–281.

Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse. Exploring Interaction in Writing.* London: Continuum.

Hyland, K. & Milton, J. (1977). Qualification and Certainty in L1 and L2 Students Writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 6*(2). 183–205.

Hyland, K. (1994). Hedging in Academic Writing and EAP Textbooks. *English for Specific Purposes, 13*(3), 239–256.

Hyland, K. (1996). Talking to the Academy: Forms of Hedging in Science Research Articles. *Written Communication, 13*(2), 251–281.

Hyland, K. (2000). Hedges, Boosters and Lexical Invisibility: Noticing Modifiers in Academic Texts. *Language Awareness, 9*(4), 179–197.

Itakura, H. (2013). Hedging praise in English and Japanese book reviews. *Journal of Pragmatics, 45*(1), 131–148

Kopple, W. V. (1985). Some Exploratory Discourse on Metadiscourse. *College Composition and Communication, 36,* 82–94.

Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and woman's place.* New York: Harper & Row.

Mauranen, A. (1993). Contrastive ESP rhetoric: Metatext in Finnish–English economics texts. *English for Specific Purposes, 12,* 3–22.

McMillan, J. R., Clifton, A. K., McGrath, D., & Gale, W. (1977). Women's language: Uncertainty or interpersonal sensitivity and emotionality? *Sex Roles, 3,* 545–559.

Mirzapour, F., & Mahand, M. R. (2012). Hedges and boosters in native and non–native library and information and computer science research articles. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of Language Studies, 18,* 119–128.

Myers, G. (1989). The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles. *Applied Linguistics, 10,* 1–35.

Newman, M. L., Groom, C. J., Handelman, L. D., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2008). Gender Differences in Language Use: An Analysis of 14,000 Text Samples. *Discourse Processes, 45*(3), 211–236.

O'Barr, W. M., & Atkins, B. K. (1980). ' "Women's language" or "powerless language" '? In S. McConnell–Ginet, R. Borker, & N. Furman (Eds.), *Women andlanguage in literature and society* (pp. 93–110). New York: Praeger.

Preisler, B. (1986). *Linguistic Sex Roles in Conversation.* Mouton de Grouter.

Schultz, K., Briere, J., & Sandier, L. (1984). The use and development of sex–typed language. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 8,* 327–336.

Skelton, J. (1988). The care and maintenance of hedges. *ELT Journal, 42*(1), 37–43.